Flapper Fashion In the Context of Cultural Changes of America in the 1920s

Soo Hyun Park
Graduate Center, City University of New York

Recommended Citation

This Thesis is brought to you by CUNY Academic Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of CUNY Academic Works. For more information, please contact deposit@gc.cuny.edu.
FLAPPER FASHION

IN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURAL CHANGES OF AMERICA IN THE 1920S

BY

SOOHYUN PARK

A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University New York

2014
This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

Approved By

Thesis Advisor _______________________________ Date ________________
Professor Eugenia Paulicelli

Executive Officer _______________________________ Date ________________
Professor Matthew K. Gold

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

FLAPPER FASHION

IN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURAL CHANGES OF AMERICA IN THE 1920S

by

Soohyun Park

Thesis Advisor: Professor Eugenia Paulicelli

This study aimed to analyze the key characteristics of flapper fashion, which shaped the American fashion scene in the 1920s, and to review how this trend reflected the society at that time, which was changing fast in terms of the society, economy, and culture. Towards this end, comprehensive scanning of flapper-related images found in a variety of media at the time was done, and it was revealed that flapper fashion indeed reflected the prominent changes in women’s role in the society in compliance with the early-20th-century modernity, which was a far cry from the traditions, while at the same time differentiating the images of new women as opposed to those found in the 19th-century conservative women from the Victorian Age.
# Table of Contents

I. Preface ........................................................................................................................................... 1

II. Main Text

1. Theoretical background ............................................................................................................... 3

2. Preconditions and background of the rise of flapper fashion
   a. Cultural differences between the pre-flapper and flapper eras and their respective
      fashion trends ......................................................................................................................... 5
   b. American fashion trends in the 1920s .................................................................................... 18

3. Analysis of the ideology and images of flapper fashion ............................................................. 22

4. Discussion on the flappers and their social status ..................................................................... 31

III. Conclusions ................................................................................................................................ 51

List of Illustrations .......................................................................................................................... 56

Bibliography ..................................................................................................................................... 64
1. Preface

The 1920s is marked by the rapid adoption of a consumer society thanks to the rise of the young postwar generation and the subsequent economic boom. The material affluence then triggered a sea of change across diverse aspects of the society and culture, ushering in the explosion of individualism, Epicureanism, and materialism. In particular, the rise of women and the young generation played a key role, along with the development of mass media, in revealing the tension lurking in the conflict between morality and thriftiness as represented by the Victorian Age and modernity as a traditional value system. In this paper, a background of the rise of flapper fashion that defined the 1920s’ American society is provided, and the cultural significance of such fashion trend is analyzed. Towards these ends, Chapter 2 discusses the preconditions for the formation of flapper fashion, Chapter 3 analyzes the images of flapper fashion found in the mass media, and Chapter 4 analyzes flapper fashion in the context of modernism, and discusses its significance. Modernism had a long reach with regard to various aspects of the arts in the 1920s, with fashion not being an exception. The analysis of flapper fashion, therefore, will deepen the understanding of the American society on the cusp of a full-fledged consumption economy and the subsequent social changes that transpired.

The flappers were a new breed of young women in the middle-income bracket who preferred the flapper look, characterized by bobbed hair, a low waistline, and short skirts.\footnote{Originated from flap, which signifies the fluttering and flapping of wild ducks’ wings or of the hems of skirts. Flapper was a slang word describing a young woman who would get romantically involved with a man for fun (American Heritage). At the turn of the 20th century, the word’s meaning changed, coming to signify young, modern women who would wear short skirts and bobbed hair and would be armed with new ideas and norms (Longman Dictionary). The word has since been used to signify modern American women as well as their fashion trends, attitudes, or propensities.} The flappers were seen as brash due to their liberal ideas, which created big ripples in the society for
flouting the social norms by smoking, drinking, and dancing. The postwar materialism and consumer capitalism, two essential elements of the flapper culture, along with the Jazz Age, paved the way for the flappers to emerge as modern girls who would play the key role in leading the rise of the popular culture. Despite the fact that the society then was still dominated by the people who would stick to the conservative values inherited from the Victorian Age, more women began to enroll in the universities beginning in the 1890s, and became active in the society. The rise of the flapper generation is one of the key evidences of the changing status of women in the American society, who came to assume leadership as a new cultural force.

The way the various media outlets represented the flappers to the general audience varied as well. The newspapers and magazines’ coverage of the flappers focused on the latter’s freewheeling ideas and fashion, and the advertisers also capitalized on the independent and progressive perception of the flappers to stimulate the desire for consumption. The flappers, as depicted in fiction novels and films, were a far cry from the conventional view of women as they were portrayed as the embodiment of materialism and of indulgence in free and dynamic social activities. Many of the heroines in the novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald were portrayed as fun-seeking but lovely flappers who would pursue materialistic pleasures, and they were also impersonated by the heroines of popular movies in the 1920s (fig.1).

For all the manifestations of the fact that the flappers were the symbol of the 1920s’ America, no clear definition or categorization of them has ever been made. The flappers first signified fashionable young women with open minds, but they later became just a part of a more comprehensive cultural phenomenon beginning in the 1920s. Who, then, were the flappers, and how did they come to obtain cultural clout? Also, what is the relationship between their sudden
social and cultural prominence in the 1920s and the shifting status of women in the society? Fashion not only reflects the zeitgeist of a given time but also embodies the ideal role model of an era as well as the ideas and artistic trends then. Given that the flappers strove to innovate by ditching the conventions in the wake of modernism, the flapper look can be understood as an extension of the avant-garde and experimental artistic movement of the 1920s. By examining the elements of modernism in flapper fashion, which reflected the zeitgeist of the era then, as well as its cultural implications, one can have a glimpse of the changing American society at that time.

II. Main Text

1. **Theoretical background**

Paul Poiret and Art Deco fashion cannot be excluded from the discussion of the 20th-century fashion. Nancy Troy discussed in *Couture Culture* how Poiret, a leader of commercial practices in the French fashion industry, reconciled the tension between originality and reproduction in the framework of the art historical issues of the period. Steel, on the other hand, analyzed the role that eroticism played in female fashion; she showed how women’s fashion got involved in the body language of women and changed it from the Victorian era through the Jazz Age. In the meantime, Sagert considered the flappers an American subculture in the discussion of the flapper women, who were frequently depicted in the literary works and movies in such period.

---


Based on her observations, the flappers were the “first modern liberated women” who exercised their voting rights freely while enjoying urban life and leisure activities.4

Additionally, a number of studies have been conducted on flapper fashion in the context of the artistic trends of the period. Whereas the studies on fashion and art have traditionally focused on the artistic trends, Mackrell analyzed how dress shapes, fabric adornments, and accessories or jewelry reflected the artistic movement of the period by closely examining the relationship between fashion and the artistic works from the Renaissance era. In particular, Mackrell singled out the dresses influenced by Italian futurism and Coco Chanel’s dresses as the biggest beneficiary of the Art Deco movement while arguing that Art Nouveau was the first movement that tried to realize a modern international style based on decoration.5 Lussier also studied the Art Deco fashion trend from the design perspective; while mentioning Europe’s fashion trends along with the Avant-Garde movement that started in the early 1900s, Lussier argued that the 1920s can be characterized by the unique collaborations between the fashion designers who expressed their respective skills and visions and the Avant-Garde artists.6 Herald examined the images of flapper fashion represented in the commercial posters and advertisements of the 1920s in his study of the 20th-century fashion analyzed by 10-year

intervals\textsuperscript{7} while McEvoy also studied the fashion trends in the 1920s and 1930s, including men’s haute couture.\textsuperscript{8}

Majority of the perspectives on flapper fashion, which were gleaned from the social background of the period, considered the flappers a group of people who were independent and truthful to their personal desires as women in the context of the women’s liberation movement. It was held that the ideas of the flappers and their sex role freed from the bounds of homes had a direct impact on the full-fledged development of the American women’s liberation movement in the 1960s. Meanwhile, the researchers on dress history approach flapper fashion as the origin of modern fashion. The 1920s is a very important era in the study of fashion; most studies on fashion deal with the Art Deco trend that spawned modernism, which pursued the aesthetic of straight lines and other fashion trends influenced by jazz.

