

Resistant Material



Theorizing
Housework at
the University
of Chicago,
1892–1915

BY HANNAH WHITEHEAD

The conditions of society have changed. One householder is no longer arrayed against another, each eager to assert his own rights as against his neighbor's. Society is no longer an aggregation of isolated units. Each member is realizing more and more as the years pass how closely interdependent all are, and how the activities of each react for the weal or woe of all. This, in fact, is the spirit of our age, of the ideal democracy. And so, just as we are recognizing the real significance and meaning in the idea of the obligation of the individual to the community, we are giving a new meaning to the dwelling in which he abides.

— Marion Talbot (*The House Beautiful*, September 1902)¹

Introduction

In 1902, the year before Marion Talbot was named head of the Department of Household Administration at the University of Chicago, she claimed

1. Marion Talbot, "The House as a Unit of Health II," *The House Beautiful*, September 1902, 246.

that the interdependency of individuals in modern society meant that “a man’s house is no longer considered his castle, to use as he pleases regardless of the welfare of other people.”² What individuals did in the privacy of their own homes, she explained, affected the lives of others and was thus within the scope of public attention and social regulation. However, even though she and her colleagues had taught that housework carried public obligations all throughout the previous decade, and would continue to do so well into the following one, the particular kinds of household activities that consumed the focus of their teaching and writing would change drastically—as would the very way they spoke about the broader role of the home. In 1896, for instance, Marion Talbot argued that sanitary conditions were an essential pre-requisite for moral behavior, and thus the basis of social progress. She had recently co-edited a manual on Home Sanitation, one of the first publications associated with

2. Marion Talbot, “The House as a Unit of Health,” *The House Beautiful*, August 1902, 186; Talbot was a central figure in home economics at the University of Chicago and is a key character in this narrative. She was born in Boston in 1858 and by 1890 had received three college degrees from Boston University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. During this time, she was mentored by the woman who led the late nineteenth-century home economics movement, Ellen Swallow Richards, and earned a reputation for her work in sanitary science. In 1882 she founded the Association of Collegiate Alumnae, at the time the most important organization for female college graduates, and in 1892, she was handpicked by William Rainey Harper to teach courses in sanitary science and to fill the position of dean of Women at his new university on the southside of Chicago. Talbot was later named chair of the Department of Household Administration and served on the faculty of the university and as dean of women from 1892 until 1924. During this entire period, she supervised—and resided in—a women’s dormitory on campus. This means that while she was writing so much about the home, she was not actually caring for a home of her own. It would be worthwhile to examine events in Talbot’s life in relation to the changing focus of home economic instruction at the university, but this is beyond the scope of the present paper [Kathleen Murphy Dierenfield, “Marion Talbot: The Dean of Educated Women,” (PhD diss. University of Virginia, 2001); Marion Talbot, *More Than Lore*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936)].

the emerging home economics movement. At this time she was head of the Sanitary Science specialization at the university, teaching courses in "House Sanitation" and "Sanitary Aspects of Water, Food, and Clothing." But by 1915, the courses in Sanitary Science had been subsumed into a department called "Household Administration," where they were gradually phased out and replaced with offerings like "The Organization of the Retail Market," "The Economic Basis of the Family," and "Household Organization."³ The professors in the department no longer talked about the home as a crucial location of disease-prevention; rather, they explained that the home was a crucial sector in an economic system—responsible for the consumption of material goods as well as the production of social values—and described the housekeeper as a financial and administrative manager. What could have caused these academics to shift their views on the social function of household activities so radically in such a short space of time?

Most works on the home economics movement study its entrance into higher education in relation to the women's movement out of the home and do not dwell for long on this specific pedagogical shift.⁴ Virginia Vincenti, in her history of the philosophy of home economics, observes that the word "sanitation" dropped out of the language of home economics during the 1910s, and that terms like "efficiency" and "economy"

3. *Annual Register, University of Chicago, 1892-1893* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press), 47; *Annual Register 1903-1904*, 248; *Annual Register 1909-1910*, 263; *Annual Register 1914-1915*, 451.

4. An excellent historiography of recent scholarship on home economics can be found in the introduction to Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vincenti's anthology *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); some examples include Catherine L. Coghlan's "Please Don't Think of Me as a Sociologist': Sophonisba Preston Breckinridge and the Early Chicago School," *The American Sociologist* 36 (Spring 2005): 3-22 and Maresi Nerad's study of the Home Economics Department at Berkeley, titled *The Academic Kitchen: A Social History of Gender Stratification at the University of California, Berkeley* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999).

became increasingly common during the same period.⁵ Jean Gordon and Jan' McArthur, in an article about American women and domestic consumption, mention that the concept of the housewife as consumer, which had become widespread by 1920, was "a far cry from...Ellen Swallow Richard's concept of women as guardians of the environment," which had predominated during the final decades of the nineteenth century.⁶ However, neither of these authors rests for long on this point, and neither offers an explanation. Nancy Tomes traces the rise and decline of sanitary concerns within home economics in her essay "Spreading the Germ Theory: Sanitary Science and Home Economics, 1880-1930," but does not delve into the subjects that replaced them.⁷

In the following paper, I will argue that two factors came into play between 1892 and 1915 that radically altered beliefs about the social role of the home. In the first place, public health researchers changed their tactics of disease prevention, shifting their focus from the effect of environmental conditions on health to the specific routes that transmit diseases between human beings. This conceptual shift, accompanied by a professionalization of medical research, caused anxieties about sanitation to largely fall out of academic and popular language about household responsibilities. The second factor was a dramatic decrease in the availability of domestic service. Near the end of the nineteenth century, the fact that more and more factory jobs were available to working-class

5. Virginia Vincenti, "A History of the Philosophy of Home Economics" (PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1981), 161-162; Vincenti, "A History of the Philosophy of Home Economics," 130.

6. Jean Gordon and Jan McArthur, "American Women and Domestic Consumption, 1800-1920: Four Interpretive Themes," *Journal of American Culture* 8 (1985): 42.

7. Nancy Tomes, "Spreading the Germ Theory: Sanitary Science and Home Economics, 1880-1930," *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession*, Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vincenti, eds. 34-54 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

women, coupled with shifts in immigration and the expansion of an urban middle class seeking inexpensive domestic help, led to a disparity between the number of women hoping to hire servant girls, and the number of women willing to become them. This perceived crisis caused those middle-class women to re-evaluate the nature of household labor within a capitalist economy. I will consider the way that the issue of domestic service became a vehicle for transferring wider concerns about modernity, labor, and efficiency to the discourse of home economics, altering the way that it described the role of the home in society and the role of the householder in the home.

Many scholars have addressed the shift to a new public-health strategy as well as the changing nature of domestic service. They have described how humoral and miasmatic theories of disease transmission were gradually displaced by germ theory, and how public health concerns with sewer systems, garbage disposal, and water supply gave way to campaigns for personal hygiene and hand-washing.⁸ They have also analyzed the critical function of the early twentieth-century servant shortage in altering the women's domestic roles and its intimate relation with the home economics movement.⁹ Gordon and McArthur, for instance, in

8. Some excellent studies include: John Duffy, *The Sanitarians: a History of American Public Health* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Elizabeth Fee, "Public Health and the State: The United States," *The History of Public Health and the Modern State*, Dorothy Porter ed., 224-275 (Atlanta: Editions Rodopi B.V., 1994); Suellen Hoy, *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Virginia Smith, *Clean: A History of Personal Hygiene and Purity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

9. Faye E. Dudden examines domestic service in the nineteenth century in *Servicing Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1983); David Katzman and Danel Sutherland trace concerns into the twentieth century in *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) and *Americans and Their Servants: Domestic Service in the United States from 1800 to 1920* (Baton Rouge, La: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), respectively.

their essay on domestic consumption, hypothesize that the shortage of domestic service created a need to make socially degrading housework acceptable labor for upper-class women, which was filled by the home economics movement.¹⁰ Sarah Stage and Virginia Vincenti also correlate the servant shortage with the desire to “upgrade domestic work” and “provide better training” for it.¹¹ Overall, works about public health or domestic service explain how each of these single social issues was addressed over time; I want to explore how the focus of home economic instruction jumped entirely from one social issue to another. What I am arguing is that the servant crisis did something much deeper than make housework socially acceptable: it forced the gaze of home economists to look beyond public health toward the labor of housekeeping itself.

In order to tease out the nature of this specific topical and linguistic shift, I will examine the way that one particular set of academic departments taught and wrote about the home during the decades just preceding and following the turn of the century—specifically, departments located at the University of Chicago between the years 1892 and 1915. I will look at books and articles that members of household-focused departments wrote or edited and other publications that they explicitly referenced, as well as course catalogs, departmental archives and personal papers. During this period, there were three departments at the university that dealt specifically with household responsibilities. From 1892, until 1905, a sub-specialization titled “Sanitary Science” was offered within the Department of Sociology and Anthropology in the School of Arts, Literature and Science. When the School of Education was founded in 1900—a post-secondary pre-professional school at the university—it included a specialization in “Home Economics.” In 1903, courses from both of these specializations were merged into a “Department of Household

10. Gordon and McArthur, “American Women and Domestic Consumption,” 41.

11. Stage and Vincenti, *Rethinking Home Economics*, 5.

Administration" within the School of Arts, Literature and Science.¹² By 1905, the Sanitary Science specialization was removed from the Department Sociology and Anthropology, but Home Economics remained a specialization in the School of Education well into the 1920s. If there was any difference between the courses taught in Home Economics in the School of Education and those in Household Administration in the School of Arts, Literature and Science, it was that the former included some practical training in methods of home economics instruction, while the later emphasized topics that were more sociological and theoretical in nature—but courses in Home Economics and Household Administration were frequently cross-listed, and overall the departments were remarkably similar.¹³ Professors working in both departments published housekeeping manuals intended for popular audiences and wrote articles in professional journals as well as popular magazines.

