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room

## Get Domestic

**"Women's work," including chores, is now also the man's domain - in theory, anyway. Pop culture is pointing to a real change.**

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CNN anchorwoman Daryn Kagan has just wrapped a segment about how food invites germs into the kitchen:

"Ya see, if you don't cook, you don't have that problem."

With one self-effacing quip, this Stanford graduate dismisses domesticity as a blight, inadvertently hoisting the flag of feminists like Betty Friedan, who blamed household chores for keeping our mothers and grandmothers from achieving independence.

But are cooking, decorating, sewing and the like less popular now that women and men are gaining equal social footing? There's no arguing that a parade of pop-culture gurus - the Rachael Rays and Todd Oldhams of the world - are peddling peace through domesticity. According to them, "home" is hot (again). This time for women and men.

Still, some of the old truisms remain painfully true. Recent studies show that while 90 percent of men and women believe household tasks should be equally divided, women do two-thirds of the work at home, "with no change between 1955 and 2002," Harvard thinker Harvey Mansfield writes in his new book "Manliness."

Even he predicts the trend could shift: "By some accounts, men are doing more around the house than they used to."

Coed domesticity is trendy on TV and at the magazine rack. Credit folks like Mexican-cuisine king Rick Bayless, who jeeps through rugged terrain south of the border to bring culture to American dining tables, and self-proclaimed coif god Jonathan Antin, who mixes hair gel with machismo. Even PBS how-to pioneer Bob Vila helped make good-looking houses appealing and accessible to homeowners of both genders.

As a country, our houses have never looked more stylish and livable. But the real impact of today's proliferation of how-to shows and magazines is that antiques-shopping and bruschetta-making are no longer seen simply as women's work. Younger generations, raised in families in which traditional roles were less prescribed, are taking the domestic gender-bending for granted. Take 16-year-old north Denver high school student Leonard Dominguez.

"Everybody does equal in our family, doesn't matter male or female," says the aspiring restaurateur. Dominguez learned to cook by watching his grandmother command the kitchen of their family-run restaurant. The result? One young man who relishes cooking and design shows on television, and executes Asian-inspired "thematic table settings" in his cooking class in record time.

"Yeah, I love it," Dominguez says of the domestic arts. He's beaming over a snapshot of a recent table-setting project at CEC Middle College in Denver in which the student conceived a streamlined motif with bamboo place mats, bamboo-edged plates and lucky bamboo at the center. Dominguez specially selected (and prepared) a stir-fry entree for the table, because its vibrant peppers and onions made the setting pop.

"The guys I hang out with are the same way," he says. "But I don't think those fashion and decorating shows are for the average guy."

His classmate, Dana Bryning, says women in her family tend to stay away from the stove.

"When I was little, my dad was always in the kitchen," the 17-year-old says. "My mom was the cleaning person, and my dad was always cooking."

Dad's best dish? Pan-fried pork chops over creamy rice.

Cat Wei sees domestic gender-bending on a wide scale. The New York City designer logged time on "Trading Spaces" and now hosts "Material Girls" on the DIY Network. She grew up in a home where Mom sewed everything from the hems to the drapes. These days, Wei says, domestic skills are important for everyone.

"There is a huge saturation of 'home' in the market now," says the University of Colorado at Boulder graduate. "There are just as many home magazines as there are fashion magazines, and you've got all these great designers doing stuff for mass-market chains."

More signs of domesticity in pop culture: Celebrity designer Jonathan Adler is making needlepoint cool again with \$165 throw pillows. And "architectural interior designer" Kelly Wearstler is harking back to the heyday of Hollywood glam with "kaleidoscopic" makeovers of famous California hotels.

But is all this domesticity good for us? Shira Tarrant is wary. The Goucher College women's studies professor says that when shows like "What Not to Wear" and "Extreme Makeover" encourage viewers to escape in a luxurious fantasy, the social backlash seems predestined.

"One scholar refers to it as the 'Real Simple' industrial complex," Tarrant says. "(Domestic) transformation is possible, but only through consumer culture."

