

1950s Women



Was the image of the happy 1950s housewife accurate?

What did American women think of their role as homemakers?

Before World War II

- Most women did not wear **pants** on a regular basis.
- Most women who worked were single and young. Society disapproved of married women working, even in Depression times.
- Women's role had traditionally been in the **home**, taking care of the children.
- Most people, husbands included, didn't believe that women were smart enough or strong enough to hold down a real job.

Gender Norms for Women



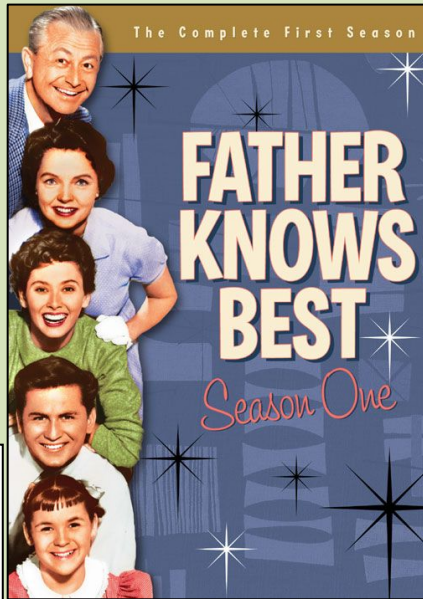
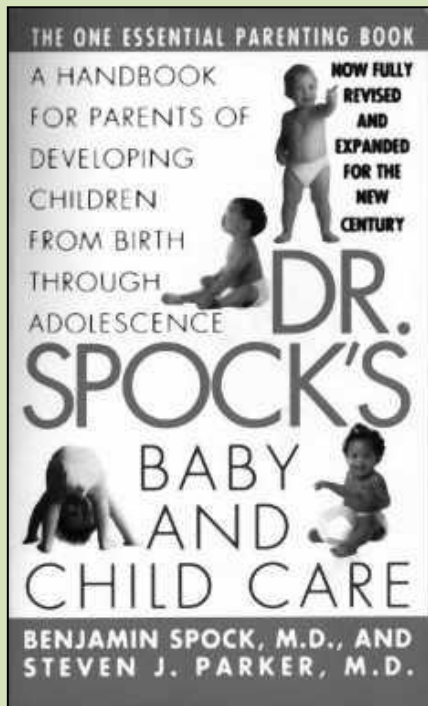
We Can Do It!



Gender Norms for Women – 1950s Women

- After WWII, women faced pressure to conform to pre-war gender norms.
 - Most women wanted their pre-war family life back but were also didn't want to give up the independence that they had gained during the war.
- Many women felt torn between their desire to work and society's expectations for women to stay home
 - The Baby Boom made decision to stay home easier...they needed to raise children!
 - Suburbia fed into housewife stereotype – HOW?





- All aspects of 1950s society reinforced the idea that women were inferior to men.
 - Dr. Benjamin Spock told mothers that if they wanted to raise stable and secure children, they should stay at home...working outside the home would jeopardize their children's mental and emotional health.
 - *Esquire* magazine called working women a "menace."
 - *Life* magazine did a special issue on women, highlighting the "Busy Wife's Achievements" as "Home Manager, Mother, Hostess, and Useful Civic Worker."
 - Movies and television also reinforced traditional images

How to Be a Good Wife

Excerpted from a 1950s high school home economic textbook

- Have dinner ready. Plan ahead, even the night before, to have a delicious meal ready on time. This is a way of letting him know that you have been thinking about him and are concerned about his needs...
- Prepare yourself. Take 15 minutes to rest so that you are refreshed when he arrives. Touch up your makeup, put a ribbon in your hair and be fresh looking. He has just been with a lot of work weary people. Be a little gay and a little more interesting. His boring day may need a lift.
- Clear away the clutter. Make one last trip through the main part of the house. Gather up the books, toys and newspapers. Dust the tables so that they appear clean. Your husband will feel that he has reached his haven of rest and order. Doing this for him will give you a lift also.
- Prepare the children. Take a few minutes to wash their faces and hands. Comb their hair and change their clothes if it is necessary to make them look presentable to him. They are “God’s creatures” and your husband would like to see them playing their part.
- Minimize all noise. At the time of his arrival, eliminate all the noises of the washer, dryer, dishwasher and vacuum. You’ve had plenty of time to do these things during the day. Don’t do them now. Encourage your children to be quiet. Be happy to see your husband. Greet him with a warm smile.

How to Be a Good Wife (cont.)