The University of Chicago is an ideal institution to examine for several reasons. It was among the first wave of co-educational institutions of higher education in the United States and had strong connections with the home economics movement. In 1892, when the University of Chicago was founded, institutions of higher education were opening their doors to women in large numbers for the first time. The percentage of universities that accepted women increased from 51.3 in 1880, to 65.5 in 1890 and 71.9 in 1900, and the University of Chicago was one of the

12. Over the first ten years of its existence, only three instructors worked consistently within this department: Marion Talbot, who specialized in sanitary science and household organization, Sophonisba Breckinridge, whose work focused more on the problems related to working-class living conditions, and Alice Peloubet Norton, who studied the chemistry of nutrition. Sophonisba Breckinridge was actively involved with the reform communities in Chicago and had lived at the Hull House settlement on the West Side before coming to the University of Chicago; Alice P. Norton originally taught in the School of Education and was transferred to Household Administration when the department was formed in 1903.

13. *Annual Register*, 1892-1893—1924-1925.

first to declare itself co-educational from the start.¹⁴ By 1903, the number of women enrolled in the University nearly equaled the number of men.¹⁵ At the same time, the establishment of the Land-Grant Colleges following the Morrill act in 1862 had been an impetus for extending concerns related to domestic economy into higher education, beginning in the 1870s with the Boston Cooking School and the Framingham Normal School for Industrial Education in the East and courses in sewing, cooking and laundry offered by agricultural colleges in the West.¹⁶ The University of Chicago in particular had close ties with the movement to disseminate information about household issues, given that the head of the Department of Household Administration at Chicago had previously collaborated with the leader of the late nineteenth-century Home Economics movement, Ellen Swallow Richards, and many members of the department were in regular contact with Isabel Bevier, head of the American Association of Home Economics, which was based in Chicago.¹⁷ It is important to note that even though the university offered courses related to the household from the start, women students were never limited to these areas of study, and most pursued degrees in other fields.

At the same time, the decades flanking the turn of the century arrived on the heels of a fundamental shift in the nature of higher education, and witnessed an economic depression that would cause academics to question the meaning of social progress and social obligation. After

14. Isabel Bevier, *Home Economics in Education* (Chicago: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1928), 101; Bevier, *Home Economics in Education*, 98.

15. Floyd W. Reeves, Ernest C. Miller and John Dale Russell, *The University of Chicago Survey, vol. 1: Trends in University Growth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), 36.

16. Vincenti, "A History of the Philosophy of Home Economics," 87; Mary Hinman Abel, "Recent Phases of Co-operation among Women—Educational Efforts," *The House Beautiful*, May 1903, 442; Isabel Bevier, *The Home Economics Movement*, (Boston: Whitcomb and Barrows, 1906), 24.

17. Dierenfield, "Marion Talbot: The Dean of Educated Women," 6.

the Civil War, small colleges that taught classics of Western thought began to decline in popularity, in favor of large-scale research universities that generated practical knowledge for social (or career) advancement. As a result, disciplines like bacteriology, sociology, education, sanitary science, and home economics, which conducted research and disseminated knowledge with the goal of social improvement, found their place at institutions of higher learning.¹⁸ Nowhere was this more evident than at the University of Chicago, which was founded specifically as a research institution, and whose very course catalog insisted that the city of Chicago was “one of the most complete social laboratories in the world.”¹⁹ That city was already desperately in need of improvement in 1892, the year that course catalog was published, but one year later an economic crash would leave thousands out of work and cause the humanitarian situation to plummet from depressing to dire.²⁰ Over the following decades, Chicago found itself at the center of debates about labor, industry, and regulation. Social reformers and progressives challenged the value of unregulated economic expansion, campaigning for larger municipal involvement in social services and adequate urban infrastructure, as well as regulation in business and industry—and the home economics movement took part in this effort.²¹ At the same time, the University of Chicago’s Departments of Sociology and Philosophy pioneered radically new empirical approaches to understanding the nature of the city and its

18. Christopher J. Lucas, *American Higher Education: a History* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 139–210; It is interesting to note that the University of Chicago was also one of the first institutions to revert back to a focus on the classics, with President Robert Hutchin’s establishment of the Great Books program in the 1930s [Lucas, *American Higher Education*, 215].

19. *Annual Register* 1893–1894, 59.

20. Louise W. Knight, *Jane Addams: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 86.

21. Maureen A. Flanagan, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivism, 1890s–1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 10.

inhabitants.²² I will not focus specifically on these developments in higher education or other university departments, but they form a crucial backdrop for understanding what was at stake for academics considering problems of the household and the relation of the household to society at the University of Chicago around the turn of the century.

In section one I will describe how professors at the University of Chicago talked about housework during the last few decades of the nineteenth century. Then I will shift to explain how new theories about disease caused language about sanitation to drop out of the discourse of home economics. In the third section, I will lay out the debates that surrounded the servant crisis, to show how a new discourse about economics and efficiency entered discussions about the home. In the final section, I will describe the new social role of the home disseminated by the departments toward the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. It is important to note that a lot of this information overlaps. The first section largely covers publications and events of the 1890s but extends up to about 1905. New ideas about the nature of disease began circulating as early as the 1880s but did not show up in the teachings of the department—or become widely accepted—until around 1910. The shortage of domestic service was an eternal complaint of nineteenth-century housewives, but certain social factors caused the situation to reach a new pitch during the first decade of the twentieth century, and it was suddenly and urgently debated in publications associated

22. Some works that were produced during this period include John Dewey's *The School and Social Progress*, published in 1899; Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, which was also published in 1899 and included the first definition of "Conspicuous Consumption"; and several papers on social consciousness by George Herbert Mead, including "What Social Objects Must Psychology Presuppose?" (1910), "The Mechanism of Social Consciousness" (1912), and "The Social Self" (1913). There are some interesting connections between this research and that being conducted by professors in Sanitary Science, Household Administration and Home Economics. It is worth noting that the household-focused departments were in close contact with these other scholars, even if further analysis is beyond the scope of this paper.

with the University of Chicago in the year 1903. The new way of speaking about the home in society that I describe in section four has roots in the nineteenth century but only becomes evident in the language of the departments during the first two decades of the twentieth.

It is also important to point out a few ideas about the home that remained constant in the departmental language across the period.²³ The first was the notion that what happened in the privacy of one's home was of public concern. In the 1910s as in the 1880s, the departments taught that individuals in modern society were increasingly interconnected, so that the actions of every individual affected (and should take into consideration) the good of the whole. This implied, furthermore, that social progress and public good often required the abridgement of personal freedom. It was the very idea that household activities affect and are affected by individuals and institutions beyond the home that gave home economics its sense of academic purpose and its place among the reform movements; for home economists, questions of household maintenance were intimately related to social organization and social progress. It was the particular way that activities of the home were linked to social progress, and the particular way that personal rights needed to be abridged for public benefit, that changed radically over this period.

The second constant in the language surrounding the home was the word "unit." The home was constantly described as a "unit" in the writings and course descriptions from Sanitary Science, Home Economics and Household Administration—most often as a "unit of health," or a "social unit." The word "unit" evokes mathematics, measurements, and statistics. It implies a delineation that is uniform and regular: a society described as a collection

23. In the following paper I will frequently reference the related terms "House," "Household" and "Home." I will use "House" to refer to a physical structure and "Household" to indicate both the collection of people within the house and the kinds of activities that they carry out. "Home" is certainly the most ambiguous of these terms—I will use it in cases where the object of description is related to the domestic environment but either encompasses both the material structure and the activities of people, or includes neither.

of units is quite unlike a society described as a body made of appendages or a machine made of parts. Units both divide larger portions and draw together smaller ones and are useful for describing and arranging dispersed sets of data. For these reasons, it is not surprising that this word appears in the writing of home economists, who sought to understand and alter the behavior of numerous disconnected individuals. Again, it was the particular way that the home functioned as a unit—a unit of *what*, composed of *what*—that changed radically during this period, and that I would like to examine.

Ultimately, it is important to remember that what I am studying is not the way that the home was considered by individuals at large or by society in general but rather the way that the home was imagined by a particular set of academic departments. Certainly individual women of all classes were concerned about health and cleanliness in their homes in the 1910s, and certainly they struggled to organize their domestic tasks or manage domestic help in the 1880s. Certainly—despite the information coming to them from magazines, newspapers, settlement houses, and university classrooms—they harbored a wide range of emotions and attitudes toward the homes that they kept throughout this period. What I am analyzing is a set of academic departments that sought to understand one particular aspect of the home: the point at which the private household affected, and was affected by, the rest of society. In its most basic form, I am asking which aspects of the house and housework—out of the entire set of possibly relevant objects and activities—that these academics chose to focus on at a particular moment, because those are what they saw as the links between the home and the rest of society. In the end, the changing focus of academic discourse about household activities—from concerns about sanitizing the material structure of the house to questions about labor and the consumption of wealth—provides one way of thinking about how capitalism and modernity entered the privacy of the home. It suggests that changes to leisured space came as a result of a crisis of labor; that the culture of consumption has origins in a crisis of production; that women's new role within the home emerged from anxieties about social interconnectivity that undermined the very idea that the home is separate from the rest of society.

