

Suggested responses: *Wild, Wild Women*

1. At the beginning of the episode, the women demand a bonus for their work. When they are refused, they threaten strike action. In what ways is this reflective of the time at which it was broadcast?

This episode was broadcast in 1969, the year after the successful strike by the female sewing machinists at the Ford factory in Dagenham. The strikers gained popular support and resulted in the women winning a pay deal of over 90% of men's salaries for the same work. The Equal Pay Act was passed in 1970, a year after the episode aired.

2. Mr Harcourt (the boss) is presented as the villain throughout. He rants 'imagine, women striking!' and calls female enfranchisement 'the impossible dream'. What is the effect and intention of this?

By mocking the idea of women voting and striking and responding aggressively to their request, Mr Harcourt is presented as the villain. His aggressive response may have mirrored attitudes towards the female strikers in 1968, implying that this attitude is outdated and belongs back in 1902, when the programme was set. Therefore, the episode pokes fun at these old-fashioned attitudes, demonstrating that female rights have largely progressed since then.

3. Using your knowledge of the twentieth century, in what ways did female roles change between 1902 (when the programme was set) and 1969 (when it was produced)?

Women were enfranchised and their representation grew in Parliament. Women made gains in the workplace during the First World War and afterwards, although limited educational opportunities and the marriage bar still prevented many women from progressing in their chosen professions in the 1960s. Social change in the 1960s saw greater personal and sexual freedoms for women (e.g. the pill). The movement towards equal pay demonstrated progression towards equality.

4. Identify and summarise the two examples of the sexualisation of the female workers.

Mr Harcourt grabs Millie's bottom when she is reaching to get something from a shelf.

Millie offers to kiss Mr Harcourt's assistant and offers him her body in exchange for him keeping her secret.

5. Describe how the women behave in each case. What does this suggest about female empowerment?

Millie challenges Mr Harcourt after he grabs her, suggesting that she is empowered to take control of her own body and confront outdated male actions. However, one way in which she does this is by offering herself to him, which makes him retreat. Similarly, Millie offers sexual acts to Harcourt's assistant to keep him from sharing her secret. These responses suggest that Millie is aware of how to sexualise herself in order to gain the upper hand, implying that female empowerment can be rooted in misogynistic ideas.

6. What does this episode suggest about the way in which male attitudes towards women changed between 1902 (when the programme was set) and 1969 (when it was produced)?

The programme suggests that some males still believed that women should be subservient towards men, both in terms of their working lives and in their gender roles. It suggests that growing female assertiveness and sexual empowerment could be viewed as both threatening and alluring to men, and that women were increasingly aware of this in the 1960s.

7. Describe two aspects of the episode that encourage the idea of women being 'wild'. Based on your knowledge of 1960s culture and society, do you think that this was an accurate adjective? Explain your reasoning.

The women are presented as wild for demanding higher wages and encouraging their sexualisation. Although contemporaries to the period may have viewed these actions as 'wild' and not in keeping with the traditional role of women, it reflects the changing attitudes of the period.

8. To discuss in class: How does the fact that this is a BBC sitcom affect its usefulness to you in analysing 1960s society?

The purpose of the sitcom is to reflect contemporary issues, such as the changing role of women in society, through the lens of comedy. It emphasises the fact that attitudes like those perpetuated by Mr Harcourt were outdated by making him the butt of the joke, and it champions the women, indicating that female empowerment is a positive force. It is unclear, purely from watching the episode, whether or not these views were mirrored in wider society. However, the fact that this was the subject matter of a popular sitcom suggests that these are views that the BBC felt were significant and in need of exploration.