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Do-It-Yourself: Constructing, Repairing and Maintaining Domestic Masculinity

STEVEN M. GELBER

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IN THE 1860S WHEN HARRIET ROBINSON ANNUALLY SET ASIDE A FULL month for the spring cleaning of her Malden, Massachusetts home, she had the occasional assistance of hired help, but none from her husband William. Over the years, as the Robinsons improved their house by installing weather stripping, repapering rooms, refinishing furniture, and putting in a new mantle, Harriet's biographer Claudia Bushman notes that neither she nor William "lifted a finger toward household maintenance."¹ Some eighty years later, immediately after World War II, when Eve and Sam Goldenberg moved into a somewhat decrepit apartment in the Bronx, Sam patched the holes in the wall himself and they both worked to scrub away the residual odor "of people who don't care."² After a few years in the Bronx, the Goldenbergs (now the Gordons) moved out to a new subdivision on Long Island where Sam built a brick patio and the surrounding fence, installed a new front door, and drew up plans to build a dormer window on the front facade. Real estate agents for the development would drive prospective buyers to the Gordons' house so they could admire Sam's handiwork and, in the words of the family chronicler Donald Katz, "see what a homeowner could do with old-fashioned, all American know-how . . . through the agency of his own hands."³

Only there was nothing at all "old-fashioned" about Sam's work around his suburban homestead in Island Park. Real old-fashioned husbands in the 1860s, even those in modest middle-class circum-

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stances like William Robinson, usually hired professionals to do the smallest home repair or improvement. Robinson and his socio-economic peers may have been the titular heads of their households, but they had very little to do there. Their wives raised the children and supervised the servants; they retired to the library to smoke their cigars—or left the house altogether to pass their leisure hours with their male friends. One would have to go back to an even earlier time, before there were suburbs, when most people lived on farms, in order to find husbands who had the knowledge and inclination to use tools on their own homes. When industrialization separated living and working spaces it also separated men and women into non-overlapping spheres of competence, and men like Robinson fulfilled their familial obligations by bringing home the money with which their wives ran the household.

The metamorphosis of the restrained and distant Victorian father into the engaged and present suburban dad was one of the more significant changes in the structure of the modern family, and the male use of tools around the house was a critical component of that change. Historians Mark Carnes and Clyde Griffen recently asked, “When did Mr. Fixit and the master of the barbecue appear and did these circumscribed modifications in role alter the older division of gender spheres significantly?”⁴ This article answers part of that question; “Mr. Fixit” put in his first formal appearance just after the turn of the century, although there had been calls and precursors as early as the 1870s. Furthermore, his appearance did indeed indicate an important alteration of the male sphere. By taking over chores previously done by professionals, the do-it-yourselfer created a new place for himself inside the house. In theory it overlapped with a widening female household sphere, but in practice it was sufficiently distinct so that by end of the 1950s the very term “do-it-yourself” would become part of the definition of suburban husbanding.

In the process of reacquainting themselves with manual skills, male householders renegotiated the way they functioned with their wives and the way that each related to their residence. The increasingly equalitarian rhetoric of democratic households in the twentieth century acknowledged the right of women to use tools in the same way as men, and calls for female emancipation on the tool front appeared for the first time in the Progressive era. Clearly, there was a steady expansion throughout the twentieth century of the kinds of do-it-yourself tasks

women were willing to take on. Nevertheless, in most cases, wives limited themselves to helping their handyman husbands and acting as an appreciative audience to their household triumphs.

Men were able to move easily into home-based do-it-yourself activity because household construction, repair, and maintenance were free from any hint of gender-role compromise. In fact, do-it-yourself can be thought of as a reassertion of traditional direct male control of the physical environment through the use of heavy tools in a way that evoked pre-industrial manual competence. If, as numerous historians have asserted, industrialism and the rise of white-collar employment in sexually integrated work places made the job a more ambiguous source of masculine identity, then do-it-yourself provided men with an opportunity to recapture the pride that went along with doing a task from start to finish with one's own hands.⁵ In periods of economic stress like the Great Depression, their labor could contribute directly to the family's standard of living and thus be a logical extension of work. However, even in good times such as the 1950s, when they might otherwise have been able to hire professional help, what men made or fixed around the house had some theoretical market value that gave do-it-yourself an aura of masculine legitimacy.

There is no doubt that single home ownership was a *sine qua non* for do-it-yourself activity; apartment dwellers do not normally have the space, the incentive, or even the right to fix-up someone else's property. For this reason, the growth of do-it-yourself closely paralleled the growth of suburbs. Not only did the absolute number of owner-occupied homes go up from fewer than three million in 1890 to more than thirty million in 1960, but the percentage of dwellings that were occupied by their owners increased from 37 percent to over 60 percent. Thus, by the end of the 1950s there were ten times as many homeowners as there had been in the Gilded Age and proportionately fewer people living in rented housing.⁶ Nevertheless, there was nothing inevitable about the do-it-yourself movement. The shift from professional to personal home maintenance, the growth of home workshops, the emergence of do-it-yourself as a hobby, and the unequal distribution of authority between men and women, were all functions of cultural forces beyond the mere growth in the number of privately owned homes.

Do-it-yourself had a series of distinct elements that permitted it to become virtually a male necessity by the 1950s. First, it drew on a pre-

industrial yeoman/artisan tradition of mastery over heavy tools. Second, what men did around the house may or may not have been necessary, but it had economic value and thus partook in the masculine legitimacy of skilled labor. Third, although work-like, household projects were undertaken more or less voluntarily. As self-directed and even playful, do-it-yourself was leisure—something to be embraced rather than avoided. Finally, do-it-yourself was the justification for men to claim a portion of their homes as a workshop for themselves. This new masculine space permitted men to be both a part of the house and apart from it, sharing the home with their families while retaining spatial and functional autonomy. Do-it-yourself was one of a series of roles that suburban men created so that they could actively participate in family activities while retaining a distinct masculine style. Outdoor cook, little league coach, driver of the car (when the whole family was present), and household handyman were all ways men could be intimate in family affairs without sacrificing their sense of maleness and recreate places for themselves in the homes they had left for factory and office.

Tools and Gender in Victorian America

Direct participation in household chores was not anathema to nineteenth-century male homeowners, but neither, it seems, was it something to be actively pursued or highly valued. There were, however, experts who recommended a change in that behavior. Catharine Beecher and her sister Harriet Beecher Stowe assumed that some men would be willing and able “to use plane and saw” to build the elaborate sliding-wall screen they described in their classic 1869 advice book, *The American Woman’s Home*. At the same time, however, they factored in the cost of a carpenter, recognizing that woodworking skills were probably more the exception than the rule among middle-class men.⁷ Writing in a somewhat admonitory tone in a related article, Stowe urged the home-owning husband to become a “handy man [who] knows how to use every sort of tool that keeps his house in order.” She proceeded to list familiar examples of the kinds of minor household crises that the handyman might address: replacing a broken window pane, soldering a leaking pipe joint, attaching a piece of peeling furniture veneer, tightening a loose hinge screw, and patching a leaky roof.⁸ Stowe never implied that home repair might be a satisfying or

gender-affirming activity, but both she and her sister did try to break down a widespread reluctance to the occasional use of physical labor in household maintenance.

Although American middle-class men would not embrace the idea of doing manual home work until after 1900, in one sense their wives and daughters had already done so with home decorating and crafts. Throughout the nineteenth century women who had leisure time filled much of it by making personal items, gifts, and decorative household objects. Women's magazines, and subsequently their rooms, were filled with home-made decorations constructed from shells, dried plants, feathers, human hair, colored paper, paint, wax, needlework, or any other small, colorful items that could be glued to cardboard to make pictures or table-top ornaments.⁹ The scope of middle-class female handicraft activities, however, was severely limited by women's reluctance to use what were perceived of as "men's tools." Even the most encouraging advocates of handicrafts for women ultimately conceded woodworking tools to men. Writing in *Godey's Lady's Book* in 1870, "Mertie" urged her female readers not to be discouraged from trying to make furniture at home. Mertie acknowledged that most women thought that "even if anything in that line can be made at home, it must owe its production to the hands of one of the gentlemen who may have a taste for, and have learnt, carpentering." But, she said, her plans could "be done by any lady who can manage a hammer and nails, and the little rough work that is needed is within the power of any school-boy or man-servant."¹⁰ While Mertie was trying to be encouraging and break down female aversion to men's tools, what she gave with one hand she immediately retracted with the other. First she says "do it," and then she says the rough work can be done by schoolboys or manservants. In the final analysis Mertie's projects for women emphasized the needle arts, and any serious cabinet making was left for the "fair amateur carpenter or the village professional," either of whom would obviously have been a man.¹¹

The situation was inverted for men; they could use woodworking tools but not needle and thread. In fact there seems to have been what I will call a "half-pound rule." That is, women did not use any tool weighing more than a half-pound while men by and large avoided most tools weighing less, although larger paint brushes sometimes occupied a degendered middle ground. Mertie's reference to "fair amateur carpenters" indicates that as early as 1870 there was a nascent and

generally unremarked upon group of urban or suburban male do-it-yourselfers. If there were no expectations that men would work on their own dwellings as there would be in the next century, nor even any assumption that tool work could be a source of pride, in the last decades of the nineteenth century there did at least seem to be a general acceptance of male competence with hammer and saw. Examples are scarce but indicative of the sharp distinctions between what each gender could do. In 1883 a bachelor faced with an unprepossessing rented room refinished the floor, painted the curtain rod and window frame, and purchased old chairs that he painted to match his black, red and gold color scheme. However, his greatest achievement was to remove the "common-place marble mantel," and replace it with one that incorporated a set of shelves he constructed out of white pine.¹²

Ultimately however, very few husbands or wives undertook household repair and maintenance in the nineteenth century. Because they had an ongoing tradition of handicrafts, Victorian women, more so than men, had the potential to be the real harbingers of the do-it-yourself movement. They were, however, stymied by their demonstrated reluctance to use heavy tools. On the male side, industrialism had broken the farmer/artisan tradition of manual competence. Men could, if they wished, take up tools around the home, but very few seem to have wanted to, and there was no general expectation that they should. Those men who had moved off the farm and out of the home-based workplace had severed their ties to self-sufficiency. They worked away from the house, often in offices, and like their wives, were willing to buy what their forebears had made. Among the urban and suburban middle class, both Victorian men and women exhibited a clear disinclination to use heavy tools, women because they were masculine, men because they were no longer a part of the way a man earned his living.

Over the course of the twentieth century, increasing numbers of women picked up the tools of household repair. Nevertheless, big tools never lost their aura of masculinity. Strict distinctions about their use broke down at roughly the same rate as strict distinctions in other areas of gender specialization, which is to say slowly and unevenly with the rhetoric of equality often outpacing the practice.