2. Preconditions and background of the rise of flapper fashion

   a. Cultural differences between the pre-flapper and flapper eras and their respective fashion trends

Changes in the Concept of Ideal Femininity

Cultural norms on the appropriate status and desirable behavior of women had always been present throughout the history of humanity. Such expectations and requirements gave birth

\textsuperscript{7} Herald, Jacqueline. Fashions of a Decade: The 1920s, Chelsea House. 2006.

\textsuperscript{8} McEvoy, Anne. Costume and Fashion Source Books: The 1920s and 1930s, Chelsea House. 2009.
to a different idea of the representative femininity in each era. It was as early as in the 1920s when the flappers began to emerge as the image of the young women representing the time. In the 19th century, women were required to follow the Victorian ideal of women since the colonial era, who were moral, reverent, and submissive. It was during the modernization movement in the late 19th century that women began to change and express themselves not only in terms of their dresses and appearances but also in terms of their behavior. It was also at that time when women started to pursue an independent personality freed from economic and social bounds. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, well before the 1920s, which is represented by the flappers and the Jazz Age, Gibson Girl was considered to have represented femininity. The image of Gibson Girl first appeared in 1890, when Charles Dana Gibson’s paintings were published in *Life* magazine. The image had since become popular among the Americans, becoming the image representing the 1890s.9 Gibson captured the changing image of women in her paintings by drawing a series of women for *Life* magazine who wore free and mannish jackets instead of tight dresses and corsets (fig.2). Gibson Girl emerged as the most desirable model of a woman: an independent, attractive, and ambitious woman with an active lifestyle.

The 1920s was also the period when the American culture jumped to the next level, and the postwar industrial development triggered an unprecedented economic boom. The economic boom had a great impact on the people’s lifestyle, and the changes in the people’s lifestyle were again accompanied by cultural changes. The introduction of new technology and the mass production system made the vision of a popular-culture society a reality, and the contemporary

---

cultural scene became more colorful and richer with liberal ideas.\textsuperscript{10} When seen from the perspective that the images of women in a society are the outcomes of the society’s moral and cultural production, the rapid changes in the American society can be said to have already foretold the emergence of a new concept of femininity, as embodied by the flappers. If one wishes to determine the cause of the rise of the flappers in the 1920s from the historical perspective, one has to compare the Victorian and Gibson Girl eras. In this paper, it was intended to determine the impact of the social and economic changes that transpired in the late 19th century on the birth of the flappers.

The cultural standards of the Victorian era can be summed up as follows: (1) thrift and saving; (2) emphasis on the ideal of the community; and (3) clear separation of the private and public domains for men and women. The leading elites of the society back then were the middle- and upper-class people devoted to commerce or other specialized professions who defined the culture of their time. In accordance with such criteria, there was a clear and unequivocal distinction between the two sexes, with the men mainly responsible for social activities and the women mainly homemakers. They were required to play different roles depending on their area of responsibility, and the educated men and women had to be separated. The Victorian women were taught to keep their respective families free from seduction outside their homes as patrons of morality, and to protect their husbands and children from the lure of debaucheries. Accordingly, the ideal Victorian woman was one who was submissive, healthy, and clean, and

whose sexual desire was under stringent control.\textsuperscript{11} As the ultimate goal of social and individual activities was generally to build a virtuous and industrious nation, the individual desires of people were relatively ignored.

In the 1890s, Gibson Girl emerged as an ideal model representing the contemporary femininity. The image of Gibson Girl was that of a well-dressed, hospitable, independent, and intelligent female university student.\textsuperscript{12} Unlike the Victorian girls, who wore long dresses, Gibson Girl wore shirts or simple blouses. On one hand, Gibson Girls put great importance on the traditional values, such as marriage and love, but on the other hand, they retained the aspect of active women enjoying various sports, such as tennis and golf. Also, the image of Gibson Girl as a university student reflects the changing face of femininity that the society projected on women. The number of female university students was about 11,000 in 1870, when higher education was allowed for women, but the number had ballooned to 283,000 by 1890.\textsuperscript{13} Women learned to take pleasure in the joy of life through a variety of activities while living in dorms far from their homes, as they satisfied their desire for learning and developed their ability to think. Their much simpler attire compared to that in the Victorian era, and their diverse sports activities and socialization through university education, meant that women began to escape the suppression of the family-oriented, submissive, and traditional image of women inherited from the Victorian era beginning in the 1890s.

\textsuperscript{11} Steel. \textit{Ibid.} 1985, p. 224.
\textsuperscript{13} Sinclair. \textit{Ibid.} p. 214.
The scope of women’s social activities gradually expanded through various means, including acquisition of legal rights, provision of learning, and expansion of job opportunities. First, there was a growing move to amend the discriminatory provisions found in the law in terms of women’s legal rights. For instance, women were given the legal right to inherit or earn income. As late as in the 1890s, women were just a part of their husbands’ property in many states, and they themselves could not claim any legal right over their own income, children, or property. With the amendment of the related laws, however, women earned the right to participate in the nurturing of their children even when divorced from their husbands, and their acquisition of property rights motivated them to participate in social activities more actively.

Second, women were given opportunities to acquire institutional education beginning in the 1890s. Until as late as in the 19th century, no woman was given an opportunity to participate in institutional education. Even upper-class women with plenty of leaning opportunities were educated by private tutors. Schools accommodated only male students and were open only to a limited number of female students during the summer semesters. Beginning in the late 19th century, however, higher education was opened to women, and the graduation rates of female students in high schools began to surpass those of male students by 1890. Moreover, starting with the opening of Vassar in 1861, Wellesley in 1870, and Smith College in 1871, many women’s colleges were established. Finally, women’s job opportunities had been limited, with a relatively lower wage level compared to their male counterparts, but a growing number of workplaces began to accept female workers as it became a norm for women to have a job.14

The Victorian standards of femininity gradually weakened in the 1890s, but the images of Gibson Girl still followed the traditional ideal of women to a certain extent, not completely freed from marriage and the home. In the period between 1900 and 1920, the previous moral order of the Americans centered on the family and the local community began to weaken, and the Americans started to enjoy the benefits of industrial advancement. The invention of a series of home appliances, such as the vacuum cleaner and the refrigerator, beginning in the early 1900s liberated women from domestic chores. The women in the urban areas were exposed more to the benefits of the mechanization of housework compared to those in the rural areas. Freed from domestic chores, the women were able to use the time that they had saved from housework for themselves, with much more time to kill. This again undermined the role model of the traditional mothers while weakening the traditional family relations based on the family.