- Do not greet your husband with problems or complaints. Don't complain when he is late to dinner. Count this as minor when compared to what he had to go through all day.
- Make him very comfortable. Have him lean back in a comfortable chair or suggest that he lie down for a few moments in the bedroom. Have a cool or warm drink ready for him. Arrange his pillows and offer to take off his shoes. Speak in a low, soft, soothing and pleasant voice. Allow him to relax and unwind.
- Listen to him. You may have a dozen things to tell him, but the moment of his arrival is not the time. Let him speak first.
- Make the evening his. He is special! Never complain that he does not take you out to dinner or to other pleasant entertainment. Instead, try to understand his world of strain and pressure, his need to unwind and relax. Remember that you relaxed all day waiting for his return. Now it's his turn to enjoy what you enjoyed.
- Try to make his home a place of peace and order, a place where your husband can relax in body and spirit.



MARRIED?—No reason to neglect stockings!



Husbands admire wives who keep their stockings perfect

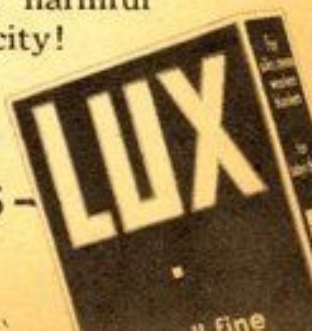
Lovely stockings add so much to your appearance. Don't risk constant runs, snaky seams and wrinkles.

SAVE ELASTICITY—Cut down on runs and wrinkles with Lux! Write to Lever Brothers Co., Dept. 16, Cambridge, Mass., for a free box of Lux. (Offer good in U. S. and Canada only.)

Lux saves the elasticity that makes stockings *fit* and *wear*. Cake-soap rubbing and soaps with harmful alkali *weaken* elasticity!

CONSTANT RUNS
are unsightly and expensive—cut them down with LUX

for stockings—



If your husband ever finds out

you're not "store-testing" for fresher coffee...



*... if he discovers you're
still taking chances
on getting flat, stale coffee
... we'll be with you!
For today
there's a sure
and certain way
to test for freshness
before you buy*

Here's how easy it is to be sure of fresher coffee



Just do this!

Look for the "Smile Test" on all Chase & Sanborn. Obviously, rounded lips mean it's packed and pressure-packed. Look for the man.

There's only one test against the store test. After you buy Chase & Sanborn, it's back to the store to see if you can get a better price. It's the one way to get the freshest coffee ever packed.

No other can lets you test!

You can't see an instant flat top can. Some are "Wobblers" that have 1/2 an oz or more of water that all flat top cans lock alike. You can't tell which one good and which one bad.

Here's the payoff!

Just as you grab a cup, they'll want more! For Chase & Sanborn is a genuine blend of three different coffees. . . . Bought for you fresh. The wonder Chase & Sanborn pays a favor dividend you won't find in any other coffee!



"PRESSURE
PACKED"

Chase & Sanborn

His kind of girl

Surf helped her prove she was not such a scatterbrain after all...



"LIZ, DARLING... they've made me captain of the team!" Bill beamed with cheeks of joy and glad his scatterbrain was off his feet.

"Put 'em down and later, you big cat," she said, catching sight of a article also stuffed carelessly in his sports bag. She pulled it out and grimaced from his last game. "That's not tennis out tomorrow is this, Bill, it's a diaper! I'll wash it for you."

"Zee! Don't make me laugh, Liz. You're a wonderful dancer—but he's forgotten that stuff about washing. Come on. We've got a date for the Palace. Let's go!" "Bring 'em! Just give me a few minutes and I'll show you."



SHE GOT THE SURF and put the cloth to soak in cold Surf while they had a cup of tea.

Think goodness!



"NOW, 15 MINUTES BOIL to finish Surf will do the trick," Liz said. Before they set out to the Palace she hung the cloth to dry. When they got back it looked...



MORE THAN JUST WHITE... SPOTLESS! "Darling, it seems now you were so capable," Bill said. "It's knowing what you mean," replied Liz. "More and I use Surf for everything we wash!"

Surf boils spotless!

SAVES YOU MONEY EVERY WEEK



A LEVIER BRAND











WARNER
PATHE

and

**MRS.
AMERICA**

WARNER PATHE NEWS

Gender Roles

- Men:
 - Primary breadwinner & sole provider for the family, head of the of the house, decision-maker
- Women:
 - Expected to be the perfect housewife (cook, clean, raise children, take care of their husband's needs)
 - Women, like children, were told that they “should be seen and not heard” and that they must always play the role of supportive wife.

