

## How far have the lives of women in society changed from 1939-1975

**Aim:** To acquire a chronological understanding of how far the lives and roles of women in society have changed in the middle of 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the contributing factors.



## What impact did WW2 have on women in the years 1945-51?

Much like in WWI, when war was declared, women flooded the workplace filling the gaps left by the men off fighting the Nazis. The government wasted no time recruiting women following the massive impact they had in WWI, there was little doubt this time.

Women adopted many of the same roles, serving in the armed forces, plumbing, working the land (Women's Land Army), industry and even espionage!

There were still the same old problems though, the women still had families to raise and feed as well as work and they STILL weren't paid the same as men!

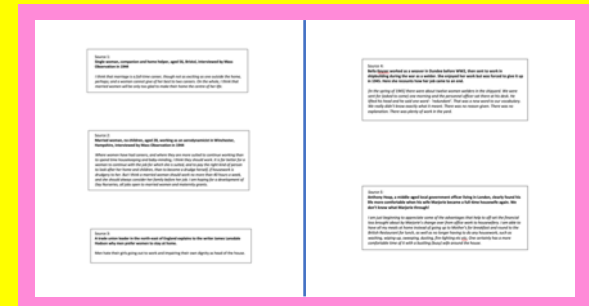


Princess Elizabeth  
volunteering during WW2

Similarly, following WW2, lots of women gave up their jobs when the men returned, but many women wanted to continue working and looking after the family home. The government expected the women to return to their homes, most employers agreed, not all women though!

Annotate around your sources ON THE SHEETS and then stick them carefully on two clean pages in your book, you're looking to comment on the following...

1. What do you think the message of the source is?
2. Consider also what the source is (interview etc)
3. Who is saying / making it ?
4. When was it made or said?
5. How does your observations of 1 – 4 affect how useful / reliable the sources are?



6. Read sources 1 & 2, what different attitudes to married women working outside the home do these two women show?
7. Read source 3, 4 and 5, what attitudes to women working outside the home are shown by the men in these sources?

## Britain following WW2:

Copy this list of examples of how attitudes were starting to change towards women, identify if you think they show CHANGE or CONTINUITY

- Lots of women went back to their old domestic and hotel work
- Some women got jobs in shops or as clerical office workers
- Women who had contributed to the war were offered training courses to retrain for peacetime work by the government
- More women joined Trade Unions
- The ban on married women teaching was lifted
- Medical schools were encouraged to admit women
- Scholarships were made available for women wanting a higher education in physics and chemistry, electrical engineering and aeronautical construction
- School meals were available for all children making it easier for married women to continue working
- 22% of married women had jobs, compared to 10% before the war
- Many believed that a working woman shamed the husband
- There was still no equal pay



### Keyword:

Discrimination - the unfair treatment of different groups of people especially on the grounds of age, race, gender or sexuality