The House as a Unit of Health

During the 1890s, the University of Chicago professors who studied issues related to the household were primarily concerned with limiting the spread of disease through cleanliness. This was not unique to home economics instruction at this university: health and cleanliness were central to the mission of the home economics movement in general during the last decade of the nineteenth century.²⁴ This concern was not unwarranted, given contemporary urban realities. The urban population had expanded radically during the preceding decades, with individuals continuing to arrive from both Europe and rural areas in the United States to take up factory jobs in the city, and the existing urban infrastructure was simply insufficient to provide such numbers with basic needs. Nowhere was this more acutely felt than in Chicago, which grew from a city of 300,000 in 1870 to 1.1 million in 1890.²⁵ Epidemics of typhoid and cholera plagued these over-crowded populations and threatened to jump the boundaries to the middle and upper classes.²⁶ During the 1870s and 1880s, those from many fields turned to issues of sanitation, especially the regulation

24. Vincenti, "A History of the Philosophy of Home Economics," 161.

25. Maureen A. Flanagan, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivism, 1890s-1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4.

26. Elizabeth Fee describes the situation well in "Public Health and the State: The United States": "The belief that epidemic diseases posed only occasional threats to an otherwise healthy social order was, however, shaken by the industrial transformations of the late nineteenth century...the overwhelming influx of immigrants...the terrifying death and disease rates of working-class slums, the total inadequacy of water supplies and sewage systems for the rapidly growing population, the spread of endemic and epidemic diseases from the slums to the homes of the wealthy...poverty and disease could no longer be treated simply as individual failings; they were becoming social and political problems of massive proportions" [Elizabeth Fee. "Public Health and the State: The United States," *The History of Public Health and the Modern State*, ed. Dorothy Porter (Atlanta: Editions Rodopi B.V, 1994), 231-232].

of water pipes, plumbing, and garbage removal in order to combat epidemics.²⁷

In the 1890s, instructors at Chicago who would later teach courses explicitly in home economics concentrated their research and their instruction on the topic of sanitation. Marion Talbot taught all courses in Sanitary Science offered by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. These classes dealt with topics in sanitation that were particularly relevant to the care of the private home: the four courses offered the year that the university opened were titled "House Sanitation," "Sanitary Aspects of Water, Food and Clothing," "Seminar in Sanitary Science," and "The Economy of Living."²⁸ In 1887, Talbot had co-edited the manual on home sanitation that was assembled by the Association of College Alumnae. This was a small, readable book intended for a mainstream audience.²⁹ Talbot also wrote articles about the importance of sanitation for academic and popular periodicals. Most significantly, she curated a section of the popular magazine *The House Beautiful* between 1902 and 1904, which included submissions from her colleagues at the University of Chicago as well as other prominent home economists.³⁰ Articles published in this magazine in 1903 and 1904 will figure centrally later in the paper (and I will explain more about the history and readership of *The House Beautiful* then) but in 1902 and 1903 contributors were still giving the kind of sanitary advice that I discuss in this section. In general, the publications emerging from the study of household sanitation were meant to reach a wide audience: they were not scientific articles and were

27. John Duffy, *The Sanitarians: a History of American Public Health* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 128; Suellen Hoy, *Chasing Dirt: the American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 72.

28. *Annual Register* 1892-1893, 47.

29. The Sanitary Science Club of the Association of Collegiate Alumnae, *Home Sanitation: A Manual for Housekeepers* (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1887).

30. Domestic Science Department (later Home Economics), *The House Beautiful*, August 1902-May 1904 (New York: Hearst Corp).

rarely included in scholarly journals but rather were meant to bring modern sanitary knowledge to the ordinary housekeeper.

These academics argued for the place of sanitary science among those modern disciplines that sought to improve society through their research, by explaining that there was an intimate relationship between the material environment, human behavior, and social progress. Marion Talbot, in an article published in *The American Journal of Sociology* in 1896, argued that ill health compromised an individual's moral and intellectual capacity and, thus, on a large scale, limited the moral and intellectual potential of the social group. "Even though it is necessary for practical purposes to use the term health in a restricted sense, meaning chiefly physical well-being," she wrote, "the underlying idea of physical health as a means of giving expression to the highest faculties and activities must be constantly borne in mind."³¹ She went on to explain how certain neighborhoods were full of crime because their physical environments reduced the bodily health of inhabitants and therefore inhibited their ability to behave in rational and responsible ways. In short, bad environments created unhealthy bodies, which created bad citizens; sanitary environments fostered physical, moral, and social health.³² She suggested that body, mind, and morality were inseparably linked—social progress was based in physical health, and physical health was based in material conditions.

Those who advocated modern sanitary methods explained that scientific theories about the environmental origins of disease had come to replace the religious notion that illness was a punishment from God. "The day is past," read *Home Sanitation*, "when sickness was held to be a direct interference of Providence, as retributive punishment."³³ In *The Sanitarians*:

31. Marion Talbot, "Sanitation and Sociology," *The American Journal of Sociology* 2 (July 1896): 81.

32. Talbot, "Sanitation and Sociology," 77.

33. The Sanitary Science Club of the Association of Collegiate Alumnae, *Home Sanitation*, 76.

A History of American Public Health, John Duffy point out that “whereas sinfulness and lack of moral character were held to be largely responsible for poverty and disease early in the first half of the nineteenth century, increasingly the middle and upper classes began to recognize the role of environment in shaping people’s lives.”³⁴ In an article published in *The American Journal of Sociology*, Talbot mocked the opinion that personal qualities derive from some internal or inherent quality and explained that social theory suggests that individuals and societies are formed by their environments.³⁵ However, this new model did not entirely erase morality from the equation. In fact, theories of environmental disease causation asserted a kind of moral reversal: disease was not a punishment for immoral behavior; it was the *cause* of immoral behavior.

Just as these academics were concerned on a broad level with the way that human growth was affected by material conditions, they were concerned on a more technical level with the way that diseases were fostered or hindered by particular environments. Talbot explained in a *House Beautiful* article that germs thrived in darkness and dampness but were killed by air, sunlight, and soap.³⁶ She and the other contributors to this series were particularly concerned with the health dangers of dark, damp, places like cellars, pipes, and the cupboard under the kitchen sink. The 1893 description for the course in “House Sanitation” read:

This course includes a study of the following topics: Situation, surroundings, ventilation, heating, drainage, plumbing, lighting, and furnishing. There will be a study of the sanitation of the dwelling as the unit of public health. Buildings of good and bad types will be inspected and critical reports made. Special

34. Duffy, *The Sanitarians*, 128.

35. Talbot, “Sanitation and Sociology,” 80.

36. For example, see: Marion Talbot, “Housekeeping in Relation to Social Progress,” *The House Beautiful*, July 1903, 120.

attention will be given to the investigation of general sanitary conditions from a practical and scientific standpoint.³⁷

This course focused attention on aspects of the building itself, such as the situation, surroundings, and ventilation. The course about the Economy of Living also taught during that year was not focused on finances but rather on subjects like the “chemistry of cleaning.”³⁸ These courses and articles explained that by controlling the material conditions in their homes, women could guard against the spread of disease.

Marion Talbot and her colleagues were also concerned about the conditions that produced bodies strong enough to resist disease, and there was an uncanny correlation between the way that they thought particular material conditions affected diseases and the way that they thought those conditions affected human beings. Marion Talbot explained that “students of the laws of health are finding out that those very agencies, sunlight, and air, which destroy germs, also act on the human system in such a way as to give it greater power to resist disease.”³⁹ One aspect of the environment that could particularly affect physical health was the quality of the air or “Atmospheric Vitiation.”⁴⁰ Domestic scientists taught that a lack of fresh air circulation, and especially impurities in the air, had negative consequences for the human body.⁴¹ Light—which was thought to kill disease—was also considered important for maintaining healthy bodies. “For the twofold purpose of giving the members of a family vigorous bodies and of preventing the development

37. *Annual Register* 1892-1893, 47.

38. *Annual Register* 1892-1893, 47.

39. Marion Talbot, “Housekeeping in Relation to Social Progress,” *The House Beautiful*, July 1903, 120.

40. Marion Talbot, “Atmospheric Vitiation,” *The House Beautiful*, January 1903, 133.

41. Marion Talbot, “Conditions Affecting Standards of Cleanliness,” *The House Beautiful*, October 1903, 325.

and the growth of all kinds of harmful germs in the house," Talbot wrote in 1903, "every housekeeper should see to it that damp cellars, dark shut-up rooms, and unventilated closets should not be tolerated...the dark, inaccessible closet under the kitchen sink be laid open to the light."⁴² Controlling air, sunlight, and moisture affected not only the appearance of disease but also the ability of human bodies to resist it.

Proper nutrition was also important for maintaining physical strength. Alice Norton, assistant professor of Nutritional Science in the College of Education, offered numerous courses in the chemical principles of nutrition and the organization of dietaries.⁴³ Not only were she and others concerned that people were getting the proper nutrients, they were also concerned about the possibility that food had been infected by unclean production facilities or adulterated with cheap additives. The course on "Sanitary Aspects of Food, Water and Clothing" that Marion Talbot taught in 1892 dealt with subjects of "food analysis, *food adulterations*, and dietaries. [my italics]"⁴⁴ Talbot, Norton, and their colleagues were concerned about the way that large-scale systems of distribution obscured the sanitary conditions of production. A contributor to the *House Beautiful* vividly described this fear: "A recent writer portrays, all too realistically...the actual modern American practice." He wrote, "Some old fellow stumbles out of the house and to the barn...wearing overalls and boots saturated and covered with the filth acquired by a winter's use. When he reaches the barn he selects some recumbent cow, kicks her until she starts up, dripping and slimy...he does not stop to clean up behind the cow, but sitting down on a stool, proceeds to gather the milk and whatever else may fall into a pail."⁴⁵

42. Marion Talbot, "Housekeeping in Relation to Social Progress," 120.

43. *Annual Register*, 1903-1904, 249.

