Summary of Gender Norms in 1970s-80s

In the early 70s, the 'Women's Liberation' movement coined the phrase 'The Personal Is Political' - this reflected the need for women to seek equality in their relationships, reproductive rights, and sexuality as much as in legal, political and cultural spheres. Legislation in the US and UK gave women new rights in education and the workplace, and the percentage of women in the USA in full-time employment rose from 30% in 1970, to 40% in 1980 then to 50% by 1990. Some have said this was an economic necessity: the consumer boom that began in the 60s both created many more jobs, but also created aspirational lifestyles that couldn't be sustained with just a single full-time salary.

Mainstream culture, whilst accepting and reflecting women's growing power in society, also continued to see these changes as threatening, and gave birth to the stereotype of the 'man-hating' feminist. Men, in real interviews - and in sitcoms, soaps and movies - confessed to feeling under attack: patriarchal society was accused of being responsible for every injustice against women, yet *individual* men often felt they had done little to oppress anyone. Their privileged positions in society were suddenly being criticised, and men felt caught between tradition and the new expectations placed on them.

It seemed – certainly in the pages of Cosmopolitan and modern girl's magazines – that women were empowering themselves with a new set of expectations of men: men who would be sensitive, who would take equal role in domestic responsibilities, who could provide satisfying sex and encourage his partner to pursue a successful career. High-profile celebrities such as John Lennon displayed a more peaceful, gentle form of masculinity. However, as much as films like *Tootsie*, questioned ideas of masculinity, much popular culture resorted to more violent and muscular imagery (e.g. action films of Schwarzenegger and Stallone) to reassert male power.

The obsession with material success that has typified the 1980s led to traditional masculine values often being championed by women themselves. The 'power-dressing' business women in *Dynasty* and *Dallas* revelled in their masculine traits and equal status, even dominance over, men. Many feminists criticised this as 'feminist machismo' - women rejecting all notions femininity in attempt to be men's equals. Some have accused Margaret Thatcher, UK Prime Minister from 1979-1990 as personifying this attitude.

Similar to Reagan in the US, Thatcher (who famously claimed she "owed nothing to Women's Lib") managed to represent contradictory political elements. She was morally conservative, encouraging traditional 'family values' in the face of a soaring divorce rate). But she was also economically liberal – encouraging everyone (including women) to go to work, and to be as successful as they could be.

It was also during this period that Thatcher's Tory government began to dismantle the UK's traditional industries (coal, steel, car and ship building). These had been seen as a 'male domain'. The work environment began to shift to offices and the emerging IT industry, which women were often better qualified for than men. Widespread unemployment meant that many men were denied the role of 'breadwinner', and began to question their role in society. (*The Full Monty* is a good exploration of this period)

One ironic side-effect of Thatcher-Reagan culture was the move of gay culture towards the mainstream. There are two main causes for this. Firstly, the emerging AIDS pandemic - and the threat of it spreading through the heterosexual community - forced a neo-conservative West to deal explicitly with LGBT sexuality. Whilst this raised awareness, it also reinforced homophobic views of gay culture as dangerous, threatening and deviant.

Nonetheless, homosexuality began to be accepted as an integral part of society – and, the capitalist boom aided this. During the late 80s, media industries discovered the notion of the 'Pink Pound': that many gay men occupied well-paid jobs, with no children. This gave them a largely disposable income, with their main outlay being lifestyle products. Though the Thatcherite culture may have morally disapproved of homosexuality, the high status of the consumer in society meant that the gay consumer was encouraged. The popular media exploited this: TV, magazine, film and pop music actively targeted the gay audience (making lots of money), while liberals applauded the new tolerance such pop culture seemed to be announcing.

Key dates:

1970 - Equal Pay Act makes it illegal to pay women differently for the same job (but ignores childcare and housework as 'second shift' jobs that many women do in addition to paid work).

1970 - First Gay Pride parade held in New York

1970 - UK press backlash as feminist protesters disrupt the Miss World competition in London

1971 - *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millett promotes the term 'patriarchy' and suggests men are as much victims as women.

1971 - Betty Friedan's *Ms.* magazine first published

1973 - Women allowed to join the London Stock Exchange

1973 - Billie Jean King beats Bobby Riggs in the 'Battle of the Sexes' tennis match

1973 - Ross vs Wade court case affirms a woman's right to terminate an early pregnancy (effectively making abortion legal in the US)

1975 - Sexual Discrimination Act

1980 - John Lennon assassinated

1981 - AIDS virus identified

1981 - Start of all-woman Greenham Common anti-nuclear missile protest

1983 - Sally Ride becomes first American woman in space (20 years after cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova)

1984 - State of Mississippi (finally) grants women the vote!

Can you think of 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.

Watergate Scandal	Space Shuttle	'Test-tube Baby'	Three Mile Island
End of Vietnam War	Oil Crisis	Home Computers	Ethiopian Famine	Chernobyl
Collapse of USSR	Falklands War	Miners' Strike	Cable/Satellite TV	MTV

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: 1970s TV ads - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbUCW6LO-WE
Barbie doll ads from 1980s - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFFhSI_A-PY

Audience pleasures - aspirational lifestyles?

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

How is gender being represented?

Film: Trailer for *Nine To Five* (Colin Higgins, 1980) - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aOYDV3IIWFQ
Trailer for *Tootsie* (Sydney Pollack, 1982) - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VdWOP7E_Z9E
Trailer for *The Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984) - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k64P4l2Wmeg

Audience pleasures?

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

How is gender being represented?

Pop music: 'I Am A Woman' by Helen Reddy (1971) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rptW7zOPX2E
'Material Girl' by Madonna (1985) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6p-lDYPR2P8
'Alphabet Street' by Prince (1988) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vP1kZLGG5gw

Audience pleasures?

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

How is gender being represented?

Television: Opening to *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1972) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2AO2LSddPs
'Alexis Takes Control' from *Dynasty* (1984) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWjDbNnMQuQ&t=2s
'Barry and Dot' from *Eastender*s (1987) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7EV6vc1QA2Q

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?