

Post-war Educational Videos as Reflections of Cold War Era Anxieties on Gender and Sexuality

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Abstract

Some view the Cold War era as a frantic time when Americans lived in constant fear of looming international nuclear threat. Others see it as an age of moral youth, a population boom, job openings, and simple gender roles. It was, of course, a complex combination of both. Anxieties surrounding gender and sexual freedom were prevalent at this time. These anxieties were propagated by effects of the war, and societal shifts affected the behaviors and education that circulated the time. To deal with and prevent these fears from becoming reality, Americans utilized educational films aimed at youth. Thus, these films reflected the growing anxieties of the Cold War era and show us how the relationship between power and knowledge supported the dominant power structures of the time. The link between societal shifts and anxieties post-war and educational videos that were shown to American youth is then of interest.

Or a weenie roast? Another group date. A chance to learn the give and take of working and playing together. Not much arranging needed, and not much expense, and that can be important... Yes, there are lots of things to do on dates, if you know how to look for them, if you plan them with the other person in mind, and if you really try to make sure each date's a good time. If you do these things, you'll know what to do on your date.¹

1. Body of Paper

In 1950, young students watched this film, Coronet Instructional Films' "What to do on a Date."² This film represented an example of instruction in the often strictly placed and enforced gender expectations for dating. While the students watched the film, they were asked to consider their own ideas about courtship and their roles in it. In this film, a high school boy is taught how to ask a girl on a date, where to take her where both can have a good time and not be bored by over commercialized entertainment, but not also spend an outrageous amount of money. The film is almost hard to watch with a modern lens. It is awkward, charmingly well-intending, and at the same time, problematic for its use of gendered assumptions, all in one ten-minute video. Films like these were common in the post-war era and still remain in the memories of those who grew up watching them in their schools.

The Cold War Era following World War II is at times characterized as a hectic time where American citizens lived in fear of nuclear threat. It is at other times represented as a simple time of well-behaved youth, social norms, and innately understood gendered roles in which everyone had specific duties to perform. However, the extended post-war era of the mid-1940s to the end of the 1950s was likely a complex combination of both. The United States was emerging from a war and its citizens were figuring out how to smoothly transition back into a normal post-war society. This general tension would inevitably lead to more specific anxieties. Anxieties surrounding gender and sexual freedom were prevalent at this time. Researchers learn from viewing these films that conventional public suggestions about gender and sexual freedom were woven into public curriculum. Even within a culture of consensus, as this was, there was a fracture. It is important for historians to identify fractures within this culture of consensus.

Americans in all walks of life experienced anxiety during this uncertain time. These worries, propagated by the effects of the war and societal shifts, not surprisingly, affected the behaviors, norms, and education during this time. An overlooked, yet important way in which American people not only dealt with their anxieties, was through the use of education and instructional video. These films were aimed at American youth and sought to make sure these fears would never come to be realities. These educational films reflected the growing anxieties of the Cold War Era and show us how the relationship between power and knowledge supported the dominant power structures of the time. There was a persistent fear of damage to the status quo, which, leaders feared, would then lead to mass social chaos. There were fears that these shifts would lead to the destruction of the traditional, American nuclear family.³ Producers of these videos, as well as the instructors who showed them, sought to contain or maintain these societal worries, to maintain order by containing the perceived disorderly conduct that would come with breaking the norms. Historians discuss post-war American educational film and the anxieties of the Cold War, but rarely in historical scholarship are the two ever connected. This paper is primarily concerned with worries about the female gender, but will address some of the films' messages to men about ideals of manhood as well.

Educational films of the 1940's through 1960 were primarily used to promote desirable "mental hygiene."⁴ Mental hygiene can be described as ranging from psychological counseling to the instilling of sets of appropriate pre-adult behaviors and values or the science of the promotion of mental health and the prevention of mental illness.⁵ Film was a hugely significant medium of the post-World War II era. We see this in popular films that gave viewers messages about gender norms and race, like *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Some Like It Hot*, and later, *A Raisin in the Sun*, with stars like James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, Vivien Leigh, and Sidney Poitier.⁶ On the other hand, educational films did something similar. The films developed following World War II tried to correct behavior, ensure morality, and create dependable and in a sense "model" citizens, while also creating literacy on big topics and issues of the time.⁷

Films like these often surface during times of crisis and social change. For example, Coronet Instructional Films released "Communism" in 1952 to effectively maintain fears about the quickly spreading threat of Communism.⁸ The film presents Russia as a country that the United States may "study," but also as a major threat, maybe the major threat, to American values and democracy. The video often says, "You see the reason," "You see the reason why we are spending billions of dollars in defense production," and so on. As if the audience is in on the inside joke of how Russia's existence negatively affects the United States.⁹ The film, as in the other educational films of the era, has a relaxed and conversational script, for example, "Ever hear of Karl Marx?"¹⁰ While the film may have a small amount of factual information in it, it is such a biased piece of propaganda that modern audiences would most likely find it hard to listen to. This was often the nature of these videos, as will be explored further in this paper. "Communism" is an example of how films and other educational propaganda worked in times of change or perceived danger. These films draw the viewer in with a conversational tone, offers some educational content, but relies on unspoken sets of assumptions. While "Communism" addressed ideas about politics and economics, other educational films addressed social scenarios, dating, sexual behavior, domestic life, career aspirations, marriage, and gender roles. In all these cases the underlying message remains the same: new forms of educational advertising, in this case through film, are used when the status quo is threatened.

