

# 5 (Fake) Tips From the 1950s on How to Be a Good Housewife

In a restaurant in Cannon Beach, Oregon, one will find on the wall an excerpt from a 1950s-era “high school home economics textbook” that offers readers several tips on how to be a good wife. They consist of the following:

*1) 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. Most men are hungry when they come home and the prospect of a good meal (especially his favorite dish) is part of the warm welcome needed.*

*2) Prepare yourself. Take 15 minutes to rest so you'll be 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 for him. His boring day may need a lift and one of your duties is to provide it.*

*3) Clear away the clutter. Make one last trip through the main part of the house just before your husband arrives. Gather up schoolbooks, toys, paper, etc. and then run a dust cloth over the tables. Your husband will feel he has reached a haven of rest and order, and it will give you a lift too.*

*4) Prepare the children: Take a few minutes to wash the children's hands and faces (if they are small), comb their hair and, if necessary, change their clothes. Children are little treasures and he would like to see them playing the part.*

*5) Minimize all noise. At the time of his arrival, eliminate all noise of the washer, dryer or vacuum. Try to encourage the children to be quiet. Be happy to see him. Give him a*

*warm smile and be glad to see him.*

*Some don'ts: Don't greet him with complaints and problems. Don't complain if he's late home for dinner or even if he stays out all night. Count this as minor compared to what he might have gone through that day. Make him comfortable. Have him lean back in a comfortable chair or have him lie down in the bedroom. Have a cool or warm drink ready for him.*

*Arrange his pillow and offer to take off his shoes. Speak in a low, 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 talk first.*

*Make the evening his: Never complain if he does not take you out to dinner or to other places of entertainment. Instead, try to understand his world of strain and pressure, his need to be home and relax.*

*The goal: Try to make your home a place of peace and order where your husband can renew in body and spirit.*

I got a bit of a chuckle out of the advice, a fact a wiser man would not publicly admit. The language sounds sexist and condescending, especially by modern standards. One does not have to be a member of the Gloria Steinem fan club to be a little troubled by the idea of schools subjecting children to such ideas.

It made me wonder: *Are these tips true? Did such a textbook exist?*

Nope. A brief internet search would lead one to believe that the tips were based on an article published in *Housekeeping Monthly* in May 1955, not a textbook. A dozen or so PDFs of the article, which is slightly *more* offensive than the tips at the

restaurant in Oregon, can be found online. (The list concludes with the line, “A good wife always knows her place.”)

My initial reaction to this was relief that the article was not in schools, just in a housekeeping magazine. However, it turns out that the PDF of the magazine article also is fake.

[Via Snopes](#):

*“We know the graphic reproduced above (supposedly from the 13 May 1955 edition of a magazine called Housekeeping Monthly) is a fabrication: It didn’t first appear until well after the “How to Be a Good Wife” list had begun circulating via e-mail, and it’s clearly a mock-up produced by adding the text of the e-mail around an image taken from [a 1957 cover of John Bull](#) magazine. (The image itself even bears an “Advertising Archives” legend along its side, indicating its source.) As for the text itself, nobody has turned up the infamous textbook that supposedly included these ten steps. The list is often attributed to Helen B. Andelin’s book Fascinating Womanhood, first published in 1963 to provide instruction in “The Art of Winning a Man’s Complete Love,” but no such list appears in that work.”*

Inexplicably, however, Snopes does not declare the “How to Be a Good Wife” article false. It is given a tag of “unproven” because the writer sees the article “as a condensation of the worst of this particular ‘joy through subservience’ era.” Unlike the, ahem, fact-checking website, several books declare the article apocryphal. ([Here](#) and [here](#), for example.)

What I found astonishing is how many people were taken in by the fake article. Several books reference the magazine piece—some in support of the tips, others condemning them—which means it probably slipped by fact-checkers. The guide was featured prominently in [a 2004 episode](#) of NCSI and referenced in the 2004 film [The Stepford Wives](#). It was [featured in](#) Huffpost—where it was billed as a piece that “will

make your feminist blood boil”—and [on university websites](#).

Like [other fake stories](#) circulating the web (and restaurant walls), it is packaged to make people feel something. For some people, it provokes sadness over how much American values have changed. In others, it elicits anger because it confirms their belief that America has treated women terribly.

You’ll notice that in either case, the story provokes a powerful *feeling*. This should not be surprising. We [recently shared](#) four tips on how to fight propaganda. Number three was this:

*Check your Emotions – When you read a headline, watch a video (especially on social media), or look at a picture accompanied by a message, step away and ask yourself how it made you feel. Did you react with pity, guilt, anger? If you did, why and to what was it directed? As you contemplate those questions, also consider what would happen if you followed your feelings on an issue (or even a product) and who would benefit.*

Learning how to spot false narratives and label them as such is key to neutralizing propaganda, which is no simple task in the mass media age. It would be made easier if fact-checking sites like Snopes actually had the fortitude to label fake stories as such, instead of giving them “unproven” status because the site is sympathetic to the fake story’s narrative.