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The Flapper Era of the 1920’s

The flapper women of the 1920’s redefined femininity for the twentieth-century. The flapper girls were not seen as the traditional women in the 1920’s by society’s norms and by the Gibson Girls yet they inspired every middle class women and the fashion industry. Flapper girls has their own unique attitudes, styles, and perspectives for themselves; they has their own definition of who they were and what they did. In 1920, it was the first time women wore skirts and dresses above their knees, wore cosmetics’ and wore their hair up. These flapper girls created and inspired a style revolution and redefined femininity for the twentieth-century American women.

In the 1920’s there were two ideal types of women: flapper and the Gibson girl. The Gibson girl was wifely, old-fashioned and was the girl who married your grandfather. The flapper girl was a whole new concept. Flapper girls were boyish and single. According to Kenneth A. Yellis in *Some Thoughts on the Flapper,* “The term “flapper” originated in England as a description of girls of the awkward age,”[[1]](#footnote-1) but the flapper weren’t awkward at all! Their characteristics were intense, energized and exciting. The flapper girls had a different perspective; their behavior and their dressing was what made the flappers change in lifestyle for an American women. The flappers’ hair was mostly bobbed up, tweezed her eyebrows, used cosmetics, and wore dresses that were tight, straight, and short. Flappers’ usually tried to wear as little as possible. In the book Prosperity’s Child*: Some Thoughts on the Flapper*, author Yellis said “women were now competing with men in the business world to an unprecedented degree.”[[2]](#footnote-2) At that time the fashion industry skyrocketed because of the flapper girls. Clothing became lighter, more flexible for athletic women. The clothing was simple, inexpensive and highly in demand. Women had more business casual outfits that they wore within offices. The drastic change in clothing and behavior made men sex mad for the 1920’s women. Modern twentieth-century middle class women were creating styles of fashion that will evolve throughout the century. They were beginning to express their sexual independence by their style of dress.

The flappers had their own definition of who they were. A poem written by Dorothy Parker called *“Observation”* describes what the flappers girls lived by and how they were defined as. The poem defined flappers as being playful and not what grandma used to be. They were a new generation of women. The flappers were exciting and their manners caused scenes. They never cared or gave a damn about what others said and rumored about. Parker wrote, “Her speed is great, but her control is something else again.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Parkers’ quote describes how the flapper girls created a fast moving life for themselves, but their control was mostly uncertain. They danced all night with men and had a spotlight where ever they went. In Dorothy Parkers’ poem she said “I’m pretty sure to make my mark.”[[4]](#footnote-4) This verse from Dorothy’s poem tells us how every flapper girl lived to make some kind of drastic change within herself and broke the norms within her society. Flapper girls had head turn for them mostly by men. These girls made their name in history and their styles to be influenced onto women living in the twentieth-century.

This rising of the flapper era of the 1920s was one of many civilizations to influence fashion and women. It was the first time the world had seen female knees. In the article *The Overwhelming Psychology of the Feminine Knee*, it said “the flapper is revealing herself as a sensation of angles, edges, and protuberances.”[[5]](#footnote-5) This quote from the flapper magazine provides a description of what society thought of the flappers themselves, their style of dress and everything that they showed off for the first time in the 1920s. The flapper girls had the gentle legs, pretty toes and shaped ankles that attracted mainly men. This article also has a picture of a flapper girl wearing and nicely draped dress and she pulled up her dress above her knees to show off those amazing legs. Her dress was usually loose and straight with silk stockings. The showing off of the knees became an enjoyed spectacle for men of the century. There was a small consequence flappers had to pay; that is the male excitement, but they these women still kept their freedom. This article talked about how once you see one of the flapper’s knees you will be shocked, but late after a few hundred knees you’ll get use to them. The flapper had become the new gossip of America. Everyone had rumored about them and how many women had the intentions to follow the flapper style. Their style inspired the dress style called the Robe de style. These flapper girls became truly modern and gave a new style of femininity for the 1920s middle class woman.

The new flapper style of the 1920s created little too drastic improvements within women’s appearances’. Women started wearing more cosmetics, pampered themselves more, and changed their style of clothing. The flapper styles also led to something called the “new women.” These women pushed boundaries like: gender roles, having sexual and economic freedom, and became their own independent thinkers. In the newspaper article titled *“A Flappers Appeal to Parents,”* author Ellen Welles Page said “there are many degrees of flappers. There’s the semi-flapper: the flapper; the super flapper.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Ellen’s words give us an open perspective of how women would adapt only certain flapper styles and behaviors. Ellen’s article summarizes how she herself had worn skirts, bobbed her hair up, and adored to dance but, this didn’t make her any less of a flapper herself. The article included how the old generation such as parents and grandparents judged these flapper girls and blamed the effects of the war on the flapper period. The old generations never understood that the flapper era was made as an escape from the 1920s norm and a boost of confidence for the American women. Being a flapper took an enormous amount of energy to constantly be living a fast paced life and being spontaneous but, most of the parents couldn’t process the flapper lifestyle at all. Flapper girls broke away from the norms and tested the waters and their faith. Ellen said “you must help us; give us confidence-not distrust.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Ellen’s statement explains how parents should’ve given these young women confidence, given them a helping hand instead they distrusted them and criticized them. Flapper girls were those young girls who had a new sense of style, had their own independency, didn’t fear change, lived by their own thoughts and created a new perception of femininity for the twentieth-century.

