

# Home Economics, “Handicapped Homemakers,” and Postwar America

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*In the two decades following World War II, a loose network of home economists at colleges and universities across the United States turned their attention to home-making methods for women with physical disabilities. Often in consultation with physically disabled homemakers, these home economists researched and designed assistive devices, adaptive equipment, and work simplification techniques for use in the home. Their efforts signaled a new field of study, “homemaker rehabilitation,” which helped to enlarge the broader vocational rehabilitation system beyond its historic focus on male veterans and wage earners while also expanding the boundaries of home economics itself. Home economists’ work with disabled homemakers both bolstered and challenged postwar domesticity, middle-class gender roles, and able-bodied normalcy. Calling attention to these contradictions reveals much about how home economists engaged with and understood disability and how their work intersected with burgeoning movements for disability rights.*

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In the summer of 1956, the University of Connecticut’s School of Home Economics began planning a new instructional film to showcase its recent work. An early script opened with a scene of a woman bathing her baby, which the male narrator described as “one of the happiest experiences of the young mother.” Another scene showed the same woman cheerfully peeling potatoes, before panning to her husband enjoying them mashed and covered with brown gravy.<sup>1</sup> Although

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<sup>1</sup>University of Connecticut, School of Home Economics, untitled film script, ca. June 1956, 1, folder 7, box 94, MSP 7, Frank and Lillian Gilbreth Papers, Archives and Special Collections, Purdue University Libraries, West Lafayette, IN (hereafter cited as Gilbreth Papers).

1950s home economics materials routinely featured such topics as cooking and childcare, UConn's approach was far less conventional than initially portrayed. In a series of dramatic twists, the narrator implored the audience to "consider the woman whose husband just loves mashed potatoes and gravy. And she has lost the use of one hand." Or "suppose you are a mother who has only one hand with which to bathe her child."<sup>2</sup> As viewers pondered these scenarios, the shot transitioned to a montage of other "seemingly impossible jobs" for women with physical disabilities. Turning to the home economics program at UConn, the script introduced Neva Waggoner, a wife and mother who had lost the use of her left arm when she contracted polio at age three. Seamlessly and without any apparent difficulty, Waggoner was then shown carrying out an array of homemaking tasks before explaining, in the final scene, how life can be as full and rewarding for individuals with disabilities as for "normal people."<sup>3</sup>

The film project was designed to publicize UConn's recent workshop, *The Team Approach to the Rehabilitation of the Handicapped Homemaker*, which Waggoner had helped to coordinate through the School of Home Economics the previous year.<sup>4</sup> Bringing together a wide range of professionals working in vocational rehabilitation—a field focused on assisting disabled people enter or resume

<sup>2</sup>University of Connecticut, School of Home Economics, untitled film script, 1.

<sup>3</sup>University of Connecticut, School of Home Economics, untitled film script, 1–2. This early draft eventually evolved into *Where There's a Will* (University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT and John L. Schwab Associates, Management Consultants, Bridgeport, CT, released 1958 [premiered 1957]) 16mm, 28 min. Correspondence regarding the early history of the script and film can be found in folder 7, box 18, Gilbreth Papers. For more on the film's production and release, see Elizabeth Eckhardt May and Neva R. Waggoner, "Work Simplification in the Area of Child Care for Physically Handicapped Women," progress report, June 15, 1956–June 15 1957, p. 23, folder 6, box 1; May and Waggoner, "Work Simplification in the Area of Child Care for Physically Handicapped Women," progress report, June 15, 1957–June 15–1958, p. 25, folder 7, box 1; and May and Waggoner, "Work Simplification in the Area of Child Care for Physically Handicapped Women," progress report, June 15, 1958–June 15, 1959, p. 4, folder 8, box 1, all in Handicapped Homemaker Project Records, Archives and Special Collections, Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Library, Storrs, CT (hereafter cited as Handicapped Homemaker Project Records). Additional materials related to UConn's study of disabled homemakers are included in the Elizabeth E. May Papers also held at Archives and Special Collections, Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Library, Storrs, CT. For a biographical treatment of Waggoner, see Betty Milburn, "Here Are Hints for Handicapped," *Tucson (AZ) Daily Citizen*, June 11, 1959, 29.

<sup>4</sup>University of Connecticut, School of Home Economics, *The Team Approach to the Rehabilitation of the Handicapped Homemaker, Workshop Proceedings, May 31–June 3, 1955* (Storrs, CT: University of Connecticut, 1955).

employment—the workshop reflected a growing interest among home economists in the subject of physical disability. Although some teachers at deaf and blind schools had provided homemaking instruction to their students beginning in the nineteenth century, their efforts had been scattered and largely restricted to special institutions.<sup>5</sup> It was not until after World War II that home economics students and faculty studied the role of physical disability in homemaking and family life in any systematic way.

In the two decades after the war's end, a network of home economists emerged that sought to help homemakers with physical disabilities perform their work. At colleges and universities across the country, and often in consultation with physically disabled homemakers, these home economists researched and designed assistive devices, adaptive equipment, and work simplification techniques that could be used to “rehabilitate” this population of ten million.<sup>6</sup> They publicized their findings through home economics courses in the subject, graduate theses and academic publications, instructional films and printed materials, workshops for “rehabilitation” professionals, cooperative projects with government agencies and community groups, fellowship programs, and professional conferences.

Home economists' new attention to disability was informed by a number of factors, such as the growth of the vocational rehabilitation system in the 1940s and beyond. As disabled soldiers and defense workers returned from the frontlines and factories, government funding for vocational rehabilitation research and training programs swelled for veterans and civilians alike. Amidst the postwar baby boom and heightened emphasis on domesticity, home economists sought to increase the participation of homemakers in this system. In doing so, they helped to expand vocational rehabilitation beyond its historic focus on male wage earners while also enlarging the parameters of their own field by addressing disability in meaningful ways.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Jessica Lee, “Family Matters: Female Dynamics within Deaf Schools,” in *Women and Deafness: Double Visions*, ed. Brenda Jo Brueggemann and Susan Burch (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2006), 5–20.

<sup>6</sup> Howard A. Rusk et al., introduction to *A Manual for Training the Disabled Homemaker* (New York: New York Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, 1955). This oft-cited statistic was based on the work of rehabilitation pioneer Howard A. Rusk, MD. According to Rusk, the disabled homemaker population consisted primarily of women with physical disabilities such as cardiovascular disease, hemiplegia, arthritis, tuberculosis, and other orthopedic disabilities.

<sup>7</sup> For more on the history of efforts to include homemaking in the vocational rehabilitation system, see Laura Micheletti Puaca, “The Largest Occupational Group of All the Disabled: Homemakers with Disabilities and Vocational Rehabilitation in Postwar America,” in *Disabling Domesticity*, ed. Michael Rembis (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 73–102.

Using a wide range of archival sources from colleges and universities across the country, this article uncovers a little-known chapter in the history of home economics: the development of "homemaker rehabilitation" as a field of study. In doing so, it responds to calls by Richard J. Altenbaugh, Kate Rousmaniere, and others to analyze the history of education through the lens of disability.<sup>8</sup> Although historians of education have aptly documented how gender, race, and class shaped the development of home economics, few have examined the role of disability in the same way. Consequently, we know little about how ability and disability informed the experiences of home economics students, faculty, or the field itself.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, scholars who have studied the development of the vocational rehabilitation system and its educational programs have devoted little attention to gender.<sup>10</sup> The history of homemaker rehabilitation, then, provides a new way to understand the intersections of gender, disability, and education.

In exploring how home economists understood and engaged with disability, this article calls attention to the contradictions embodied in their efforts to "rehabilitate" physically disabled homemakers. Home economists' work with physically disabled homemakers simultaneously upheld and challenged white, middle-class, able-bodied gender roles. In the two decades following World War II, home economists—like many of their contemporaries—viewed homemaking as primarily women's work. While discussions of vocational rehabilitation for men (and some wage-earning women) focused on preparing them to resume paid employment, the subject of homemaking centered almost entirely on women. Although it was not uncommon for physically disabled men to learn to prepare food with one hand or sweep while using

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<sup>8</sup>Richard J. Altenbaugh, "Where Are the Disabled in the History of Education? The Impact of Polio on Sites of Learning," *History of Education* 35, no. 6 (Nov. 2006), 705–30; and Kate Rousmaniere, "Those Who Can't, Teach: The Disabling History of American Educators," *History of Education Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (Feb. 2013), 90–103.