Negotiating Domestic Space

Prior to the Civil War only 12 percent of Americans worked for somebody else; by 1910 more than two-thirds of all Americans were

employees.¹³ On the one hand, work in larger firms was more dependable than self-employment, making postbellum men better able to fulfill what Ileen DeVault has called the “social definition of masculinity”—the imperative to support their families.¹⁴ On the other hand, as the more traditional sense of “manly independence” that came with being one’s own boss became increasingly a thing of the past, Victorian men, as Carnes and Griffen point out, were forced to “devise new conceptions of masculinity.”¹⁵ While the job remained a—perhaps *the*—major source of personal identity for men, it appears to have been a less complete, less satisfying basis for feeling manly than self-employment had been.¹⁶ As women began to work in offices, albeit in small numbers and limited roles, the fundamental demography of the workplace shifted and presented white-collar men with additional complications in defining masculinity through their jobs. Angel Kwolek-Folland discovered, for example, that the introduction of women into the life insurance business after the 1890s disturbed the traditional air (and language) of male camaraderie among the old-time clerks who felt they were being “civilized” and losing their manhood as a result.¹⁷

Historians of the postbellum era have suggested that male gender anxieties induced by industrialization found most of their resolutions away from the female-dominated home. In separate studies, both Mary Ann Clawson and Mark Carnes report that Victorian men spent many of their evenings at fraternal meetings that, like their jobs, kept them away from the female world of the house. According to Carnes, these ritual-filled meetings may have provided men with the psychological permission to break from the inhibiting bonds that tied them to their mothers.¹⁸ Clawson goes even further, claiming that fraternalism “was an alternative to domesticity, one that worked to preserve rather than deny the primacy of masculine social organization.”¹⁹ These conclusions about fraternalism and masculinity have been reinforced by E. Anthony Rotundo’s findings that boys and adolescent males formed homosocial groups that allowed them to retreat from the female dominated household and practice the non-feminine values of aggression and competition that they would need in the workplace.²⁰ This picture of the father-as-stranger under his own roof is consistent with the general reluctance of nineteenth-century men to undertake work around the house. Their worlds of both work and leisure lay beyond the white picket fence. The rise of muscular Christianity and organized athletics, the continuation of fraternal orders, and the emergence of the Boy

Scouts after 1900 are all indications that male groups remained an important, but no longer the sole, source of masculine identity into the new century.²¹

Along with this continuation of homosocial bonding, a counter-trend emerged in which men found companionship and masculine identity within the home. Beginning very tentatively in the nineteenth century, it took on a recognizably modern form at the beginning of the twentieth, as part of the rise of “masculine domesticity.” Moving from the position of a somewhat remote *paterfamilias*, the new suburban husband was, according to Margaret Marsh, willing “to take on increased responsibility for some of the day-to-day tasks of bringing up children,” and make “his wife, rather than his male cronies, his regular companion on evenings out.”²² Marsh notes in passing that part of this new role was some increased male attention to home decoration.²³ That increased attention to decoration was more than a part of the broader pattern of masculine domesticity; it was also an expression of a new relationship that developed between men and their houses in the first decades of the twentieth century. This relationship extended the concept of masculine domesticity to the structure itself and served both to broaden the man’s sphere within the home and to further cement the partnership aspect of suburban married life. While it is true that men and women worked together more frequently on their houses, it is also important to understand that men staked out areas of activity at home that became their particular domains. By doing so they created what I prefer to call spheres of “domestic masculinity.” Unlike masculine domesticity, which had men doing jobs that had once belonged to women, domestic masculinity was practiced in areas that had been the purview of professional (male) craftsmen, and therefore retained the aura of pre-industrial vocational masculinity. The two concepts are complementary, but the introduction of the idea of domestic masculinity recognizes the creation of a male sphere *inside* the house.

When Marsh links the rise of male domesticity to the growth of new suburbs that removed the family from the alternative activities of the city, she recognizes that the physical environment is reciprocally linked to gender roles in the family.²⁴ However, as she and others have observed, it was not only the geographic locus of the family that shifted; the very appearance of the house changed in a way that complemented the new role of the middle-class male homeowner and his relationship with his wife. The fussy, overstuffed, and richly

textured designs of high Victorian taste were replaced by two styles of architecture, furniture, and decorative objects that de-emphasized the soft “feminine” complexity of the nineteenth century. As one contemporary noted, both these new looks promoted interiors in which everything was “simple, plain, strong, and vigorous, rich and harmonious in coloring, and absolutely uncrowded.”²⁵ The first new look with its emphasis on straight lines, exposed joints, and natural materials was generically referred to as “arts and crafts,” but the architecture was often called “craftsman” or “bungalow,” and the furniture labeled “mission.” The second new look was the self-consciously pre-industrial “colonial” style, also called “early-American,” which included both upper-class styles like Queen Anne and Chippendale and chaste native forms like Shaker and vernacular rustic. Although they evoked different historical epochs, many arts and crafts era decorators were willing to combine mission and colonial styles since they shared an austerity that produced the desired appearance of simplicity.²⁶

It was perhaps only a fortuitous historical accident that these new masculinized homes were built in the “craftsman” style, a name derived from *The Craftsman* magazine published by Gustav Stickley, furniture manufacturer and guru of the American arts and crafts movement. Nevertheless, the image of the craftsman, an artisan in his leather apron surrounded by the tools of his trade and the products of his own hand, was the perfect one for the new domestic masculinity. “Any fool can write a book but it takes a man to dovetail a door,” declared Charles F. Lummis, a writer, civic reformer, and romantic primitivist who, with the help of local Indians, hauled his own field stones while building his Pasadena Arroyo home.²⁷ The equivalency of man and artisan is central to understanding the meaning of home-based manual skills in both the arts and crafts period, and in the years that follow. Mary Ann Clawson has persuasively argued that in the nineteenth century, the masculine artisanal imagery of the Masons was one of the essential elements of the order’s success in attracting men seeking affirmation of their besieged maleness.²⁸ Fraternal orders, however, took men away from their homes and allowed them to become only symbolic artisans. In the twentieth century, basement workshops kept men in their homes and allowed them to become, or at least try to become, actual craftsmen.²⁹

Whereas male do-it-yourself activity in the nineteenth century had been limited to minor household repairs and light maintenance with

almost no crafts at all, as a result of the arts and crafts movement building things for pleasure became part of the masculine repertoire in the twentieth century.³⁰ As a form of work at home that was a relief from work on the job, the arts and crafts movement generated a whole set of psychotherapeutic arguments to augment the heretofore practical ones for do-it-yourself activity.³¹ Under this new rubric, work around the house was not work; it was recreation that soothed the troubled minds of men when they returned from the city by providing them with a masculine alternative to effete office work. Typically, a 1910 article entitled "Recreation with Tools" explained that every person needed some interest aside from daily work in order to "maintain that balance and poise—physical and mental—which is so essential to right living."³² Historian T. J. Jackson Lears seems to regret this palliative aspect of do-it-yourself when he notes that by World War I the arts and crafts ideal had "been reduced to a revivifying hobby for the affluent" in which the "nervous businessman would return refreshed to the office after a weekend of puttering at his basement workbench."³³ It is true that craft work had been "reduced" in the sense that the movement did not revolutionize industrial capitalism as many of its most ardent supporters had hoped, but it would provide generations of men with a sense of satisfaction that may have disappeared from their jobs.

The impact of the arts and crafts movement was amplified by its convergence with the spread of manual training in the public schools. Manual training had been introduced into the United States from Russia in 1876 as a form of vocational education for working-class children, but it combined with drawing instruction around the turn of the century to bring both the philosophy and techniques of the arts and crafts movement into middle- as well as working-class school rooms.³⁴ Shop courses introduced boys to the use of tools at a time when simpler house and furnishing styles made it easier for them, and their fathers, to make fashionable household items.³⁵ Ira Griffith, a manual arts teacher and do-it-yourself writer for *Suburban Life*, promoted the "plain, square Mission type of furniture" as both suitable for woodworking beginners and as compatible with the aesthetic dictum that form should follow function (figure 1).³⁶ Manual arts classes legitimated constructive work for the middle-class and recreated a home environment where fathers could once again pass on specific manly skills to their sons, a form of masculine bonding that was virtually universal before the



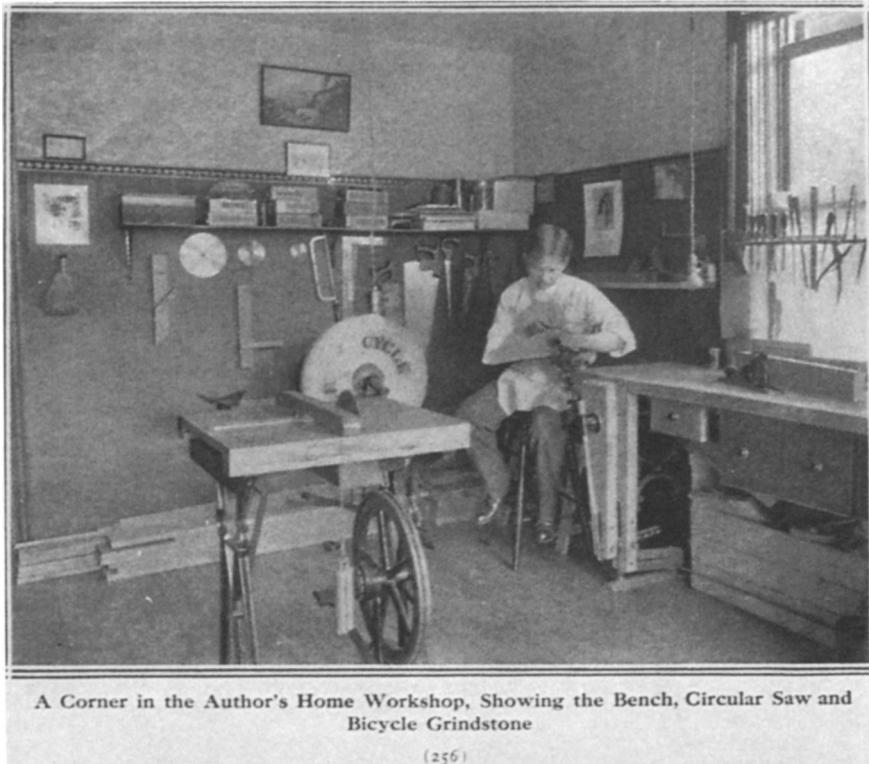
A number of interesting examples of work done by boys in an up-to-date manual training school

Fig. 1. Examples of mission-style furniture popular among shop teachers and do-it-yourselfers in the arts and crafts era before World War I. Ira S. Griffith, "Cabinet Making as a Handicraft," *Suburban Life* (Sept. 1910): 347.

industrial revolution but rare after it.³⁷ Beginning in the arts and crafts era and continuing through the 1950s, workshop plans frequently contained references to bringing fathers and sons closer.³⁸

Although they tended to be smaller than their Victorian predecessors, there was a strong sense that the craftsman-style bungalows so popular after the turn of century should make room somewhere for a man's workshop. This "factory in miniature," as one writer called it, would serve the practical purpose of storing the tools necessary to do the "numerous small repairs" that would otherwise be left undone because they were "hardly of sufficient importance for the calling in of a carpenter or a plumber."³⁹ In addition the shop would be the place where men could pursue messy craft hobbies without bothering their wives.⁴⁰ With the disappearance of the library, men still seemed to want a room of their own, and household repair and improvement offered an excellent rationale for setting aside some territory for themselves. The kitchen remained the woman's bailiwick; the bedroom was shared but, according to decorators writing in 1919, still considered "the one room in the house above all others where the woman's taste reigns supreme."⁴¹ Since the living room was family space, where could a man turn for a physical place in the home that was his alone?