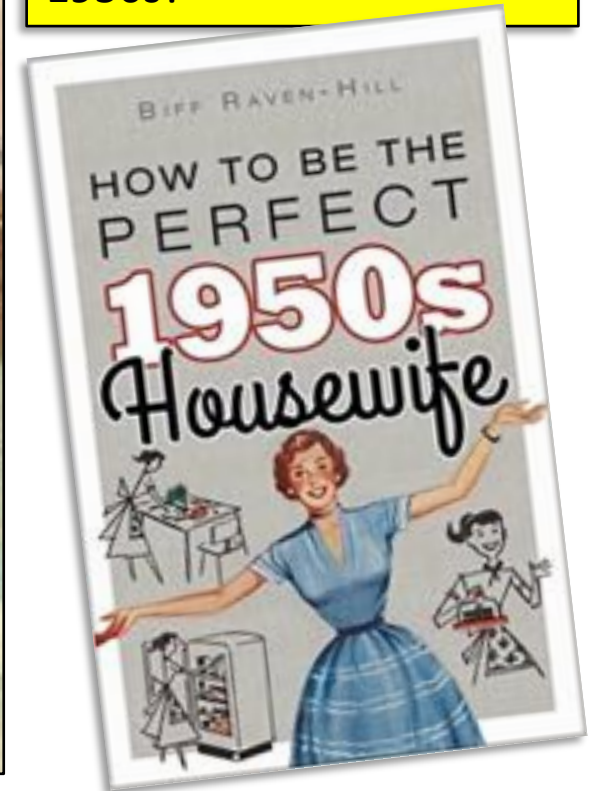


# Life in the 1950s

The main image to be seen in the 1950s would be that of 'womanhood'. Even in schools, the story book's characters like 'Janet and John' showed the mother doing chores around the house with the daughter, while the father and son did 'manly' things like working on the car and building bonfires. Father went to work, while mum stayed home. Mother was always prettily dressed, father was appreciative of home cooking and a clean house, and the children playing happily.



How do these images reinforce the stereotypical view of the 1950s?





No wonder you women buy more **TIDE** than any other washday product!

**TIDE'S GOT WHAT WOMEN WANT!**

NO SOAP-NO OTHER "SUIDS"-NO OTHER WASHING PRODUCT KNOWN-WILL GET YOUR WASH AS **CLEAN** AS **TIDE**!



ONLY **TIDE** DOES ALL THREE!

1. World's **CLEANEST** wash!  
Tide will get your wash clean-should that ever come washing product-THAT'S RIGHT! Tide, because Tide will get your wash the cleanest more than any other washing product!
2. World's **WASHEST** wash!  
Tide is known to be the best wash. Tide will get your clothes, shoes, towels, curtains, etc. whiter than any other wash. Tide will keep your clothes looking like new!
3. Actually **DISINFECTS** clothes!  
Tide is known to be the best wash. Tide will get your clothes, shoes, towels, curtains, etc. whiter than any other wash. Tide will keep your clothes looking like new!



**TIDE** GETS CLOTHES CLEANER THAN ANY OTHER WASHDAY PRODUCT YOU CAN BUY!



## How happy was the house wife?



The 1950s saw an introduction of all sorts of technological advances making the role of the housewife a lot easier. Gadgets ranging from dusters, toasters, cookers, fridges, vacuum cleaners and washing machines were in most homes by the end of the 1950s.

Advertising started giving warnings to women to make them choose their products. For example 'a child was saved from bullying because his mother washed with Surf' and 'a husband who was tempted to cheat, happily returned home each night after his wife used Zal disinfectant'.

The images we've seen of women being shown as happy, dutiful and pretty at all times with clean homes were intended to persuade women that was was a good lifestyle.

Go around the country, go to the industrial towns, go to the farms and you will see a state of prosperity such as we have never had in my lifetime – nor, indeed in the history of this country. Indeed, let us be frank about it - most of our people have never had it so good.



Conservative Prime Minister  
Harold Macmillan, 1957

Do you agree with this statement?

Complete this table with examples of how women's lives have changed for the better or examples showing some negatives

Good	Bad



**Life in the  
1960s**



The 1960's is known as the 'swinging sixties' with 'sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll' playing a huge role in British society. Being a young female in the sixties was certainly a dramatic change from the obedient women of the last 50 years. These young girls became known as 'dolly-birds' and as the decade went on, the skirts got shorter! Discrimination was still a significant problem however...



Was it really all good, and had women really “never had it so good?”...

Copy this table onto a clean page, you'll be adding laws and details as we go through the topic so don't rule off the bottom until we've written about the law or event

Law / event	Details

The battle for equal pay would continue into the 1960s. Women now made up 1/3 of the total workforce of the UK. Most employers (and men) argued that most women didn't have careers or work long term as they would get married and look after their families, so didn't deserve equal pay.



There was much protest in the 1960s, eventually leading to the Equal Pay Act of 1970...