<sup>9</sup>See, for example, Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vincenti, eds., *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Megan J. Elias, *Stir It Up: Home Economics in American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Carolyn M. Goldstein, *Creating Consumers: Home Economists in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); and Sharon Y. Nickols and Gwen Kay, eds., *Remaking Home Economics: Resourcefulness and Innovation in Changing Times* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015).

<sup>10</sup>Classic histories of vocational rehabilitation include C. Esco Obermann, *A History of Vocational Rehabilitation in America* (Minneapolis: T. S. Denison, 1965); and Edward David Berkowitz, *Rehabilitation: The Federal Government's Response to Disability, 1935–1954* (New York: Arno Press, 1980). For a more recent account, see Beth Linker, *War's Waste: Rehabilitation in World War I America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

crutches as part of their overall rehabilitation process, their work was usually framed as “daily living” and hardly ever as homemaking. Men’s work inside of the home was not only divorced from any vocational importance but also described as an aberration from gender norms. The 1957 *Handbook for One-Handers*, which provided guidance on carrying out everyday tasks, prefaced its section on sewing with the statement, “While this is a problem in which women or girls are most interested, there are also emergency situations when the male might find the following information valuable,” thereby reinforcing the unusualness of having men conduct such work.<sup>11</sup> Eventually, by the late 1950s and early 1960s, some home economists acknowledged the need to prepare disabled men for homemaking roles so that their nondisabled wives could work outside of the home. But they were also cautious in this approach, warning that these men would likely “need psychiatric aid in order to make this traumatic shift from ‘men’s work’ to ‘women’s work.’”<sup>12</sup>

Homemaker rehabilitation was geared not only toward female homemakers but also families with male breadwinners. While many white men struggled to earn a “family wage” that supported full-time homemaking, attaining this level of income was even more difficult for African Americans due to persistent racism and discrimination. Because many black families relied on the income of mothers and wives, African American women were less likely to be full-time homemakers when compared to white women, even though they remained responsible for much of the work inside of their homes.<sup>13</sup> In 1960, as Stephanie Coontz has shown, 64 percent of black upper-middle-class mothers worked outside of the home. By contrast, only 35 percent of white lower middle-class mothers and 27 percent of white upper-

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<sup>11</sup>Georgia F. McCoy and Howard A. Rusk, *An Evaluation of Rehabilitation* (New York: Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, New York University, Bellevue Medical Center, 1953); Edward E. Gordon, “Development of the Applied Sciences to the Handicapped Homemaker,” in *Rehabilitation of the Physically Handicapped in Homemaking Activities: Proceedings of a Workshop*, Highland Park, Illinois, Jan. 27–30, 1963 (Washington, DC: Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, 1963), 166; and Aaron L. Danzig, *Handbook for One-Handers: A Practical Guide for Those Who Have Lost the Functional Use of an Arm or Hand*, 2nd ed. (New York: Federation of the Handicapped, 1957), 20.

<sup>12</sup>Elizabeth Eckhardt May and Neva R. Waggoner, preface to *Work Simplification in the Area of Child Care for Physically Handicapped Women: Final Report*, 1961, folder 1, box 9, Handicapped Homemaker Project Records.

<sup>13</sup>Emilie Stoltzfus, *Mother Worker: Child Care After the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 4.

middle-class mothers held outside jobs that year.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, the women who comprised the focus of most homemaker rehabilitation studies were overwhelmingly white and lower to middle class, a trend that reflected the demographics of American homemakers. Although African American women were included in homemaker rehabilitation initiatives, as evidenced by occasional examples and photographs, they appeared infrequently. Moreover, few programs broke down participation rates by race or analyzed the role of race in the rehabilitation process.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time that home economists reinforced gender, class, and race-based biases in their approach to homemaking, they also helped to expand opportunities for disabled women, who had long been discouraged or prevented from pursuing this vocation. Homemaker rehabilitation provided an avenue to disabled women for participating in postwar domesticity—and reaping its cultural rewards—in ways similar to their nondisabled counterparts. Working with disabled homemakers, home economists forged a broader definition of homemaking and brought new attention to the experiences of disabled women. Although many home economists saw disability as a problem to be solved, they stressed the importance of adapting work to individuals, as later disability rights activists would do. At the same time, home economists created professional networks, extended the boundaries of their discipline, and carved out new spaces for themselves in the burgeoning rehabilitation system.

## Historical Context

Home economists' work with physically disabled homemakers in the post-World War II period built on two longer developments: the emergence of home economics as a subject of study in the nineteenth century and the creation of the vocational rehabilitation system in the early twentieth century. Despite their different trajectories and goals, both home economics and vocational rehabilitation hinged on gendered assumptions about the home, work, and family life that prized white, middle-class, male-breadwinning models. Although these formulations hardly fit with the lives and experiences of many Americans, they nevertheless occupied a central place in the

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<sup>14</sup>Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 125.

<sup>15</sup>See Elizabeth Eckhardt May, Neva R. Waggoner, and Eleanor M. Boettke, eds., *Homemaking for the Handicapped* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1966). This study includes descriptions and photographs of African American homemakers, but does not provide their overall numbers or participation rates.



educational experiences of home economists and vocational rehabilitation participants. Gender expectations were shaped not only by race and class, however, but also by ability. For much of their early histories, home economics and vocational rehabilitation promoted a model of family life as one where members—whether explicitly stated or simply deduced—were decidedly not disabled, or had managed ways to compensate for or hide their disability.

While these constructions of gender and family life informed both fields, they manifested themselves in different ways. From its beginnings in the mid-nineteenth century, home economics drew inspiration and justification from emerging white, middle-class gender roles and the doctrine of “separate spheres,” which dictated that women concern themselves with the “private sphere” of the home, while men focus on the “public sphere” of politics, government, and paid employment. Although this distinction between public and private was artificial, permeable, and race- and class-specific, it nevertheless exerted a powerful influence on the work of home economics advocates, such as famed nineteenth-century education reformer Catharine Beecher.<sup>16</sup> Beecher believed not only that schooling for women should be as purposeful and rigorous as men’s, but also that women’s responsibilities centered primarily on domestic life. Consequently, she championed home economics—or what she initially called “domestic economy” and later “domestic science”—as a field of study that belonged in every school for women.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Margaret A. Nash, *Women's Education in the United States, 1780–1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 1–14. Nash also helps to problematize the public-private distinction by demonstrating how imprecise it was and how the very meaning of these designations shifted over time and place. For more on women’s education in this period, see Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). For an analysis of dominant expectations for white women in the nineteenth century more generally, see Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860,” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1966), 151–74.

<sup>17</sup>Beecher’s contributions to women’s education are well-documented. See, in particular, Joan N. Burstyn, “Catharine Beecher and the Education of American Women,” *New England Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (Sept. 1974), 386–403 and Charlotte Elizabeth Biester, “Catharine Beecher and Her Contributions to Home Economics” (EdD diss., Colorado State College of Education, 1950). Biester published a portion of this dissertation in Charlotte E. Biester, “Catharine Beecher’s Views of Home Economics,” *History of Education Journal* 3, no. 3 (Spring 1952), 88–91. For a broader analysis of Beecher’s life and work, see Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973). For more on the evolution of the terminology used to describe the field, see Sarah Stage, “Home Economics: What’s in a Name,” in Stage and Vincenti, *Rethinking Home Economics*, 1–13.