The problem of gendering limited domestic space faced A. L. Hall when he moved into his moderate sized house in 1908. Hall reported that he was given a rear room on the second floor as a den. At the same time, however, he encroached on his wife's territory by storing his household tools in the kitchen. When Hall found that he hardly used the den, he gladly followed his wife's suggestion that he convert it to a workshop. Hall was able to turn his allocated room into the location for a new woodworking hobby. He equipped the workshop with a fly-wheel-driven circular saw that, along with a pedal-driven lathe, scroll-saw, and grindstone, he used to build furniture of his own design (figure 2).⁴² A surprising number of writers followed Hall's lead and recommended that workshops share space with living quarters.⁴³ Noise and sawdust, however, made such arrangements impractical, and most of this first generation of male do-it-yourselfers staked a subterranean claim next to the furnace, which was already considered men's territory because of the labor necessary to shovel coal and ashes. From there, generations of men would produce a steady flow of household objects and regularly emerge with hammer and Stillson wrench to keep their homes in tip-top order.⁴⁴



A Corner in the Author's Home Workshop, Showing the Bench, Circular Saw and
Bicycle Grindstone

(256)

Fig. 2. Home workshop with treadle-driven circular saw in a converted den. Most workshops, however, were in basements. A. L. Hall, "My Workshop at Home," *Suburban Life* (Nov. 1908): 256.

In the Victorian period women's painting had been mostly artistic; in the Progressive era, however, women began to undertake more ambitious decorating projects, although they continued to defer to men on those jobs that were arduous or risky. "Women Do Not Paint," proclaimed a paint advertisement in 1912, but, it went on, they should know enough about paint to insist that the professional they hire use the Dutch Boy brand (figure 3). Because they feared alienating their professional customers, manufacturers of building and maintenance materials would not advertise for direct sale to the general public until the do-it-yourself boom of the 1950s, so this advertisement's focus on professional painters is not unusual. Yet it is indicative that the accompanying illustration showed a housewife directing a painter on a ladder outside rather than inside her house.⁴⁵

Two articles published at almost the same time as the Dutch Boy advertisement illustrate how men's and women's do-it-yourself spheres overlapped when they were painting inside. The first, which was directed toward men, urged homeowners not to hand over the redoing of their interiors to professional painters, but to do it themselves. In fact, this 1912 article may be the first to self-consciously use the phrase "Do-It-Yourself" (capital, hyphens, and quotation marks in the original) to refer to owner-completed household projects.⁴⁶ The second article, entitled "What a Woman Can Do With a Paint Brush," appeared a month later in the same magazine. The author assured her readers that "any woman, indeed, possessed of average energy and the ability to read and follow directions on a can of paint or varnish can be her own decorator." Nevertheless, by conceding that women could not paint exteriors she explicitly acknowledged that doing so was a masculine activity: "painting a whole house or barn may possibly be tried by the ambitious father, but his wife, who classes ladders and scaffolds among the implements of a dangerous trade, is undoubtedly glad to have professional labor called in."⁴⁷

By 1912, then, suburban homeowners were participating in two related but distinct forms of do-it-yourself. The first, done by husbands and wives together, was an aspect of masculine domesticity. The second, done only by men, was an exercise in domestic masculinity. When men and women undertook household chores such as interior painting with rough equality, they were contributing to the degendering of the home. However, when husbands alone took over household jobs that had been previously done by professionals, like exterior painting or

Women Do Not Paint

but they should know something about the paint their painters use.

"I suppose in nine cases out of ten it is the wife who first suggests that the house is looking shabby and needs repainting," said a friend of the Dutch Boy the other day.

"Yes," was the reply, "but she should go farther and interest herself in *how* it is painted. Then she wouldn't have to call John's attention to the shabbiness of the house so often."

When women learn how much *longer*

"Dutch Boy Painter"
Pure White Lead

lasts than ordinary paint, they will insist on its use always, just for the sake of keeping the house looking nice.

Madame, we have some painting literature especially interesting to you—bearing particularly on the usefulness of genuine white lead paint in home decoration. Send for "Paint Helps No. 358" and remember that *a house white leaded is a house well painted.*

Our white lead is sold in scaled packages containing 12½, 25, 50 and 100 pounds, net weight, of white lead exclusive of the package. Our guarantee is on every keg.

National Lead Company

| | | |
|-----------|---------------|-----------|
| New York | Boston | Buffalo |
| Chicago | Cincinnati | Cleveland |
| St. Louis | San Francisco | |

(John T. Lewis & Bros. Co.,
Philadelphia, Pa.)
(National Lead & Oil Co.,
Pittsburgh, Pa.)

Fig. 3. Advertisement for Dutch Boy paint indicating both the general aversion of women to large-scale painting and the reluctance of manufacturers to advertise for nonprofessional use of their home-care products. *Suburban Life* (Apr. 1911): 259.

household building projects, they were doing something different from masculine domesticity because they were carving out a gender specific role within the house. Such activities were exclusively male and doing them gave men a sense of special ability that may well have compensated for some loss of masculine affirmation at work.

The House Becomes a Hobby

Judging from the dramatic increase in do-it-yourself literature, the role for men in caring for their homes grew so palpably during the interwar years that the house was transformed from a place *in* which to do things to a place *on* which to do things. Continuing the pattern that had begun in the Progressive era, and paralleling the general loosening of gender constraints, women also increased their role in home maintenance and repair thus maintaining a rough proportionality with men. However, this was no zero-sum situation because both husbands and wives expanded their spheres of household competence. The only losers were professionals, the need for whose services continued to decline steadily. Because do-it-yourself was carving out new territory for householder activity, and because most of that activity was performed by men, home maintenance and repair became a major source of domestic masculinity in the 1920s and 1930s, slowing down only temporarily when World War II forced home owners to exchange their hammers and saws for the tools of war.

A change to more traditional architectural and furniture styles after World War I did little to dampen the growing enthusiasm of home owners to improve their surroundings.⁴⁸ Do-it-yourself magazines simply ignored the new styles and continued to publish plans for straight-lined mission-style furniture that made up in simplicity of construction what it lacked in current fashion. Furthermore, the great antique craze of the 1920s helped by popularizing easy-to-replicate rustic colonial styles along with some much harder to copy early-American examples of fine cabinet making.⁴⁹ While the change in styles may have slightly reduced the number of do-it-yourself furniture projects published in advice magazines, that shortage was more than made up for by an increase in general home maintenance and improvement suggestions.

Between 1890 and 1930 the number of privately owned homes more than tripled, while mass distribution of automobiles in the 1920s

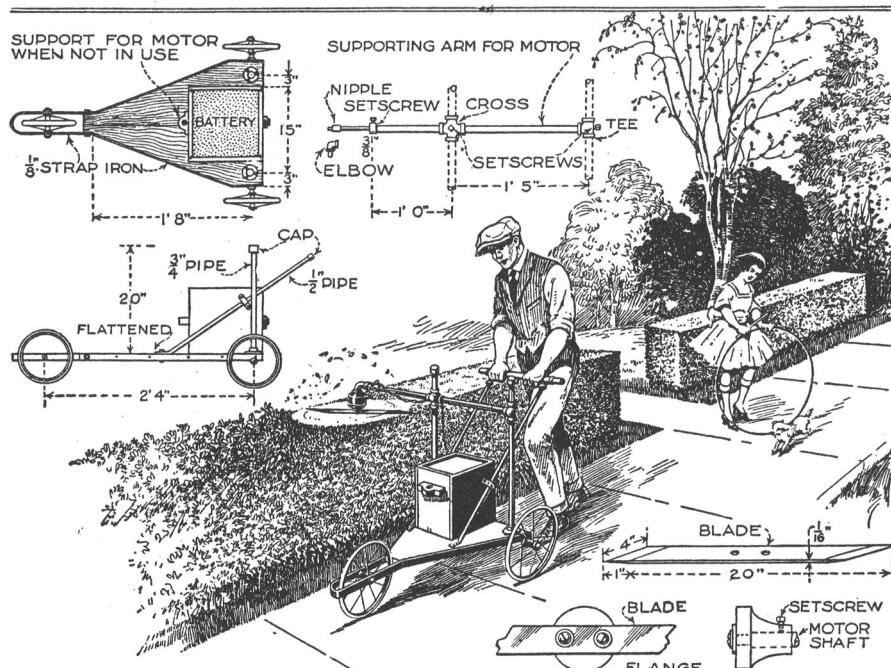
encouraged the growth of new housing developments beyond the confines of streetcar and rail lines.⁵⁰ As had been the case in the nineteenth century, this private housing boom was not restricted to the white-collar middle-class. Richard Harris has shown that at the end of the Depression, the percentage of skilled workers who owned their own homes was actually higher than that of professional workers (41.9 percent versus 40.3 percent).⁵¹ Although he has no precise figures, Harris is confident "that the families of male blue-collar workers did more work within and upon the home than did those of other groups."⁵² Blue-collar workers who knew how to use tools and who risked no loss in status by doing so had everything to gain by working on their own homes. Trumpeting the benefits of his forty-hour work week in 1926, Henry Ford explained that his men "have been building houses for themselves, and to meet their demand for good and cheap lumber we have established a lumber yard where they can buy wood from our own forests."⁵³ And in lovely symmetry, the working men who bought the inexpensive cars produced by Ford's workers spent their free time building shelters for this first generation of cheap automobiles. When social worker Rose Feld investigated the leisure activities of steel workers who had just gotten an eight-hour workday in 1924 she discovered that a high percentage of them were constructing their own garages—which incidentally is additional testimony to the widespread private homeownership among blue collar workers.⁵⁴

Because do-it-yourself was an artifact of homeownership, and because homeownership was widespread among blue-collar workers, do-it-yourself was an activity that transcended class more readily than gender. While commonsense suggests that poorer householders had a greater economic stake in doing their own building, repairing, and maintenance than did richer homeowners, men from all classes appear to have had an essentially similar set of attitudes toward do-it-yourself. They recognized it as not-quite-a-chore, that is, something useful undertaken voluntarily. As such, do-it-yourself activities were a jumble of contradictions; they were leisure that was work-like and chores that were leisurely; they produced outcomes with real economic value that might actually cost more in time and money than the product was worth; they were performed by middle-class men acting like blue-collar workers and blue-collar workers acting like middle-class homeowners. It is precisely this categorical fuzziness that allowed do-it-yourself to become so central to domestic masculinity. Its justifications and

satisfactions were multiple, permitting men, depending on their circumstances, to rationalize it as money-saving, trouble-saving, useful, psychologically fulfilling, creative, or compensatory. It was, in other words, a hobby.