- 1968 – 40 women from the Ford factory in Dagenham went on strike for 3 weeks, eventually getting 92% of the rate paid to men
- A rally in 1969, attended by 30,000 people put pressure on the government
- Britain had to sign the 'Treaty of Rome' to join the EU which said there must be equal pay for equal work.
- Labour's Barbara Castle introduced the **Equal Pay Act** of 1970

Add this information to your table then rule off for the next law

Law	Details
Equal Pay Act 1970	Came into effect in 1975, giving businesses 5 years to prepare for the higher costs. Equal pay for equal work.

## What was the Women's Lib Movement?

The protesting didn't stop there, the 1960s had also seen the rise of the Women's Lib Movement. Lib stands for liberation, meaning freedom. This wasn't just one group with similar beliefs, rather it was a collection of protests and rallies all over the world with one main aim...

What do you think the women wanted freedom from? **Discrimination against women**

Make a list of as many things women might have felt discriminated against by?

- Their pay compared to men (although we're making progress on that...)
- Marriage, divorce & childcare
- Better jobs
- Attitudes towards women and their role at home
- **A woman's right to choose**

By the end of the 1960s, there were 70 'women's lib' groups in Britain. They would really begin their work in the 1970s...

## A woman's right to choose?

The most intense and angry public debates in the 1960s were not really about equal pay and childcare. They were about a **woman's right to choose...**

- Whether to stay in a marriage
- Whether she could have an abortion
- To take control of her own sexual choices



## The Pill:



The pill was introduced and was seen as a reliable contraceptive to be used by women so they could take control over when, or even if, they had children. The first pill was prescribed by British doctors in January 1961.

Add the pill info to your table

Why was this so controversial (think about attitudes and expectations of women's roles)

By the summer of 1962, 150,000 women were taking the pill, rising to 480,000 in 1964. But by 1969, fewer than 20% of women were taking the pill. **Why?**

Access to the pill was very difficult, again more difficult based on individual circumstances.

**Is this fair? Does this affect a woman's right to choose?**

## The Pill:



Add the Family Planning Act of 1967 to your table

- In the early 1960s, GPs would only prescribe the Pill to married women and married couples
- There was no where for a single woman to go until The Brook clinics opened in 1964, giving some access but more so advice to girls as young as 16.
- Family Planning Act of 1967, following pressure from the Women's Lib, encouraged more clinics to be open by the 'family planning association'

It was the late 1960s and 70's where the Pill became widely available to both single and married women and really began impacting the choices that were available.

Can you think of any possible problems with this advance?



*"I was at university in 1968 when campus health centres were handing out the Pill like sweets. We slept around and talked a lot to each other bout the evolution we were part of... it became hard to say no"*

A women interviewed on BBC Radio in 1970

## The Abortion Act 1967



Add the Abortion Act of 1967 to your table

### **Is this fair? Does this affect a woman's right to choose?**

Many women found themselves with an unwanted pregnancy and resorted to illegal abortion. Abortion was illegal and both the pregnant woman and the person helping her could be jailed.

It is estimated that the years before 1967 around 100,000 backstreet abortions and self induced miscarriages took place each year. Between 1958-60 82 women had died, thousands more left hospitalised with permanent damage. 1966, the year before the Abortion Act, 49 women died due to bungled back street abortions. It was time to change...

The Act, introduced by Liberal MP David Steel became law in 1967 stating abortion was possible up to 28<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy (later reduced to 24<sup>th</sup> week) provided two doctors were in agreement that it was medically or psychologically necessary. There was major opposition, and still is today, mainly from the Catholic Church but others as well.

## The Divorce Reform Act 1969

What can you remember about divorce and marriage from this study so far?

Before 1969, only the 'innocent party' could sue for divorce. Remember a wife could if her husband had deserted or she could prove he had been cruel to her. Divorce was usually financially and socially crippling for the woman.