In addition to working with educational associations and individual schools, Beecher sought to elevate and professionalize homemaking through her writings, which treated the subject as a science and served as some of the first texts in the field.<sup>18</sup> Although these publications were adopted widely by schools and homemakers alike, they were narrow in scope, speaking primarily to the experiences of white, middle-class, able-bodied women. Beecher's advice on managing servants, for example, mainly concerned women with the means to employ a labor force in their home. Her sketches of home interiors also contained architectural features such as twisting staircases and wardrobes that required overhead lifting that would have been inaccessible to many physically disabled women. Although some of these designs aimed to reduce the required amount of time and labor in much the same way that later home economists sought to streamline work processes (both in general and in an effort to assist disabled homemakers), it is evident that disability did not factor into Beecher's designs.<sup>19</sup>

As domestic science instruction expanded throughout the late nineteenth century, so did the parameters of the field. Civil War-era legislation such as the Morrill Land-Grant College Act of 1862 both

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<sup>18</sup> As Biester acknowledges, "Catharine Beecher was by no means the first person to evolve a philosophy of education in which homemakers had a part," citing examples as far back as Aristotle and Plato. Nor did Beecher "wholly originate the idea of home economics as a subject-matter field," noting that Emma Willard had already proposed the idea in 1819 as part of her plan for improving higher education for women in the United States. Willard realized, however, that such a program of study would be limited without a suitable textbook. Beecher remedied this problem in 1841 when she published *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, which the Massachusetts Board of Education adopted, making it the "first book on home economics to be recognized officially by the education profession." The text was in such demand that it was reprinted almost every year between 1841 and 1856. See Biester, "Catherine Beecher and Her Contributions to Home Economics," v-viii, 68; Burstyn, "Catharine Beecher and the Education of American Women," 391, 397–400. Beecher's most popular publications include Catharine E. Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy, for the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School* (Boston: Marsh, Capen, Lyon & Webb, 1841); and Catharine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home: Or, Principles of Domestic Science; Being a Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful, and Christian Homes* (New York: J. B. Ford, 1869). For a summary of reprintings, see Burstyn, "Catharine Beecher and the Education of American Women," 391n8.

<sup>19</sup> Beecher and Stowe, *American Woman's Home*, 27–29, 307–34. For more on Beecher's designs and their relation to later homes, see Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 55. Indeed, the few references to "disability" contained in these publications referred mainly to the need for homemaking education, such as the opening to *The American Woman's Home*, which attributed the "chief cause of woman's disabilities and sufferings" to the fact "that women are not trained, as men are, for their peculiar duties." See Beecher and Stowe, *American Woman's Home*, i.



enlarged existing institutions of higher education and led to the creation of new ones, where coeducation soon became commonplace.<sup>20</sup> The resulting growth in female enrollments was accompanied by the expansion of domestic science instruction, which many educators viewed as bolstering their land-grant missions.<sup>21</sup> While most land-grant schools primarily benefited white students, some—such as the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Hampton, Virginia—exclusively served students of color.<sup>22</sup> Although domestic science instruction at both kinds of institutions shared the continued presumption of able-bodiedness, curricula and expectations for female students varied widely based on race, class, and ethnicity, as Elisa Miller demonstrates. In the first decades of the Hampton Institute, where white administrators viewed domestic science as a tool for stabilizing southern race relations and assimilating Native Americans, courses stressed the need for African American and Native American women to unlearn old habits from their communities and to replace them with

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<sup>20</sup>Nathan M. Sorber, *Land-Grant Colleges and Popular Revolt: The Origins of the Morrill Act and the Reform of Higher Education* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 150–71. See also Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz, “Putting the ‘Co’ in Education: Timing, Reasons, and Consequences of College Coeducation from 1835 to the Present,” *Journal of Human Capital* 5, no. 4 (Winter 2011), 377–417. Although, as Sorber argues, debates over their purpose reflected a “gendered discourse that presupposed the land-grant idea to be inherently male and aligned with institutional practices tailored to serve class-based notions of the social, cultural, or economic needs of white men,” many “land grant” institutions admitted women over the course of their first decade. See Sorber, *Land-Grant Colleges and Popular Revolt*, 150.

<sup>21</sup>Andrea G. Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch: Women and Coeducation in the American West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 6.

<sup>22</sup>Nicholas A. Betts, “The Struggle Toward Equality in Higher Education: The Impact of the Morrill Acts on Race Relations in Virginia, 1872–1958” (master’s thesis, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2013), 1–3; and Peter Wallenstein, *Cradle of America: Four Centuries of Virginia History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 225–27. In 1872, four years after its founding, the Hampton Institute was awarded one-third of Virginia’s Morrill funds, which supported vocational and agricultural education for African Americans as well as Native Americans who were later admitted in 1878. In 1890, the second Morrill Act provided additional funds for black land-grant colleges, but the resulting schools remained separate from and unequal to white ones. Virginia later transferred its Morrill funds from the Hampton Institute to the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute (now Virginia State University) in 1920. See Betts, “The Struggle Toward Equality in Higher Education,” 47. For more on the impact of the 1890 Morrill Land-Grant Act on African American education in general, see Debra A. Reid, “People’s Colleges for Other Citizens: Black Land-Grant Institutions and the Politics of Educational Expansion in the Post-Civil War Era,” in *Science as Service: Establishing and Reformulating Land-Grant Universities 1865–1930*, ed. Alan I. Marcus (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2015), 141–71.

the ideals of white, middle-class domesticity.<sup>23</sup> Domestic science instruction for rural white women and white, middle-class women, by contrast, more readily stressed modernization and the application of scientific principles to everyday life. At Iowa State, beginning in 1871, students not only attended lectures on housekeeping but also enrolled in Chemistry as Applied to Domestic Economy, while from the mid-1870s, Kansas State students supplemented their hands-on instruction in sewing with a course in household chemistry.<sup>24</sup>

Over the next several decades, scientific training became a common part of domestic science instruction more broadly, with important implications for the developing field. As new disciplines such as bacteriology, hygiene, and sanitary science grew in this period, so did their place in domestic science curricula at white land-grant institutions and beyond.<sup>25</sup> The heightened emphasis on these topics reflected not only the older belief espoused by Beecher and others that scientific approaches improved homemaking, but also the emerging Progressive Era view that scientific knowledge could help ameliorate the excesses

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<sup>23</sup>Elisa Miller, "In the Name of the Home: Women, Domestic Science, and American Higher Education, 1865–1930," (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2004), 4–6, 42–56, 61. In addition to carrying out domestic chores on campus, many Native American and African American women students at the Hampton Institute also worked as domestic servants in the North. Beginning in 1879, the Institute required all Native American students to spend a semester-long internship in northern homes, whereas domestic service in the North was voluntary for African American students. In both cases, however, Hampton administrators believed that it was important for their students to encounter and emulate white northern domesticity. See Miller, "In the Name of the Home," 53–54.

<sup>24</sup>Miller, "In the Name of the Home," 3; Amy Sue Bix, "Equipped for Life: Gendered Technical Training and Consumerism in Home Economics, 1920–1980," *Technology and Culture* 43, no. 4 (Oct. 2002), 731; and Virginia Railsback Gunn, "Industrialists Not Butterflies: Women's Higher Education at Kansas State Agricultural College, 1873–1882," *Kansas History* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1995), 11–12.

<sup>25</sup>Shortly after being established in the 1870s and 1880s, urban cooking schools incorporated lessons in nutrition and food chemistry. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, historically black colleges such as the Hampton Institute were offering similar courses, as were women's colleges that had previously opposed domestic science instruction because they viewed it as insufficiently academic and fraught with gender stereotypes. Miller, "In the Name of the Home," 60–61, 68–70; Nancy Tomes, "Spreading the Germ Theory: Sanitary Science and Home Economics, 1880–1930," in Stage and Vincenti, *Rethinking Home Economics*, 39–44; and Stage, "Home Economics," 7. As Megan J. Elias notes, however, "cooking school teachers and home economists were very different in their training and their goals, although there was sometimes overlap in culinary ideology between nutritionists and scientific cookery experts." See Elias, "No Place Like Home: A Survey of American Home Economics History," *History Compass* 9, no. 1 (Jan. 2011), 99.

of late nineteenth-century industrial capitalism.<sup>26</sup> Training in domestic science likewise bolstered women's claims to "municipal house-keeping," which extended the boundaries of the home to society at large. Imbued with scientific authority, domestic scientists found themselves equipped to speak on a wide range of social and political problems. Their education provided an academic outlet for women interested in science, an avenue to Progressive Era reform, and a path to professional careers ranging from teaching to public health.<sup>27</sup> These themes figured prominently in the series of ten "Lake Placid" conferences that were held annually beginning in 1899, where domestic scientists sought to systematically define, professionalize, and publicize the field. Their efforts included adopting the term "home economics" to better represent their work and later, in 1909, creating the American Home Economics Association (AHEA), which became the principal professional organization in the field.<sup>28</sup>

In many ways, the teaching and practice of home economics in the early twentieth century looked considerably different from the version Beecher first advanced. Preparation for careers outside of the home had assumed a prominent place in home economics curricula and graduates could be found not only in their own homes but also government agencies, public school classrooms, university laboratories, hospitals, and private industry.<sup>29</sup> The demographics of home economics students, teachers, practitioners, and subjects of study had also expanded significantly beyond white, middle-class housewives. Yet the experiences of this racial and socioeconomic group continued to

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<sup>26</sup>Tomes, "Spreading the Germ Theory," 34, 37–38; and Miller, "In the Name of the Home," 61.