The large increase in the number of small-sized suburban houses after World War I made for a significant number of homeowners who could treat their homes playfully and act as an audience for increasing numbers of do-it-yourself articles. It was during the 1920s that the wonderful, if slightly nutty, tradition of home-made labor-savers got started.⁵⁵ Plans for devices like bicycle-driven lawn mowers, battery-run hedge trimmers, chicken-operated hen house doors, and remote electric ignition switches for water heaters, filled the pages of *Popular Mechanics* and other do-it-yourself magazines (figure 4).⁵⁶ While these implements may in fact have saved some time and effort (if they ever worked), they contained an element of exuberance that made them as much playful as labor saving. The house itself was becoming a hobby, both the location and the object of leisure time activity.⁵⁷ To the extent that it was a hobby, the house was part of a pattern of "serious leisure," which, as sociologist Robert Stebbins has noted, is leisure pursued as though it were work.⁵⁸ Serious leisure is a strong source of personal identification, and a hobby that involved the use of traditional male skills contributed to a sense of domestic masculinity. By taking over work from professional craftsmen, this interwar generation of handymen expressed pride in their homes, much as they did in their cars, by tricking them out with gadgets and keeping them polished and purring.

With this new conception of the house as a pastime came the growing belief that do-it-yourself maintenance and repair work could be satisfying in the same way as more obviously creative constructive projects. The hobby label had been applied to furniture-building projects in the arts and crafts era; during the 1920s its application was broadened to include even routine work on the house itself. "Do It Yourself," urged the title of the first chapter in a 1924 home-repair book, because the best form of rest was taking up a "work hobby" that would provide a sense of accomplishment and ward off nervous collapse.⁵⁹ Saving money and avoiding inconvenience would remain the primary reasons for do-it-yourself household repair, but writers increasingly recognized the psychological satisfaction that could make household care as much a satisfying hobby as a chore.⁶⁰ The shifting balance between necessity and pleasure meant that, for the first time,



This Electrically Driven Hedge-Trimming Machine will Delight the Amateur Mechanic Who Prides Himself on the Appearance of His Grounds. It is Easily Made, and Quite Efficient

Fig. 4. Home-made, battery-powered hedge-trimmer was typical of make-it-yourself labor saving devices in men's technology and do-it-yourself magazines in the 1920s. *Make It Yourself* (Chicago, 1927), 307.

how-to writers could begin to acknowledge what most home owners had discovered for themselves; do-it-yourself did not necessarily save either money or aggravation, but could be pleasurable nevertheless. In a general how-to article on setting up a home workshop, James Tate advised “Mr. Amateur Mechanic” to be sure he had the tools necessary to fix a loose coffee pot handle, put up a few shelves, make the screen door fit, and repair the cord on the toaster. Tate was not advocating do-it-yourself repairs because they would save the homeowner money. On the contrary, he said he was addressing “the man who gets more fun out of twenty dollars’ worth of time spent in tinkering with tools than in paying out five to have the job done.”⁶¹ In other words, Tate turned some of the traditional rationales for home repair upside-down. It was neither the cost saving, nor the convenience of bypassing professionals that mattered, it was the satisfaction of doing-it-yourself—even if you lost money in the process.

Following up on the inroads they had made during the 1910s, wives moved on to new challenges in do-it-yourself repair and maintenance in the 1920s, when, for the first time, detailed articles on such things as electrical appliance repair began appearing for women.⁶² Although there is little hard data on female participation in do-it-yourself, the home-care literature indicates that the trend toward including wives in a house maintenance team continued and even expanded a bit during the Great Depression. With limited money to hire professionals or to buy new household items when the old ones wore out, the economic incentive to do it yourself became preeminent.⁶³ Indeed, the mid 1930s appear to have been something of a watershed for female incorporation in do-it-yourself. Women enjoyed the fact that they too could do-it-themselves, and did not have to depend on men. In 1936, when Martha Wirt Davis instructed women how to hammer in a nail—and how *not* to hammer in a screw, she did not cite financial savings as the reason women should gain competence with tools. What she did stress was the convenience and pride of being independent of men. She discovered that “there is quite a bit of satisfaction in being able to fix one’s own cords, open stubborn windows, unstop stopped-up sinks, put new washers in leaky faucets or replace burned-out fuses without calling for male assistance.”⁶⁴ Similarly, in 1938 when J. C. Woodin published what appears to be the first American textbook on home mechanics for girls, he explained that he hoped to “allow housewives to deal with minor, everyday problems without having to call professional repair-

men or wait for their husbands to come home.”⁶⁵ That women had to be encouraged to learn do-it-yourself tasks as elementary as hammering a nail or changing a fuse is testimony to both how andric household repair and maintenance remained and to a new rhetorical willingness to advocate female use of non-traditional tools.

Like hobbies in general, home workshops enjoyed a great boom during the depression. In a society where jobs were at a premium and the work ethic itself was under siege from unemployment, leisure time activities that replicated work activity and reinforced work values gave employed people a way to confirm the importance of productive labor as the core activity in modern society.⁶⁶ Advocates of do-it-yourself in the 1930s praised it both for its practicality in allowing homeowners to save money by doing their own work and for the sense of satisfaction it provided.⁶⁷ Workshop hobbyists consumed the fruits of their own production, and could argue they were saving money in the bargain. “I am sitting on a home-made chair,” wrote one author, and “the greatest reward coming out of this piece of work was the fun of making it with my own hands.” However, he went on point out that there was also “a dollar-and-cents moral to be drawn” because it cost him less than a commercially produced chair.⁶⁸

Underlying the claims of pride and practicality during the depression was a poignant sense of self-reliance; if a man could take care of his own home and build his own furniture, he had special resources with which to face the vicissitudes of life. There was a new stress on the corruptibility of the physical environment and the key role of the homeowner in staving off breakdown and decay. Advisors stressed that houses, like cars, needed to be maintained. The work could be done professionally if necessary, but would be much more satisfying if done by the owner himself.⁶⁹ The quirky household hints and oddball projects that had established the home as a hobby in the 1920s kept appearing in pulp how-to magazines like *Modern Mechanix*—where else could one learn how to use dynamite to dig a hole in which to plant a tree, or how to make a door closer from an automobile water-pump?⁷⁰ The 1930s, however, subordinated these aspects of do-it-yourself to a sense of the household workshop as a redoubt where the beleaguered homeowner could exercise those masculine skills that enabled him to keep a very dangerous world at bay.⁷¹ “If you can cook a meal, sew on a button and use a saw and hammer, you can face almost any situation,” observed one atypically androgynous do-it-yourselfer; “if you can’t do

these things, you may be a railroad president, but you are not a completely self-reliant human being.”⁷²

Even while they were declaring the superiority of skill over wealth, do-it-yourselfers in the 1930s seemed to crave the affirmation that their mundane hobby was shared by those who were not economically constrained to work around the house. In good times craftsmanship was a sign of manly self reliance, but in bad times it could be a sign of economic impotence. Thus, the knowledge that rich people were also do-it-yourselfers contributed to the sense, however illusory, that do-it-yourself was still more leisure than chore. In other words, gender transcended class. Home craftsmen could, and presumably rich ones did, look upon their efforts as an expression of masculinity rather than frugality, or even necessity. The *New York Times* made a point of describing doctors, lawyers and bankers who rolled up their sleeves in workshops that sometimes took up large portions of their homes.⁷³ Similarly, the Leisure League of America, a Depression-era organization that promoted the productive use of spare time, explained that “tucked away in a closet of one of the swankiest of New York’s apartment hotels there happens to be a woodworker’s bench, a power lathe and an amazing assortment of hand tools ready, at a moment’s notice, to make the sawdust fly!”⁷⁴

Just as the less affluent do-it-yourselfers might feel less self-conscious by knowing that the wealthy shared their hobby, home workshops allowed wealthier professionals and executives to establish their connection to the tradition of manly labor, which was experiencing a visual revival at the hands of New Deal artists. As Barbara Melosh points out, a disproportionately large number of broad-shouldered, barrel-chested workers peered down in mute disapproval of those who did not work with their hands, or did not work at all, from public buildings throughout the country.⁷⁵ In the Depression-era home workshop, however, the symbolic could still become real, and every office worker could imagine himself the heroic figure on the post office wall. Indeed, what little data we do have for the 1930s, confirms the classless nature of do-it-yourself. Approximately half of all home workshops were owned by middle-class college graduates and half by skilled blue-collar workers.⁷⁶

The most dedicated and wealthy do-it-yourself hobbyists, like the one in the swanky New York apartment, equipped their shops with electrically driven tools. Some craft workers had motorized their foot-

powered jigsaws and lathes as soon as small electric motors and electrically wired homes had appeared early in the century, but it was not until the end of the 1920s that craft writers could begin to assume that any significant number of their readers would have power tools at home.⁷⁸ The Delta corporation produced the first home power tool, a scroll saw, in 1923, and the new industry actually experienced a boomlet during the cash-starved years of the Great Depression.⁷⁹ It was a boomlet, not a boom, because of the price of the electrical tools. Walker-Turner, the leading manufacturer of home power tools in the 1930s offered a motor-driven jigsaw, drill press, or lathe for about twenty dollars, and they were carried, at least for a while, by large department stores such as Macy's.⁸⁰ Other companies sold similar machines for thirty to forty dollars apiece, which did not include the cost of the motor used to run them. Because such prices amounted to 2-3 percent of the average worker's gross income, the market was limited to the wealthy or the highly motivated hobbyist.⁸¹ A 1935 survey of home workshops in Lima, Ohio found that significantly fewer than half had any power equipment at all—and much of that was homemade.⁸² On the other hand, a poll the same year of the more serious craftsmen who had joined the National Homeworkshop Guild determined that almost two-thirds of them had some sort of electrically driven tool, most commonly a lathe and circular saw.⁸³