44. *Annual Register*, 1892-1893, 47.

45. Edwin O. Jordan, "The Household Supply of Milk," *The House Beautiful*, September 1902, 252; Edwin Oakes Jordan was chairman and founder of the

These concerns about food contamination point to an overarching theme in these analyses of environmental cleanliness: that is, that what detracted from human health were impurities and what furnished proper health was purity. Those impurities might have been in the form of dust, dampness, dirt, and germs, and they might have polluted environments, objects, or foods, but in all cases the metaphor of contamination and adulteration remained the same. Cleanliness—the buzzword of this earlier period—was in fact *defined* as the removal of impurities. Marion Talbot described how modern life led to “the production of a vast amount of waste substances which, unless properly disposed of, are not only of no direct use to mankind, but are frequently harmful.” These, she explained, “are called impurities, and an effort should be made to remove them, and thus secure what is known as cleanliness.”⁴⁶ In another article she elaborated on her definition of impurities: “Solid impurities are of two general classes: (1) dead matter, (2) living germs. The former may simply irritate the lungs and throat, the latter may produce decay or disease, and are the more serious in their effects.”⁴⁷ These fears about impurities reveal anxieties about the by-products and waste resulting from increased production and from the distribution and consumption of mass-produced goods. Those writing about the household were concerned with the kinds of materials—and the kinds of impurities carried by materials—that now passed between distant environments and distant individuals.

This concern about materials and environments gave a particular meaning to the larger narrative about increasing interconnectivity. The

Department of Hygiene and Bacteriology at the University of Chicago. He co-edited *The Journal of Infectious Diseases* and published a pamphlet analyzing milk in the Chicago market for the Civic Federation of Chicago in 1904 [Publications of the Members of the University, 1902-1916 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1917)].

46. Marion Talbot, “The Significance of Clean Air I,” *The House Beautiful*, February 1903, 206.

47. Talbot, “Conditions Affecting Standards of Cleanliness,” 325.

public responsibility of the home was located in the physical structure itself, because of that environment's role in the maintenance of physical health and thus the achievement of social progress. The maintenance of physical space and material objects became a social obligation because its performance affected disparate individuals. "It has been shown," wrote Talbot, "first, that disease may be largely controlled, or even prevented; second, *that the citizen in his public and private capacity has a distinct duty to perform in lessening the amount of disease*; and third, that cleanliness of air, water, and soil is the foundation for all effort toward the control of disease."⁴⁸ According to Talbot and her colleagues, the way that individuals in society were linked was embedded directly in the material objects that passed between them and the material conditions that affected their behavior.

The home was considered a particularly crucial environment for several reasons. First, it was the location where individuals were raised, and thus where the physical, moral, and intellectual constitution of a country's citizens was formed. Home sanitation was especially crucial to the well-being of society because it was where citizens passed through their formative years. Second, the home was crucially important to the quest for health and social progress because it was the level at which sanitary practices were implemented. Talbot frequently referenced sanitarian W. B. Richardson's claim that "If, in the centers called home the foundations of the science of health are laid, the rest, on a larger scale, will necessarily follow, for the same rule that applies to the accumulation of wealth applies equally to the accumulation of health. 'Take care of the pennies,' says the financier, 'the pounds will take care of themselves.' 'Take care of the houses,' says the sanitarian, 'the towns will take care of themselves.'"⁴⁹

48. Talbot, "The Significance of Clean Air I," 206.

49. B. W. Richardson, as quoted by Marion Talbot in "The House as a Unit of Health," 186; Talbot states this herself later in the article: "The place where conditions of living can be most completely directed is the house," she wrote, "and in so far as the house is healthful, the community as a whole will be free from disease with its attendant suffering" [Talbot, "The House as a Unit of Health II," 187].

The image of a town as a collection of individual homes points to the way that the home functioned as a unit during this earlier period: it was the smallest segment of the urban environment. "The House as a Unit of Health" the title of an article by Marion Talbot in *The House Beautiful*, published in August 1902, encapsulated the particular way that the home was considered to be a unit.⁵⁰ In the first place, Talbot used the word "house," as opposed to "home," "family" or "household," suggesting a physical location rather than a collection of people. In the second place, this house was a unit of "health": the wider importance of that physical unit was its role in maintaining bodily, moral, and social well-being.

If sanitation within the home was so crucial to social well-being, then women could not be left to their own devices when it came to caring for their houses. On the one hand, this implied the need for more social legislation directing the way that individuals could act in their homes. In 1898 the Association of Collegiate Alumnae wrote in their manual, "Sanitary legislation is essential, and is making progress...the habits of people must be improved as well as their houses...bad food, unwholesome surroundings, unclean habits, and foul air..."⁵¹ This kind of legislation might infringe upon personal rights, but that was alright if society as a whole would benefit. "Law," explained Marion Talbot, "is based on the principle that every citizen is entitled to protection in regard to his liberty or life and his property. Modern sanitary law is based on the principle that he is entitled to his health, which is synonymous with his life, and is the basis of his property ...the sacrifice of the seeming liberty becomes a mere trifle in comparison with the larger opportunity."⁵²

50. Marion Talbot, "The House as a Unit of Health" *The House Beautiful*, August 1902, 186.

51. The Association of Collegiate Alumnae, *Home Sanitation*, 75.

52. Talbot, "The House as a Unit of Health II," 256.

Just as centralized legislation was essential for establishing and enforcing standards of cleanliness, so scientific knowledge produced in institutions of higher learning needed to displace passed-down wisdom in order to standardize and modernize beliefs about how and what to clean. All writers about home sanitation referred at some point to the current situation of general ignorance among housewives and spent a great deal of time consciously correcting popular misconceptions. They lamented, on the one hand, over-enthusiasm for non-academic advice and, on the other, traditional wisdom passed from mother to daughter. "The fault rests largely with popular writers on sanitary matters," claimed Talbot, "who have been quick to place before the public conclusions not thoroughly tested by scientific men, and who have not followed with equal zest the more conservative and less sensational results now held by scholars."⁵³ Too many women "have a motto, but do not use it," complained another contributor to Talbot's *House Beautiful* column. "They are the slaves of custom or favored conditions."⁵⁴ The knowledge produced by this and other academic departments related to home economics was not meant to sit in an ivory tower: it was meant to improve the conditions of society, and as such it needed to be broadcast to and adopted by the widest possible audience.⁵⁵ The regulation and dissemination of this sanitary knowledge was crucial for progress within this particular narrative about social interconnectivity and the intimate relationship

53. Marion Talbot, "Popular Fallacies about Food and Sanitation," *The House Beautiful*, August 1902, 187.

54. Marion Elliott, "Household Cleansing Processes and Means of Lightening Them," *The House Beautiful*, October 1902, 322.

55. It is interesting to note that at least three quarters of the women who graduated from the college between 1892 and 1911 went on to become teachers in both primary/secondary and higher education, while less than 5 percent became full-time homemakers. [Floyd W. Reeves and John Dale Russell, *The University of Chicago Survey, Volume VI: The Alumni of the Colleges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), 66]

between environment, body and behavior. However, as economic and social realities began to change, the particular way that the household was incorporated into this narrative about modernity began to change too.

The New Public Health

Around the turn of the century, public health researchers radically shifted their views regarding the transmission and control of disease. During the middle part of the nineteenth century, disease had been attributed to a combination of humoral imbalance—a theory about internal ratios of wet, dry, hot, and cold inherited from the eighteenth century—and the theory of miasma. This second theory emerged because the humoral model failed to account for the sudden and rapid spread of epidemics, which increasingly plagued industrial cities during the nineteenth century. People noticed that illness seemed to follow sewer lines, garbage, and newly cleared earth and that it died down once the land was cultivated, leading to the hypothesis that when sunlight hit exposed earth it caused the release of poisonous miasmas, which spread disease.⁵⁶ After the Civil War, these earlier theories about miasma and the role of environmental factors in the spread of disease became widely accepted, and led to the creation of municipal health organizations that campaigned for the construction of better plumbing and sewer systems.⁵⁷ However, as early as the 1880s in Europe, scientists had begun to notice that tiny organisms seemed to be associated with particular illnesses and hypothesized that it was these living particles—rather than miasmas or humors—that caused human beings to become sick. Yet the germ theory of disease did not immediately displace older theories, especially in the United States. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, those who thought that disease derived from material conditions clashed heads with those who thought that disease derived from tiny organisms that lived in human

56. Duffy, *The Sanitarians*, 67-68.

57. Duffy, *The Sanitarians*, 128.

bodies.⁵⁸ Even into the first decade of the twentieth century some public health officials still supported the miasma theory of disease, and it was not until the end of that decade that germ theory was unanimously accepted.⁵⁹

Scholars of medical history disagree about whether the sanitary focus of the 1880s and 1890s—the concern with cleansing environments that I described in the previous section—was based in a miasmatic or germ theory of disease. Either could be possible, given the slow and uneven acceptance of germ theory in the United States during the twenty years spanning this sanitary frenzy. Elizabeth Fee in “Public Health and the State: The United States” and John Duffy in *The Sanitarians: a History of American Public Health* suggest that the cleaning frenzy was a result of miasmatic theories of disease and came to an end because of the arrival of germ theory. Associating sanitary reform with miasmatic theories would explain the sanitarians’ obsession with fresh air as well as their concern with damp ground.⁶⁰ On the other hand, Virginia Smith in *Clean: a History of Personal Hygiene and Purity* claims that it was precisely the arrival of germ theory that set off this cleaning frenzy.⁶¹ This is supported by the fact that instructors at the university specifically used the word “germ” when referring to health hazards and were concerned about the conditions that caused these living organisms to grow or die. Suellen Hoy in *Chasing Dirt: the American Pursuit of Cleanliness* argues the middle ground, suggesting that the sanitary obsession, which originally followed from miasmatic theories about the environmental causes of disease, gradually, unevenly, and often incorrectly incorporated germ theory—at points employing language like “microbe” and “bacilli” even though “sewer gas

58. Hoy, *Chasing Dirt*, 72; *Ibid*, 107.

59. Duffy, *The Sanitarians*, 129.

60. Fee, “Public Health and the State: The United States,” 237-239; Duffy, *The Sanitarians*, 129 and 206.

61. Virginia Smith, *Clean: a History of Personal Hygiene and Purity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 299.

remained mysteriously responsible for illnesses of every kind."⁶² This last theory seems to account most completely for the dizzying mixture of germ language and miasmatic language that pervaded the writing of home economists and sanitary reformers at Chicago during the 1880s and 1890s. However, over the course of the first decade of the twentieth century the real implications of a contagionist model for disease seemed to have finally reached the consciousness of home economists, rendering the old concern for environmental conditions and material cleanliness inadequate and calling for something new.