<sup>27</sup>Rima D. Apple and Joyce Coleman, "As Members of the Social Whole': A History of Social Reform as a Focus of Home Economics, 1895–1940," *Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journal* 32, no. 2 (Dec. 2003), 105–110; and Margaret W. Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America: Struggles and Strategies to 1940* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 65–70.

<sup>28</sup>Emma Seifrit Weigley, "It Might Have Been Euthenics: The Lake Placid Conferences and the Home Economics Movement," *American Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (March 1974), 85–86; Stage, "Home Economics," 5; and Elias, *Stir It Up*, 8. Despite the nomenclature, not all ten conferences were held in Lake Placid. For the official history of the AHEA, see Helen Marie Pundt, *AHEA: A History of Excellence* (Washington, DC: American Home Economics Association, 1980). For more on the chief organizer of the Lake Placid Conferences, Ellen Swallow Richards, see Sarah Stage, "Ellen Richards and the Social Significance of the Home Economics Movement," in Stage and Vincenti, *Rethinking Home Economics*, 17–33.

<sup>29</sup>For an excellent overview of the varied professions in which home economists were employed, see Stage and Vincenti, *Rethinking Home Economics*, which includes chapters on such wide-ranging fields as hospital work, rural electrification, and ice manufacturing.

be privileged by many in the field. As Joan Jacobs Brumberg and others have shown, the idealized homemaker, as presented in home economics materials well into the twentieth century, was a woman who was white and middle class.<sup>30</sup> According to Penny A. Ralston, black women home economists regularly found themselves marginalized and their experiences discounted by white colleagues. Despite their numerous professional contributions, black home economists were not involved with the Lake Placid Conferences, and until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 many in the South could only participate in the AHEA through segregated state associations.<sup>31</sup>

The AHEA, and the field of home economics more broadly, also continued to venerate the experiences of able-bodied women. With the important exception of schools for deaf and blind students, where education for girls often included some preparation in home economics, practitioners seem to have largely ignored the subject of disability.<sup>32</sup> Home economists' general lack of attention to the subject can also be viewed in the activities and publications of the AHEA. It was not until 1931, more than two decades after the association's founding, that the AHEA's *Journal of Home Economics* covered disability in an extended way. That August, the AHEA published a special volume devoted to "Home Economics for the Handicapped," which examined in a series of five articles how home economics could be used to improve the lives of people with physical and intellectual disabilities. Most of the articles focused largely on how (presumably non-disabled) teachers could use home economics principles to enhance student instruction. While it was acknowledged that these lessons would prepare students for their adult lives, only cursory attention was given to the subject of homemaking or its social role.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Joan Jacobs Brumberg, "Defining the Profession and the Good Life: Home Economics on Film," in Stage and Vincenti, *Rethinking Home Economics*, 189–202.

<sup>31</sup>Penny A. Ralston, "Distinctive Themes from Black Home Economists," *Journal of Home Economics* 84, no. 2 (Summer 1992), 41–42; and Penny A. Ralston, "Black Participation in Home Economics: A Partial Account," *Journal of Home Economics* 70, no. 5 (Winter 1978), 36. See also Carmen Harris, "Grace Under Pressure: The Black Home Extension Service in South Carolina, 1919–1966," in Stage and Vincenti, *Rethinking Home Economics*, 203–28.

<sup>32</sup>For an analysis of gender and deaf education, see Lee, "Family Matters."

<sup>33</sup>These articles included Clara Lee Cone, "A Study of Home Economics in the Training of Handicapped Children," *Journal of Home Economics* 23, no. 8 (Aug. 1931), 732–35; Helen Valk, "Vocational Home Economics for Slow-Progress Students," *Journal of Home Economics* 23, no. 8 (Aug. 1931), 735–37; Stella V. Coffman, "Homemaking Activities for 'Different' Children," *Journal of Home Economics* 23, no. 8 (Aug. 1931), 737–39; Isabel Betz, "Cooking and Sewing for Blind Students," *Journal of Home Economics* 23, no. 8 (Aug. 1931), 740–42; and Hazel Thompson

The failure of most home economists to consider the lives and experiences of physically disabled women must be examined in the context of how many Americans understood disability in this period. Until the late nineteenth century, as K. Walter Hickel indicates, “Disability and its economic effects of unemployment, poverty, and dependence were often regarded as a preordained fate, a divine stigma incurred at birth, or a result of individual moral flaws and self-destructive habits such as criminality, alcoholism, and sexual promiscuity.” Beginning in the 1890s, this “moral understanding of disability” was increasingly abandoned as a growing number of Americans “began to locate its causes not just in the trauma of warfare but in the effects of infectious disease . . . and the health risks of factory production.”<sup>34</sup> In both formulations, however, disabled women were largely presumed to be unfit mothers and wives. Even blind women, who were more likely to receive home economics instruction than other physically disabled women, were not necessarily expected to marry and have children. As Catherine J. Kudlick points out in her study of representations of blind women at the turn of the twentieth century, “Since few believed blind women could run a household and provide a home environment for a husband and children, they were deemed unmarriageable, cutting them off from a major avenue of social participation.”<sup>35</sup>

The right of disabled people to marry and procreate was challenged in other ways as well, such as through the eugenics movement that gained influence in the early twentieth century and which justified the involuntary sterilization of disabled people by claiming they would pass down “undesirable” traits.<sup>36</sup> Characterizations of physically disabled women as “unfit” for marriage and motherhood were also circulated through psychological studies conducted in the 1930s

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Craig, “Home Economics for the Deaf,” *Journal of Home Economics* 23, no. 8 (Aug. 1931), 742–46.

<sup>34</sup>K. Walter Hickel, “Medicine, Bureaucracy, and Social Welfare: The Politics of Disability Compensation for American Veterans of World War I,” in *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, ed. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 241–42.

<sup>35</sup>Catherine J. Kudlick, “The Outlook of *The Problem* and the Problem with the *Outlook*: Two Advocacy Journals Reinvent Blind People in Turn-of-the-Century America,” in Longmore and Umansky, *New Disability History*, 202.

<sup>36</sup>R. A. R. Edwards, *Words Made Flesh: Nineteenth-Century Deaf Education and the Growth of Deaf Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 121. For more on eugenics in general, as well as the emergence of the designation *feeble-minded*, see Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

and 1940s that described them as lacking sexual desire.<sup>37</sup> Many of these beliefs persisted into the post-World War II era, when many Americans continued to view "disabled citizens' capacity to serve as wives and mothers . . . with skepticism," as Audra Jennings writes.<sup>38</sup>

Home economists' attention to physically disabled homemakers in this period helped challenge such views. Amidst rising marriage rates among young couples, the accompanying baby boom, and a renewed focus on domesticity, home economists increasingly sought to assist women with physical disabilities to fulfill the same gender expectations as their nondisabled counterparts. While their emphasis on conforming to white, middle-class family life can certainly be viewed as conservative, it represented a radical departure for those women who had long been discouraged from pursuing such options because of their disability. Home economists' focus on homemakers with physical disabilities, a population defined as women with cardiovascular disease, hemiplegia, arthritis, tuberculosis, and other orthopedic conditions, also helped to expand the reach of home economics beyond blind and deaf students.<sup>39</sup>

These changes were informed by a number of factors, including the diagnosis and incidence of certain "disabling" diseases. Polio epidemics in the early twentieth century left a significant number of marriageable-age women with restricted mobility. Fear of the disease, which peaked in 1952, preoccupied countless Americans, as did efforts to develop a vaccine over the course of the decade.<sup>40</sup> The longitudinal Framingham Heart Study launched in 1948 also brought new attention to cardiovascular disease. Women constituted more than half of the participants in the landmark study, which was the first major investigation on the topic to include female subjects.<sup>41</sup>

Alongside these developments was a heightened awareness of disability in general, as disabled veterans and defense workers sought to resume their former lives—and jobs. Integrating them into the

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<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Carney Landis and M. Marjorie Bolles, *The Personality and Sexuality of the Physically Handicapped Woman* (New York: Paul B. Hoeber, 1942).

<sup>38</sup> Audra Jennings, "Engendering and Regendering Disability: Gender and Disability Activism in Postwar America," in *Disability Histories*, ed. Susan Burch and Michael Rembis (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 346–48.