Expensive equipment distinguished wealthy from middle-class amateurs, but that difference was secondary to the sense of common masculine experience they shared. When one magazine printed an illustration of what it called a "typical" power-driven basement workshop in 1937, it belonged to the hardly typical Milwaukee industrialist, Louis Allis. Yet the image is typical in a number of ways. Like the average Joe, Allis's workshop retreat was in his basement. It was, furthermore, a man's space, or at least a male's space, since Allis was pictured smoking a cigarette as he worked at his drill press while his son cut a pattern on an electric scroll saw. A second illustration depicts a similarly equipped basement shop with a large dog lying at the feet of his master. The article implies that while he might be a millionaire manufacturer of electric motors, Allis was also a craftsman participating in the democratic fraternity of home-based artisans, along with "bank and industrial executives, opera and movie stars, salesmen, professional men, mechanics and laborers," all of whom were numbered "among the ranks of the home shop operators."⁸⁴

Whether for reasons of pride, practicality, or self-reliance, there was a proliferation of home workshops during the 1930s. A variety of specialized magazines that catered to home handymen promoted this workshop movement, headed by the perennial leaders in the field, *Popular Mechanics* and *Popular Science Monthly*. *Popular Mechanics* pioneered the category before World War I and remained one of the most successful magazines for do-it-yourselfers well into the 1950s.⁸⁴ Arch-rival *Popular Science* was able to carve out a particular place for itself in the 1930s by promoting the National Homeworkshop Guild, a network of three hundred local clubs in forty-four states that supported home handicrafts.⁸⁵ The Guild represented a midpoint between the Victorian period, when a relatively few men participated in do-it-yourself as a convenient but unnecessary activity, and the 1950s when it would become a virtual obligation for the suburban homeowner. As a formal institutionalization of workshop hobbies, the Guild was evidence that work around the house was neither unexpected nor commonplace. That which is never done cannot be institutionalized and that which is ubiquitous does not have to be. In other words, by the Great Depression significant numbers of householders were engaged in do-it-yourself projects, but they still felt a sufficient sense of distinctiveness to join an organization of like-minded men.⁸⁶

Members of the National Homeworkshop Guild did not distinguish between small projects and large, between work in the house or on it, or between the creative and the routine. By the 1930s, do-it-yourself had become a category embracing all household jobs requiring the use of tools, a fact recognized by the author of an early home care manual who said his book "should prove particularly valuable to the man who has his own workshop and makes a hobby of woodworking and home maintenance."⁸⁷ Not only did the author categorically link woodworking and home maintenance to the workshop, but he also labeled them parts of the same hobby. Thus when more than six hundred members of the Guild were asked why they had a home workshop the largest number (592) said it was for recreation, yet a very substantial majority (465) also said they kept a shop for home repairs.⁸⁸ The survey did not ask, and there is no way to know, whether the respondents perceived recreation activities and repair activities as separate, but given the way household repair, maintenance, and improvement suggestions appeared side by side with constructive projects in the literature, there is no reason to assume that the householders themselves made very much of

a distinction. Working in your own house thus contained the basic components of both work and leisure; it was a source of wealth and a source of pleasure.

By putting home repair on a par with creative crafts, the movement spawned a new subset of do-it-yourself literature, home maintenance manuals. The pioneer book in this field was C. T. Schaefer's *The Handy Man's Handbook*, published in 1931 by Harper and Brothers, which proclaimed itself to be "the first attempt to present all of the fundamental [repair and maintenance] information in a single volume, carefully arranged for instant reference."⁸⁹ Previous books had been hybrids of creative furniture projects and household maintenance hints, but Schaefer's book focused almost exclusively on home care.⁹⁰ In a holdover from the earlier style, it began with an extraneous description of cabinetry wood joints, but instead of printing the usual plans for woodworking projects, the rest of the book dealt strictly with repairs: to woodwork, to hinges and locks; to ceilings, walls, and floors; to plumbing and wiring, and to some electric appliances.

This new category of dwelling-maintenance books took for granted the husband's role as handyman. What had been, prior to the depression, convenient but voluntary householder incursions into the realm of professional craftsmen were becoming expected, if not yet required, exercises in manual competence. What was once a hobby of small creative projects was now also a hobby of maintenance and repair. *Homo faber* had returned to the cave. It was now in his basement and contained a workbench that allowed the middle-class homeowner to re-integrate the meaning of work. While he might be limited to more routine or intellectual production on the job, now, like his forefathers, he could produce with his hands at home at a *workbench* in a *workshop*. These terms were not mere anachronisms; they survived because they continued to express the sense that using tools to make and repair things was man's work even while it was his leisure. Men and tools were beginning to create a definitional loop; to be a man one used the tools, and using the tools made one a man.

Rosie and Joe in War and Peace

During that brief period of prosperity between the outbreak of fighting in Europe and American entry into World War II, the pragmatic reasons for do-it-yourself shifted from lack of money to the shortage of

qualified professional workers. American production for the European war absorbed skilled workers, which may be why there was a discernible change in attitudes toward women doing heavier work at home. As they had since the 1910s, most male do-it-yourselfers took it for granted that their wives would set the agenda, but that they would do the work.⁹¹ Thus, the illustrator for a 1942 article in *Parents' Magazine* showed the wife directing her husband's use of heavy tools in four pictures, but doing light work herself in only one (figure 5).⁹² Yet three other articles from the same two-year period had women participating with their husbands in fairly heavy household projects, such as putting in a parking area and refinishing a basement.⁹³ There was a certain amount of ambivalence in the idea of women doing men's work. For example, when Rachel McKinley Bushong wrote an inspirational (as opposed to an instructional) article in *The American Home* that described how she painted walls and made furniture, the cartoon illustrations showed a woman hammering and sawing with much less competence than the determined self-taught do-it-yourselfer of the text (figure 6).⁹⁴

Official American entry into World War II at the end of 1941 erased that ambivalence. Women took over men's jobs in factories and at home. Sabina Ormsby Dean remembered being embarrassed as a girl by her mother who made her own window screens and installed her own plumbing. But when the war came and women everywhere were forced to learn the skills she had grown up with, she could boast in the title of a 1943 article, "It Didn't Take a War to Make a Carpenter Out of Mother."⁹⁵ A variety of organizations established adult education classes for women during the war so that they could nurse their ailing homes and appliances for the duration. The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), the U.S. Extension Service, and especially the American Women's Voluntary Services (a private war-time support organization) held classes to teach women to change fuses, splice wires, trouble-shoot appliances, paint, plumb, and do simple wood repairs.⁹⁶ War-time magazine articles on household repair routinely showed women using the heavy tools that had once been almost exclusively men's and proclaimed: "Every woman her own handyman!"⁹⁷ Seldom did one find a traditional reference to the woman as instigator but not participant in household improvement—and even then she might be vulnerable to her husband's uniquely war-time response: "How can you say such things when you are a riveter?"⁹⁸



Fig. 5. The son helps, the wife directs, the husband works. A typical division of responsibilities in home maintenance. J Harold Hawkins, "Fixing Things Around the House," *The Parents' Magazine* (Aug. 1942): 48.



Fig. 6. The article, written by a woman, described a highly competent female do-it-yourselfer. The illustrations showed a mechanical naif who can't even keep her shoes on. Rachel McKinley Bushong, "Get Going! Not Brains, Not Talent, Not Skill, but Just Plain Works, Try It," *The American Home* (Mar. 1941): 30.

From the perspective of household do-it-yourself, Rosie the Riveter and her GI Joe husband returned home after the war transformed by their experiences. Historians of the family often characterize gender roles in the 1950s as “neo-Victorian,” and for good reason.⁹⁹ The crises of the 1930s and 1940s made the prospect of a husband at work and a wife at home with their children extremely attractive. The Victorian “cult of domesticity” returned with a vengeance in the late 1940s. Three million women left the labor force in the year after the war ended, and gave birth at a rate 20 percent greater than during the war years.¹⁰⁰ Although by 1953 the number of women in the labor force had actually regained its wartime peak, even women’s return to work was domestically oriented; most of those who found jobs did so not to pursue careers but to support a material lifestyle, a major portion of which was a private home.¹⁰¹

The home of the 1950s, however was not the home of the 1850s. Middle-class men and women did more with their own hands and did more together than their Victorian great-grandparents. Rather than neo-Victorian, a more apt, if excessively hyphenated, characterization of the 1950s family would be neo-pre-industrial. Like farm and artisan couples, husbands and wives in the 1950s had distinct jobs around the house, but ones that were done within sight of and in cooperation with each other.¹⁰² Men were expected to be there for their wives, for their children, and for themselves. Being a father was no longer limited to bringing home the paycheck; men were also supposed to be warm and nurturing parents, but at the same time, popular images of emasculated suburban men seemed to warn of dangers in the role of suburban dad.¹⁰³ The increased calls for paternal presence clashed with the continuing assumptions of traditional gender models, catching men in a no-win position. Do-it-yourself provided at least a partial solution because household maintenance and repair permitted the suburban father to stay at home without feeling emasculated or being subsumed into an undifferentiated entity with his wife.¹⁰⁴

The workshop, in particular, remained the man’s realm. A 1954 advertisement for Corby’s whiskey shows five men standing around in the garage workshop of what is clearly a very new house. The foreground is dominated by a large wood-lathe, with just enough wood shavings scattered about to make it clear this is a working shop. Hand tools and parts of power tools are hung neatly on the far wall. The casually dressed men have obviously stepped out of the house and away

from their wives to admire a half-finished colonial-style Windsor rocking chair, while helping themselves to whiskey from a home-made serving cart.¹⁰⁵ Their collective retreat to the garage workshop to smoke, drink, and admire the artisanal prowess of the householder all bespeak male camaraderie built on a shared appreciation of the masculine role of suburban handyman.

These were just the men *Business Week* was referring to in its 2 June 1952 issue when it christened the new movement. Proclaiming the 1950s "the age of do-it-yourself," the magazine located the home improvement movement in the rapidly expanding postwar suburbs. Although the phrase "do-it-yourself" had been used from time to time at least as far back as 1912, this appears to be the earliest prominent use of the term in the 1950s and the one that gave it widespread currency.¹⁰⁶ Within the year, the phrase had become commonplace, spread in part by a series of "do-it-yourself" expositions, which themselves were additional evidence of the hands-on ownership trend.