Hibbert W. Hill, a favorite author of Marion Talbot's, who wrote a popular manual on germ theory called *The New Public Health*, explained that a radical shift in popular attitude toward disease occurred toward the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. "The conceptions of health, public and private, held by our ancestors and, until very lately, by ourselves," he wrote in *The New Public Health*, first published in 1913, "have undergone gradual revision, not to say revolution, in the last twenty years; changing most radically perhaps in the last ten."⁶³ He went

62. Hoy, *Chasing Dirt*, 71.

63. Hibbert Winslow Hill *The New Public Health*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), Preface. Hibbert Winslow Hill was the director of the Division of Epidemiology at the Minnesota Board of Health. He popularized Charles Chapin's seminal text on germ theory in a series of newspaper articles, which he collected into a book, *The New Public Health*, first published in 1913 [Fee, "Public Health and the State: The United States," 237]. Nancy Tomes also points out that even though germ theory circulated among home economists before the turn of the century, something changed in their understanding by around 1910, and Hibbert Hill's *The New Public Health* was critical in bringing about that change. She writes, "In 1913, a Minnesota public health official named Hibbert Winslow Hill published a book entitled *The New Public Health*, which heralded an important shift in public health practice. At first glance, Hill's book seemed only to reinforce the emphasis on domestic sanitation so central to home economics...yet Hill's conception of the new public health represented a significant change from the home economist's program of sanitary cleanliness." [Tomes, "Spreading the Germ Theory," 48]. It is interesting to note that the scientific text that Talbot cites the most is a popular manual rather than the seminal scientific work that the manual draws from.

on to explain: "The essential change is this: The old public health was concerned with the environment; the new is concerned with the individual; the old sought the sources of infectious disease in the surroundings of man; the new finds them in man himself."⁶⁴

Because it was now accepted that germs would die after only a short amount of time in any environment outside of a living animal, there was no question as to the kinds of environmental conditions that would furnish or hinder their proliferation. Marion Talbot explained in her 1912 revision of *Home Sanitation* that "the new house sanitation teaches that the person in the house, not the house itself, is the source of danger from infection."⁶⁵ In short, people became ill by exposing themselves to germs through contact with sick people or their bodily fluids, not from dark or damp environments. This meant that the most effective sanitary precautions were those that maintained the body—such as washing hands frequently or covering a cough—rather than those that safeguarded the environment.⁶⁶

This shift meant that situations that used to be considered dangerous—like dusty corners and dark cupboards—were rendered harmless. In the 1912 revision of *Home Sanitation* Marion Talbot noted that "Sewers, plumbing, garbage, night air, damp cellars, carbonic acid, odors, and dust have in large measure if not wholly lost their terrors, since they are now known not to be the cause of disease."⁶⁷ The only environmental factors that needed to be monitored under this new system were the routes travelled by human bodily fluids, especially human waste. Hill advised sanitizing the paths by which human waste exited the household—not because human waste was inherently dangerous, but because, were someone in the household to become sick, the waste passing

64. Hill, *The New Public Health*, 8.

65. Marion Talbot. *House Sanitation: A Manual for Housekeepers*. (Boston: Whitcomb and Barrows, 1912), 97.

66. Hill, *The New Public Health*, 104; *Ibid*, 102-103.

67. Talbot, *House Sanitation*, 96.

through those pathways would also carry the disease.⁶⁸ Additionally, a whole new set of potentially dangerous environments emerged. These dangerous situations were ones in which large numbers of people came into contact with each other: places like overcrowded dwellings, public spaces, and institutions. The health hazard was considered especially high when a large number of those individuals were children—as in the case of a school—since children were considered more susceptible to disease and thus more likely to be carriers.⁶⁹

This change was evident in the courses offered by the Departments of Household Administration and Home Economics. By the 1903-1904 school year, the description for the course on “House Sanitation” had been changed to read: “This course deals with the house as a *factor in health*. Special attention will be given to *modern conceptions of cleanliness*, and to the investigation of general sanitary conditions from a practical and scientific standpoint and with special reference to the needs of *the community, the household, and the school* [my italics].”⁷⁰ This course, which used to focus on the physical features of the house—“ventilation, heating, drainage...” —now laid out “modern conceptions of cleanliness” and a notion of health that was expanded beyond the structure of the home to include locations where strangers interact, like the “community” “household” and “school.”

This revised narrative about the growth and transmission of disease created an entirely different schema for the way that disparate individuals affect each other through their interactions with material objects. Before, individuals had a responsibility to care for their private surroundings so that they could remain healthy and contribute most fully to the collective social improvement, or they had a responsibility to regulate the way others in society kept their homes. Now, however, disease was maintained and

68. Hill, *The New Public Health*, 13.

69. Hill, *The New Public Health*, 14; *Ibid.*, 29.

70. *Annual Register* 1903-1904, 241.

transferred directly within and between the bodies of human beings. Public health researchers and home economists no longer talked about conditions of growth but about routes of transfer. Hill called for an end to “general sanitation,” which he described as “an orgy of sweeping, burning, scrubbing; and ecstasy of dirt-destruction, individual, household, municipal” and hailed the advent of “specific sanitation”—the desire to “speedily determine... the exact *route* of infection actually responsible; and promptly... abolish or block that route.”⁷¹ Public health researchers and home economists shifted from focusing on the environment’s impact on human beings, to places where human bodies interacted.

Deeper than the shift from a focus on environmental conditions to a focus on personal hygiene and bodily contact was a change in attitude from advising general and complete cleanliness to pinpointing specific locations of infection and identifying the most direct and effective solutions to health threats. Hill explained, “Taught for, lo these many years, that general cleanliness is a protection against disease, we are beginning to realize that only a *specific* cleanliness, that which actually eliminates disease germs, is of real value for this purpose; taught also that general high health protects against disease, we are beginning to understand that the only form of bodily condition which secures this end is the possession by the body of a *specific* protection against each specific disease” [my italics].⁷² There was a strong language shift, not only from conditions of growth to routes of transfer, but also from general sanitary conditions to specific and effective methods of combating disease.

Ultimately, though, what was most significant about this revised theory was not its new strategy for addressing and eliminating disease, but its new conception of why disease was a social problem in the first place. The writings by Hill, Talbot, and others stopped describing how disease limited physical capacity and thus mental, moral, and social capacity as well; instead they started to lament the human and economic

71. Hill, *The New Public Health*, 63-64.

72. Hill, *The New Public Health*, 3.

waste caused by misdirected and excessive efforts at disease-control. "Each generation of Americans pays now for infectious disease ten billion dollars at the least, *and has the diseases, too!*" exclaimed Hill, "Why not pay one-tenth this sum and rid ourselves of all of them forever?"⁷³ Those advocating the new public health were concerned primarily with disease prevention that was cost-effective in terms of the loss of money and effort and the gains in human life. It was for this reason that they emphasized the identification of incredibly specific routes of infection over general cleanliness: they wanted to reduce the loss to human life without unnecessarily throwing away money or time. "Conservation of human life is to be accomplished in large part through the practice of sanitary measures," explained Talbot in the revised edition of *Home Sanitation*, "to be effective in the best sense, this practice must be carried on with the least possible expenditure of time, effort, and money."⁷⁴ These scholars were no longer concerned about material impurities but rather about waste—waste of life, waste of effort, and waste of money.

In fact, this shift in attitude and in language toward economy and efficiency pervaded all articles, books, and courses related to home economics after about 1905. What emerged was an entirely new way of talking about disease and thinking about disease that strikingly reflected developments elsewhere in home economics and changes in the general political and social discourse of the progressive era. Partly as a result of this new public-health strategy, which identified the most dangerous locations for disease transmission in institutions *outside* the home, and partly as a result of the success of nineteenth-century public-health campaigns in reducing urban mortality, disease gradually disappeared from the language of home economics.⁷⁵ At the same time, the professionalization of

73. Hill, *The New Public Health*, 193.

74. Talbot, *House Sanitation*, 1.

75. Walter Nugent, "Epidemics," *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, 2004; Vincenti, "A History of the Philosophy of Home Economics," 161-162; Tomes, "Spreading the Germ Theory," 49.

medical research accompanying the success of germ theory also removed legitimacy from non-medical reformers, and was likely another factor that removed disease from home economic concern.⁷⁶ In 1903 the specialization in Sanitary Science at the university was merged into the department of Household Administration, and the courses on disease were gradually phased out. What took their place were classes and articles about markets, management, and finances. Changes in public health strategy provide a possible explanation for the disappearance of sanitary concerns, but they do not explain why issues of environmental cleanliness were replaced with a study of management, finance, and consumption, as well as a growing awareness of economic class and household budget. In order to attempt an explanation for this second aspect of the shift, I will go back in time a few years to an event that was almost never addressed in university courses but filled the pages Marion Talbot's *House Beautiful* column during the year 1903: the crisis of household help.