The most notable among the changes then was that women started to have a more open attitude towards sex. This trend was more pronounced among the young urban women in the middle-income bracket. Such trends mainly developed in two different directions. First, it laid the platform for a more open social discussion of sex. The previous inhibition with regard to the discussion of sexual topics started to gradually disappear while a more open discussion of sex began to appear in the public domain. By 1909, when Sigmund Freud visited America, his theory...
had been known throughout the country, and popular songs and magazines with scandalous titles had been selling well\(^\text{16}\) in the market.

Second, women started to emulate the key properties of masculinity. The semi-masculine appearance and behavior had grown popular as a new ideal of women while the younger generation of women started to challenge what was once the exclusive domain of their male counterparts. The most desirable images sought after by those women who had craved for the same rights enjoyed by their male siblings could be found in the mass media. The fact that Louise Brooks showed up in the mass media often as a tomboy wearing a jacket and pants while retaining her quintessential femininity is a clear evidence of the dramatic change in what was expected from an ideal woman (fig. 3). Beginning in the 1910s, some audacious styles, such as wearing make-up and short skirts as well as drinking and smoking, the key characteristics of the flappers, already started to be seen. As a growing number of women started to escape the bounds of home and to mingle with men in workplaces and schools, the Victorian ideal of women began to be increasingly considered obsolescent.

Some tangible resistance to the oppressive view of sex began to materialize in 1910. A new perspective on marriage, in which women were no longer dependent on men economically, had rapidly spread among the middle-class people living in the urban areas. For instance, the heroine of *Sister Carrie*, a popular novel by Theodore Dreiser in the 1910s, aspires to succeed as an actress while living in a city. As her lover wishes her to stay home instead of getting involved in social activities, they eventually break up. Other novels that dealt with the independence and

divorce of women were popular among the readers, which signified that the change in the traditional idea of marriage had already spread across the society. While the economic independence of women would not necessarily threaten marriage itself as a social institution, the erstwhile view of marriage that centered on the masculine view had certainly been weakened.

The 1920s can be characterized by an explosive outpouring of such changes that the Americans had witnessed for the past 10 years throughout their society. As discussed above, the change in the traditional view of sex and moral values had been under way for a while. What was considered the flapper culture in the 1920s had already been under way for a long time before this era. What makes the 1920s the focus of academic interest is that what was once considered a deviation from the acceptable behavior had now firmly become acceptable behavior in the contemporary cultural scene.

Not until the dawn of the 1920s had the flappers been the focus of social discourse. The term flappers first appeared in Britain in the 18th century, and it had been commonly used in America well before the 1920s. According to columnist Dorothy Dix, the flappers before World War I were defined as “girls from the socially privileged class filled with energy, attractiveness, and liveliness.” The prewar perception of the flappers was not very clearly defined, but with the dawn of the 1920s, the flappers were redefined with the resulting consensus on what constituted the typical fashion of the flappers. New Republic published an article in 1922 in which the writer
argued that “the flappers provide vivid life patterns of the young contemporary generation and
created a brand new vanity fair.”

The rapid rise of the young postwar generation and of the consumption society revealed
the tension lurking between modernity and the traditional values represented by morality and
thriftiness. World War I marked the turning point for the lifestyle and way of thinking of the
Americans. The war shook the traditional concept of morality from the roots up. The fear of war
was no different in intensity regardless of whether one belongs to the older or young generation,
but for most young people who had to fight in the battlefield, the fear of injury and death was
beyond words. They started to pursue pleasure in an attempt to calm down the tension stemming
from their fear of war.

It was much easier for young people to get access to sex during the war. Whereas the
girls in the Victorian era had to wait until some right young man approached them for a proposal
instead of going out for a date, the postwar generation acted in a completely different manner.
With plenty of young people either injured or killed in action, young girls decided to enjoy their
life rather than simply wait for Mr. Right. The Survey magazine published a report in 1925 by a
journalist who had participated in a conference titled “Petting and the Campus.” According to
the report, petting was an established part of the sex culture in the campus, and the students were
freely enjoying it. On top of the liberal sex culture, drinking and smoking had also become
symbols of the young culture, and jazz cocktail parties and dancing sessions provided a place for

meeting young men and women. The Epicureanism and changed morality of the young
generation formed over the course of the postwar restoration set off intergenerational conflicts.
The war created deep-seated skepticism of the older generation, gradually loosening the grip on
the traditional values of the society.

*Consumption Culture and the Jazz Age*

The economic prosperity in the 1920s was an important turning point for the American
society from the standpoint of cultural history. The government’s pro-business policy boosted the
American industries, which had already seen dramatic growth thanks to the explosion of the
demand during the war, laying the foundation for economic revival in the future. The per-capita
gross national production, which was US$480 back in 1900, surpassed the US$681 point in the
1920s, and the wage level of the workers was highest throughout the American history. The
America was changing from a production-centric to a consumption-centric society, one that
praises the virtue of sale on credit and bottomless consumption.

As such, the development of a consumption culture defined the very nature of the
American economy, creating a sentiment throughout the society that consumption is a virtue as it
prevents the accumulation of mass-produced goods. The Victorian values so dominant
throughout the 19th century, which put emphasis on thrift and saving, were now considered
obsolescent ideas while the new lifestyle based on mass production and mass consumption was
fast rising as the new virtue conducive to economic development. The old norms harking back to

---

the Victorian era could find no place in the consumption-centric society that pursued pleasures.\textsuperscript{21} The so-called “consumption culture” had become a keyword for understanding the American society in the 1920s.

The group that embraced the consumption culture most enthusiastically and enjoyed it to its fullest was that of the young middle-class women living in urban areas. The employment of women in this period can be attributed to the increase of professional jobs such as lawyers and bankers compared to the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, and women’s employment was directly linked with the women’s reaction to the cool tangibility of a salary.\textsuperscript{22} The employment of young women meant more than just their liberation from domestic chores or the development of a new area in social activities. With consumption fast becoming a prime motivation behind economic activities, women needed money, and getting a job was an obvious way to amass financial resources.

The 1920s is also called the “Jazz Age.” The first person who mentioned the Jazz Age was Scott Fitzgerald, who proclaimed in 1925 that “this is the Age of Jazz.”\textsuperscript{23} As he described the telltale aspects of the culture at the time in his books, including the confusion and values of the young generation, he was considered the spokesperson of the Jazz Age or the symbol of the 1920s’ America by literary critics. The 1920s’ America was also called other names, such as “The Roaring Twenties,” “The Gay Twenties,” “The Reckless Twenties,” and “The Aspirin Age.” Scott Fitzgerald defined the Jazz Age as a decade that “extended from the suppression of the riots

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Leuchtenburg, \textit{Ibid}, p. 145.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Brown, Dorothy. \textit{Setting a Course: American Women in the 1920s}. Boston: Twayne. 1987, p. 130.
\end{itemize}
on May Day 1919 to the crash of the stock market in 1929. “Jazz,” as declared by Scott Fitzgerald, signifies the changing social atmosphere in the 1920s, and the people’s attitude. The period was also one of the most tumultuous eras in American history, strewn with an unprecedented scale of revolution and great awakening.