The instructional videos that were present throughout post-war American classrooms were literacy tools that were also full of questions on how to achieve the morals, ethics, and behaviors associated with white, middle-class society. They seemed needed and even necessary in an era where there was uncertainty and fear over the behavior and freedom of young people. These films were one way to give Americans a sense of hope and societal improvement.¹¹ When it comes to the films' takes on topics of gender and sexuality, it seems that the main fears or concerns are gender roles and social characteristics, traditional family values, and sexual morality. Though this was the period of the baby boom, it appears that the older generation was discouraging premarital sex and early marriage. The apparent growing sense of independence, financial status, and consumer importance that teenagers experienced during this time only increased anxieties over their decisions and values. Educational videos addressed these issues.

Kelly Ritter's *Reframing the Subject: Postwar Instructional Film and Class-Conscious Literacies* and Eckhardt Fuchs' "Introduction: Educational Films: A Historical Review of Media Innovation in Schools" state that educational films, such as the ones distributed by Coronet Films, were used to promote desirable "mental hygiene."¹² They agree that they became integral after World War II with the main purpose of promoting morality to young people, specifically in an era where there was uncertainty and fear over the behavior and freedom of young people. The films also had the role of educating children on the scientific matters they needed to be aware of, that the educators believed to be and promoted as factual. This could include videos on the effects of alcohol, drugs, and other themes.

Historians like Jennifer Holt, author of "The Ideal Woman" and Rickie Solinger, author of *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race Before Roe V. Wade* concentrate on women and their roles within a family structure, and how those roles affect the mentality of women.¹³ While it may be tempting to think of the 1950's as a "happier" time because of the baby boom, increased marriage rates, and a societal structure where everyone had a definite role, there

was more going on behind the scenes. According to Holt, employers in the post war era lowered wages and encouraged women to return to more “feminine” duties. To justify this, the concept of “the proper role(s) for women” was created and spread.¹⁴ Along with these roles came stereotypes, says Holt. Solinger agrees because the ways a woman was perceived held a lot of meaning and her potential to be associated with even an imagined sense of sexuality could damage her reputation. Solinger argues that these differences emphasize the demands of a racist, traditional family-centered society.

These educational films reflect Cold War Era anxieties, some of which were concerns over a return to gendered roles after the war, sexual hygiene, and the behavior and morality of American youth regarding sex and independence. Elaine Tyler May’s book *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* addresses some of these fears. These fears, she argues, very often surrounded topics of women’s economic, social, and sexual behavior, which was seen as dangerously flippant after the war. Nonmarital sexual behavior in all its forms became a national obsession after the war. National obsession over gender matters was in part due to the politics of the time, with government and medical officials believing and promoting the idea that “sexual depravity” and Communism have a direct link.¹⁵ Because of a fear of changing the status quo and then social chaos, people searched for a way to maintain these fears about sexuality and about politics, linking the two topics together in people’s minds. People may have thought that if Communism is synonymous with evil, and freedom in sexuality and sexual conduct are evil behaviors, then two are connected.

Many Americans thought the war, and its end, would bring reform for the economy, politics, and minority concerns. The majority of post-war women wished to keep their wartime jobs.”¹⁶ Although “statistical advances” were made throughout the war in the women’s employment movement, jobs women held were often menial and did not reflect the popular “Rosie the Riveter” propaganda. There was little indication that traditional gender roles would fade. According to William Chafe, “although some change had occurred, it was within a structure of assumptions and values that perpetuated massive inequality between the sexes.”¹⁷ Educational films helped facilitate a return to normalcy. These films addressed key issues in ways that were both reassuring and reinforced conventional gender norms. Therefore, issues of gender and sexuality including dating dangers, dating etiquette as it relates to gender expectations, heteronormativity in terms of sexuality, domestic and nondomestic work, marriage and sexuality norms, sexual assault, and stereotyped characteristics of the genders became key topics for classroom viewing.

Because of concerns over gender and sexuality, classroom film would have offered relief. The films’ main purpose was to promote morality to young people in an era where there was uncertainty and fear. While teachers and the American public promoted these films to students, major companies and producers worked behind the scenes to create them. Companies like Encyclopedia Britannica Films, Coronet Films, and Centron were amongst the most well-known. Encyclopedia Britannica Films, specifically, was the top producer of educational films for schools following World War II.¹⁸

Encyclopedia Britannica Films (EBF) was a rival of Coronet Films, but ultimately was able to outproduce them. They were similar in content, both popular for their “mental hygiene” films, but also close in location to each other, with the studios only ten minutes apart. EBF got its real start in 1936 with a young multimillionaire named William Benton. Benton began work as the vice-president of the University of Chicago, where brand new to the job, he proposed a four-million-dollar grant to produce classroom films; he was rejected. Simultaneously, the previous owners of EB offered the company to the University of Chicago for one hundred thousand dollars; the University refused, but Benton bought it out of pocket. The university repaid Benton within three years, and soon began earning profit from the new company. This is when EBF started to flourish and outproduce its competitors. During this period, they mainly produced educational videos on history and science, only creating a few social guidance ones in comparison, maybe as a way to discredit Coronet Films. Coronet director Ted Peshak would joke, “...Encyclopedia Britannica brings the world to the classroom; Coronet brings the classroom to the classroom.”¹⁹