The Silent Revolt

Marion Talbot edited a "Home Economics" section in the monthly ladies journal called *The House Beautiful* from August 1902 to May 1904. Some of the articles were her own, but a great many were written by other women and men working in the field of home economics, or related fields, at the University of Chicago and elsewhere. The magazine, started in 1896 and based in Chicago, rejected the cluttered Victorian aesthetic

76. Duffy, *The Sanitarians*, 206. It is interesting to note that from 1908-09 to 1928-29, Household Administration and Hygiene and Bacteriology experienced the second and third largest percentage increase in number of students, respectively. This supports the hypothesis that one of the factors leading to the de-emphasis of disease-prevention in home economics was the rise of professionalized forms of medical training and research [Reeves, Miller and Dale, *Trends in University Growth*, 61].

that had dominated the last quarter of the nineteenth century and advocated simple, functional design. At first it only contained articles on architecture, but by 1902 had expanded to include “departments” on topics as diverse as gardening, antiques, fabrics, and housekeeping. It had a readership of 7,000 in 1900 and 20,000 in 1904 and, at 20 cents per issue, was marketed toward the middle class. It was a fairly progressive magazine: not only did it trumpet cutting-edge work such as that of Frank Lloyd Wright, but it also published a controversial series criticizing the gaudy tastes of the rich in 1904.⁷⁷ The department that Marion Talbot edited was originally titled “Domestic Science Department”; the name was changed to “Home Economics” in 1903. The articles that she included covered topics on sanitation, cooking, food purity, municipal regulation, home economics events, servants, and women’s education. Throughout 1902, most of the articles focused on the kind of sanitary advice that was emphasized during the early years of the department. However, starting in December of 1902 and lasting through the following year, at least one article about the “service question” appeared every month—and frequently both, or all three, of the articles in the section were devoted to the problem. This included a three-month series on problems in domestic service by Gail Laughlin, and a nine-month series on modern housekeeping by Mary Hinman Abel.⁷⁸ After 1903, the majority

77. Kathleen L. Endres and Therese L. Lueck, *Women’s Periodicals in the United States: Consumer Magazines* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), 158-160.

78. Gail Laughlin, 1898 Graduate of Cornell Law School, served as an expert agent for the United States Industrial Commission from 1900-1902, during which time she carried out a report on domestic service [“Laughlin, Gail,” *Notable American Women: The Modern Period*, eds. Barbara Sicherman and Green, Carl Hurd (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 410]. Mary Hinman Abel was a close colleague of Ellen Richards, and editor of the *Journal of Home Economics* from 1909-1915 [Laura Shapiro, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 143].

of articles in the column focused on aspects women's education.⁷⁹ But the sudden appearance and disappearance of these debates about domestic service marked a change in the way that contributors talked about women's domestic duties in the magazine and in other departmental publications. The particular way that these authors framed their concerns over domestic service, therefore, hints at a possible origin for the new discourse of economy and efficiency that came to dominate the departments of Household Administration and Home Economics.

Women had complained about the behavior of their servants and about the shortage of household help in general, since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century, but something was different by the start of the twentieth. There had always been a shortage of women willing to go into domestic service because of its undesirability and social stigma, and employers perpetually looked back to a golden age of quiet, obedient service girls.⁸⁰ However, during the late nineteenth century, the accelerated expansion of the urban middle class radically augmented the number of women seeking to hire servants.⁸¹ At the same time, immigration patterns were changing away from national groups that traditionally sought domestic service positions—like the Swedes or the Irish—and towards national groups that shunned household work.⁸² Even though there were as many servants as there had ever been in 1900, the number of servants per thousand families was half what it was 1870.⁸³

79. Domestic Science Department (later Home Economics), *The House Beautiful*, August 1902-May 1904.

80. Daniel Sutherland, *Americans and Their Servants: Domestic Service in the United States from 1800 to 1920* (Baton Rouge, La: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 6.

81. David Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 46.

82. Katzman, *Seven Days a Week*, 55.

83. Katzman, *Seven Days a Week*, 61.

Ultimately, this way of organizing household help was unsustainable. The first decade of the twentieth century saw the radical transition from live-in service to hourly domestic help. By the First World War, this transformation was complete.⁸⁴ Writing in 1903, Marion Talbot and the contributors to her column were at the center of this difficult transition.

The way that women diagnosed the service problem around the turn of the century was also different from how they had presented it during most of the nineteenth century. Earlier, discussions of the service issue tended to emphasize the need to reform the behavior of servant girls themselves.⁸⁵ By the turn of the century, those writers instead blamed the unappealing labor conditions inherent to the organization of contemporary domestic service. At that time, domestic service was not the only occupation experiencing a crisis. Even before the depression of 1893, Chicago had become a center for labor unrest, and the situation was only exacerbated by deteriorating economic conditions that left hundreds of thousands out of work. In 1886 anarchist protestors set off a bomb in Haymarket Square; in 1894 a strike of Pullman workers hindered railroad traffic across the country; and in 1904 the International Workers of the World was founded in Chicago. These are only some particularly glaring examples of events that fed a growing awareness and anxiety around labor issues in Chicago.⁸⁶ It is no surprise, then, that by the turn of the twentieth century, the contributors to Talbot's column analyzed the problem of domestic service, not as a behavioral issue, but as a labor issue. They tried to figure out what was wrong with domestic service as an institution, rather than what was wrong with "lazy" servants. Why, they asked, did working-class women prefer factory jobs, when factor labor actually paid *less* than domestic labor?

84. Katzman, *Seven Days a Week*, vii.

85. Katzman, *Seven Days a Week*, 251.

86. Flanagan, *America Reformed*, 6-8.

In "Domestic Service—Reasons for Un-popularity," Gail Laughlin laid out what she considered to be the negative aspects of household labor (principles that were echoed by the other women who analyzed the problem in Talbot's column): first, that the hours were unregulated, unfixed and often excessive; second, that the tasks were varied and unpredictable; third, that under the 'living in' system the servant's private life was supervised by the mistress at all times; fourth, that because servants lived with their employers but were separated from them by social class, working in domestic service entailed a constant and unbearable awareness of economic status; and, finally, that domestic service was the least respected profession in society.⁸⁷ Laughlin and others also point out that this feeling of class tension and lowered status was heightened when the servant was of a different race or ethnicity than the mistress, as was increasingly the case in the early years of the twentieth century.

What Gail Laughlin and Mary Hinman Abel ultimately concluded was that the current organization of domestic service was essentially a form of feudal labor that was out of step with modernity. Unlike wage laborers, who sold their time or their ability to perform a specific task, domestic workers were hired to be on call for any task at any time—they were selling were their whole selves. "In other occupations," wrote Laughlin, "it is the labor of the person, distinctively, which is contracted for; in domestic service, the person, rather than the labor of the person, is the subject of the contract."⁸⁸ It was the fact that the domestic worker sold not just her time or her labor but her whole being that lead to social degradation. Laughlin continued, "an equal may sell his labor to an equal, but when a worker sells also the right to designate what

87. Gail Laughlin, "Domestic Service—Reasons for Un-popularity," *The House Beautiful*, March 1903, 281.

88. Laughlin, "Domestic Service—the Basic Principle of Reform," *The House Beautiful*, May 1903, 440.

that labor shall be, he is regarded as having bartered away a part of his independence."⁸⁹ Furthermore, the isolated and irregular character of domestic labor meant that it was left out of labor reform and social legislation. Laughlin and Abel both described the inevitability that this institution would change. Laughlin concluded her second article:

Everywhere people are being forced to adjust themselves, in one way or another, to the conditions which are being brought about by the silent revolt against the system of domestic service as it exists to-day. The old will not come back. The last vestige of feudalism will be driven out from all other fields. We can wait until we are forced to accept new conditions, or we can yield gracefully and reap the advantages which come from a ready adaptation to the inevitable.⁹⁰

What both Laughlin and Abel went on to explore were the possible ways that household labor might be incorporated into a modern system of capitalist production. They proposed three solutions. The first would be to change the system of domestic service so that it functioned more like wage labor. "The question of how to eliminate the features of domestic service which are objectionable to most women," Laughlin wrote, "may be answered...comprehensively, by saying: 'apply to household labor the economic principles which are recognized as being applicable to other branches of industry. Get away from the old feudal idea that the domestic worker is a personal servant rather than an employee, hired to perform certain specified labor.'"⁹¹ This would involve throwing out the 'living-in' system, making domestic service an hourly job, standardizing tasks, and establishing a system of education to teach those specific and

89. Laughlin, "The Basic Principle of Reform," 442.

90. Laughlin, "The Basic Principle of Reform," 442.

91. Laughlin, "The Basic Principle of Reform," 440.

uniform chores. "The establishment of the relation upon an economic basis, and the practical application of economic principles," continued Laughlin, "would do away with this conception of inferiority, and would thus remove the last and the most potent obstacle which stands in the way of the entrance of competent women into domestic service."⁹²

The second solution to the problem of housekeeping that they suggested was to outsource housework to external service industries. This might have involved a transition to hotel-apartments—an apartment complex with a central kitchen and laundry—the establishment of municipal laundry services, or the increased availability of cheap restaurants and prepared foods. "There is no other possible solution of the service question for the small household...but to help out of the house all the work that can be managed by organized industries," Abel wrote. "Even now," she continued, "what are called the household industries, cooking, cleaning, laundry work, and sewing, are, as one may say, on the very edge of the nest—pluming for flight."⁹³ The establishment of adequate services outside of the home would be another way of transforming household tasks into labor that could be accomplished on a waged and hourly basis.