The femininity of middle class women was not only expressed by clothing it was also expressed by bathing suits. A picture represents this exactly this concept. The picture took place in Washington D.C. in 1922. In the picture there are two middle aged women on the beach with swim caps on and were wearing a bathing suit that was above their knees. Also, the picture showed a beach “cop” named Bill Norton who was using a tape measure to determine the distance between the women’s knee and the bottom of her bathing suit on the beach. In the picture there is a description of the image. It said “bathing suits at the Washington beach must not be over six inches above the knee.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Going off what the image said that meant that women in the 1920s couldn’t even wear proper bathing suits. Women had to be measured? They had to keep their bathing suits six inches and under? That’s nonsense how people in the 1920s tried to give women every rule they could make up. Women used their bathing suits to express their femininity as well. They wore shorter length bathing suits that were above their knees just like their dresses. These women wanted to express their flapper style in any way they could. In my opinion, I believe men were just afraid of women raising their skirts and dresses and wearing less clothing because they wouldn’t know how to control their sexual excitements. These women were boosting their own confidence with how they dress. They wanted to change for themselves and not for society and what others thought. Their short skirts, dresses, and bathing suits changed the way people saw femininity in the 1920s into the twentieth century.

Society was not the only ones that had a hard time swallowing the flapper style and women breaking the norms. In the courts, judges had a hard time helping parents that brought their complaints about their daughters’ to the court. A newspaper article by Doris Blake was written to gives us a perspective of what the judges had thought of these flapper women. The newspaper article is named *“Judge gives Code for Working Girls and Their Parents.”* In this article it explains a situation about a daughter named Angelina and how she went out with her girls a lot and acted like a flapper. The mother; Mrs. Jennie de Stefano took her complaint about Angelina’s’ acts to the Yonkers court. At the court Judge Boote listened to the mother’s complaint. Mrs. Jennie de Stefano said “she goes out with other girls, she does not come at 9:30 every night like I tell her to.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Mrs. Jennie Stefano stated this to let the judge know that Angelina is not behaving like a proper women and is not taking any responsibility for herself. Angelina loved the flapper life, the dancing, and wasted her salary on luxuries. Angelina’s mother was furious that she was wasting her money on herself instead of helping her financially. After Judge Boote heard all this, he had come to a decision and said “the judicial code for young women is subject to abuse from flappers of another specie than Angelina.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Boote was trying to keep the mother happy as well as the daughter. Boote gave this code for Angelina so that she wouldn’t go out and behave like a flapper or become one. This newspaper article lets us know that a judge would also be opposed to the flapper life and style. Who knew even a judge had the same feelings as the rest of society towards the flapper girls. Although, the flappers were redefining femininity across America there had always been a part of society that went against the flapper ways.

In the short clip titled Our Dancing daughters’*“Diana the Dangerous,”* A young flapper girl named Diana goes to a party at a Yacht club with her man. At the Yacht club Diana and her man drank and danced freely. While they danced a man named Ben Blaine caught her gaze then Diana’s man went over to Ben to talk with him. Diana noticed how much Ben staring at her so she asked him to dance. As they danced Diana said “here for long Mr. Blaine?”[[11]](#footnote-11) Then Blaine said “I wasn’t-but I am.”[[12]](#footnote-12) Diana was flirting with Blaine and Blaine flirted back obviously. She was a basic flirt in the clip. Diana was the flapper that had femininity through her dress, her make-up, and her flirtatious attitude. Through this clip it showed how the flapper girls were full of energy from left to right and were wanted by all men. Diana like many other flapper girls were fashionable and brought fun into the 1920’s. These girls came into the 1920s and used their fashion, flirtatious attitudes, and glamor to bring femininity for the twentieth century.

In conclusion, Flapper women were a new definition for an American woman in the 1920s’. These flapper women had given a new perspective of femininity for the twentieth century. Overall, the flapper era created new fashions, had different behaviors, and changed the way middle class women looked at themselves. This era revolutionized the style for the upcoming twentieth century women.

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Research paper Reflection

In writing my research paper I’ve learned how to add footnotes for the first time and how to use Chicago style for my paper. I have learned the importance of using footnotes and references. In having to write this paper I thought how much effort it takes and all the putting together it took. I thought about how it was my first time writing a history research paper and how it would be when it was all written out. I thought this assignment is something any student could learn from and use it in another class that requires Chicago style format. I enjoyed writing about my own topic and I learned even more about my topic than I thought I knew. I want to thank you for making us to all the research a month in advance and the bibliography as well.

1. Kenneth A. Yellis, *Some Thoughts on the Flapper(*1969), pg. 49 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Dorothy Parker, *Poems by Dorothy Parker,* (New York, 1926), 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Flapper Magazine, *OldMagazineArticles,* (1922). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ellen Welles Page, “*A Flapper’s Appeal to Parents*,” *Flappers Cried out to be Understood,* 1922, pg. 607. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Library of Congress Website, 1922. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Blake, Doris, *“Judge Gives Code for Working Girls and Their Parents,”* Feb 27, 1924, pg. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Our Dancing Daughters’-Diana the Dangerous*, (1928, Turner Classic,dvd). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)