Coronet Films, in comparison to Encyclopedia Britannica Films, especially, was a “social guidance” mogul. They have been compared to Hollywood movies more than to educational classroom videos, so although they are not relevant in all aspects, they remain entertaining to view. Their films focused on manners, behavior, and social norms more so than other companies did. Coronet Films began with David Smart, an eventual millionaire and employer of Hugh Hefner, who profited in publishing. He was eccentric, choosing to sleep in a motorized bed and posing for shirtless photographs. He was primarily concerned with “making money and making movies.”²⁰ He realized quickly that social guidance and mental hygiene films were profitable and trendy with educators. Coronet utilized the techniques of Hollywood film in their music, lighting, editing, and use of montage. Their competitor EBF criticized educational videos that were reminiscent of popular films, while Coronet argued that the Hollywood style added interest, and therefore promoted the curriculum. Ted Peshak would say, “We were supposed to be as good as Hollywood; we just wouldn’t be paid as much.”²¹ The studio has since been bulldozed down, with only the street sign remaining, as a reminder of the significance of Coronet’s mental hygiene influence.

These companies are only a couple of examples, and though they competed in production, content, and beliefs to a certain extent, there were some overarching themes and situations that their respective films shared that expressed and propagated the social dynamics and power structure of the ever-changing era. The films that will be discussed are concerned with gender or sexuality, meaning strict gender norms or stereotypical characteristics in both genders, though women are more blatantly used as examples, sexual health and responsibility, or dating.

Encyclopedia Britannica Films' 1953 film "Beginning to Date" tells the age-old story of shy and awkward George. George is a teenager who has never asked a girl out, and is worried about how to ask his crush Mildred to the Winter Frolic.²² His friend Bill, though more experienced with dating, does not fare too much better. Bill's struggle is actually what leads into the guidance and etiquette part of the video.²³ Less than one minute into the video, a group of schoolgirls is excitedly chattering about the Winter Frolic dance. One girl states that going together as a group of girls may be the best option, as going with a boy would "scare [her] to death."²⁴

Once George receives encouragement and advice from his coach, his friend Bill calls Helen, to ask her to the dance. He is at first rejected. When Bill calls Helen, there are various kinds of miscommunication, with neither party exhibiting behavior which would end in a successful coupling. They are used as an example of two teenagers who are not going to "get it right." Bill does not introduce himself immediately, and assumes Helen would recognize his voice. Then he "extended an invitation" without telling Helen exactly to what she was invited.²⁵ The next time he calls, with the narrator's help, he corrects this behavior, ridding himself of the arrogance and impoliteness from his first call. In this call, however, Bill has trouble getting Helen to stop talking after she accepts his invitation. The etiquette now switches briefly onto the female who we are told, should, in politeness, accept quickly, and then end the call.²⁶

Before the film ends, it flashes back to the first boy George. George has had his first successful date, and danced with his crush. He even arranges for his father to take his date Mildred home. His "first plunge into the social scene comes to a successful end." This end, notably, does not include so much as a kiss.

One of the first aspects of dating films that "Beginning to Date" highlights is that young people need the guidance of adults in their private dating lives. When the film begins, it sets up a mentor-mentee dynamic. George depends on his swim coach for dating guidance. This may seem odd to modern audiences, but occurs frequently in these educational videos.²⁷ Their relationship speaks to perceived weaknesses of teenage boys and the wisdom of an adult man. Timid George cannot properly talk to a girl he likes without the guidance of a more mature adult male. This is not only true of the boys. When Helen is corrected at one point, it reflects the assumption that teenage girls, if not corrected, will keep talking. The narrator says, "if Helen had been a few years older, she might have handled the telephone conversation something like this..."²⁸ Young ladies are expected to accept the invitation, say "thank you" and "goodbye." Had Helen been an adult woman, she would have known this already. Helen, along with George and Bill who are young gentlemen in training, need to be taught the skill of courtship.

This film is packed with gendered expectations for teenage dating. The obvious ones affect the etiquette of extending and accepting an invitation. More subtle are the physical cues, like George's big date not ending in a kiss. This can be explained by understanding the role of a 1950's gentleman. Men were expected to show restraint and to take responsibility for their date returning home safely, as the film shows George do. The film also challenged quid pro quo dating, asking a woman out, behaving nicely, but expecting sex or other behavior in return. Is courtship something that is almost platonic? Educators certainly wanted kids to believe so. It effectively takes sexuality, and thus some potential danger, out of the equation for teenage youth in a dating scenario.