<sup>39</sup> Rusk et al., introduction to *Manual for Training the Disabled Homemaker*.

<sup>40</sup> For an excellent overview, see David M. Oshinsky, *Polio: An American Story* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> Patrick A. McKee et al., "The Natural History of Congestive Heart Failure: The Framingham Study," *New England Journal of Medicine* 285, no. 26 (Dec. 23, 1971), 1441–46; and Syed S. Mahmood, "The Framingham Heart Study and the Epidemiology of Cardiovascular Disease: A Historical Perspective," *Lancet* 383, no. 9921 (March 14, 2014), 999–1008.



workforce was at the heart of vocational rehabilitation, a system that dated back to World War I. During these early years, the federal government adopted a number of measures to assist people with disabilities enter or resume employment. In 1917, amendments to the War Risk Insurance Act of 1914 included vocational rehabilitation in its provisions for disabled veterans.<sup>42</sup> The following year, the Smith-Sears Veterans Rehabilitation Act of 1918, established and subsidized state-level vocational rehabilitation programs and entrusted their oversight to a federal board. In 1920, Congress extended vocational rehabilitation to disabled civilians through the Smith-Fess Act, which authorized vocational training, job placement, and counseling for “persons disabled in industry or otherwise.”<sup>43</sup> Another major change occurred in 1943 when Congress passed two pieces of wartime legislation, Public Law 16 and the Barden-LaFollette Act, which substantially expanded the size and scope of vocational rehabilitation services for disabled veterans and civilians alike.<sup>44</sup>

For much of its early history, vocational rehabilitation primarily benefited male veterans and wage earners by restoring their bread-winning potential.<sup>45</sup> Following World War I, as Beth Linker describes, rehabilitation helped to reestablish social order “by (re)making men into producers of capital. Since wage earning often defined manhood, rehabilitation was, in essence, a process of making a man manly.”<sup>46</sup> The historic connection between rehabilitation and masculinity was further reflected in the demographics of vocational rehabilitation participants. According to Ruth O’Brien, “In the 1920s and 1930s, the average

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<sup>42</sup> Act to Amend . . . an Act to Authorize the Establishment of a Bureau of War Risk Insurance in the Treasury Department, Pub. L. No. 65–90, HR 5723 (October 6, 1917); and Obermann, *History of Vocational Rehabilitation in America*, 14.

<sup>43</sup> Richard K. Scotch, “American Disability Policy in the Twentieth Century,” in Longmore and Umansky, *New Disability History*, 381; and Act to Provide for the Promotion of Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons Disabled in Industry or Otherwise and Their Return to Civil Employment, Pub. L. No. 66–236, HR 4438 (June 2, 1920). The federal government made monies available on a matching basis and thereby assumed half of the cost.

<sup>44</sup> Obermann, *A History of Vocational Rehabilitation in America*, 179–82, 286–87. Act to . . . Provide for Rehabilitation of Disabled Veterans, and for other Purposes, Pub. L. No. 78–16, S 786 (March 24 1943); and Barden-LaFollette Act, Pub. L. No. 78–113, 128 Stat. 647 (1943).

<sup>45</sup> Federal Board for Vocational Education, *Vocational Rehabilitation: Its Purpose, Scope, and Methods with Illustrative Cases* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1923), 6.

<sup>46</sup> Linker, *War’s Waste*, 4. While homemakers were technically included in the civilian rehabilitation program, they made up a tiny minority. According to Audra Jennings, homemakers accounted for just 156 of the 41,925 people who received rehabilitation services in 1945. See Jennings, “Engendering and Regendering Disability, 350.

rehabilitated person was white, male, and thirty-one years old."<sup>47</sup> Over the course of these two decades, women were included only gradually and peripherally.

In the post-World War II period, however, home economists increasingly asserted the importance of homemaking to the vocational rehabilitation system. At colleges and universities across the country, home economics students and faculty began investigating ways to assist disabled homemakers with their work. Their efforts were bolstered by new legislation, such as the Vocational Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1954, which made available funding for research projects in the field.<sup>48</sup> Most of these initiatives reflected the demographics of American homemakers, who were largely white and middle class, and often privileged their experiences in ways that earlier home economists had done. Yet they also helped to broaden understandings of disabled women's choices and lives in ways that were quite radical. At the same time that home economists expanded the parameters of vocational rehabilitation, they enlarged the purview of their own discipline, where "homemaker rehabilitation" emerged as a subject of study. This new focus can be seen in the explosion of homemaker rehabilitation projects, conferences, and publications that came out of home economics departments and schools in the postwar era as well as increased attention from the AHEA.

### "Discovering" Disability

Home economists' interest in homemaker rehabilitation is most widely credited to the famed industrial engineer, psychologist, and efficiency expert Lillian Moller Gilbreth, who made some of the first forays into the subject during World War II. Although Gilbreth was not formally trained in home economics, she had an immeasurable impact on the field that spanned decades. Her contributions to home economics drew largely on the principles of motion study that she and her husband, Frank Bunker Gilbreth, had pioneered years earlier. Following their 1904 marriage, the Gilbreths became increasingly involved in the scientific management movement that sought to increase worker productivity and economic efficiency through the analysis of workflows. They recorded, charted, and studied work processes in order to eliminate unnecessary movements that caused physical and psychological fatigue. The Gilbreths applied these principles to bricklaying, factory work, surgical procedures, vocational

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<sup>47</sup> Ruth O'Brien, *Crippled Justice: The History of Modern Disability Policy in the Workplace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 65.

<sup>48</sup> Puaca, "The Largest Occupational Group of All the Disabled," 88–90.

rehabilitation for disabled World War I veterans, and even rearing their eleven living children, as featured in the blockbuster book and movie *Cheaper by the Dozen*.<sup>49</sup>

Home economists' embrace of scientific management as promoted by the Gilbreths and others can be seen as an extension of their Progressive Era faith in science as a cure-all for social ills. Although most early scientific management studies focused on industrial settings, home economists gradually applied their findings to reduce the drudgery of the housewife. In 1910, for example, the AHEA's *Journal of Home Economics* recommended that homemakers calculate their hours in the same way as factory and commercial laundry managers. Efficiency experts who focused on the home, such as Christine Frederick, helped to further popularize these methods in the 1910s.<sup>50</sup> The Gilbreths conducted their first studies of homemaking during this period as well and, as early as 1912, Frank shared their research at an AHEA meeting. At this time, however, the Gilbreths viewed their work in home efficiency as secondary to their more lucrative consulting work in industry and the service sector. This situation changed drastically in 1924 when Frank died of a heart attack and Lillian found that three of their biggest clients now refused to work with her. Struggling to make ends meet, Lillian increasingly embraced home management, reinvented herself as a domestic consultant, and marketed her expertise in home efficiency.<sup>51</sup>

Gilbreth's professional work in engineering and psychology (in which she held a PhD), along with her personal experiences raising a large family, made her attractive to broad audiences and she quickly

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<sup>49</sup>Jane Lancaster, *Making Time: Lillian Moller Gilbreth—A Life Beyond "Cheaper by the Dozen"* (Northeastern University Press, 2004), 1–2, 90–93, 107–20, 149, 163–64; Julie Des Jardins, *Lillian Gilbreth: Redefining Domesticity* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2013), 57–69; and Ruth Schwartz Cowan, "Gilbreth, Lillian Evelyn Moller," in *Notable American Women: The Modern Period: A Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Barbara Sicherman and Carol Hurd Green (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1980), 293–94. See also Frank Gilbreth, Jr. and Ernestine Gilbreth Carey, *Cheaper by the Dozen* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1948). Mary, a twelfth child, died of diphtheria in 1912.

<sup>50</sup>See Janice Williams Rutherford, *Selling Mrs. Consumer: Christine Frederick and the Rise of Household Efficiency* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 36–45; and Christine Frederick, "Points in Efficiency," *Journal of Home Economics* 6, no. 3 (June 1914), 278–80. Frederick's article was based on her address to the Sixth Annual Meeting of the American Home Economics Association, Ithaca, New York, 1913.