The Jazz Age was also the age of machines. Many writers, artists, architects, and film industry insiders were unanimous in their shared interest in the mechanization of the modern society as a result of the advancement of industrial technology. The futurists believed that the civilization based on machines and technology would free humanity. More mathematical and geometric principles that corresponded with the new machine age formed the basis of the Purism movement. The mechanical esthetics was expressed in visual art via diverse methods in many different areas. In particular, the abstract trends in the early-20th-century paintings and sculptures represented mainly in various geometric forms reflected an attitude that saw rationalism and functionalism, the fundamental principles of technology, as symbols of modern beauty. The far-reaching influence of mechanical esthetics was also reflected in the dances and dancewear of the young generation. In the end, humanity’s obsession with machines gave a sense of speed in most areas, which again signified an entrance into a new society. As Bevis Hillier said, it can be concluded from the observation that the artists at the time were obsessed with speed and fragmentation that Art Deco, the decorative art trend of the era, was influenced by the

24 “…The Jazz Age is over. If Mark Sullivan is going on, you might tell him I claim credit for naming it and that it extended from the suppression of the riots on May Day 1919 to the crash of the stock market in 1929, almost exactly one decade.” Excerpted from Turbull, Andrew (Ed.). The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons. 1963, p. 225.

25 Fillippo Tommaso Marinetti announced Futurist Manifesto in 1909, ushering in the Futurism movement that aimed to liberate everything from the past traditions. The Futurism movement was warmly embraced by artists, particularly by those working with paintings and sculptures
emerging living environment that was given birth to by the mechanical development of modern cities.\textsuperscript{26}

The cultural form defining this period was popular culture, which was discovered throughout various media, including newspapers, magazines, movies, advertisements, and radio. Miniaturized tabloids such as \textit{Reader's Digest} (1922), \textit{Time} (1925), and \textit{The New Yorker} (1925) were also established in this period. In particular, the development of American films after World War I was the most prominent phenomenon in this period. By 1922, almost all cities had movie theaters selling over 40 million tickets every week.\textsuperscript{27} Movie going was adopted as a key cultural activity of the period, a medium through which people could experience trending styles and fashions.

The significance of the development of mass media is that it made it possible for everyone to get exposed to shared cultural experiences regardless of their social class by conveying the same information simultaneously. People were finally able to greet the advent of the mass society, and popular trends were being recreated ad infinitum by the mass media.

As such, the 1920s’ America was characterized by the prominent development of mass media and of the consumption culture, triggering an explosive manifestation of the transformation of values that had been under way before the Victorian era. The advancement of the mechanical civilization along with the rise of Modernism was significant in that it was rooted

\begin{flushright}

\textsuperscript{27} Sklar, ibid. p.8.
\end{flushright}
in escape from traditions and realism and was formed spontaneously in America. Although the modern art in Europe had an impact on America to a certain extent, the Americans still strove to cut their cultural dependence on Europe by denying any fixed value inherited from the past. All told, the 1920s or the so-called “Jazz Age” was the period when America’s indigenous culture started to form its own identity on the foundation of the mechanical civilization and mass culture. It was thus only natural in such historical context that the flappers appeared in the American society.

b. American fashion trends in the 1920s

According to Banner, the historians of European fashion relied on the class structure or on their social positions when they studied clothes. That was because Britain and France both had a very rigorous class structure in their cramped territory\(^{28}\), which again shows how conservative those societies were and how tenaciously they demanded distinction between different classes. On the other hand, America was just an emulator of their fashion as late as in the early 20\(^{th}\) century, from their perspective, and American fashion indeed followed the European fashion modes. Such trends had been pronounced until the 1890s, when Gibson Girl created an entirely new fashion type and perfected it as the new popular criterion of beauty by challenging the fashion leadership of Europe.\(^{29}\) It was not common in the Jazz Age for an American designer’s name to be either printed on labels or advertised.


The American fashion world, however, started to build its own foundation in fashion through various changes, just as those that transpired during the Jazz Age, a period of change and challenge. First of all, the preferred fashion style changed after the war, with the formal trends being phased out and casual and loose fashion being ushered in. Only a limited number of people bought their dresses from the haute couture in Paris; in general, people simply looked for convenient and practical attire. The American fashion industry, which was following the European haute couture, started to look for something more characteristic and uniquely American. *Fortune* magazine reported on the trend, declaring that “the famous couture was sunken.”\(^30\) A fashion style that is simpler, natural, and easy to copy began to be highlighted, with a more promising potential for success in the market. As the American customers were an important target for the European haute couture, it was more important for them to design for the Americans than to focus on honing their finer artistic senses.\(^31\)

On the other hand, the American designers were required to acquire skills for promoting their fashion to their customers while at the same time applying their copying skills effectively. Whereas the off-the-rack clothing industry was still being enjoyed only by the European bourgeoisie, it was growing at a breakneck pace in the U.S. In the wake of World War I, many European couture houses, including those in France, had to scale back their activities to participate in the war, and the American fashion industry joined forces with *Vogue* magazine to show off its home-grown designer collections by American designers, ushering in the development of full-fledged fashion activities. Their fashion shows scored rave reactions with

\(^{30}\) Milbank, p. 72.

\(^{31}\) **Ibid.** p. 72.
successful results, thanks to the support of the upper-class patronesses who helped the American talents bloom.\textsuperscript{32} Therefore \textit{Vogue, Harper’s Bazaar}, and other home-grown fashion magazines provided a series of competitive platforms to many American designers from which they could compete with their European counterparts.

\textit{Vogue} magazine, for instance, compared the Little Black Dress by Coco Chanel and the mass-produced Ford Model T in its October 1, 1926 issue, stressing that Chanel’s attire would be a great template for mass-producing clothes in America.\textsuperscript{33} The article may have aimed to stress the functionality of Chanel’s design, but it is a good example of a work that shows how deeply America was interested in the mass production of modern off-the-rack clothing. One of the key fashion trends in the American Jazz Age was daywear with straight lines 8-10 inches up from the ground. The key attributes of the flapper fashion in America started in earnest in 1924 and culminated in 1928. Shorter skirts were soon adopted as a symbol of the new American feminine aesthetic and came to rule the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Lively American girls with a boyish build, long legs, and straight trunk lines are said to be working in the day and dancing overnight, which was considered the ideal contemporary woman of the period.\textsuperscript{34}

With the ever-shortening skirts, the weights and materials of women’s dresses changed greatly. Petticoats were nowhere to be seen, and it became an increasingly popular trend among American women to wear only a single layer of dress. With the invention of beautiful, lightweight, and easy-to-wear fabrics, new standards of feminine beauty were established. “Art

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Ibid.} p. 121.


\textsuperscript{34} Milbank, p. 70.
(artificial)” silk was first developed in the late 19th century as military supply, but it began to be used widely for commercial purposes after World War I (fig.4). Acetate and viscose rayon were also widely used in making dresses due to their sparkle. The biggest discovery of all in the middle of this fever to mass-produce fabrics was the invention of skin-color stockings, which gave the impression of women’s exposed naked legs. Thanks to their low prices, working girls could afford to buy skin-colored stockings rather than wear the traditional black stockings.\textsuperscript{35}

With the application of such new types of fabric on the production of clothing, the emphasis was now on simplicity and lightness rather than on the rich maturity or elegance of the dresses for young women, to represent the ideal of postwar American femininity, with such images being imposed on everything, from fashion to daily behavior. The American women were not supposed to be mindful of their attire but were expected to wear evening dresses as if they were sportswear so that they would feel and look lively and fresh.