Yet even the most independent women are homebodies these days - one reason the much-hyped "third wave" women's movement is taking back domesticity by delving into crafts and cooking. Neofeminists are getting the message out through magazines like *Bust*, whose editor, Debbie Stoller, is today's knitting muse.

After spending so much energy breaking free from domestic expectations, '70s-era feminists are mildly horrified.

"It's great that women and men can now order pizza, or make pizza," Tarrant says. But the professor is concerned: At the same time Rachael Ray turns 30-minute meals into a multimillion-dollar franchise, society sees her and holds all women to that ideal. Couple that with the fact that today's men may have made room for Murphy Brown but still want housework about as much as Star Jones Reynolds wants to discuss gastric bypass surgery.

Balance lies somewhere therein. Cookbook author Maria Liberati, for instance, believes domestic tasks were once "delegated" to women but are now deemed a necessary social grace for everyone.

"Domesticity is not just a job," says the author of "The Basic Art of Italian Cooking." "Thanks to Martha (Stewart) and company, the American public is finding it chic to be skilled in the domestic arts."

But that's a hard sell for Jen Singer. If domesticity were truly "in," stay-at-home moms would be humming and vacuuming in their pearls, says the creator of the stay-at-home mom website MommaSaid.net. She says half of stay-at-home moms are desperate for less housework, and 90 percent pine for a housekeeper.

"Domesticity may be the in thing on television," Singer says, "but at home? Not so much."

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## Help for homebodies

Some people say equality between men and women has produced a society of Americans in desperate need of better domestic skills. Fear not, you gardening- and baking-phobes. Help is but a phone call or e-mail away.

### COOKING

Classes and hands-on workshops

The Seasoned Chef Cooking School at Colorado Free

University, 1510 York St., 303-399-0093. |[freeu.com](http://freeu.com)

Cost: \$55-\$59

"Cake Decorating" and "Advanced Cake Decorating"

Emily Griffith Opportunity School, 1250 Welton St., 720-423-4700 |[egos-school.com](http://egos-school.com)

Cost: about \$295

### HOUSEKEEPING

"The Art of Arrangement:

Visually Transform

Your Home"

Colorado Free University

Cost: \$34-\$39 plus materials

"Conquering Your Clutter"

Cost: \$39-\$44 plus materials

"Introductory Floral Design"

Emily Griffith Opportunity School

Cost: about \$325

## **PARENTING**

"Skills for Parenting"

Emily Griffith Opportunity School, Consumer and Family Studies Program

Cost: \$69.75

## **KNITTING/ NEEDLEWORK/ SEWING**

"Bemis Knitting Group"

Bemis Public Library, 6014 S. Datura St., Littleton, 303-795-3961

2 p.m. Friday

Cost: free

"Knit Happens"

Denver Public Library, Central

Library Learning Lounge, 10 W. 14th Ave. Parkway, 720-865-1205, [denverlibrary.org](http://denverlibrary.org)

Various dates.

Cost: free (registration required)

"Beginning Sewing"

Emily Griffith Opportunity School

Cost: about \$185

"Quilting by Machine" and "Hand Needlework"

The Creative Needle,

6905 S. Broadway, Littleton, 303-794-7312

Cost: \$30-\$45

Various knitting classes

Coppelias Needlepoint &

The Shivering Sheep,

231 Milwaukee St., 303-320-7776

Cost: \$5-\$30

## **GARDENING**

"Composting"

Denver Urban Garden,

3377 Blake St., 303-292-9900 | [dug.org](http://dug.org)

Cost: free

Various gardening classes

Including

"Preparing Garden Beds for Spring,"

"Lawn and Garden 101,"

"Selecting and Planting

Perennials for All Seasons,"

"Rose Gardening 101" and

"Planting Trees and Shrubs"

Home Depot, various locations | [homedepotclinics.com](http://homedepotclinics.com)

Cost: free

"Weeders" Gardening Group

Denver Parks and Recreation, Cook Park Recreation Center, 7100 Cherry Creek Drive South, 303-692-5659

Cost: \$5

- *Compiled by Regina Avila*