<sup>51</sup>Laurel Graham, *Managing on Her Own: Dr. Lillian Gilbreth and Women's Work in the Interwar Era* (Norcross, GA: Engineering and Management Press, 1998), 94–95; 105–107; 161–64; Frank B. Gilbreth, "Scientific Management in the Household," *Journal of Home Economics* 4, no. 5 (Nov. 1912), 438–47; and "News from the Field," *Journal of Home Economics* 15, no. 5 (May 1923), 293.

became a sought-out speaker and columnist. In 1926, Gilbreth began serving as a consultant to university home economics departments that were developing home management courses. In 1927, Gilbreth brought together more than two hundred home economics students and homemakers as part of a conference on scientific management in the home that she organized at Columbia University's Teachers College.<sup>52</sup> That same year saw the publication of Gilbreth's *The Home-Maker and Her Job*, which was hailed in the *Journal of Home Economics* as "a decided contribution to the field of home economics literature."<sup>53</sup> Utility companies and the New York Herald Tribune Institute (a homemaking research branch of the newspaper) took notice of Gilbreth as well, hiring her to design efficiency kitchens in the late 1920s and 1930s. Her designs further elevated her reputation among home economists. At Purdue University, where she was named professor of management in 1935, Gilbreth spent six years establishing work simplification as a new subfield of the university's home economics department.<sup>54</sup> Yet while she made notable contributions to home economics and home management, and while she had conducted studies on disabled workers earlier in her career, she seems to have conceived of these subjects as separate and unrelated until the 1940s.

World War II marked a pivotal moment both in Gilbreth's career and the history of homemaker rehabilitation. During the war, Gilbreth served on the New York Heart Association's Committee on Cardiovascular Disease in Industry, which was charged with studying the utilization of workers with heart problems. Over time, the committee expanded its focus beyond industrial workers and created a subcommittee devoted to conditions faced by "cardiac homemakers." Chaired by Gilbreth, the subgroup brought together experts in a variety of fields, such as engineering, home economics, physical therapy, rehabilitation, and architecture. Their crowning achievement was the design of a "Heart Kitchen" for homemakers with cardiovascular disease that aimed to help disabled homemakers perform their work with a minimum of steps and fatigue.<sup>55</sup>

The Heart Kitchen was later constructed by the New York Heart Association and put on display at the American Museum of Natural

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<sup>52</sup>Des Jardins, *Lillian Gilbreth*, 134–38; Graham, *Managing on Her Own*, 167–72; and Cowan, "Gilbreth," 294.

<sup>53</sup>Eloise Davison, review of *The Home-Maker and Her Job*, by Lillian M. Gilbreth, *Journal of Home Economics* 19, no. 9 (Sept. 1927), 529.

<sup>54</sup>Graham, *Managing on Her Own*, 179–93; Lancaster, *Making Time*, 301.

<sup>55</sup>American Heart Association, preface to *Heart of the Home* (New York: American Heart Association, 1948), folder 2, box 52, Gilbreth Papers; and Rusk et al., introduction to *Manual for Training the Disabled Homemaker*. According to Rusk et al., women with cardiac disease constituted the largest subgroup of disabled homemakers.

History in Manhattan, where it debuted in October 1948 as part of National Employ the Handicapped Week.<sup>56</sup> Later that year, it was relocated to the newly established Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at New York University (NYU), where it became the centerpiece of the fledgling homemaker rehabilitation program there. According to Howard A. Rusk—the institute’s director, the “father of rehabilitation medicine,” and a *New York Times* medical columnist—the homemaker program was inspired by Lillian Gilbreth herself. While Rusk was still planning the institute, which opened in March 1948, Gilbreth reportedly inquired whether any attention would be paid to the subject of disabled homemakers. Although she was initially informed that there would just be a “research corner,” Rusk later brought in a range of professionals, including physical therapist and home economist Julia Judson, to create a more expansive program.<sup>57</sup>

Judson, who Rusk named the coordinator of NYU’s homemaker program, had recently earned her master’s degree in home economics in 1949 from The Ohio State University. There, she completed a groundbreaking thesis on “Home Management Aids for Women with Physical Difficulties,” one of the earliest investigations of the subject, next to Gilbreth’s work. Recognizing the lack of available vocational rehabilitation programs for homemakers, her thesis sought to identify management techniques, equipment, devices, and adaptations already in use by a wide variety of physically disabled women. After surveying and interviewing physically disabled homemakers in Ohio, she analyzed and compiled their suggestions in order to assist other disabled homemakers and rehabilitation professionals, including home economists.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>“News of Food: Kitchen That Saves Time and Energy Featured at Employ-the-Disabled Show,” *New York Times*, October 5, 1948, 5; Eva vom Baur Hansl to Lillian Moller Gilbreth, Jan. 25, 1968, with Hansl’s overview of Gilbreth’s work on “Rehabilitation of the Handicapped,” folder 8, box 10, Gilbreth Papers.

<sup>57</sup>Pauline Rehder, “Trends in Management,” paper written for Mechanical Engineering 180 at the University of Wisconsin [c.a. 1952], folder 2, box 52, Gilbreth Papers; Eva vom Baur Hansl, “The Gilbreth Projects” and attached letter from Hansl to Lillian Moller Gilbreth, Jan. 25, 1968, folder 8, box 10, Gilbreth Papers; Eva vom Baur Hansl to Howard A. Rusk, Sept. 2, 1947, correspondence 1947 folder, box 2, Eva vom Baur Hansl Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries, Syracuse, NY; Rusk et al., “Acknowledgements,” *Manual for Training the Disabled Homemaker*; and “News of Food: Disabled Housewives in New Bellevue Clinic Find They Can Cook Again and Do Dishes,” *New York Times*, May 8, 1950, 26.

<sup>58</sup>See Julia Swenningesen Judson, “Home Management Aids for Women with Physical Difficulties” (master’s thesis, Ohio State University, 1949), 2–3.

## Home Economists Take Up Homemaker Rehabilitation

Under Judson's direction, and with Gilbreth as a consultant, the homemaker rehabilitation program at NYU gradually expanded beyond cardiac homemakers to include women with a broad range of physical disabilities.<sup>59</sup> The Heart Kitchen, however, remained central to the NYU program and inspired similar homemaker rehabilitation programs across the United States. The American Heart Association, for example, widely promoted it through a film strip and accompanying pamphlet, both titled "Heart of the Home," as well as through its local heart associations which subsequently adopted some version.<sup>60</sup> Not long after the kitchen's installation at NYU, the Michigan Heart Association's executive director of occupational cardiology, John G. Bielawski, paid a visit to Rusk's institute and became intrigued by the possibilities of work simplification for women with cardiac disease. Upon returning to Michigan, he helped establish a similar program at Wayne University (renamed Wayne State University in 1956) in Detroit, in conjunction with its director of home economics, Frances G. Sanderson.<sup>61</sup>

Beginning in 1950, with grants from the Michigan Heart Association and under Sanderson's direction, Wayne University's home economics department offered a free work simplification course for cardiac homemakers. Held at Wayne University's home economics laboratory and financed by the Michigan Heart Association, the set of two, three-hour classes were free to the women attending. After getting acquainted, participants enjoyed slides and instructional films, demonstrations of streamlined housework techniques by Wayne University staff, and the opportunity to share their own experiences. The homemakers also took a tour of three kitchens in the laboratory. Although they varied in price and shape, all three drew inspiration from the

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<sup>59</sup>Edith Lind Kristeller, "Work Program for the Disabled Housewife," *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation* 34, no. 7 (July 1953), 411–416. See also Rusk et al., introduction to *Manual for Training the Disabled Homemaker*.

<sup>60</sup>American Heart Association, *Heart of the Home*.

<sup>61</sup>John G. Bielawski, "Cardiac Housewife Program of the Michigan Heart Association," *Journal of the Michigan State Medical Society* 49, no. 12 (Dec. 1950), 1441, 1447; and Frances G. Sanderson, "Surmounting the Handicaps of the Physically Limited Homemaker," *Journal of Home Economics* 47, no. 9 (Nov. 1955), 691–92. For a summary of Frances G. Sanderson's 1951 report, "Improving Work Habits of the Cardiac Homemakers," prepared for Kelvinator Kitchen in Detroit, which contains additional information about the history of the Michigan Heart Association's collaboration with Wayne University, see Ruth Cresswell Kettunen, "A Limited Survey of Research Studies and Pertinent Material Bearing Upon the Problems of the Cardiac Homemaker" (master's thesis, Michigan State College of Agriculture and Applied Science, 1952), 64–65.