The messages in this film are clear, dating invites potential sexual danger and risk for young people. The group of schoolgirls talking about the Winter Frolic dance are a good example. One of them states that going with a boy would "scare [her] to death."²⁹ While this may seem like a derogatory presentation of men as intimidating or dangerous, it actually says more about the perception of easily frightened females. It highlights the potential, in the young female mind at least, for sexual and dating danger. Dating is being shown as comparable to hunting. A voracious man goes after a woman who resists just enough to make a game of it, all of which reinforces stereotypes of dating, of gender, and of conformity. The video suggests that these dangers occur more frequently in underprepared teenagers. Kids that fall into the trap of being too talkative or arrogant, as Bill and Helen were portrayed, may be in greater trouble. Bill and Helen are outliers in the film and society. They are individuals who if left to their own unguided devices may wind up in a risky situation. The job of the film and its dating etiquette is to reinforce conformity and bring the teenagers back into accepted dating norms.

People look back on this era with nostalgia. It was a time that emphasized marriage and babies, and gave everyone a defined role. These stable institutional structures had to be reinforced. Gender roles have always existed, but the Cold War Era was different. There was a need to contain sex, and the films were a way of doing that. The containment of sex, specifically premarital sex was important to educators. As mentioned, societal shifts tend to promote an obsession over sex and gender. After the war experts doubted that merely promoting sexual repression was a valid or

realistic answer. In response to fears of premarital sex and pregnancy in the face of post-war teenage independence, educational films arose to teach kids how to control their urges in a dating situation.³⁰

The next video demonstrates expectations for both genders in a post-war American home. Encyclopedia Britannica Films' "A Date with Your Family" was made in 1950.³¹ The video mainly focuses on the men of the family. The teenage son acts as another parent to his younger brother, while the teenage daughter is in the kitchen helping the mother with preparing dinner throughout most of the video. The film takes the viewer through an average evening in the home of the traditional and idealized family. It is worth noting that there are no names used in this film, only placeholder names for their respective roles in the family, mother, dad, daughter, oldest son, and so on. Their names do not matter because this could and should be everyone's family conduct.

The video begins with daughter and older son looking cheerful, "They're looking forward to an important date, dinner at home with the family,"³² the narrator starts. The inherent comparison of a date to a family dinner could be a way of relating to the young audience of the film or to replace one risky behavior, dating, with a more desired and wholesome one, family dinner. The older son does his homework and studies. He cleans up before dinner, and when his little brother runs in dirty, he helps clean him up too. The two brothers share the responsibility of keeping their room neat. They walk down to the dining room with combed hair and scrubbed hands.

When the daughter gets home, she changes from her school clothes into something more festive. The audience is told that "dressing a little makes her feel and consequently look more charming," then shortly after that "the women of this family seem to feel that they owe it to the men of the family to look relaxed and rested and attractive at dinnertime."³³ Mother then realizes that dad will be home soon and dinner has not been made. Mother is "needed in the kitchen" after losing track of time chatting with her daughter.³⁴ The two rush off before dad comes home from a presumed hard day of corporate work. This is the full screen-time the two women get outside of the dining room or kitchen.

Dad arrives home from his white-collar job and joins his sons. They share small talk, with the narrator saying that, "This is the time for pleasant discussion in a thoroughly relaxed mood. They don't take this time of day to spring unpleasant surprises on dad."³⁵ Dad joins his sons for conversation while daughter places a handpicked flower centerpiece on the table, one of her "contributions to the dinner."³⁶ The sons seem "genuinely glad to see" their father "as though they had really missed, being away from him during the day."³⁷ They make small talk while mother and daughter set up for dinner.

Once the meal commences, it is pleasant conversation only. While at the table, the daughter is even used as an example of how not to act at dinner, in this case the overused stereotype of talking too much. While she is talking, the narrator says, "Don't monopolize the conversation and go on and on without stopping. Nothing destroys the charm of a meal more quickly. To say that the rest of the group is bored would be a gross understatement."³⁸ The teenage son is encouraged to compliment the cooking of the mother and daughter because, as the narrator puts it, "makes them want to continue pleasing you."³⁹ The film ends with dessert served and the narrator explaining how special family dinner really is.

The film treats the nuclear family, a unit of married parents and dependent children, as a representation of society as a whole. A family dinner like the one shown in the film could prove that traditional family value still existed. This was a comfort for a society who worried about the collapse of the family unit. Maybe in terms of children, behavior, morality, politics, and sex, was still intact.⁴⁰

The focus of the video on men shows the obvious importance of even the young men in the family. The absence of the women for parts of the video shows the expected domestic, and privatized work of females. It highlights the standards of conformity that were imposed on men and women in the family. During this time, ads for laundry detergent and other household products depict women whose job it seemed to be to pick out the correct product to please their husbands. This is felt in "A Date with Your Family," as the mother's main concern throughout seems to be making sure dinner is sufficient to please her husband. The older brother is shown at length, while the wife and daughter are figuratively and literally pushed into the kitchen.

There was also mass consumption of makeup and other beauty products, buying into the fear that if a husband became unhappy with his wife's appearance or behavior, he could easily leave her.⁴¹ This led to further dissatisfaction and anxiety among women who attempted to meet every element of the perfect housewife ideology. What is being stressed is that appearance and accommodating men are what is important for women. Like the women "owing" it to the father to appear relaxed and attractive and to have food on the table, the pre-dinner father-son interaction leaves the audience with the same conclusion. The father's work is the most important and breadwinning, therefore the rest of the family, not dependent on gender, owes him good behavior, low stress conversation without much depth, and an attractive physical appearance.