In March 1953 New Yorkers turned out at a rate of over six thousand per day to visit the first of its kind do-it-yourself trade exposition in Manhattan. Although most of the crowd was male, the show, like the do-it-yourself movement, gave women a visible, if ambiguous role.¹⁰⁷ Marianne Shay, pictured in a New York newspaper as "Miss Do-It-Yourself," had recently moved with her husband from Iowa and was looking for work. Back in Davenport she had laid tile and linoleum, and she had done a lot of painting.¹⁰⁸ The show's organizers found Shay photogenic and sufficiently knowledgeable about tools to hire her as a demonstrator for everything from wallpaper to welding.¹⁰⁹ Wielding heavy tools and dressed in her blue-jeans and plaid shirt, Shay was far removed from her Victorian predecessors who would have hardly lifted anything heavier than an artist's paint brush. Nevertheless, it is clear that many of the tools with which she posed for photos were not ones she used in her own home. Rather like a foreigner who has mastered most, but not all, of the nuances of native culture, Shay was admired for her perseverance in the face of great odds. In the end however, she was still a curiosity, not a natural member of the clan.¹¹⁰

Home workshops originated in basements but also colonized garages as they were added to houses in the 1920s and 1930s. Do-it-yourself was not, however, dependent on a dedicated space. It is true that no man could set up a fully equipped shop unless he had space somewhere he could set aside, but the desire to work around the house managed to

overcome even the most formidable obstacle thrown up by postwar builders. Almost two million new single family homes were started in 1950, up from a war-time low of 139,000, the largest number of housing starts in American history.¹¹¹ A surprisingly large number of these new houses, built by the most prominent developers of the time, had neither basements nor garages. In the thousands of northern California houses constructed by Joseph Eichler, for example, there was literally no place to put a workshop unless the homeowner were to follow the suggestion of the Armstrong linoleum company and create a combination kitchen-workshop, which was just what most suburban husbands and wives were trying to avoid.¹¹² Eichler's modern style homes, like all houses built in California after 1945, completely abandoned what had been only rudimentary basements even before the war. Their shallow roofs offered no attic for expansion or work space, and most models substituted an unenclosed carport for a garage.¹¹³ However, the Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired houses did have the advantage of providing a perfect backdrop for what was usually referred to as modern furniture. This style relied heavily on plywood and used simple carcass construction for everything from cabinets to couches. Any man who could cut a straight line with a panel saw could, with some help from his wife, furnish his whole house from his basement (if he had one) workshop to his children's attic (if he had one) bedrooms.¹¹⁴

On the other coast, the massive developments put up by William Levitt, including more than seventeen thousand houses in Long Island's Levittown alone, were only slightly more conducive to do-it-yourself.¹¹⁵ Like the Eichlers, Levitt's houses lacked both basements and garages, but they did provide an unfinished attic where the handy homeowner could add extra bedrooms.¹¹⁶ In her definitive social-architectural history of Levittown, Barbara Kelly notes that remodeling the attic was taken for granted by both the builder and residents.¹¹⁷ And at least one contemporary commentator attributed the whole do-it-yourself movement to a combination of this attic expansion room and the fact that "some of the less expensive new houses are so uniform in appearance that their owners go in for craftsmanship in order to give them a bit of individuality."¹¹⁸ *Better Homes & Gardens*, one of a series of shelter magazines that experienced rapid growth in the 1950s in response to the housing boom, found that more than half of its readers had attics and almost half of them were unfinished.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, the perennially popular rustic colonial furniture style, which was easily

made at home, was compatible with the Cape Cod style that Levitt adopted for his developments.¹²⁰

Even if there were some homes that did not make it particularly easy for the GI generation to work around the house, the fact that there were so many new homes and that the families who occupied them had growing children and felt financially pressed was enough to elevate do-it-yourself to a national fad. Do-it-yourselfers in the 1950s seem to have been, for the most part, middle-aged, middle-income, white-collar workers, a pattern that remained unchanged in the subsequent thirty years.¹²¹ While recent studies indicate that wealthier people perceive do-it-yourself activity as a hobby and poorer people as a necessity, the popular literature of the 1950s certainly indicates that if the movement were a necessity, it was a pleasurable one.¹²² While strapped for cash, men were proud of their new houses and comfortable with tools as a result of their war-time activities. With help from their wives, they undertook home repair and maintenance with what appears to have been a maximum of enthusiasm and a minimum of complaint.¹²³

Dad the Handyman

By mid-decade only reading and watching television were more popular forms of recreation than do-it-yourself among married men.¹²⁴ There were eleven million home workshops in the United States and do-it-yourselfers were, by some estimates, spending four to six billion dollars a year on newly developed materials and tools. Among the most popular innovations in materials were pre-trimmed wallpaper and washable, water-based latex paint applied with a roller, and floor covering tiles that did not require full-size layout and cutting. Painting and papering became the most common do-it-yourself projects, more than twice as popular as either electrical work or wood work, which followed in rank order.¹²⁵ The most significant of the new tools was the hand-held quarter inch drill.¹²⁶

The Black & Decker Manufacturing Company had patented the first portable hand-held drill in 1914. The half-inch drill was large, expensive, and beyond the reach of most homeowners who, prior to World War II, jury-rigged portable drills by mounting drill bits on small jigsaw motors, but the result was both awkward and weak.¹²⁷ In 1946 Black & Decker decided to try again. This time it produced a smaller, cheaper quarter-inch drill designed for home owners.¹²⁸ It was the right

tool at the right time and became the symbol of the do-it-yourself movement. Suburbanites bought an estimated fifteen million drills from Black & Decker and a variety of other manufacturers in the next eight years.¹²⁹ Originally priced at \$16.95, the portable electric drill brought power equipment down to a price that fit the young family budget and to a size that fit in a toolbox as well as a workshop. Whereas in the 1930s, drills (in fact, drill presses) had lagged far behind lathes, saws, and grinders in popularity, in 1958 one survey found that almost three-quarters of handymen owned an electric hand-drill, twice as many as the next most popular power tool, a table saw.¹³⁰

The postwar proliferation of power tools gave amateur craftsmen a sharply increased capacity to undertake larger and more complex projects. They could cut and drill quickly and accurately with much less training than required for the effective use of hand-tools. The widespread use of the new tools also confirmed a trend that had been apparent since the late 1920s; that is, home craftsmanship in the United States was as much product as process oriented. William Morris, the English founder of the arts and crafts movement, had envisioned a world where "all work which would be irksome to do by hand is done by immensely improved machinery; and in all work which it is a pleasure to do by hand, machinery is done without."¹³¹ At the grass-roots level of the home workshop, that world had come to pass in the 1950s, a fact that Americans grasped more quickly than Morris's own countrymen. When a group of English experts toured American industrial education programs in 1950 they were disturbed by the large number of power tools they found in school shops. "What do your pupils do later if they wish to take up woodwork as a hobby, since they have been accustomed in school to do everything with power tools?" they asked. The answer was obvious: "they would, in taking up any hobby, first acquire the necessary machine tools."¹³² For the English, hobbies were, almost by definition, activities that involved traditional methods of hand construction. For the Americans, hobbies were useful ways to occupy free time, and the instruments of that usefulness did not define the legitimacy of the enterprise.

For heavy tools, the new rule seemed to be, "men must, women may," but women were still ceded aesthetic preeminence with paint brush and needle.¹³³ For example, an exhaustively complete sixteen-hundred-page home repair handbook written by veteran do-it-yourself

author Emanuele Stieri in 1950, pictured women on only two pages, those dealing with upholstery.¹³⁴ Victorian assumptions about inherent female superiority in aesthetic expression, especially with needle and brush, survived into the 1950s, but advice givers continued to add new possibilities for more substantial participation in household repair and improvement. Despite ongoing male domination of do-it-yourself, writers occasionally urged women to undertake heavy work on their own.¹³⁵ While a certain amount of this was journalistic hyperbole, it was also an indication that as men took on new household responsibilities, women were not going to surrender the right to participate. If power tools gave men additional opportunities, then do-it-yourself advocates could claim that using power tools to saw wood and drill holes was “simpler than threading, adjusting and running a sewing machine.”¹³⁶ As they had periodically in the past, women pointed with pride to being able to do a “man’s job”; the claim gained support from schools around the country as they began to open their shop classes to girls as well as boys.¹³⁷

From a gender perspective the changes in do-it-yourself during the 1950s continued to enlarge the spheres of both men and women, but it was men who cemented their position as home handyman while at best, women expanded their role as assistant handyman. Women were now free to help with home improvements if they wanted to, but men were expected to. Most frequently women were depicted as helpers or partners for their husbands and, in fact, almost half of the men in one survey said they sometimes got help from their wives in performing do-it-yourself jobs. However, most of the time more than two-thirds of the men did these chores alone.¹³⁸ In an adult version of the tomboy pattern, the wife who did a man’s work around the house was admired for her competence, but the husband who did not was less than a man. By the 1950s being handy had, like sobriety and fidelity, become an expected quality in a good husband. A sociological survey of Little Rock-area male homeowners near the end of the decade found that a significant number of them attributed their household activities to the “insistence of the wife,” leading the interviewer to conclude that women were “the boss in the homes of Pulaski County, Arkansas.”¹³⁹ This do-it-yourself environment gave rise to the ironic “honeydew” syndrome (honey do this, honey do that). Humorous complaints of henpecked husbands were a traditional form of male self-pity, but they had previously

hinged on wives telling their spouses what they should not do (drink, gamble, ramble), not on what they should do (fix the faucet, put up a shelf, paint the kitchen).¹⁴⁰

The henpecked do-it-yourselfer was not only being told do something he was expected to do, but also to do something his wife did not expect to do herself, even if she could. In other words, the image of the henpecked handyman was actually an image of continuing male dominance over the world of heavy tools. “He loves to putter around the house / To the great enjoyment of his spouse,” ran the opening lines of an advertising ditty in 1945, and it ended by noting the admiration of the community: “Neighbors marvel; you’ll hear them utter: / ‘Wise little handyman, Peter Putter.’”¹⁴¹ Such references imply that the male role of handyman was passing from voluntary to mandatory and confirm the social value placed on work around the house. The kinds of household repair, maintenance, and construction projects done by men did not change significantly during the 1950s, but the very doing of those projects became a requirement of masculinity.¹⁴² Do-it-yourself was becoming for adult males what sports were for youths, a virtual badge of manhood. Just as boys took pride in their athletic ability, grown men boasted about their craft skills: “A man makes a chair, a desk, a house, puts a washer in a leaky faucet, builds a kayak, paints a crib, he spends the rest of his life and yours telling you about it.”¹⁴³