In 1969, the Divorce Reform Act got rid of the idea of 'innocence', and said the only grounds needed for divorce were 'irretrievable breakdown of the marriage'. It also led to recognising all of the work the wife had done in the home should be taking into account in the divorce 'settlement'.

Can you think of any possible problems with this advance?

In 1965, there had been only 3 divorces in every 1000 marriages, by 1990, just 20 years later, the annual divorces were only slightly less than the actual annual marriages!





1970s



The 1970s continued much the same way as the 60s, the Women's Lib movement grew and more and more people, including celebrities got on board. Women continued taking advantage of their growing and well deserved freedoms.

It was also clear that there was still plenty to fight for...

### The Sex Discrimination Act 1975

The main goal here was to eliminate discrimination based on a persons sex (gender), to promote equality of opportunity and ensure the 'Equal Pay Act of 1970' was being upheld. Men could also use this act if they felt they were being discriminated against based on their sex.

# Miss World 1970



What do you think is going on here?

# Miss World 1970

In November 1970, the Miss World contest held in London was disrupted by protesters from the 'Women's Lib movement'. They threw flour and smoke bombs and shouted slogans. This protest didn't stop 'Miss World' but it did bring attention to the movement.





How can Fairy Liquid show us how much progress has been made?

Watch this collection of Fairy Liquid adverts from the 1960s – 1990s, is there any evidence in them to suggest attitudes have changed in reality not just by law? Are there any observations you want to make?

Read through your worksheet and complete the task with as much detail as possible, you will need this later...

HOW THOUGHT CHANGES THAT TAKES PLACE FOR WOMEN BY 1975

A great deal of change had taken place in the lives of women by 1975 as you will see from these conversations between mothers and their daughters in 1975. Change had come – and a great deal of very important changes had been made that affected the lives of women in the years to 1975. But change, as you have seen from these conversations, didn't always make women's lives easier and often presented women with very difficult choices that their mothers didn't have to make.

**Speech Bubbles:**

- "I ran the home and looked after the children and your father went out and earned the money. We knew what was expected."
- "But I want a career as well as marriage and children. Why can't I have both? My husband does."
- "In my day we were very afraid of getting pregnant before we were married, or of having babies at the wrong time after we were married."
- "Reliable contraception and easy abortion make it much easier to say 'no'. But more choices to make we do have choices to make and those aren't always easy ones."
- "Men should have the important managerial jobs. Who would take orders from a woman? I wouldn't find it comfortable telling a man what to do."
- "I am as capable of running a company as any man! And now the law says I can't be discriminated against just because I am a woman."
- "We never expected to earn what the men earned, even for doing the same work. You see, they had families to provide for, and we were just earning a bit of extra money."
- "What you do with what you earn isn't the point. The point is that if you do the same work you should get the same money."
- "We stayed at home and brought up our children ourselves. We didn't hand them over to strangers."
- "If I stayed at home with the kids I would miss out on my career prospects. What mothers need is reliable childcare. But why should this just be the mother's problem? What about the father's? Maybe nothing has changed!"

**TASK:** For each of these aspects of women's lives: Housework, Childcare, Pregnancy, Work Opportunities and earnings, award a score of 1-5 (1 no change – 5 lots of change) then justify your reasoning for your score. Maybe draw up a table like the one below to help you.

	Score	Justification of your score:
Housework		
Childcare		
Pregnancy		
Work opportunities		
Earnings		

**Key points:**

- Legislation such as the Sex Discrimination Act and the Divorce Act had improved the legal status of women.
- More women were in paid employment than in 1939 which gave them greater economic freedom but most still earned less than men
- Women had more control over whether and when to have babies due to effective contraception and the Abortion Act.

Also, make sure your laws table is complete.

Law	Details
Equal Pay Act 1970	Came into effect in 1975, giving businesses 5 years to prepare for the higher costs. Equal pay for equal work.

# How did women's lives change?