Heart Kitchen.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, the course covered meal preparation, bed making, cleaning, dusting, and other household tasks, such as laundry, which many class members reported as their most tiring activity. At the end of the session, many participants requested an additional refresher course, which the Wayne University staff arranged.<sup>63</sup>

Throughout the early 1950s, interest in rehabilitating cardiac homemakers grew quickly. The Michigan Heart Association not only funded additional homemaking projects at Michigan State University (then Michigan State College of Agriculture and Applied Science), but similar programs sprouted up in such far-flung places as Chicago, Los Angeles, Baltimore, Buffalo, Milwaukee, and Washington State. Occasionally, local heart associations worked in conjunction with utility companies and popular publications, such as *Woman's Home Companion*, to design and promote heart programs and kitchens.<sup>64</sup> At the same time as interest in cardiac homemakers spread, Wayne University's department of home economics began to address the experiences of other physically disabled homemakers, as NYU had already done. Sanderson became aware of this need after the county orthopedic consultant inquired if one of her patients—a pregnant mother of twins who was recovering from polio—could attend the cardiac homemaker classes, to which Sanderson agreed. Later, with Sanderson's assistance, the consultant organized a class for other homemakers with limited mobility. But because it was still patterned on the needs of women with cardiac disease, the class was inadequate in terms of meeting attendees' needs. Requests soon flooded in for a more comprehensive program, and a committee of representatives from twenty-three agencies began planning workshops for homemakers with a broader range of physical disabilities.<sup>65</sup>

Three disabled homemakers—including the mother with twins—played a critical role in planning and running the Wayne University workshops. One of the women, a doctor's wife who had used a wheelchair in her homemaking for more than a decade, compiled suggestions to share with other physically disabled homemakers. Additionally, she developed a planning questionnaire for all

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<sup>62</sup> Kettunen, "A Limited Survey of Research Studies," 64–65; Bielawski, "Cardiac Housewife Program," 1441; and Marion Tate Houts, "Application of Work Simplification Methods to Specific Allowed Activities of the Cardiac Homemaker" (master's thesis, Wayne University, 1951). 411, 425–26.

<sup>63</sup> Houts, "Application of Work Simplification Methods," 412, 426.

<sup>64</sup> See Margaret H. Austin, "The Cardiac Housewife," *Journal of the American Medical Women's Association* 8, no. 6 (June 1953), 198; Bielawski, "Cardiac Housewife Program," 1441; Kettunen, "A Limited Survey of Research Studies," 59; and "Gas Gives Heart to Cardiacs," *American Gas Association Monthly* (Oct. 1951), 9, 37.

<sup>65</sup> Sanderson, "Surmounting the Handicaps," 691.

prospective participants. All three homemakers also allowed photographs of their own homes, which had been recently redesigned to be more accessible, to be turned into color slides to share with others.<sup>66</sup>

Their efforts resulted in a series of three workshops, beginning in August 1953. Approximately seventy participants attended the first workshop, which included a mixture of home economists, rehabilitation professionals, and physically disabled homemakers. The three disabled homemakers who had helped organize the gathering each led a discussion group and demonstrated devices and methods for simplifying housework. These demonstrations were particularly popular with the other disabled homemakers in attendance who requested to see even more homemaking devices and equipment for wheelchair users, as well as additional movies, slides, and images.<sup>67</sup> The second workshop, held four months later, sought to build and improve on the first both in terms of content and accessibility. Additional colleges and departments participated this time, and the daily schedule was shortened by extending the overall program to four days. To minimize the amount of travel required to get to and from campus, the university arranged for lodging in the student center and food services prepared a variety of meals. The building and grounds department also built ramps to facilitate entering buildings and navigating curbs. Additionally, the university provided cots in the home economics department to allow participants to relax and shift their body positions during breaks. Disabled homemakers were also delighted with a fashion show that featured "attractive and functional garments chosen particularly for the woman on crutches or in a wheelchair." These included skirts, blouses, sweaters, dresses, short coats, capes, and a stole that were not only washable, durable, lightweight, and wrinkle-resistant but most importantly, "comfortable to put on and to wear."<sup>68</sup> The third workshop combined the most successful elements of the first two and, according to Sanderson, "was very well received."<sup>69</sup>

Similar themes can be found in the homemaker rehabilitation projects that the University of Connecticut's School of Home Economics carried out in the 1950s, with funding from the United States Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR). One of UConn's earliest undertakings was the seven-day Handicapped Homemakers conference that the university held in June 1953. Under the guidance of the school's dean, Elizabeth Eckhardt May, the event (formally called

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<sup>66</sup>Sanderson, "Surmounting the Handicaps," 691–92. Unfortunately, Sanderson did not include the names of the organizers.

<sup>67</sup>Sanderson, "Surmounting the Handicaps," 691–92.

<sup>68</sup>Sanderson, "Surmounting the Handicaps," 692.

<sup>69</sup>Sanderson, "Surmounting the Handicaps," 692.

the Leader's Workshop on Principles of Work Simplification Applied to Problems of Physically Handicapped Homemakers) brought together home economists, physical therapists, public health officials, medical experts, and local residents in a variety of fields to explore problems that homemakers with physical disabilities faced. Participants perused exhibits featuring assistive devices developed at the Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at NYU, Braille labels and recipes cards for visually impaired cooks, and the Connecticut Heart Association's adaptation of the Heart Kitchen. They also viewed films instructing them on the use of motion study principles in home management and enjoyed an address by Gilbreth, who was honored for her work in the field with a special reception.<sup>70</sup>

Neva Waggoner, who had spent the 1952–1953 academic year teaching a Marriage and Family Living course for UConn's School of Home Economics, was one of the people in attendance. As a physically disabled homemaker, she was particularly interested in the efforts of Gilbreth and others to find new ways to perform homemaking tasks. Yet the idea of "let[ting] your head save your heels" was not entirely new to her nor was the idea of testing out different work methods.<sup>71</sup> Rather, she had long used these approaches. As a child responsible for household chores, Waggoner often tended to the laundry, washing and hanging clothes. As Waggoner later explained:

Since [hanging clothes] was normally a two handed task I had to experiment until I found a way to do it with one hand. I found I had to use all five fingers on one hand to manage; two for positioning the fabric on the line and two to push the clothespin into place.<sup>72</sup>

Later on, when she was a college student pondering her future as a mother and wife, she spent the summer babysitting for a friend to see if she could carry out childcare tasks on her own. She recalled:

This was a great opportunity for me to experiment and practice with safe ways of lifting and carrying a baby; preparing formula and capping bottles; but most of all diapering securely and safely. No 'Pampers' in those days! This required considerable dexterity of all fingers to gather the two ends

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<sup>70</sup>University of Connecticut, Schools of Home Economics, Business Administration and Physical Therapy, *Handicapped Homemakers Proceedings: Leader's Workshop on Principles of Work Simplifications Applied to Problems of Physically Handicapped Homemakers, June 14–20, 1953* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, May 1954).

<sup>71</sup>Neva Waggoner, *Richly Blessed* (Phoenix, AZ: Imperial/Litho Graphics, 1989), 95–96.

<sup>72</sup>Waggoner, *Richly Blessed*, 20.

of the diaper and join them securely to the shirt without sticking the child. I practiced until it became routine.<sup>73</sup>

Over the next several years, Waggoner became increasingly involved with UConn's homemaker rehabilitation efforts. Waggoner served as assistant coordinator for the 1955 workshop on The Team Approach to the Rehabilitation of the Handicapped Homemaker that the OVR also sponsored. In this capacity, she worked closely with Gilbreth, Judson, and May, the lead organizer. May described the initiative as "a pioneer project—a workshop where representatives of nine professional fields came together for three days to consider possibilities and problems in the 'team approach' to the rehabilitation of the handicapped homemaker."<sup>74</sup> The event drew together a wide range of rehabilitation professionals, such as physicians, social workers, physical therapists, and home economists, as well as disabled homemakers, who participated in every session.<sup>75</sup> On the program, Waggoner spoke on the need for rehabilitation "experts" to see disabled homemakers as agents in their own rehabilitation and to take their experiences seriously. She urged the audience to recognize how disabled women have "all the basic needs of other women, the need for love and affection, the need to be important to some one or some thing, and the need for new and challenging experiences." She closed her remarks by calling attention to the importance of individualizing rehabilitative approaches to better meet homemakers' needs.<sup>76</sup>

The importance of tailoring home management techniques to individual disabled homemakers was also addressed by Judson, who spoke about her work at NYU. In addition to outlining specific work strategies for disabled homemakers, such as sliding filled pots from the sink to the range when possible, or positioning appliance controls in places that wheelchair users could reach, Judson spoke about the general importance of homemaking training to rehabilitation.<sup>77</sup> In doing so, she bolstered the workshop's underlying goal: to legitimize and expand the work of home economists in the growing vocational rehabilitation

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<sup>73</sup>Waggoner, *Richly Blessed*, 33.