A topic which is brought up in this video and is worth taking a brief look at is cooking and the woman's place in the kitchen. One author who researches cookbooks said, "gender ideology in the 1950s was not simply an overwhelming

and omnipresent discourse demanding conformity.”⁴² Instead, the return of women as the food makers reflected the country’s uncertainty concerning political and domestic life. Comfort food was a calling to simpler times. Cookbooks were utilized more as a way to comfort the hesitant population by returning to tradition, and not necessarily to oppress women. Women were pressured into roles primarily as mothers and wives alongside gender roles, not the strict binary roles stereotypically associated with the time, but intricate identities wound together. As Betty Crocker would say, women were “first and foremost, homemakers.” It seemed the “domestic ideal of womanhood” had not changed drastically.⁴³ What is being highlighted in the film is a women’s place in the kitchen and the return of women as food makers.

Coronet Instructional Films released “Are You Ready for Marriage?” in 1950.⁴⁴ This film warned against young, rushed, unsuccessful marriages after the war. It begins with a young couple, Sue and Larry, who have decided to elope after Sue’s parents object to their marriage. The opening shot of the film is actually an extended kiss between the two, unusually long, around twenty-five seconds, and passionate in nature for the films of the time. This is perhaps to catch the attention of and relate to the audience or to drive home the message about containing passion. The kids decide to speak to their local youth minister and counselor Mr. Hall about marriage. Sue and Larry soon realize that there is more to marriage than sexual attraction and chemistry, or as Mr. Hall later refers to it, “boing!”⁴⁵

The conversation begins with Mr. Hall where he asks how the teenagers know they are really in love, “the kind you can get married on... I had a chum in college who had the real thing with eight successive girls.”⁴⁶ The couple know they have the real thing because they have not wanted to date anyone else in the three months they have known each other, and have never fought, though even talking to Mr. Hall the audience can tell they disagree. The counselor echoes this by asking why they never fought, because they had no difference of opinion, or no opinion at all.

Mr. Hall’s questions, referred to as “Cupid’s Checklist” range from having similar backgrounds to are they “real friends” and whether they truly “understand marriage?”⁴⁷ He also uses the Marriage Development board, a board with little dolls linked by bands, to show “psychological distance” and “emotional makeup,” as well as the effects of coming from too different backgrounds. A graph is then revealed illustrating length of engagement as it relates to happiness. The audience would have been, and still is, obligated to contemplate their own relationships while watching.

After Larry proposes, he is asked what the couple will do for finances, he replies, “Well, Sue’s folks were going to pay something to put her in junior college here in town for two years, so we’ll have that.”⁴⁸ Larry is assuming that they will live off of the money that Sue’s parents were giving her to continue her education. Larry’s assumption that Sue will give up her junior college and career plans was not an uncommon one. Betty Friedan addresses this give and take domestic-non-domestic balancing act in her famous book *The Feminine Mystique*, which dealt with the “happy housewife” synonymous with the 1950’s.⁴⁹ Over half of the women in college would drop out before they received their degree, the marriage age was low, and the birth rates were drastically high, showing further the perceived importance of marriage and motherhood. Just like in the film, Sue was convinced that she was ready to give up her education and any non-domestic life to marry Larry and live a simple life. Her education and self-betterment was the tradeoff for marriage, while there was never doubt that Larry would still go to school and become an engineer. Personal and social identities were supposed to be found in being a wife and mother, therefore women were socially pressured into being homemakers, subservient to men. The “feminine mystique,” an image of domestic feminine behavior and appearance popularized in the 1950s was to blame. Marriage, or even dating in this time, was not really a matter of partnership to Friedan. Many post-war Americans found that marriage and family life would require “investment of self.”⁵⁰ It was near impossible, and certainly anxiety inducing to combine desire for a professional life with marriage and a family.⁵¹

The couple in the video has only known each other for three months. This is commentary on the often rushed and subsequently failed marriages that occurred in this time. The suggestion being that the longer a couple know each other, the better chance for happiness and success they have. Throughout the video, the couple find that they do not know too much about the other, and Mr. Hall suggests they should ask themselves some deeper level questions before jumping into marriage.

The film also highlights gender roles. Sue explains in one part that, “...I don’t want a girl. I want a man, like Larry.” Here, heteronormative ideals are seen; there is no option but for Sue to desire a man, like Larry. Next, the stereotype of women not understanding “men’s work” is raised. When Mr. Hall asks if the two talk about Larry’s future career, engineering, Sue says, “No, I don’t understand any of it. I don’t like to hear about it.”⁵² Then, when the group is looking at the Marriage Development Board, Mr. Hall remarks, seemingly out of nowhere, that Larry has his “masculine” way of looking at things, while Sue has her “feminine” way. The quote reinforces the messages being made about the balances of power in marriage. In the end, Sue and Larry are, “engaged to be engaged,” and have come to terms with the fact that they need to know more about each other before taking a big step.⁵³

The film, while wrapped up nicely for the audience to watch, ironically does not take into account what real marital conflicts and situations may arise, instead focusing on knowing your partner and extending the engagement period.