The final solution to the housekeeping question was not a new system but rather an addition that would streamline both of the other proposed ideas: that is, the expansion of courses related to home economics into secondary and post-secondary education. This referred, on the one hand, to the vocational education of domestic servants. On the other, it referred to the education of upper- and middle-class women in domestic management so that they might reduce the amount of time and effort wasted on housekeeping. "It began to be evident," wrote Abel, "that any real improvement in domestic conditions must be preceded by

92. Laughlin, "The Basic Principle of Reform," 442.

93. Mary Hinman Abel, "Recent Phases of Co-operation among Women IV.—Present Domestic Conditions," *The House Beautiful*, June 1903, 57.

education in practical lines and by careful experiment."⁹⁴ At the same time, the introduction of courses on home management into post-secondary and pre-professional institutions would gradually erase the class bias against household work, making it more acceptable to the upper- and middle-class women who suddenly had to do more of it.⁹⁵ Education would incorporate housekeeping into modern forms of vocational and professional training, attaching to it a system of job preparation and turning it into a socially respected form of labor. Over the course of 1904, the articles about the servant question were gradually replaced by those arguing for the need to bring scientific knowledge into the household and those proclaiming the importance of home economic education and research.

The year 1903 was actually the same year that the Department of Household Administration was formed at the University of Chicago. The school of education, with its sub-discipline of home economics, was founded only three years earlier. Not only does the sudden proliferation of articles about home economics education in Talbot's column show how the servant crisis led to an increased sense of urgency about the need for vocational training and professionalization, it may also be a result of the fact that Talbot and her colleagues were particularly pre-occupied with the place of home economics in higher education at that same moment. Either way, during the same three-year period, anxieties about domestic labor escalated, home economics education was advocated with increasing urgency and the formation of both a department and a specialization devoted specifically to instruction in home economics at the University of Chicago were founded.

What these debates about domestic service appeared to do was to cause home economists at the university to think about the activities that took place within the four walls of the house, rather than just its material

94. Mary Hinman Abel, "Recent Phases of Co-operation among Women—Educational Efforts," *The House Beautiful*, May 1903, 442.

95. Abel, "Educational Efforts," 444.

condition and material maintenance. The very fact that they were forced to consider the economic value of domestic tasks caused them to begin to refer to the idea of housework itself as a form of labor and an economic exchange. The concept that household activities were a form of labor provided an easy pathway for contemporary preoccupations with productivity and efficiency to enter conversations about the home. Indeed, this servant debate was the first location where the language of efficiency, economy, thrift, cost, and benefit that would come to dominate the discourse of home economics, showed up with regularity. At the same time, the fact that these academics were so pre-occupied with issues of domestic service during this short period seems to have caused them to start thinking about the housekeeper in the role of manager.

The description of the home as a workplace was accompanied by a description of household activity as a sector of the national economy. Either housekeeping was a form of production, in that it produced the future generation, or it was the essential counterpart to processes of production—that is, it was where the business of consumption was carried out in society. Ellen Richards, writing for Talbot's *House Beautiful* column, explained that the products of household labor were "comfort, satisfaction, enjoyment, growth, education, and individual and group efficiency."⁹⁶ Laughlin, on the other hand, took the view that consumption in the home was a crucial aspect of the economy. "In the homes of the country," she wrote:

is consumed a large proportion of all the wealth produced in factory and on farm; in household labor are employed eleven to twelve millions of persons; fully two hundred million dollars is paid out every year in wages alone, to some million and a half of employees. There is no other branch of the world's work which absorbs the activities of so many individuals or which

96. Ellen H. Richards, "The Creative and Vital Interest of Home Economics," *The House Beautiful*, April 1904, 303.

involves the handling of so much wealth. Yet political economists of all time have ignored household labor in their discussions... but the hour for a better day has struck.⁹⁷

The servant crisis caused home economists to glance beyond the material structure of the house toward the activities of the householder within it. It caused them to consider the economic value of that household labor and its role within an economic system. It also served as a vehicle for bringing into the home broader concerns about efficiency and economy that had begun to circulate heavily by the turn of the century. This is not to say that the particular analysis of the servant crisis that implied an economic role for the household and ushered in a language of efficiency was not itself a product of these concerns. The general problem of a servant shortage was certainly interpreted as a specific issue of labor rights, capitalism, and class relations because those issues were of utmost relevance in contemporary Chicago. Even the idea that the home is a space of backwardness and a location that resisted modernity was inherited from the earlier discourse about the home—in which the pervasiveness of traditional beliefs about cleanliness were blamed for hindering social progress. What the servant crisis did do, however, was cause a crucial and undeniable material change to conditions in the home that needed to be analyzed by home economists and thus provided an opportunity for those outside concerns about efficiency and economy, labor, capital, and class to enter conversations about the household. Together these two factors—the triumph of germ theory and transformation of domestic service—led to drastic changes in the focus of courses and publications related to the instruction of home economics at the university.

97. Gail Laughlin "The First Step Toward Reform," *The House Beautiful*, February 1903, 204.

The Household as a Social Unit

The courses and publications out of the Department of Household Administration and the College of Education increasingly focused on the economic and managerial responsibility of the householder rather than her role in public health. The home was described as a collection of working bodies and a location in an economic system rather than a material environment that needed to be properly maintained. Courses offered within these departments dealt more and more with issues of economic organization and financial budgeting. The ideal of efficiency and waste-elimination that had marked both analyses of the servant problem and the new discourse about disease was hailed as the guiding principle for household management and financial allocation.⁹⁸ By 1906, classes like “The Organization of the Retail Market” and “Public Aspects of the Household” had entered the course catalog.⁹⁹ Even though some earlier courses mentioned concepts like “economy,” the focus of the instruction had been on food chemistry and cleaning, not financial resources or budgeting.¹⁰⁰

The narrative about the interdependence and interconnectivity of individuals in modern society—and their increasing obligations to one another—only grew in strength during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Centralized regulation was still considered crucial for maintaining a just social system. “As the civilization of our time grows more complex,” Marion Talbot and Sophonisba Breckenridge wrote in *The Modern Household*, “the relation of the individual to other individuals

98. Isabel Bevier, in her history of home economics, explained that the concerns of the discipline had shifted to “careful discrimination in values between essentials and non-essentials; the ever-increasing emphasis upon the cost of living; the discussion of the waste of time in the laboratory...” [Bevier, *Home Economics in Education*, 203].

99. *Annual Register* 1906-1907, 173.

100. *Annual Register* 1892-1893, 47.

and to the community becomes more dependent and intricate...the larger control over the individual and his activities assumed by the state, showing itself by the adoption of new statues and the organization of new administrative machinery."¹⁰¹ This narrative was only given increased urgency by the lasting effects of the 1893 depression, which brought on a sense of material scarcity. "Only as the struggle for life grows keener and access to the means of production more difficult," Talbot and Breckinridge continued:

... as land is appropriated and capital is organized, as the growth of cities and improved means of communication reveal to all members of the community the struggle necessary for many, has the producer for the market on the one hand and the housewife directing the consumption of her family on the other begun to take notice of the deplorable waste which has characterized the activities of both.¹⁰²

Suddenly the need to act for the good of the whole was even more important for social progress and the collective benefit. And the kinds of actions that benefited society were no longer those that reduced environmental impurities to foster social health but rather those that reduced individual waste to increase social efficiency.

Talbot and Breckinridge claimed that because households in the past had produced goods rather than purchased them, there was no previous system in place to aid the householder in efficiently allocating household finances and making good consumer decisions—which now comprised the bulk of the householder's task in providing for her family.¹⁰³ "Without

101. Marion Talbot and Sophonisba Breckinridge, *The Modern Household* (Boston: Whitcomb and Barrows, 1912), 21.

102. Talbot and Breckinridge, *The Modern Household*, 11-12.

103. Talbot and Breckinridge, *The Modern Household*, 51.

warning," they explained in *The Modern Household*, "a far more serious change has taken place than has been realized. The domestic tasks of an earlier day have left the home, not leaving behind them a void, but making way for a substitute...this substitute for older making—of yarn, cloth, bread, and beer—is spending money for ready-made clothing, household goods, and food almost ready to be served."¹⁰⁴ It was in this task of spending—for which she has had no previous training and for which there was no established system in place, but which is an essential component of the modern system of production and distribution—that the study of home economics had to aid the housekeeper.

This framework contained the new concept that a householder organized and maintained her household within a limited financial budget. She could not always choose the very best home, food, or machines because they might be beyond her means. With this new awareness came the new challenge, not of creating the most perfect home, but of spending her allocated resources as efficiently and effectively as possible toward that end. It also shifted the cause of crime and disease in poor neighborhoods from the disheveled buildings to the limited finances of its residents. Hill claimed that "Until such time as poverty is abolished, or the State takes charge of children, the majority of the women of the race must continue to rear the majority of the children of the race inadequately, in homes too small, without facilities."¹⁰⁵ Not only was the ability to make the most of a limited income the problem of poor women, it was also a challenge for members of the rising middle class, who had to figure out how to allocate their income in the most effective and socially responsible way. Hill continued, "This is not wholly a slum problem nor is it a problem of the rich. Numerically the race is chiefly middle class... This is the problem of the family with an income below \$3,000."¹⁰⁶

104. Talbot and Breckinridge, *The Modern Household*, 4.

105. Hill, *The New Public Health*, 26.

106. Hill, *The New Public Health*, 27.

This concern about budget limitation probably reflected the combination of an economic depression and a growing middle class who found themselves somewhere in between the consumptive freedom of the wealthy and the consumptive limits of the poor.

