



Summary of Gender Norms in 1950s-60s

Scarred by war, mainstream society in Britain and America desired a return to traditional values and gender roles. Much of the independence available to women during the war was abandoned in this urge to return to the 'way things were'. The Cold War, fears of nuclear weapons and the fragmenting of the British (and other) Empires contributed to a sense of unease, and a yearning for stability.

In America, a post-war economic boom led to a thriving consumer culture, where identity (including gender identity) became linked to material goods. Suburbs - vast estates of spacious, modern housing - were built outside of cities. Women were encouraged to stay in these 'perfect homes', filled with electrical appliances. The aspiration was to become a 'domestic goddess': a patient mother, amazing cook and beautiful, attentive wife. Meanwhile, men were expected to dedicate themselves to work away from the home.

Children who reached adolescence during the 1950s felt these values were old-fashioned, and - encouraged by emerging advertising and pop music industries - teenagers began to rebel. The family home and later the workplace became a 'battleground' between generations, and between traditional and more progressive ideas.

In the 1960s, as the liberal young reached adulthood, American society went through some radical changes. The anti-Vietnam War protests and fight for civil rights challenged the values of the older generation, including gender norms. The 'Second Wave' of feminists attacked traditional ideas about femininity, and the (male) power structures that constructed them. This movement called for actual, legal changes to give women more power and autonomy. The Women's Liberation movement also encouraged women to reclaim their sexuality, and magazines like *Cosmopolitan* capitalised on this sexual empowerment.

That said, by the end of the 60s, many women and men continued to have lifestyles that conformed to traditional gender norms. Because of this, mainstream culture often portrayed the sexual revolution as an assault on American family life.



Key dates:

1951 - *I Love Lucy* first female-led sitcom

1952 - Queen Elizabeth II crowned

1956 - First female judge in UK

1959 - ITV broadcast *South*, the first ever gay drama in UK

1961 - Birth control pill is introduced in Britain and America

1963 - *Doctor Who* first broadcast

1963 - Betty Friedan publishes *The Feminine Mystique*, identifying women's dissatisfaction with domestic life

1965 - Mary Quant designs the first mini-skirt; *Cosmopolitan* first published in USA

1966 - Friedan starts the National Organisation for Women, campaigning for legal rights and female autonomy

1965-69 - Numerous court cases in US rule against gender discrimination in workplaces from heavy industry to government

1966 - Indira Gandhi becomes Prime Minister of India

1967 - Sexual Offences Act decriminalises gay sex between consenting male (21+) adults

1969 - First manned mission to the Moon



Can you think of any other key events that affected gender norms:

5 Minute Task (with 5-7 min extrapolation) - Quickfire Historical Research

Note: this could be a starter activity that is repeated over a number of lessons, each time students sharing their findings to build a 'bigger picture'.

Divide the following keywords and find out what they mean then fill in the chart below.

McCarthy 'Witch Hunts' Rosa Parks Korean War Sputnik 'Baby Boom'

Cuban Missile Crisis Assassination of JFK Civil Rights Act Space Race

Chicago Riots 'Flower Power' Sexual Revolution Motown Woodstock

Would you classify these as historical (h), social and cultural (sc), economic (e) or political (p) events?

Event / Keyword	Date	How might this affect audiences' values and beliefs?



10 Minute Task (plus 5-7 mins plenary/extrapolation) - Cultural Contexts

Note: this would be good for a series of home or independent learning tasks

Look at some of these other media products from the time. What audience pleasures do they offer? Why do you think they were popular at this time? What values about gender do they share with your set products?



Advertising: Folgers Coffee <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cnjjkgIO3Ck>

Compare with:



Audience pleasures?

Why was this popular at the time (link to historical context)?

How is gender being represented?



Film: 'Beautiful Girl' from *Singin' In The Rain* (Gene Kelly and Stanley Dolen, 1952)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E06HZ7AosrA>

Compare to Trailer for *Barbarella* (Roger Vadim, 1968)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Xo6FaypcpY>

Audience pleasures?

Why was this popular at the time (link to historical context)?

How is gender being represented?

Pop music: 'Wives and Lovers' by Jack Jones (1962)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZ7WT02wFOk>

'R.E.S.P.E.C.T' by Aretha Franklin (1967)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FOUqQt3Kg0>

Audience pleasures?

Why was this popular at the time (link to historical context)?

How is gender being represented?



Television: Opening sequence from *The Donna Reed Show* (1958-66)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wnlC7j-xrUY>

Compare to 'Equal Pay' - clip from *All In The Family* (1969-79)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0rhuKmC0Cw>

Audience pleasures?

Why was this popular at the time (link to historical context)?

How is gender being represented?

Comparison to Set Products

In what ways are the representations of men and women similar to those in your set products?

In what ways are they different?

How might the contexts have influenced these representations?