Writing in 1958 Albert Roland, the only academic analyst of do-it-yourself in the 1950s, said household projects were perceived as “real” (that is, manual) activity that confirmed masculine competence and reflected Thoreau’s observation: “Drive a nail home and clinch it so faithfully that you can wake up in the night and think of your work with satisfaction.” Working on their own homes, as Thoreau did on his cabin, gave do-it-yourselfers “the satisfying feeling of individual identity and measurable accomplishment” that they failed to get from their everyday jobs. Roland concluded that “millions have taken to heart Thoreau’s example, withdrawing to their basement and garage workshops to find there a temporary Walden.”¹⁴⁴ The literature’s casual interchanging of the leisure term “hobbyist,” the practical label “handyman,” and the mutually inclusive “do-it-yourselfer” reflects this sense of emotionally satisfying work.¹⁴⁵ Do-it-yourself was a morally superior kind of leisure because it was work-like. It is “no longer fashionable for a man to spend his leisure time just doing nothing,” said a workshop article in the *New York Times* in 1957.¹⁴⁶ Likewise *Harper’s* was prompted to

reassure its readers that they were not losing the work ethic and that “the grim forebodings about American ‘non-participation,’ the fear that we were turning into a nation of passive consumers of amusements, were largely unjustified” because they were taking to their workshops in their leisure time.¹⁴⁷ The sense of masculine accomplishment evoked in Roland’s *Walden* metaphor was at least as important as financial incentives for the explosive growth of do-it-yourself in the postwar suburbs. Surveys at the time indicated that do-it-yourselfers often cited financial reasons for their hobby, but the dollar amounts saved were actually quite modest.¹⁴⁸

As they had as early as the 1920s, home handymen in the 1950s admitted that far from saving money, doing it yourself could actually be a distinct economic liability. A mordant commentator on the new do-it-yourself craze suggested that men who decided to build their own furniture usually ended up spending more just on the wood than a store-bought suite would have cost, and that they alienated their wives and children in the process.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, frequent articles, and even a syndicated cartoon series of do-it-yourself disasters, made it clear that home-built was not necessarily better-built. In sharp contrast to earlier periods, in the 1950s almost nobody complained about poor professional work. It was, after all, unlikely that a professional would forget to install a staircase in the house he was building, wall up his wife in the attic bedroom he was constructing, or build a boat on the third floor of a New York City building so that it had to be lowered to sidewalk by piano movers.¹⁵⁰ “Make a professional feel better by viewing an amateur’s botch,” said one not-too-handy man, “and you’ve scattered a little sunshine.”¹⁵¹ To the extent that do-it-yourself had become part of the standard male repertoire, cost savings were secondary and even men who could afford to buy their work clothes at Abercrombie & Fitch, took their power tools to their country property to work on their second homes.¹⁵²

Something more important than saving money was going on. The constant, often indulgently humorous, references to handyman disasters make it clear that for do-it-yourselfers there was pleasure in the pain. The quintessentially male pastime of reveling in self-inflicted discomfort had moved indoors. One no longer had to play football, climb mountains, or sail outside the harbor to experience the perverse joy of suffering. Now even the unathletic man could waste money, bruise his fingers, and make six return trips to the hardware store, thus

participating in the community of manly perseverance. The ham-handed homeowner might make a mess, but at least it was his own mess, and he could take pride in confronting, if not always overcoming, obstacles.¹⁵³

Conclusion

Just before World War II, a newspaper columnist and do-it-yourself author named Julian Starr praised leisure woodworking by describing the psychological benefits of creativity. The cure for the boredom of repetitive jobs, he said, was to find recreation “as far removed from daily occupation as a man can achieve.” Starr claimed that sports could not fill that role because their competitiveness made them too work-like, but he then went on to promote shop work as a change of pace for white-collar workers precisely because it had the qualities of traditional artisan labor. For example, Starr celebrated the fact that “skill takes the place of thought, because 12 inches today is 12 inches tomorrow. A good joint, once learned is a good joint forever,” and noted that “fixed values of this sort are a tremendous consolation in a world where the most fundamental concepts are subject to change without notice.”¹⁵⁴ In other words, Starr’s justification for do-it-yourself as leisure was an appeal to its intrinsically work-like qualities. Do-it-yourself might not be work, yet it had to be done, if not by the homeowner then by a paid professional; it might not be work, yet it was the exercise of creativity and productivity; it might not be work, yet it required planning, organization, knowledge and skill, the same values necessary for success on the job; it might not be work as it was—it was work as it might be.

Starr’s contradictory assessment of the meaning of do-it-yourself derived from the culturally marginal location of the activity—it was leisure, yet it was work. By embracing two oppositional categories, do-it-yourself was able to become an instrument of domestic masculinity. As leisure, it could be done voluntarily, distinct from the arena of alienation that was the modern workplace. As manual work, it could confirm the homeowner’s ties to his yeoman/artisan forefathers, thus creating and responding to a new cultural stereotype of masculinity. Over more than a century homeowner maintenance and amateur home production grew from somewhat suspect activities into a hobby that was a core component of suburban masculinity. The rise of do-it-

yourself did not take place at the expense of women; they too expanded their role in the care and improvement of their suburban homes, albeit in a secondary capacity. Women, however, already had a place in the home (not in the workplace), which is why male do-it-yourself fits Margaret Marsh's definition of masculine domesticity. Do-it-yourself was an element in the more general pattern of increasing male involvement in the household. Unlike other aspects of masculine domesticity, however, do-it-yourself was always dominated by men and was therefore part of a process in which men reclaimed for themselves a legacy that had been lost when they swapped household for factory production.

Household maintenance, which started off as a money-saving convenience in the Victorian era, combined with amateur woodworking after the turn of the century to become a predominantly male domain defined by the use of heavy tools. There was a general acknowledgment of this activity as a hobby in the 1930s when its practicality complemented both the need to save money and the stress on traditional work values in an economically unstable world. The movement reached its culmination after World War II with the great suburban expansion and baby boom. Building on their war-time experiences, women joined men in improving their new tract homes, but female participation was optional. It seems likely that they did not challenge their husbands' dominance of do-it-yourself because it kept the men usefully occupied close to home. By ceding them space for a workshop and proprietary interest in the house, women helped perpetuate a male domestic sphere.

In 1959 *Popular Mechanics* reported that when a tourist asked actor Dick Powell's six-year-old daughter if a movie star lived in the house where she was playing, she answered no. She admitted, when pressed, that it was where Dick Powell lived, but assured the curious tourist that he was not a movie star. When asked what he did, she replied, "He fixes things." Headed by a picture of cowboy star Roy Rogers and his two young sons in his workshop, the article went on to list the do-it-yourself exploits of a dozen male actors, several of whom were described as building things with and for their children.¹⁵⁵ The article observed that these residents of a town known for "wild parties and wild spending" were now "climbing out of their glamorous occupational trappings into levis and becoming Mr. Fixits."¹⁵⁶ By the end of the 1950s, it would seem that actors, the most highly visible examples of idealized American manhood, could be held up as models of frugality, practical-

ity, family orientation, and manual work through their participation in the do-it-yourself movement that had brought men back into the home by turning their houses into hobbies.

NOTES

1. Claudia L. Bushman, *A Good Poor Man's Wife* (Hanover, N.H., 1981), 116–17; see also, Faye E. Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth Century America* (Middletown, Conn., 1983), 158; Margaret Marsh, "Suburban Men and Masculine Domesticity, 1870–1915," *American Quarterly* 40 (June 1988): 172.
2. Donald Katz, *Home Fires: An Intimate Portrait of One Middle-Class Family in Postwar America* (New York, 1992), 29.
3. *Ibid.*, 71.
4. Mark Carnes and Clyde Griffen, "Constructions of Masculinity in Friendship and Marriage," in *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America*, ed. Mark Carnes and Clyde Griffen (Chicago, 1990), 83. None of the historical data used in this article acknowledged race, and is presumed to refer to whites. Whether African Americans, or any other ethnic group, behaved differently is a question that remains to be explored.
5. For discussions of masculinity and the work place see Peter G. Filene, *Him, Her, Self: Sex Roles in Modern America* (New York, 1974), 73; Peter N. Stearns, *Be a Man! Males in Modern Society* (New York, 1979), 47–48, 109, 131; Michael S. Kimmel "The Contemporary 'Crisis' of Masculinity in Historical Perspective," in *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies*, ed. Harry Brod (Boston, 1987), 138–39; Ava Baron, "Acquiring Manly Competence: the Demise of Apprenticeship and the Remasculinization of Printers' Work," in Carnes, *Meanings for Manhood*, 152–63; Ava Baron, ed., *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor*, (Ithaca, N.Y., 1991); Joe L. Dubbert, *A Man's Place: Masculinity in Transition* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1979), 15–28; Anthony E. Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York, 1993), 167–68.
6. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, Part 2 (Washington, D.C., 1975), 646.
7. Catharine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home* (New York, 1869), 32, 87, 91.
8. [Harriet Beecher Stowe], "The Handy Man," *Arthur's Home Magazine* 34 (Oct. 1869): 230.
9. The best survey of female crafts in England and America is Jan Toller, *The Regency and Victorian Crafts: or the Genteel Female—Her Arts and Pursuits* (London, 1969).
10. "Home Made Furniture," *Godey's Lady's Book* 81 (Sept. 1870): 273; see also, Mrs. John A. Logan, *The Home Manual: Everybody's Guide in Social, Domestic and Business Life* (Chicago, 1889), 270.
11. "Home Made Furniture," 273; for other examples of women doing light woodwork, see: "Hints on Home Adornment," *Godey's Lady's Book* 99 (Oct. 1879): 374–75; Janet E. Ruutz-Rees, *Home Occupations* (New York, 1883), 79–80.