This may be to balance scaring teenagers away from marriage and simply discouraging young and rushed marriages. By doing this, however, the film seems to suggest that these other, more serious issues will simply disappear once the wedding comes. The film, though reassuring, boils down to encouraging submission and blind acceptance of the films' wisdom and societal worries that made the video necessary. The film is reassuring because it reinforces all kinds of gender norms and women's subordination.

Crawley Films released "How Much Affection?" in 1958. It has the audience consider how far a young couple can go physically while still staying within the boundaries of what is socially acceptable.⁵⁴ An overwhelmed Mary scurries into her house and breaks down in tears after a date with Jeff. Mary confesses to her mother that her and Jeff parked on the way home and had almost gotten physical. "Oh, Mother, I don't know what to think," Mary says. "I'm so mixed up!" Her mother tries to comfort her by relating to her, saying, "Your physical urges fight against your reason... In the height of emotion, it's not always easy to think things through."⁵⁵ The mother even offers to help her daughter by talking things over with her so Mary can slow down and think about the potential consequences of her actions.

Later, Jeff is seen apologizing to Mary awkwardly. He takes full responsibility for the occurrences of the previous night, reassuring her that he does not think of her as "that kind of girl."⁵⁶ Mary, however, assures Jeff that it is her responsibility as well. The two are confused and "mixed up" about how their night ended, and they agree they are not ready for sex. Jeff is concerned about Mary being mad that he assumed her sexual promiscuity, and also takes the blame for almost having sex.

While Jeff and Mary attempt to reconcile their relationship, the audience is introduced to a subplot, Eileen and Fred. Eileen is portrayed as a naive girl who could not control her urges like Mary did. Fred and Eileen fell victim to their urges, had sex, Eileen fell pregnant, and the two were rushed into a shotgun wedding and dropping out of school, while their personal aspirations and goals crumbled. A friend of Eileen's sums up the general feeling, saying, "Imagine marrying someone who has to marry you."⁵⁷ Eileen wonders whether her friends will stop to acknowledge her on the street. As the people who make poor decisions in these films often do, Eileen and Fred appear miserable.

The film ends after the main couple, Mary and Jeff, are teased throughout their night for taking it slow physically, as it is clear other couples are not. The couple quietly endures the teasing and goes back to Mary's house for some food and to talk to her parents. A note is left saying that her parents will not be back until late, a seemingly odd note for the mother to leave after discussing sex and temptation with her daughter. They put on music and dance, when the urge comes, Mary recites sandwich ingredients she has in her kitchen. The two kiss, and then comes an echo of Mary's mother's words. They dance closely and the scene fades.

The film emphasizes that it is not wrong or bad to feel affectionate toward an individual that you like, "it's the way happy marriages are built."⁵⁸ The film is not a complete condemnation of affectionate feelings or even some affectionate actions, but it is a warning against further pre-marital sexual acts. When Jeff takes the blame for how the date ends, it suggests that men are more in control of sexual matters, though this video does not suggest that women do not desire sex, as Mary and another character, Eileen, clearly get the urge to have intercourse. The main message of this film was that pre-marital sex can ruin a relationship. However, it is clear from historical data that Americans behaved very differently from these norms.

In 1948 and 1953, University of Indiana's Dr. Alfred Kinsey, shook Americans with his records of expansive premarital sex, homosexual relationships, masturbation, and extramarital sexual affairs amongst the population. It described everything the film "How Much Affection?" feared for American youth. As if to further Kinsey's assertion that Americans have an obsession with sexual behavior, his work made it to bestsellers lists. After the shock of Kinsey's reports died down, new efforts would need to be put in place to better contain sexual promiscuity, and marriage was often seen as a fair option to do just that. Americans had to walk a line between encouraging sex only after marriage, while also not encouraging more rushed, young, and unsuccessful marriages. There was such concern over the sexual behavior of youths that around 1948 there were claims that public health workers were referring to venereal disease as a "teen- age disease."⁵⁹

Eileen wonders if she will even be acknowledged by her friends after she gets pregnant out of wedlock and rushes into marriage. This sad moment in the film only lasts for a few seconds, but reflects a widely experienced phenomena, the isolation of the unwed mother. Even in Eileen's case where she was married quickly after falling pregnant, she would have been susceptible to this discrimination. Unwed mothers were seen as having "violated multiple rules concerning femininity and sexuality, marriage and maternity" and were therefore a danger to the nuclear family unit and the morals and traditions that it represented.⁶⁰ Postwar years are often portrayed as encouraging of a baby boom but young marriage families were actually discouraged.⁶¹ Even the most outspoken advocates of healthy sexual expression, like Dr. Mary Calderone, advised young people to avoid premarital intercourse. Calderone believed that sex education or taught dating etiquette, would be the most effective means of containment. Dating had become part of the social youth culture of the post-war era, with articles and magazines spelling out the dos and don'ts of dating.⁶² Dating films served as a way to remind teens that post-war dating had not escaped the domain of accepted customs.

Teenagers might not listen to their parent's outdated courtship advice, but these films gave adults the opportunity to control the information their children were learning through younger and more relatable characters.⁶³

The film, "Girls Beware," is part of a trilogy and has a partner film "Boys Beware."⁶⁴ It consists of three short stories of young girls getting in over their heads. Policewoman Norma Neufner narrates the stories of the girls who face danger because of their own naivety and desire for independence. The concerns of the film range from babysitting danger, sexual danger, and dating danger. Each story echoes the risk in trusting strangers and not keeping parents informed.

The first story stars Judy who advertises her babysitting services publicly. She then accepts a job, and a car ride, from a male stranger who enlists her service. Judy's mother comes home, cannot find her daughter, panics and calls the police. Judy is eventually found dead; her carelessness and the man's own mental sickness are named at fault. "Judy hadn't done anything wrong; she'd just been careless..." the narrator explains.⁶⁵ The audience is then introduced to Barbara who is also babysitting. When she hears a knock on the door, she politely guides the visitor, a man who wants to use the landline, to a neighbor instead. The narrator praises her for her helpfulness, but also her unwillingness to take any chances with a stranger.⁶⁶ This is placed in contrast to Judy's "failed" attempt at babysitting and avoiding strangers.

The next story is of Sally and Elizabeth who meet two older boys at the movie theater. Elizabeth refuses their offer for a ride, but Sally goes along with the two boys. Elizabeth does not inform either girl's parents of Sally's decision to accept the ride. Sally is later found dazedly wandering the road, presumably after being sexually assaulted by both older boys.⁶⁷

Last is the story of Mary and Robert. Robert is a jobless high school graduate who is an outcast in his own age group. Because of this, he focuses on a younger girl, Mary. Mary likes the attention she gets from dating an older boy. Robert becomes more controlling and the two spend more intimate and secluded time together. Mary winds up "in trouble," the 1950's way of alluding to pregnancy, and must leave school. She is placed in the care of the Juvenile Authority. The audience is not privy to what this means, but it does add an element of dread and emphasize that Mary made a poor decision in dating Robert.⁶⁸ As did Fred and Eileen in "How Much Affection?," Mary and her parents appear miserable.

In the first story, Barbara is praised for her social skills while in a dangerous situation. Social skills were part of being a woman in American society, and were seen as a survival tactic. Women were expected to stay within their gender norms while also protecting themselves. Films like Encyclopedia Britannica Films' "Office Courtesy: Meeting the Public," McGraw Hill Films' "Habit Patterns," and their other film "Body Care and Grooming" were made with the sole aim of guiding women in appearance, social gatherings, hosting, interacting with men and other women, how to act in a work setting, and more.⁶⁹

In the third story, Mary is subjected to at least some form of isolation and discrimination as a pregnant and unwed teenager. She is placed in the care of the Juvenile Authority, whatever this means. Like Eileen in the last film, "How Much Affection?," Mary would have been prone to social isolation, a loss of education and career opportunities, and would have been seen as a morality threat to the idealized American family.⁷⁰ As Fred and Eileen did in "How Much Affection?," Mary and her parents appear miserable. In this story as well as the third is a warning. Girls are told that older boys who take an interest in them may misguide them, may use them. There is probably a reason they are going after young girls instead of their own age group. It is a warning against all "older boys," all men you do not know, not just a reminder to be careful. Mary and Sally trust older boys, one falls pregnant, one is assaulted, and both are suffering the consequences.

In each scenario, the parents are the last to know. Parents in this film appear oddly absent and as a result unable to protect their children from these dangers. Girls must learn not to be too trusting, not to be lured by boys, and not to open the door to strangers. If the parents of these girls were around, they would have been able to prevent these dangers. The film educated kids on what to do when their parents were not around. Adults were able to teach their children how to act without them there, and to keep an adult informed on every aspect of their lives to prevent these scenarios from becoming real. They used young actors and relatable situations to do it.

The theme seems to be not to act too grown up or independent and to keep the adults in your life aware. The girls wanted to be seen as older and mature. An important aspect of influencing the behavior of teenagers was controlling and promoting the acceptable behavior of young girls. The films would instead say that women are naturally better suited for some tasks, and men others.⁷¹ One of Betty Friedan's interviewees would say, "These kids are concerned about dating and sex, how to get along with boys, is it alright to have premarital relations. Maybe a girl is trying to decide her major; she's thinking about a career, and she's also thinking about marriage... She sees she need not feel guilty about being just a housewife."⁷² This quote attests to the fact that these feminine tasks were guidance into a domestic lifestyle. The fact that women could have non-domestic aspirations rarely entered the picture at all. Non-domestic goals, as seen in the film, were potentially dangerous.

The Cold War Era which followed the end of World War II is sometimes described as a dangerous and paranoid era and other times a simpler time of well-behaved youth and social norms. The United States was emerging from a war and its citizens were figuring out how to smoothly transition back into a normal post-war society wrought with gender roles and tamed sexuality. Educational films aimed at American youth, therefore, seemed a good solution. They sought to ensure these fears, especially those on gender and sexuality, would never come to be realities. Because of these deep-rooted concerns over traditional gendered roles and norms, classroom film would have offered relief. Educational films were used to promote desirable “mental hygiene.” They gave Americans a great sense of hope for reform and societal improvement.⁷³ Educational film propagated a Cold War consensus in a time of coerced conformity. They played a significant role in promoting gender norms in hopes that it would create a more conventionally standard society. After the major social and political shifts occurred, these videos were a reminder of simpler times, and an insurance that simpler times would return amongst an otherwise chaotic background.