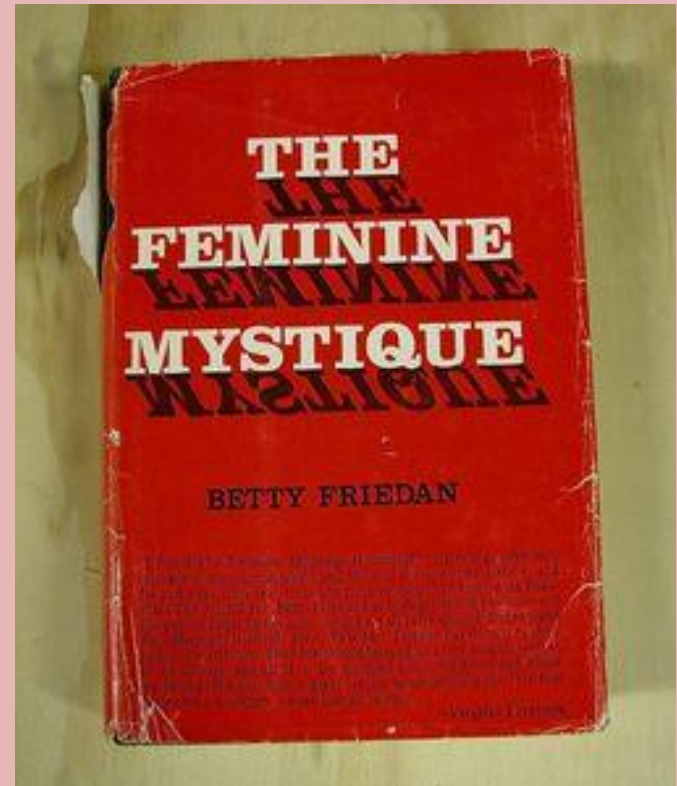


BBC

**WOMEN
KNOW
YOUR LIMITS**

- In 1957, bored with writing articles on breast feeding for women's magazines like *Redbook* and *Ladies Home Journal*, Betty Friedan sent a survey to her fellow Smith graduates of the class of 1942 to find out how happy and prepared they were for the roles that were expected of them as women.
- The responses raised more questions than it answered for her and led Friedan to explore the issue more fully in a book.
- She had trouble getting the book published. One editor was horrified and said it couldn't be true, while another editor told her agent, "Betty has gone off her rocker. She has always done a good job for us, but this time only the most neurotic housewife could identify."
 - Friedan realized the only way to get her findings published was in her own book.

Betty Friedan's
The Feminine Mystique
(1963)



- Her writing called to attention what she termed “the feminine mystique.” (DEFINE)



The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night – she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question – ‘Is this all?’”

Response to Friedan's book

- After the book was published, Friedan received hundreds of letters from other women who also saw through the feminine mystique.
 - They wanted to stop doing their children's homework and start doing their own.
 - They were tired of being told they weren't capable of doing anything else but housework.
 - They felt they were not being taken seriously as people and that society must change in order for women to survive.



13 March 1963
Ridgewood, NJ

- ...[I am] the mother of five and the wife of a successful partner in an investment banking firm. In seeking that something “more” out of life, I have tried large doses of everything from alcohol to religion, from a frenzy of sports activities to PTA...to every phase of church work... Each served its purpose at the time, but I suddenly realized that none had any real future. Our children are all in school except for the baby... However, I felt that if I waited until she’s in school I’ll be too close to 40 to learn any new tricks. I’ve seen too many women day they would “do something” when the last child went to school. The something has usually been bridge, bowling, or drinking.

23 April 1963
Leicester, Mass.

- For the last few years, I have been on the “old housekeeping merry-go round.” ...I cleaned and cleaned...and then I cleaned some more! All day—every day. My mother had returned to teaching school when I was twelve, and I had resented it, and consequently vowed that when I married and had children I would make it my vocation. I was quite convinced that I was very happy with my role in life as we had our own home and my husband is a good husband and father and a very sufficient provider. However, one night last November, all Hell broke loose in my psyche. I was sitting calmly reading when I became overwhelmed with waves of anxiety. I couldn’t imagine what was happening... I visited my family doctor. He put me on tranquilizers and diagnosed it as a mild state of anxiety. However there was no explanation...I chose security over everything else...I felt I had something about it...I now have a goal and no longer feel like a vegetable.