The 1920s was also the period when the two domains of fashion and sports intersected with each other. With the end of the war, people started to care more about their health and spent more time engaging in leisure activities, which again resulted in the development of outdoor sports such as swimming, golf, and tennis as well as in the popularity of sun tanning. \textit{Vogue} magazine started to showcase Riviera styles such as Palm Beach, beach trousers, and backless bathing suits. The Riviera style was pioneered by the haute couture houses in Paris, but other boutiques also jumped on the trend with the expansion of the outdoor wear market. In America, the West Coast rose as the center of outdoor fashion in the late 1920s.\textsuperscript{36} With the rising

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{35} Herald, Jacqueline. \textit{Ibid}, p. 48.
\item \textsuperscript{36} \textit{Ibid}, p. 54.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
popularity of sports in the 1920s, casual wear was increasingly worn by ordinary people. Coco Chanel commercialized daywear and sportswear by designing a casual suit made of jersey, giving people the joy of uninhibited activities and slim bodylines. The printed fabrics with neat and simple casual styles also helped the women feel part of the sporty set.\textsuperscript{37} There were other street wear influenced by yachting, skiing, riding, golf, and other sports activities (fig.5).

3. **Analysis of the ideology and images of flapper fashion**

The flappers as modern girls played a leading role in pioneering the new social atmosphere in the Jazz Age. Initially confined to the late teens or early twenties, the behavior and fashion of the flappers soon spread across the American society, eventually coming to represent all the young women, firmly establishing itself as a culture code transcending generations. The flappers were one of the most active groups that were sensitive to the changes in the American society in the early 1900s, and with the development of mass media, they were frequently featured in newspapers and magazines as well as in movies and novels.

Scott Fitzgerald highlighted the life of the flappers and the young middle-class Americans in *This Side of Paradise*, his first full-length novel. Rosalind, the heroine of the novel, was a “lovely, extravagant, but young” flapper who enjoyed smoking and drinking and other deviant behaviors. Anita Loos was also a popular writer who vividly depicted the flappers in her novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. As the writer herself embodied the very characteristics of a flapper, she was featured as the heroine of a comic book on the flappers written by John Held Jr.,

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Ibid}, p. 51.
an illustrator who was active in the 1920s. The flappers in the comics were characterized by their rejection of the traditional values and morality; having experienced material prosperity and war, the young women, who were required to stay in their homes, dreamed of escaping from all their domestic restrictions. If there was any sense of rebellion in their hearts, it was not portrayed as something serious or gloomy but was generally treated in a light and lively tone (fig.6).

Followed by an image of a flapper first published in *Life* magazine in 1920, an image of a flapper dancing to the tune of jazz music published in the same magazine in 1929 clearly showed the distance between the traditional femininity and the flappers as modern girls (fig.7). According to John Held Jr., who drew magazine cover images, just as Gibson Girl symbolized the 1890s, the flappers were the new contemporary class that represented the 1920s.38 None of the femininity that Gibson Girl embodied was present in the flappers, who rose to the cultural scene. Whereas Gibson Girl flaunted a long and swollen hairdo, the flappers loved the bobbed hairstyle. Gibson Girl stressed her bust and waist, but the flappers made their bust flat and wore loose blouses. While Gibson Girl hid her legs, the flappers wore short skirts and lowered their stockings to below the knee line. Even a flapper with bobbed hair and an exposed cleavage, wearing a skirt short enough to reveal her garter belt, and sitting on an Art-Deco-style chair was drawn (fig.8). The image of a mature Victorian-era woman who was shy and oppressed was replaced by the image of a young and lively flapper with open minds.

Flapper fashion in the Jazz Age was perceived to be a rebellion against the women’s fashion in the past, which was rigid and exaggerated, and suggested the most basic form of the contemporary women’s fashion. The image of a mature noblewoman in the past was no longer

welcomed by the masses; instead, they looked for simple and modern esthetics in women’s fashion. The pursuit of simplified esthetics was expressed with straight silhouette lines, short skirts, and the bobbed hairstyle. The boyish silhouette with emphasis on straight lines rather than curves was often called the “Garçonne Look.” Of all the iconoclastic features of flapper fashion in the period, the most prominent change was that women came to wear short skirts. The rise of the hemline had since played an important role in defining the key characteristics of the contemporary fashion; the fashion trend of wearing skirts long enough to sweep the ground never became vogue again throughout the 20th-century fashion ever since flapper fashion emerged. Given that wearing skirts revealing the ankle line was considered blasphemy as late as in the latter part of the 1890s, it was developed to an extent that sent shockwaves throughout the society. Naturally, the older generation criticized short skirts as mean and lowly, but short skirts were not a short-lived fad but endured throughout the 1920s. The key characteristics of modern fashion were pronounced particularly in 1925 and 1926. The dresses were slender and completely streamlined while the waistline slightly dangled under the hipline, with the hemline rising up to over the knees. A long and feminine style that foretold the fashion that was to become hot in the next era started to appear by 1929, confirming the suggestion by Steel that the typical simplified look of the flappers lasted from 1924 to 1928.

---

39 Garçonne Look, hot from 1920 to 1926 and marked by a boyish style, was born in the middle of the social trends including the stream of consciousness among women that argued for gender equality and the stress on the importance of youth among the young generation. Garçonne is a feminine form of Garçon (boy) in French, and signifies a “woman with a boyish look.” The word was originated from La Garçonne, a novel written by the French writer Victor Margueritte that became a sensation when it was unveiled in 1922. The heroine sported a short hairstyle and a mannish look including a jacket, a shirt, and a necktie, symbolizing the open-minded and active women of the period (American Heritage Online). The style is characterized by the adoption of a slender, straight silhouette, a flat bosom, a trouser, a shirt blouse, a tailored suit, and a necktie as well as the elimination of excessive adornments.


41 Steel, 1985, p. 235.
The flappers would wear loosely shaped dresses not just for daywear but also for evening wear. These dresses had hemlines dangling right below the knee lines and showed no distinction in waistline, and women would put a belt around the hip. These dresses generally had long silk fringes so that they would be eye-catching when the women were dancing to the tune of jazz music. Such dresses had fringes usually dangling below the shoulder line or below the bottom line of the hair (fig. 9).

Short hair, which was called “the bob style of the flappers,” was one of the most prominent features of the 1920s fashion. First introduced in 1914 by Irene Castle, a prominent dancer, the bob style was popularized by Pauline Frederick and Louis Brooks, both of whom were called “the most beautiful women in America,” and were frequently featured as models in many leading fashion magazines. The cloche hat, an indispensable fashion item that went with bob hair, was worn in the streets or in home lunch parties. The hat and hairstyle were soon adopted universally by the late 1920s, with almost all the women in the United States and Western Europe sporting such hairdo. Notable here is that there was a matching love symbol given to each hat depending on the shape of the ribbon attached to the hat. An arrow knot ribbon signified an unmarried single girl with a lover, a tightly knot ribbon signified a married woman, and an irregular knot alluded a free and independent woman (fig. 10).42

The corset was also rejected by the flappers as it was largely considered a symbol of the suppressed femininity inherited from the past. The corset was a tool of sexual distinction that was designed to preserve the perfect Victorian ideal of physical femininity.43 It was also a

symbol of male-centr ic morality, which was oppressive to women. This is because a woman’s body, when locked in a corset, is not prone to external temptation, and a woman wearing a corset is able to maintain her stern dignity in terms of her behavior and attitude, as opposed to a woman not wearing a corset. For such reasons, a woman’s rejection of the corset was not simply a change in dress but an act that may insinuate that her value system had already been tainted. Indeed, the older generation considered this an act of the young women that was destructive to the conventional morality. The abolition of the corset, however, freed women from any inhibition and allowed them to act according to their will while also symbolically signifying that the restrictions oppressing women’s consciousness had finally been eliminated. Instead, the brassiere emerged to replace the corset as new lingerie. The lingerie advertisements published in Sears, the most widely known sales catalogue in the 1920s, were quite different from those published in 1897. The advertisements in 1897 stressed the mature body of women firmly based on the Victorian ideal of femininity (fig.11). On the other hand, the catalogues published in 1929 contained advertisements of the brassiere that focused on its convenience and functionality (fig.12).