<sup>74</sup>Elizabeth Eckhardt May, "Forward," *The Team Approach*, 1. For list of organizers, which includes May, Waggoner, Gilbreth, and Judson, see p2age 2.

<sup>75</sup>May, "Forward," *The Team Approach*, 1.

<sup>76</sup>Neva R. Waggoner, "The Role of the Homemaker and Her Family on the Rehabilitation Team, Presenting the Point of View of a Handicapped Homemaker," in *The Team Approach*, 14–17.

<sup>77</sup>Julia S. Judson, "The Team Approach at the Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation of the New York University-Bellevue Medical Center," in *The Team Approach*, 10–13.

system. Although doctors, physical therapists, and social workers were already seen as integral members of any “rehabilitation team” or group of people who worked to assist in the rehabilitation of disabled people, the role of home economists was still relatively new. This concern was echoed by a home economics working group chaired by Hannah Pretzer, a home economics instructor at Wayne University. The group argued that other rehabilitation professionals should recognize “that home economics specialists . . . have definite contributions to make to the rehabilitation of the handicapped homemaker” and that “home economists should be recruited and trained to take their position on the rehabilitation team.”<sup>78</sup>

### Expanding the Role of Home Economics

The efforts of UConn’s School of Home Economics to carve out a role for home economists in vocational rehabilitation shaped the direction of the AHEA itself. Particularly influential in this shift was A. June Bricker, who became the executive director of the AHEA in 1960. Earlier, as the head of the Field and Community Health Bureau of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in New York City, she represented the AHEA at UConn’s 1955 Team Approach workshop.<sup>79</sup> Reporting on this workshop in an article published in the AHEA’s *Journal of Home Economics*, Bricker wrote that the program “did more than make available many facts concerning rehabilitation of the handicapped homemaker [or] focus attention on the need for more research in many areas. . . . It stimulated thinking on the potentials of our own profession and its relation to the whole large area of rehabilitation.” “In reflecting over this three-day workshop and what it meant to me,” Bricker continued, “I think of how much the home economist can do in this field. This is a new horizon for service—a new challenge in our recruitment program. Are enough of us aware of the tremendous scope of rehabilitation?”<sup>80</sup>

The role of home economists in rehabilitation was also discussed at the AHEA’s preconvention Workshop on Job Evaluation, held in conjunction with the association’s 1955 annual meeting in Minneapolis. After hearing from AHEA members who, like Bricker,

<sup>78</sup>“Recommendation of the Home Economics Group,” in *The Team Approach*, 23. See also Elizabeth Eckhardt May, “Rehabilitation Views and Previews,” *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 32, no. 11 (Nov. 1956), 1049–53.

<sup>79</sup>Nancy B. Leidenfrost, “Obituary: Dr. A. June Bricker,” *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences* 92, no. 2 (March 2000), 62.

<sup>80</sup>A. June Bricker, “The Team Approach for the Rehabilitation of the Handicapped Homemaker,” *Journal of Home Economics* 47, no. 8 (Oct. 1955), 626–27.

had attended the UConn Team Approach workshop just weeks earlier, participants discussed how they could contribute to the field. They expressed such a desire to learn more that some members approached the AHEA board in early 1956. Later that year, the AHEA's social welfare and public health section formed a rehabilitation committee which, by June of 1957, became a joint committee of the AHEA and American Dietetic Association (ADA). The committee sought to stimulate members' interest in rehabilitation work, highlight the contributions of home economists and allied professionals to rehabilitation teams, publicize services for disabled people, and enhance the training of home economists, nutritionists, and dieticians by assisting with course content. Bricker, who headed up the group's publicity efforts, and Judson, who served as co-chair on behalf of the AHEA, were instrumental in this initiative.<sup>81</sup>

Over the next decade, attention to homemaker rehabilitation increased exponentially, as evidenced by the growing number of journal articles, conferences, graduate theses, courses, and research studies on the subject. In June 1960, the joint AHEA-ADA committee collaborated with Colorado State University's College of Home Economics and the Denver Regional Office of Vocational Rehabilitation to host a homemaker rehabilitation workshop. The program, held in connection with the annual meeting of the AHEA, included formal remarks from Judson, Bricker, Waggoner, Sanderson, May, and others.<sup>82</sup> Two and half years later, in January 1963, the AHEA held one of its largest rehabilitation workshops to date in Highland Park, Illinois. According to the AHEA's executive director Bricker, much of the planning had been done by Neva Waggoner, who was credited as assistant director of the workshop. While the workshop addressed many of the same themes and included many of the same participants as earlier meetings, what was distinctly new was the announcement of the inaugural AHEA fellowships in rehabilitation. Supported by the newly reconstituted Vocational Rehabilitation Administration (previously OVR),

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<sup>81</sup> A. June Bricker, "Planning for Rehabilitation Service," *Journal of Home Economics* 50, no. 9 (Nov. 1958), 701–702; A. June Bricker, "Plan and Purpose of the Workshop," in *Rehabilitation of the Physically Handicapped in Homemaking Activities: Proceedings of a Workshop, Highland Park, Illinois, Jan. 27–30, 1963*, 3–5. For the goals of the AHEA-ADA subcommittee, see Bricker, "Planning for Rehabilitation Service," 701–702.

<sup>82</sup> Bricker, "Plan and Purpose of the Workshop," 4. See also *Proceedings: AHEA Pre-Convention Workshop Expanding the Services of the Home Economist in Rehabilitation*, Denver, Colorado, June 25–27, 1960, folder 47, box 1, Handicapped Homemaker Project Records.



these fellowships funded forty-one home economics master's and doctoral students in the program's first five years.<sup>83</sup>

The AHEA's rehabilitation fellowship programs highlight the expanding interests of the association, the increased involvement of home economists in rehabilitation, and new directions for home economics itself. Home economists' increased attention to disability in the post-World War II period reflected a significant change in how educators, students, and practitioners in the field conceived of women's homemaking roles. Although popular representations of homemaking continued to focus on white, middle-class, able-bodied models, home economists took a more expansive view, as seen in their work and studies. By recognizing the experiences of disabled women and by drawing on disabled homemakers' own expertise, home economists forged connections to the later independent-living movement. May, for example, even spoke on behalf of an "Independent Living Bill" proposed in Congress in 1959.<sup>84</sup>

The work of home economists after World War II also expanded the boundaries of their discipline and their roles in society. These efforts were carried out largely through the creation of loose networks that allowed them to share their interests, publicize their work, and expand their influence. By situating their work within the broader rehabilitation system, home economists at colleges and universities across the country promoted the usefulness and relevance of their own training, while at the same time complicating postwar domesticity and able-bodied normalcy.

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<sup>83</sup>Bricker, "Plan and Purpose of the Workshop," 4; "AHEA Fellowship Awards Presented at the Annual Meeting," *Journal of Home Economics* 55, no. 7 (Sept. 1963), 508–509; and Julia Judson, *Home Economics Research Abstracts, 1963–1968* (Washington, DC: American Home Economics Association, 1969), 2–3. Examples of funded theses and dissertations include Mabel Grace Stolte, "Physically Handicapped Homemakers' Meal Management Patterns" (master's thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 1968); Rosemary M. Harzmann, "Decision-Making in Homes of Disabled Homemakers" (master's thesis, Michigan State University, 1969); Carol Glenn Prentiss, "Some Homemaking Practices of the Hearing Impaired" (master's thesis, Colorado State University, 1968); and Lois O. Schwab, "Self-Perceptions of Physically Disabled Homemakers" (EdD diss. University of Nebraska, 1966). See descriptions in Judson, *Home Economics Research Abstracts*.

<sup>84</sup>See Elizabeth Eckhardt May, "Text of Statement Summarized Before the Congressional Hearing Subcommittee on Special Education and Rehabilitation, House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor," Dec. 18, 1959, folder 255, box 5, Elizabeth E. May Papers, Archives and Special Collections, Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut.