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Word to the Wives

To begin with, even though the 1950s were a decade of conformity to conventional gender roles in several respects, it was also a decade of transition, with growing dissatisfaction with the status quo. Furthermore, conventional gender roles, consumerism, and the Cold War concept of domesticity were all promoted by popular culture and the mainstream media; however, the fact of women's lives did not always portray these values. Besides, marriage and homeownership rates increased in the 1950s, so it's no surprise that several Americans were happy to follow the "American dream". Suburbanization and mass production of cars supported these developments.

Moving on, cars made it possible for Americans living in the suburbs to conveniently travel to work in cities. On top of that, cars influenced not only occupational and accommodation trends, but also the emergence of new sexualities. Also, they gave young couples a private place to enjoy time together away from the prying eyes of their parents and other general public. Subsequently, sex before marriage and birth rates increased. As a result, patterns of sexual activity were shifting, even as the conventional idea of marriage came first (May, 1988). Thus, women's identities as wives and mothers were intensified as a result of this demographic pattern.

Besides that, in the 1950s, gender roles were intrinsically tied to the Cold War. The word "nuclear family" was coined to characterize and promote family unity as an important component of a strong and safe society. According to this viewpoint, a woman performed a critical role in battling the Cold War by maintaining the family unit's strength and stability. It was assumed that staying at home to care for her spouse and kids and declining to seek a job would be the best way for her to do this. Consequently, a connection between conventional gender roles and national security was established (Foner, 2014).

The short film “A Word to the Wives” is also related to this type of demographic pattern. Although the movie showed how two women trick a husband into buying a new kitchen (Lloyd, 1955). As discussed before, it is basically portraying the gender roles of the USA during the 1950s where women chose to live at home to take care of their husbands and children. Additionally, women were encouraged to identify as proud Americans by being smart shoppers, despite the fact that they were historically supposed to do the majority of the household purchasing. When it comes to cooking for himself and his son in their aged kitchen, George (husband in this film) is totally inept. George then realizes that his whole house needs to be replaced, so he makes plans to purchase a new home that includes his wife’s dream kitchen.

Apart from that, this film showed that the women had the liberty to do household shopping as well as they can do jobs along with taking care of their children. They were significantly presented on TV shows and other mass media. Thus, during the 1950s, women played a substantial role in upbringing their kids and taking care of their husbands as shown in the picture by Norman Rockwell, “The Four Freedoms”. One part of the picture shows Freedom from Want, in which three generations gather around the dining table to partake in a mid-afternoon meal. On top of that, the gleaming bird, introduced by the matriarch of the family, is the highlight of the meal, which also includes a covered casserole dish, a plate of celery, cranberry sauce, and a bowl of fruit (Rockwell, 1943). Despite the appetizing array, the people sitting at the table seem to marvel at one another, rejoicing in the affection and connectedness that characterizes the space. There is no want, as the title of the work suggests (Rockwell, 1943).

In conclusion, I wanted to portray that the early Cold War period was characterized by polarising gender politics following WW II. For the sake of their kids and the country, there was a common concept of female supremacy in the home. Working women faced a

national security danger. Finally, bearing children appeared to be a matter of national security, as maintaining population levels meant ensuring that there would be a younger generation to protect the country if the Soviet Union attacked.

References

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