The image of the flappers with regard to sex was that of openness and proactiveness at the same time. As brilliantly argued by Scott Fitzgerald in *Echoes of the Jazz Age*, the universal curiosity about sex defined the very essence of the 1920s. The scientific achievements on human nature represented by Sigmund Freud, coupled with the development of contraceptive techniques thanks to scientific advancement, and the advancement of automobiles made people more open-
minded with regard to the concept of sex. Young women, now liberated from the Victorian ideas, were enthusiastic about sex and maintained close relationships with their male counterparts.

According to an analysis of the film industry in the 1930s, sex, love, and crime were the three main topics of the movies released during that period, with those dealing with love declining in number but those dealing with sex growing.\textsuperscript{44} For instance, \textit{It}, the movie featuring Clara Bow, maximized the sexual image of the flappers in the movie. In the movie, Clara Bow is a saleswoman who is seducing her affluent boss, and was depicted as a fun-loving and liberal woman.

The freewheeling lifestyle of the flappers went in lockstep with the advancement of the auto industry. The young generation would simply enjoy driving or dating in the backseat. Young people enjoyed petting, an increasingly popular act among the youngsters at the time, and newspapers kept publishing articles on behavior involving uninhibited sexual acts. The older generation was convinced that automobiles were responsible for the proliferation of crimes, transformed sexual morality from its roots, and even shattered the basic family unit. As such, automobiles were redefining the way of life, to say nothing of its significance in terms of mechanical advancement.

Advertisements carried pictures of women smoking cigarettes, and they were depicted as attractive and cool figures. Handsome and beautiful movie heroes and heroines would pick up a cigarette at any time throughout the movie’s running time. Women’s smoking soon became a universal phenomenon; the satire corner in the \textit{Oakland Tribune} dealt with female smokers on a

\textsuperscript{44} Higashi, Virgins. \textit{Vamps and Flapper}, p. 113.
regular basis in 1924 (fig.13). Dancing with a male partner, in close proximity to him, to the tune of jazz music and while sipping whiskey was a well-established habit among the flappers. The drinking culture of the flappers was closely related with the establishment of the National Prohibition Act. The enforcement of such act backfired, triggering an explosion of bootlegged liquors consumed behind closed doors. The enormous economic gains obtained through the sale of bootlegged liquors were an attractive financial incentive to many housewives, including widowed women, and among professional sex workers and middle-income housewives, bootlegged liquor spread even more not because of its economic gains but simply because of the thrills and excitement associated with it. Such female merchants of bootlegged liquor attacked the social convention on the so-called “appropriate space for women.”45 The reason that female drinking was considered to have more social significance was that women were able to enjoy more relaxed relationships with their male partners while drinking with them, and that they were able to access masculinity much easily now that they were freed from the bounds of the Victorian ideal of femininity.

The rejection of the traditional values by the flappers, and their active images, sometimes materialized in a rebellious form. The generational conflicts were only growing worse while the flappers rose up against their parents. The older generation stressed the traditional power of man and the moral authority of women, and argued that they possessed superior mental capability to judge the rising new generation. The only valuable experiences for the young generation, however, were those experienced in the entirely new domains. Furthermore, for young people enthusiastic about the enormous changes transpiring in the new century, the

experiences of the older generation were useless at best and were sometimes even hazardous. Every generation had its share of generational conflict with the old or young generation, but behind the massive change in the 1920s lurked the new scientific and economic understanding as well as the new moral order. Now, young people were doing what would never have been possible in the past.

A secular and materialistic image was another key aspect of the flappers. As the first generation that had grown up in the era with unprecedented materialistic affluence where consumption was encouraged, it was inevitable that they were materialistic to their core. In the backdrop of such social atmosphere, young people had come to understand the power of secular success and what money can buy for them. Meanwhile, the romantic fantasy of the 19th-century idealists was rendered useless. What was important for them was the steel-cold reality, and they knew the joy that money can buy.

The consequence of economic prosperity, however, was not entirely desirable for everyone. It was easy to find the widespread pursuit of lowly materialism and pleasure throughout the society. The secular images that the flappers embodied simply reflected the confusion inherent in the era and the society. The 1920s was an era of prosperity and affluence, but at the same time, it was an era of great confusion filled with rampant illegal acts and cruel indifference. As the conscious development failed to catch up with the rapid materialistic advancement, a cultural lag was observed throughout the society, with money and pleasure being

---

the de rigueur pursuits of the era. Shakespeare was required to be learned simply because the schools made it mandatory to learn his works, and science and politics were simply boring subjects. For the young generation, including the flappers, who were forced to immerse themselves in a fresh new environment in the period during which their life goal and value system had been established, immediate success and happiness were the norm of their daily life.

To sum up, the image of the flappers was firmly established as one of the most popular images of the American society since it first appeared in a newspaper illustration in 1920. The image of the flappers, however, changed over time. The image of the flappers in the early 1920s was represented by short skirts, dancing, dating, or smoking. Given that the early 1920s was the time when the flappers had just started to show their identity, the exaggerated representation of their images signifies that the very presence of the flappers was unfamiliar among the ordinary citizens. The people were looking at the flappers with much curiosity, and they revealed their interest in them through their exaggerated representation of the flappers.

Beginning in the late 1920s, however, well after the year 1926, when flapper fashion was the hottest trend, images of the flappers were highlighted from the commercial perspective. The images of the flappers were found most frequently in advertisements. Articles dealing with information on the flappers were the most popular articles, and it was easy to find images of the flappers in Ladies Home Journal or in the Sears catalogues, which signifies that flapper fashion had been firmly rooted in the American society as a popular style. It also meant that the flappers were no longer just an object of gossip but had risen to a status prominent enough for them to flaunt their appeal to the masses. The public had already become accustomed to flapper fashion,
and images of the flappers had grown out of their exaggerated state and were absorbed by the public. Now, flapper fashion had grown out of the simple manifestation of the uniqueness that the flappers possessed, and started to formulate and lead social trends.

4. Discussion on the Flappers and Their Social Status

Social assessment of the flappers has been performed from various perspectives with regard to their behavioral patterns and ideology. On one hand, there existed a favorable perspective on the flappers in that they were “modern women” who embraced new values freed from the values inherited from the past, and rose as a role model in the American society; on the other hand, their unconventional behavior, way of thinking, and fashion were constantly controversial in the American society throughout the 1920s.

The contemporary discussions on the flappers in the 1920s had centered on the accusation regarding flappers’ morality. In such discussions, the appearance or behavioral characteristics of the flappers were directly associated with their moral values, with the discussion being dominantly negative. Various magazines and newspapers were overflowing with criticisms of the flappers. As the long-standing value of the Victorian era turned at a critical juncture in the middle of the gigantic incident that was a war, the resistance from the groups that fought to preserve the existing values was exacerbated. Conservative commentators

condemned the fashion and behavior of the flappers as something close to evil rather than just a change in customs.