2. Endnotes

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2. Coronet Instructional Films, “What to do on a Date.”
3. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 6.
4. Kelly Ritter, *Reframing the Subject: Postwar Instructional Film and Class-Conscious Literacies*, (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), 62.
5. Ritter, *Reframing the Subject*, 144.
6. *A Streetcar Named Desire*, directed by Elia Kazan, featuring Vivien Leigh and Marlon Brando (Warner Bros., 1951.); *Some Like It Hot*, directed by Billy Wilder, featuring Marilyn Monroe, Tony Curtis, and Jack Lemmon (United Artists, 1959.); *A Raisin in the Sun*, directed by Daniel Petrie, featuring Sidney Poitier, Claudia McNeil, and Ruby Dee (Columbia Pictures, 1961.)
7. Ritter, *Reframing the Subject*, 63.
8. Coronet Instructional Films, “Communism” (educational video), 1952, <https://archive.org/details/Communis1952>.
9. Coronet Instructional Films, “Communism,” 1:07.
10. Coronet Instructional Films, “Communism,” 1:34.
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15. May, *Homeward Bound*, 91.
16. William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 105, 74.
17. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey*, 80.
18. Smith, *Mental Hygiene*, 100.
19. Smith, *Mental Hygiene*, 100.
20. Smith, *Mental Hygiene*, 89.
21. Smith, *Mental Hygiene*, 94.
22. Encyclopaedia Britannica Films, Inc. “Beginning to Date ” (educational video), 1953, <https://archive.org/details/Beginnin1953>.
23. Encyclopaedia Britannica Films, Inc. “Beginning to Date,” 2:55.
24. Encyclopaedia Britannica Films, Inc. “Beginning to Date,” 00:45.
25. Encyclopaedia Britannica Films, Inc. “Beginning to Date,” 3:50.

26. Encyclopaedia Britannica Films, Inc. "Beginning to Date," 4:40.
27. An example of this includes: Medical Arts Productions. "As Boys Grow." 1957.
<https://archive.org/details/AsBoysGr1957#maincontent>. This a sex education video about young men, which discusses topics like sexual organs, masturbation, sexual dreams, and more. Before this video was released, there were not many sex education films circulating in post-war American society, and the ones that did were often the rigid films with doctors pointing at diagrams and models of reproductive organs. Male sex education videos were not prevalent during this time. Similar videos that did exist but were aimed at young females to explain menstruation and sexual hygiene. The film, provocatively for the time, consists of boys asking questions on topics regarding male sexuality. Medical Arts Productions specialized in the production of sexual education films during the 1950's.
28. Encyclopaedia Britannica Films, Inc. "Beginning to Date," 4:20.
29. Encyclopaedia Britannica Films, Inc. "Beginning to Date," 00:45.
30. May, *Homeward Bound*, 97.
31. Arthur Jones, "A Date with Your Family" (educational video), directed by Edward G. Simme, 1950, accessed October 10, 2017, <https://archive.org/details/DateWith1950>.
32. Jones, "A Date with Your Family," 00:22.
33. Jones, "A Date with Your Family," 1:05; 00:53.
34. Jones, "A Date with Your Family," 1:46.
35. Jones, "A Date with Your Family," 3:52.
36. Jones, "A Date with Your Family," 3:20.
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38. Jones, "A Date with Your Family," 6:56.
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48. Coronet Instructional Films, "Are You Ready for Marriage?," 1:45.
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50. May, *Homeward Bound*, 34.
51. For an example of this, see: May, *Homeward Bound*, 34.
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53. Coronet Instructional Films, "Are You Ready for Marriage?," 15:39.
54. Crawley Films, "How Much Affection?" (educational video), 1958,
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55. Crawley Films, "How Much Affection?," 3:15; 3:55.
56. Crawley Films, "How Much Affection?," 6:43.
57. Crawley Films, "How Much Affection?," 8:43.
58. Crawley Films, "How Much Affection?," 4:25.
59. Littauer, *Bad Girls*, 113-114.
60. Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie*, 22.
61. Smith, *Mental Hygiene*, 49.
62. May, *Homeward Bound*, 97.
63. Smith, *Mental Hygiene*, 47.
64. Sid Davis Productions, "Girls Beware" (educational video), 1961, https://archive.org/details/girls_beware.;
Sid Davis Productions, "Boys Beware" (educational video), 1961, https://archive.org/details/boys_beware.
65. Sid Davis Productions, "Girls Beware," 3:05.
66. Sid Davis Productions, "Girls Beware," 3:26-4:03.
67. Sid Davis Productions, "Girls Beware," 4:04-6:34.
68. Sid Davis Productions, "Girls Beware," 6:35-9:55.

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70. Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie*, 22.
71. Smith, *Mental Hygiene*, 53.
72. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 215.
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