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Does Class Shape Men's Attitudes toward Home Improvement Projects?

Financial pressure and workplace stress lead some American men to take on home improvement projects, according to a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#).

“Depending on their social class, men tend to use DIY home improvement to envision themselves as either suburban craftsmen or family handymen,” write authors Risto Moisio (California State University, Long Beach), Eric J. Arnould (University of Bath), and James Gentry (University of Nebraska, Lincoln).

Consumer research has tended to focus on demonstrating how masculine identity is constructed away from home in arenas such as the golf course or the barber shop. In contrast, through in-depth interviews, the authors discovered how men develop their masculine identities via DIY home improvement.

For upper class male consumers, DIY home improvement offers the means of unleashing the inner suburban craftsman who relishes in physical labor. In contrast to their day jobs, upper class men enjoy the process of toiling away on various projects and feeling self-fulfilled in the process.

For lower class male consumers, a different pattern emerges. Work around the house allows lower class men to assert their identities, and in particular, construct an identity of the family handyman relative to their female partners. In this way, lower class men find meaning in their DIY home improvement projects as a masculine form of caring for their families and providing them with better homes than otherwise possible due to their subordinate economic and social standing.

“For upper class men, DIY home improvement is a therapeutic escape from the burdens of knowledge work, allowing them to experience a blue-collar fantasy by working with their hands. In contrast, lower class men treat DIY home improvement as a chore rather than a therapeutic outlet. Projects around the house represent an essential part of their male territory and housework repertoire,” the authors conclude.

Risto Moisio, Eric J. Arnould, and James Gentry. “Productive Consumption in the Class-Mediated Construction of Domestic Masculinity: Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Home Improvement in Men's Identity Work.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: August 2013. For more information, contact Risto Moisio (rmoisio@csulb.edu) or visit <http://ejcr.org/>.

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