Ella A. Boole, a director of the New York State Union, once mentioned the smoking of the flappers. For her, smoking was simply a bad habit formed in the midst of the confusion of war, but after the war, it spread among the young people. She criticized smoking and urged the parents to correct this bad habit of their children, which was bad from the perspectives of science and education. Anne Shaw Faulkner, who was responsible for the music department in the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, condemned jazz music as “a sin” as she believed that dancing and jazz music, which were popular among the flappers, were actually causing their behavior and mental condition to degenerate into an immoral state. Willard Thorp, dean of the University of Southern California, criticized the make-up of the flappers in the *Forum* magazine. He named what he saw as the lowly appearance of the flappers as “flapperolatry” and argued that a mortal cult was in progress then, adding that the make-up worn by the flappers looked like scars inflicted by an unskilled surgeon, and that they looked as if they were caked with mud.⁴⁸

The most vitriolic criticism of the flappers was raised by the people in religious circles. They tried to trace the cause of the ever-dwindling American morality and of the comprehensive depravity of the society in the behavior of the women and young people. In Philadelphia, they mailed a questionnaire on the appropriate attire for a religious community while in New York, they proposed to take measures to curb excessive bodily exposure. With regard to the popularity of some strange dances, such as Charleston instead of waltz from the Victorian era, they were astonished that girls were dancing without wearing a corset and then condemned such dancing as

an expression of bodily desire and as a teaching tool of adultery. Some Methodist Protestants even banned dancing teachers from registering in church, and faithful followers of the Lutheran church even condemned the dance marathon, claiming that it pushed all evil spirits to their limits and defining it as an omen of coming mental destruction.49

Notable here is that the flappers were even criticized by feminists as well despite the fact that they were liberated from the femininity of the paternalistic Victorian era and its resulting restrictions in behavior. The feminists’ discussions on the flappers centered on criticizing their individualistic tendencies. Many women’s rights reformers, including Mary Herton Vorse, a prominent women’s rights activist, jumped on the criticism of the flappers, saying, “The flappers are wasting their time flaunting their youthfulness, wearing make-up, and dancing.”50 From their viewpoint, the flappers’ indifference to political activities was undermining the significance of the reforms they had achieved. In their eyes, the flappers seemed to have no interest in the rights of all women as well as in gender equality with their male counterparts. In fact, some young flappers even said, “Our generation does not have much interest in the status of women.”51 To some flappers, the very word feminism felt like an insult.

The morality of the flappers was also under attack. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a prominent feminist, scolded the young generation then, saying that the young women, in particular, were wasting their energy on pursuing cheap pleasures. Observing that sex was being


50 __________, Ibid, p. 73.

used not for procreation but for recreation, she criticized the theory of Freud.\footnote{Chafe, William H. \textit{The Paradox of Change: American Women in the 20th Century}. New York: Oxford University Press. 1991, p. 96.} She also wrote in her newspaper op-ed that “it is disgusting that the flappers are talking about freedom when in reality they are simply emulating the weak and evil aspects of men.”\footnote{______. \textit{Ibid}, p. 400.}

Dorothy Bromley came up with a counterargument against such attacks by feminists against the flappers in her article “Feminist – New Style” published in 1927. The essence of her argument was the need to look at the flappers as “individuals.” According to her, the flappers were more interested in their economic independence and professional achievement than in social reformation or in their relationships with other women, unlike the existing feminists then, who viewed women’s rights from the perspective of the community, the flappers.\footnote{Bromley, Dorothy, “Feminist – new style,” \textit{Harper’s CIV}, Oct. 1927, pp. 552-560.} Accordingly, the feminists’ criticism of the flappers — that they (the flappers) were turning their backs against the wide-ranging fights of women by getting married or having babies — was overblown. She also argued that the flappers knew well that living a balanced and realistic life and enjoying freedom by achieving what they wanted to achieve was much more advantageous for them than fighting for some vague ideal.

Bromley argued, in essence, that the flappers were individuals with clear independence who can design their own lives, and this placed men and women on a more equal footing. Her argument is considered valuable as she respected human nature and the freedom of individual persons. Of course, the change in women’s political and economic status is still important, but pursuing the success and freedom of the group as a whole while suppressing human nature is far
from genuine equality. The feminists’ criticism that “the flappers are wasting time only on
dancing and making themselves up” may be rooted in their obsession with the cause and results-
oriented mindset of female reformists. Their obsession in obtaining tangible results, including the
realization of women’s right of suffrage, could result in another form of oppression of women,
and given that women’s suffrage had already been realized, it should be recognized that young
women have other things to pay attention to than simply politics. It should also be pondered why
the feminist movement failed to appeal to the flappers. The failure of the feminists in gaining the
flappers’ support may have more to do with their failure to respond to the winds of change than
to the individualistic attitude of the flappers.

There were quite a few scholars in the 1930s who recognized the emergence of the
flappers as a positive phenomenon and who stressed the flappers’ role in the advancement of the
society. What distinguishes their arguments is that they applied the concept of “new women” to
the flappers instead of “feminist reformists.” They were interested in the positive roles of women
as well as in their active participation in their life while also stressing the importance of the
changes in women’s social status that happened throughout the 1920s. In his book *The Great
Crusade and After*, Preston W. Slosson showed his interest in the change in what had been
traditionally considered the domain of women. According to Slosson’s observation, what was
light and freed from formality, such as a short skirt, comfortable underwear, bobbed hair,
cosmetics, smoking, and drinking, defined the period. He argued that bigger progress was
realized in the changes in the economic condition and social status of women, while at the same
time recognizing the significance of the political achievement of the women activists.55

---

The postwar disillusionment, the new status of women, the Freudian theory, and automobiles and movies were all prepared for the conversion of the women’s way of life and morality. The reinforced freedom and changes in fashion combined to trigger more natural changes in the American femininity. Those who mentioned the progressive role that the flappers played in advancing the American society understood that the flappers learned to accept their inherent desires and to obtain pleasure in such, and that the flappers were pioneers who created a new moral order freed from the standards imposed by men on women. The role of the flappers in the 1920s was to introduce a new way of life to women, and the flappers provided a model through which women may be able to make a small change in their marriage and life.

The conflict between the young and older generations, one of the hottest issues of the period, was something more than a simple generational conflict; the conflict symbolized the sprouting of modernity, which was an attempt to escape from the modern times. The young generation stressed that the moral authority of the new age should be freed from the traditional values and was compatible with the era in which new technologies and a new order were born. Born in the 20th century and having participated in the war, they were dynamic middle-class people who were consuming the latest technologies. From the perspective of the flappers, it was their parents who were amplifying the generational conflict as they were narrow-minded people who were unable to understand that their daughters had grown up in a completely different environment. The problem of their parents’ generation, according to the flappers, was that they would not even try to understand them (the flappers) but simply dismissed everything that they did as bad and unacceptable. The flappers believed that their parents should understand and
respect them as a generation with a strong sense of identity. In addition, they feared that their parents would exacerbate the intergenerational conflict by simply dismissing their behavior as evil rather than recognizing it as a trend of the period.\textsuperscript{56} The flappers already had a strong sense of identity as “different” social entities who had been educated in an environment that was different from that of the older generation. Having recognized their identity, the flappers requested the older generation to understand them instead of condemning them unconditionally. They also argued that their behavior, which was criticized by the older generation, was just a process of obtaining new experiences, and that the older generation was simply incapable of recognizing the changing world.

The women from the older generation criticized the flappers by comparing themselves with the young flappers. They blamed the flappers for damaging the social status of women as the patronesses of morality. According to the values of the older generation, it was very important with regard to female behavior that all women join hands to make a better society. Although the feminists focused on the political aspects, for the older-generation women, it was an important social role of women to protect the home while improving their married life. Accordingly, the behavior of the flappers was considered a deviation from this.