Within this new vision, the activities of the housekeeper had social relevance and public value in three important ways. First, because household labor and domestic consumption were part of a larger economic system, the housekeeper had an obligation to reduce waste and increase efficiency in the maintenance of her home and family. "Not only, then, are we beginning to recognize the significance of the spending function," wrote Talbot in *The Modern Household*, "but new measures are being worked out by which the importance of the efficient performance of the household task is estimated in terms of social well-being."¹⁰⁷ By reducing waste in the maintenance of familial happiness and health, the householder was helping to reduce the waste of the entire social system.

Second, the consumer choices that the housekeeper made and the way that she allocated household tasks affected the temperament of the children she raised. The fact that children were raised in the home had also contributed to the social importance of household activities in the 1890s, but now the focus was less on raising healthy bodies than on raising morally responsible, frugal children who knew the value of order and self-restraint.¹⁰⁸ Talbot and Breckinridge explained that "the failure to secure regular sleep, regular feeding, and regular play for the child at first, and then the loss of regular family life, and especially the family meal... lead the children into the humiliating paths which may end in the truant and reform school."¹⁰⁹ Ellen Richards expanded upon this idea in an article in Talbot's *House Beautiful* column. "History teaches us," she

107. Hill, *The Modern Household*, 6.

108. Talbot and Breckinridge, *The Modern Household*, 3.

109. Talbot and Breckinridge, *The Modern Household*, 7.

wrote, "...that only those who strive ever survive...the self-sacrifice demanded, the self-restraint learned strengthens, not weakens."¹¹⁰ Indeed the language of efficiency, which originally applied to industry, now seemed to apply also to character and had become practically a behavioral ideal. Marion Talbot explained the goals of every female student in a lecture, listing "1. To become as efficient as possible as a human being. 2. To become as efficient as possible as a citizen. 3. To become as efficient as possible in some line of expert service."¹¹¹ Because the household was the location where future citizens were formed, it was the most important location for instilling these values of self-sacrifice and efficiency. The householder's ability to provide the amount and type of consumer goods that encouraged correct behaviors and attitudes in her children affected the possibility of social progress and social survival.

Finally, those same consumer choices that framed her children's upbringing also affected the individuals who made those consumer items. In deciding to purchase or pass over a product she had the power to support or protest the conditions of production for those who manufacture that product. "By her buying," Talbot and Breckinridge explained in *The Modern Household*, "employers are tempted to continue the use of sweated labor on the curtains which hang in reception rooms like hers, and convict labor is enabled to compete with the union workingman, whose efforts to improve his condition are thus rendered futile."¹¹² She then warned more directly, "The goods that were the products of the labor of separate small family groups are now the products of big business. Through the act of purchase, the housekeeper becomes related to those who buy and sell, who plan and toil and exploit, the wide world

110. Richards, "The Creative and Vital Interest of Home Economics," 304.

111. "Status of University of Chicago Women Faculty and Students" ca. 1908-1923, Talbot Papers, Box 5, University of Chicago Special Collections Research Center.

112. Talbot and Breckinridge, *The Modern Household*, 5.

over."¹¹³ This was not the first appearance of a consumer consciousness, or of the awareness that geographically and socially distant makers and buyers are interconnected in capitalist systems of production—indeed, as early as 1790 women in England boycotted sugar produced in the West Indies to protest the slave labor that produced it¹¹⁴—but it did expand the way in which household goods reached across class boundaries in the discourse of home economics: not only did diseases from the poor travel to the rich through the circulation of material objects, but the actions of the rich affected the conditions of the poor through the circulation of material objects as well. Anxieties about the circulation of disease in an increasingly interconnected society had given way to anxieties about the wider economic repercussions of individual actions. Not only that, but the new awareness of the power of consumer choice was certainly another manifestation of contemporary concerns about labor conditions. If the house was an economic sector in society, then not only was its internal efficiency crucial, but its connection to other elements of society—and its affect on those elements—was mediated through forms of economic exchange.

Both the change in the notion of the kinds of environments that constituted a health hazard—from the home to places where strangers and especially children interacted—and the shift toward an emphasis on management and economics were part of a general expansion of the focus of home economics beyond the home. Combined, the focus on management and on public places of encounter ushered in the arrival of a new subject to the discipline: the management of institutions. Indeed, courses in both the department of Household Administration, and the field of Home Economics in the College of Education, increasingly focused on the problems posed by institutions. In 1911, the university

113. Talbot and Breckinridge, *The Modern Household*, 6.

114. Clare Midgley. "Slave Sugar Boycotts, Female Activism and the Domestic Base of British Anti-Slavery Culture." *Slavery and Abolition*, (1996): 173.

added an instructor in Institution Economics to the Department of Household Administration and by 1916, the home economic courses in the School of Education included a section called "Institution Economics."¹¹⁵ The Department of Household Administration also contained a sub-section called "Institution Economics" when the courses were divided by topic in 1924.¹¹⁶ At the same time, these new courses catered to widening career opportunities for women outside of the home.

The expansion of these departments beyond problems of the home to include training for other professions available to women was one of the factors contributing to the fact that the literature produced by and surrounding these courses was increasingly gendered after the turn of the century. The entire focus of the department seemed to shift from research and instruction related to the role of the home in society, to research and instruction related to the labor of upper-and middle-class women in society. The opening up of the department to include aspects of women's pre-professional training beyond the household made the department appear as though it was more specifically directed to women—as a "women's" department—than it had been before. Even homemaking, through the emphasis on management and finances, seems to be described more and more as a "women's profession." As the focus of the instruction shifted from environments to labor more generally, the focus of the entire department shifted from the location over which women presided to the labor that women performed. And unlike the home—which a man often owns and in which people of many genders reside—a woman's labor was embedded directly in her body and thus inescapably linked her gender. Whereas ideas of the abridgement of property rights were described using a male noun, as in "a *man's* home is no longer his castle,"¹¹⁷ now the social obligations of the housekeeper

115. *Annual Register* 1911-1912, 252; *Annual Register* 1916-1917, 385.

116. *Annual Register* 1924-1925, 165.

117. Talbot, "The House as a Unit of Health," 186.

belonged specifically to a woman—“*her* making,” “*her* spending,” “*her* power,” “*her* task.”¹¹⁸

Furthermore, if the home was an economic or social unit rather than a geographic or medical unit, then the language of “unit” meant something different. The title of this section—“The Household as a Social Unit”—came from the title of a chapter in *The Modern Household*, published in 1912.¹¹⁹ There are two significant changes between this phrase and the earlier one—“The House as a Unit of Health.” The word “House” has been changed to “Household”—transferring the focus from a physical location to a collection of bodies—and “Unit of Health” has been replaced with “Social Unit”—pointing to the shift from a focus on health to a focus on the organization of individuals in a social system. The word “unit” no longer dissected public health regulations into its smallest level of application—a division of the whole into its smallest spatial elements—but rather identified one particular group within a larger social system; that is, it divided a whole into non-identical functional components. The modern house or household was no longer important because it was the ground-level of disease prevention, it was important because it carried out a crucial economic and social function within a larger system of production, distribution, class, and labor.

Conclusion

When Marion Talbot stated that “a man’s house is no longer his castle” in *The House Beautiful* in 1902 and when she repeated it again in *The Modern Household* in 1912, she was talking about how modern sanitary law and modern economic interdependency implied that personal

118. Talbot and Breckinridge, *The Modern Household*, pgs. 5, 5, 8, and 8 respectively.

119. Talbot and Breckinridge, *The Modern Household*, 1.

freedom occasionally had to be abridged for public benefit.¹²⁰ But the word “castle” also hints at a broader theme in her writing and the writing of her colleagues. Not only did they believe that a man’s home was no longer a space where he could do whatever he pleased—on a more general level, they believed that it was no longer a place where out-dated forms of living should be preserved. It was no longer a place where diseases should be endured as the wrath of god, where tasks should be carried out according to a feudal relationship between mistress and maid, or where women should be taught only how to bake bread and mend clothes. By using the word “castle” to describe older forms of public and private rights, Talbot linked individual-oriented thinking with the past and community-oriented thinking with the future. In doing so, she firmly situated her efforts to influence the activities of the household among contemporary ideas about the present state of society and the path to social improvement.

Ellen Richards summed up this attitude most gracefully in one of the last issues of Talbot’s *House Beautiful* column:

The tendency of democracy is to reduce to a level—to bring up, but also to pull down...So far women and house and home have been the resistant material, while all other things seem to be machine made and the property of thousands alike. Hundreds wear the same coats and the same shoes, but the house has maintained its individuality, and the bread has been flavored with home-grown bacteria, the clothes have been laundered badly after a certain fashion; the cook has had her own ways of

120. Talbot, “The House as a Unit of Health,” 186; Talbot and Breckinridge, *The Modern Household*, 21; “The word ‘castle,’” she explained, involved “the idea of exclusive ownership, and of defense against the outside world; the lord of the castle tolerated no interference with his ownership and his independence.” [Talbot, “The House as a Unit of Health II,” 256].

spoiling the food, and each stove has had its own peculiarity in smoking...The individual manufacturers are now leaving the house like rats a sinking ship. Does this fact have a warning, a meaning for us? If so, what? Are we doing the right thing to encourage cooked food depots? Shall we use public laundries and employ special service by the hour? ... Will the child who selects his own food from a restaurant bill of fare, instead of eating what is put upon his plate by his mother, be the better and wiser man?¹²¹

121. Richards, "The Creative and Vital Interest of Home Economics," 303.

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