12. *Treasures of Use and Beauty: An Epitome of the Choicest Gems of Wisdom, History, Reference and Recreation* (Detroit, 1883), 363–64.
13. Kimmel, “The Contemporary ‘Crisis,’” 138.
14. Ileen A. DeVault, “‘Give the Boys a Trade’: Gender and Job Choice in the 1890s” in Baron, *Work Engendered*, 211; see also Baron, “Acquiring Manly Competence,” 153.
15. Mark Carnes and Clyde Griffen, “Introduction,” in Carnes and Griffen, *Meanings for Manhood*, 6
16. Stearns, *Be a Man!*, 47–48; Dubbert, *A Man’s Place*, 15, 18, 22, 28; Mary H. Blewett, “Manhood and the Market: The Politics of Gender and Class Among the Textile Workers of Fall River,” in Baron, *Work Engendered*, 94–95; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 167–68.
17. Angel Kwolek-Folland, “Gender, Self, and Work in the Life Insurance Industry, 1880–1930,” in Baron, *Work Engendered*, 176–77.
18. Mark C. Carnes, “Middle-Class Men and the Solace of Fraternal Ritual,” in Carnes and Griffen, *Meanings for Manhood*, 38–39, 46–48.
19. Clawson, Mary Ann, *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender, and Fraternalism* (Princeton, N.J., 1989), 174.
20. Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 31–74; see also Dubbert, *A Man’s Place*, 99, 143.
21. Jeffrey P. Hantover, “The Boy Scouts and the Validation of Masculinity,” in *The American Man*, ed. Elizabeth H. Pleck and Joseph H. Pleck (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1980), 285–301.
22. Marsh, “Suburban Men,” 166.
23. Ibid., 181.
24. Ibid.
25. M. Cutler, “The Arts and Crafts Movement,” *Harper’s Bazaar* 40 (February 1906): 162–6.
26. Cheryl Robertson, “House and Home in the Arts and Crafts Era,” in “*The Art that is Life*,” *The Arts and Crafts Movement in America, 1875–1920*, ed. Wendy Kaplan (New York, 1987), 350.
27. Eileen Boris, “‘Dreams of Brotherhood and Beauty’: The Social Ideas of the Arts and Crafts Movement,” in Kaplan, *The Art That is Life*, 211. It is unclear to me exactly how or why one would dovetail a door, but the point is made nevertheless.
28. Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood*, 153–54, 164.
29. See for examples, Robertson, “House and Home,” 341, n.27; Wendy Kaplan, “Spreading the Crafts: The Role of Schools,” in Kaplan, “*The Art that is Life*,” 299.
30. For some isolated examples of male hobby craftsmanship in the nineteenth century, see “Napkins and Handicrafts,” *Godey’s Magazine and Lady’s Book* 42 (February 1851): 127; and “Hobbies,” *Arthur’s Home Magazine* 8 (Sept. 1856): 167–68.
31. T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture* (New York, 1981), 47–58; Ruth Ellen Levine, “The Influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement on the Professional Status of Occupational Therapy,” *American Journal of Occupational Therapy* 41 (Apr. 1987): 240.
32. Ira S. Griffith, “Recreation With Tools,” *Suburban Life* 10 (June 1910): 22; see also, John R. Stilgoe, *Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb 1820–1939* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 262.
33. Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 65.
34. Eileen Boris, *Art and Labor: Ruskin, Morris, and the Craftsman Ideal in America*, (Philadelphia, 1986), 82–98; Paul Hopkins Rule, “Industrial Arts in Educa-

tion for Leisure" (master's thesis, University of Washington, 1940): 20–23; M. F. Johnston, "Arts and Crafts in Civic Improvements," *Chautauquan* 43 (June 1906): 382; Edgar Morton, "Home Work Shop," *American Homes and Gardens* 9 (Oct. 1912): sup. 18; Lewis Flint Anderson, *History of Manual and Industrial School Education* (New York, 1926), 188–90, 198.

35. Ira S. Griffith, "Three Things to Make in Your Own Workshop," *Suburban Life* 13 (Nov. 1911): 269.

36. Ira S. Griffith, "Cabinet Making as a Handicraft," *Suburban Life* 7 (Sept. 1910): 346; see also, D. H. Culyer, "Making a Magazine Stand," *The Circle* 2 (July 1907): 48; Griffith, "Three Things to Make," 269; A. Neely Hall, *Handicraft for Handy Boys* (Boston: Lathrop, Lee & Shepard, 1911), 111.

37. Robert L. Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York, 1993), 13–17, 26.

38. See for example, Arthur Wakeling, ed., *Things to Make in Your Home Workshop* (New York, 1930), v; Emanuele Stieri, *Home Craftsmanship* (New York, 1935), 277.

39. Morton, "Home Work Shop," sup. 18.

40. Ibid.

41. Robertson, "House and Home," 342.

42. A. L. Hall, "My Workshop at Home," *Suburban Life* 7 (Nov. 1908): 256.

43. Griffith, "Cabinet Making," 345.

44. Paul Ellsworth, "A Portable Workshop," *Suburban Life* 16 (Mar. 1913): 133; see also, Floyd H. Allport, "This Coming Era of Leisure," in *These United States*, ed. Louis Jones, William Huse, Jr., and Harvey Eagleson (New York, 1933), 201–2; Hall, *Handicraft for Handy Boys*, 3; Marvin A. Powell, "A Survey of the National Home Workshop Guild" (master's thesis, Colorado State College of Education, Greeley, 1935): 43; Dean F. Kittle, "Activities and Equipment Found in the Home Workshops of Sixty Boys in Lima, Ohio," (master's thesis, Iowa State College, 1936): 15.

45. Advertisement, *Suburban Life* 12 (Apr. 1911): 259; Roger W. Babson, "Do It Yourself—A New Industry," *Commercial and Financial Chronicle* 177 (5 Mar. 1953): 1012; *New York Times*, 10 June 1956, VIII.1.

46. Garrett Winslow, "Practical Decoration for the Home Interior," *Suburban Life* 15 (Oct. 1912): 187.

47. Agnes Athol, "What a Woman Can Do With a Paint Brush," *Suburban Life* 15 (Nov. 1912): 268.

48. For an example of the more traditional style of the period see the plans in Frederick Grinde, "Homemade Furniture That You Can Make," *Illustrated World* 35 (July 1921): 823–25.

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51. Richard Harris, "Working-Class Home Ownership in the American Metropolis," *Journal of Urban History* 17 (Nov. 1990): 58.

52. Ibid., 54.

53. Samuel Crowther, "Henry Ford: Why I Favor Five Days' Work With Six Days' Pay," *The World's Work* 52 (Oct. 1926): 615.

54. Rose C. Feld, "Now That They Have It," *Century Magazine* 108 (Oct. 1924): 753, 756.

55. Mary Sies notes that architect-designed (rather than home-made) household gadgets got their start a generation earlier. Mary Corbin Sies, "American Country House Architecture in Context: The Suburban Ideal of Living in the East and Midwest," (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1987): 110.
56. *Make It Yourself*.
57. Note for example the title of Walter J. Coppock, *Make Your Home Your Hobby* (Yellow Springs, Ohio, 1945).
58. Robert A. Stebbins, *Amateurs, Professionals, and Serious Leisure* (Montreal, 1992).
59. Henry H. Saylor, *Tinkering With Tools* (New York, 1924), 3–11.
60. Arthur Wakeling, ed., *Fix It Yourself* (New York, 1929), 5; Arthur Wakeling, ed., *Home Workshop Manual* (New York, 1930), 1–2.
61. J. Tate, "Tools for the Home Mechanic," *Make It Yourself* (Chicago: Popular Mechanics Press, 1927), 2.
62. Stilgoe, *Borderland*, 266–67; for example, see James Tate, "Soldering for the Home Mechanic," in *Make It Yourself*, 158; Wakeling, *Fix It Yourself*, 149.
63. Marge E. Staunton, "Marge Does it Herself!" *American Home* 18 (Aug. 1937): 42.
64. Martha Wirt Davis, "Some Tips for Mrs. Fixit," *American Home* 15 (Apr. 1936): 44.
65. J. C. Woodin, *Home Mechanics for Girls* (Wichita, Kans., 1938), iii; for girls using woodworking machinery in a school in the 1930s, see W. Brewer, "Boys Not Allowed," *Texas Outlook* 33 (Dec. 1949): 16–18.
66. Steven M. Gelber, "A Job You Can't Lose: Work and Hobbies in the Great Depression," *Journal of Social History* 24 (summer 1991): 741–66.
67. Arthur W. Wilson, "Home Hobbyists Offer a Market," *Printers' Ink* 163 (4 May 1933): 69; H. J. Hobbs, "51 Hours a Week," *Better Homes and Gardens* 12 (Jan. 1934): 24.
68. Harry J. Hobbs, *Working With Tools* (New York, 1935), 63; see also, Clemens T. Schaefer, "Home Mechanics," in *Hobbies for Everybody*, ed. Ruth Lampland (New York: Harper, 1934), 216; Wakeling, *Things to Make*, v.
69. Godfrey Ernst, "Things That Make You Say Damn!" *House and Garden* 70 (July 1936): 38–39; Julius Gregory, "Keep Your Home From Slipping Back," *House and Garden* 64 (Oct. 1933): 56.
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72. Hobbs, *Working With Tools*, 12.
73. *New York Times*, 10 Jan. 1937, XI12.
74. *Ibid.*, 9.
75. Barbara Melosh, "Manly Work: Public Art and Masculinity in Depression America," in *Gender and American History Since 1890*, ed. Barbara Melosh (London, 1993), 182–206; see also, Steven M. Gelber, "Working to Prosperity: California's New Deal Murals," *California History* 61 (summer 1979): 98–127.
76. M. A. Powell, "A Survey of the National Home Workshop Guild" (master's thesis, Colorado State College of Education, Greeley, 1935), 5, 20–21, 26, 28–29, 37; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics*, 380.

77. Wakeling, *Fix It Yourself*, 233; For illustrations of these tools, see Wakeling, *Home Workshop*, 51–65.
78. “History of the Delta Specialty Company, Delta Manufacturing Company, Rockwell Manufacturing Company, Rockwell International, Delta International Machinery Corp.” [timeline] Delta International Machinery Corp., n.d. [c. 1993]; John Allen Murphy, “Sales Boom in Hobby Goods,” *American Business* 6 (May 1936): 51.
79. Ibid., 51, 55; Robert K. Leavitt, “Mr. Macy, Meet the Guppy . . . and Mr. Advertiser, Meet the Hobby,” *Advertising and Selling* 21 (22 June 1933): 17.
80. “Millions in Power Tools for Craftsmen Hobbies,” *Steel* 100 (17 May 1937): 28–29.
81. Kittle, “Activities and Equipment,” 26.
82. Powell, “Survey,” 53; see also, Kittle, “Activities and Equipment,” 26; C. L. Page, “A Survey of the Home Workshops in Ottumwa, Iowa,” (master’s thesis, Colorado State College of Education, Greeley, 1941): 32.
83. “Millions in Power Tools,” 28–29.
84. Joseph J. Corn, “Educating the Enthusiast: Print and the Popularization of Technical Knowledge,” in *Possible Dreams: Enthusiasm for Technology in America*, ed. John L. Wright (Dearborn, Mich., 1992); Joseph J. Corn, “Popular Mechanics, Mechanical Literacy and American Culture, 1900–1950,” in *Reading in America*, ed. Kathryn Grover (Westport, Conn., forthcoming); Kittle, “Activities and Equipment,” 24; Powell, “Survey,” 77; Elmer W. Cressman, *Out of School Activities of High School Pupils in Relation to Intelligence and Socio-Economic Status* (State College, Pa., 1937), 50; Page, “A Survey of the Home Workshops,” 41.
85. Wakeling, *Things to Make*, v.; Powell, “Survey.”
86. Powell does not indicate how many women might have been among the three thousand members, but only two of the 633 responses were from women, Powell, “Survey,” 15.
87. C. T. Schaefer, *Handy Man’s Handbook* (New York, 1931), xi.
88. Powell, “Survey,” 65.
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91. Dick Ramsell, “Diary of a Desperate Daddy,” *Better Homes & Gardens* 20 (May 1942): 22–23.
92. Harold J. Hawkins, “Fixing Things Around the House,” *Parents’ Magazine* 17 (Aug. 1942): 48–49.
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