The foregoing facts revealed that the young women singled out as flappers were actually fighting in three different fronts at the same time: (1) they were being targeted by the older generation as a subject of controversy; (2) they had to endure criticism from the older-

\textsuperscript{56} “I want to beg all you parents, and grandparents, and friends, and teachers, and preachers – you who constitute the ‘older generation’ – to overlook our shortcomings and to appreciate our virtues … Give us confidence, not distrust. Give us practical aid and advice, not criticism. Praise us when praise is merited. We are a younger negation … Parents, study your children. Talk to them more intimately. Respect their right to a point of view … The key is yours in return for patient understanding, sympathetic encouragement, and kindly wisdom. Make love to your daughter if necessary! … And remember this: A little merited praise means so much! A little encouragement goes such a long way! … Is it too much to ask?” From Page, Ellen Welles, “A flapper’s appeal to parents,” \textit{Outlook}, Dec. 6, 1922, p. 607.
generation women for having damaged the traditional concept of femininity; and (3) they were being attacked by the feminists for having turned their backs on the collective feminist movement. Such clashes can be interpreted as signifying that the flappers did not actively fight for women’s liberation and did not actively protest against masculinity as they were associated with the resistance against the values and contradictions of the past. This is supported by the fact that the criticism of the flappers was not led by their male counterparts but by the older women or by women reformers with opposing ideas.

Whereas the discussion on the flappers in the 1920s focused on the direct description of the behavior and way of thinking of the flappers, the focus of the discussion from the 1920s and 1930s through the 1960s shifted to their legitimate place in history. Many scholars have attached either a positive or negative meaning to the behavior and culture of the flappers.

The discussion on the flappers came to a lull in the 1930s and 1940s, but Alfred Kinsey’s groundbreaking research on the women’s sex reopened the discussion on them. Although Kinsey did not directly mention the flappers, the research on women, which had been silent for an extended period in the wake of the Great Depression and World War II, rekindled the interest in the flappers. Many scholars conducted research on women’s sex, with the flappers being an attractive target of their research.

Among such scholars, West et al. came up with an unusual twist on the assumption that the behavior of the flappers symbolized freedom. Their interpretation focused on the flappers as a minority group, a departure from the approach that focused on the question of whether the liberal behavior of the flappers was an innovation or a depravation. Overturning the long-held assumption that the flappers’ fashion or behavior symbolized freedom, such researchers
concluded that the flappers were simply following the behavior of men.\footnote{Freedman, Estelle B. “The new woman: the changing views of women in the 1920s.” \textit{Journal of American History} 61. Sep. 1974, p. 385.} The flappers were drinking or smoking as if they were the patronesses of freedom, but in reality, they were simply emulating the behavior of the superior group, as any minority group would do, according to their revisionist interpretation.

Scholars such as William O’Neill and William Chafe presented their observations on the 1920s women, including the flappers, in their books \textit{Everyone Was Brave} (1969) and \textit{The American Woman} (1971). O’Neill concluded that the change in women’s social status in the 1920s was trivial, and that the influence of the flappers was not really that great. According to O’Neill, the unconventional attitude towards sex can be traced to the prewar era, and no big change was newly made in the 1920s. Also, for the majority of women, who put value in the safety of the home and family, the flappers had no meaningful influence.\footnote{O’Neill, William. \textit{Everyone Was Brave}. Chicago: Quadrangle Books. 1969, p. 306.} According to O’Neill, the home was still an exclusive professional area of women, and only some young women attempted to leave such standards behind.

Chafe also evaluated the flappers lightly. First, he made a sweeping assumption that there was virtually no meaningful achievement made by women in their social roles, including economic equality, until the 1940s. In a more detailed analysis, he argued that the flappers were too small in number to have had any meaningful impact on the society, and that for the majority of women, the home remained the most essential private area. Moreover, the flappers’ uninhibited behavior seemed to be narrowing the gap between men and women in their own perception, but it was actually just a superficial phenomenon. For true gender equality to be
realized, a fundamental revolution had to happen in the minds of both men and women, as well as a new division of responsibilities inside the structure of marriage and the family, according to Chafe.59 When reviewed from such perspective, the new convention led by the flappers can be said to have been just an empty echo. In truth, they still remained in a state of oppression and the target of discrimination, far from being modern.

The aforementioned arguments, however, overlooked a few issues, particularly their arguments that the flappers’ behavior was typical of the minority group aspiring to emulate the superior group, that only a small group of women enjoyed the trend and that such trend did not have any meaningful impact on the society, and that their freedom was just superficial. These were all results of their partial assessment of what the flappers possessed. Even while evaluating the historical significance of the flappers, they did not consider the relationship between the overall social context and the flappers. That is, assessing the flappers’ behavior without analyzing the changing social context of the period can result in ignoring the significance of the flappers in history.

As the home remained the exclusive domain of the majority of women, the argument that the flapper culture was the culture of the minority is accurate in pure numeric terms. Moreover, country girls, women working in factories, and black and married women would have a good deal of limitations when it comes to receiving academic education, getting a job, or behaving freely. What the aforementioned critics failed to note, however, is that even if the flappers were a minority, they still managed to get out of the domain of the home and to realize the preciousness of the freedom they discovered there. Moreover, even though only a small
number of women were flappers, it is notable that they still served as role models to many women in different classes, whether married or aged, as they were ubiquitous in fiction novels, magazines, and movies. What is important is that as a symbol of the modern society, the flappers provided a clue to some tiny change in their lives, no matter how small it was. If modernity can be characterized as severance, individualism, liberalism, and popularization, it can provide a big framework for the significance of the flappers.

The significance of the flappers can be found in the fact that they represented the culture of the young generation during their time. As Mark Sullivan pointed out, the 1920s was the “Age of Youngsters.” The 1920s was the first decade in history when the young generation was highlighted, and the flappers had an essential presence in the young generation, which was leading the social changes then. They experienced the war hands-on, grew up amidst the postwar economic prosperity, and absorbed new values, knowledge, and technologies more proactively than any other group. As the young generation was exposed to new worlds both mentally and physically, it is no surprise that they came to evaluate the older generation with brand-new standards.

The flappers enjoyed sexual activities, smoking, dancing, and drinking, freed from the constraints of the past or from the traditional restrictions, which became shared interests among the young women and soon became a part of their daily lives. A woman named Oliver Darling recalled that when she turned 80, she “was a free woman even before [she] knew its accurate meaning.” She grew up listening to the stories of romantic movie stars, brave pilots, and bars selling bootlegged liquors. When she entered the university after graduating from high school,

she felt the energy of the young women then who enjoyed drinking and driving and who chatted about their professions. She said, “Even if the 1920s was over, we knew that it was an extraordinary period filled with freedom.”

What was notable in the freewheeling behavior of the flappers was that they had their own identity. The entirely new experience of the young generation then separated them forever from their parents’ generation. They were the first young generation who were aware of their culture and value system and who possessed an identity completely independent from that of the older generation. The period when the young generation began to have their own identity as an independent group coincided with the period when a new set of values was being established after World War I. The young people’s dissatisfaction with the older generation due to the war was expressed in extreme ways, which again formed camaraderie among the young peer groups.

The desire to reveal the identity of the flappers was a slice of modernity and another expression of the flappers’ distinctiveness that differentiated them from the older generation. This way, they were revealing what they held dear in their lives and understood their uniqueness in various ways. Such tendency among the young people then made them put into practice what had been traditionally considered immoral.

The reinforcement of the flappers’ identity seems to have been partly due to their experience in the universities. University education played the role of binding together the flappers’ consciousness and experience, and made them perceive themselves as a homogeneous

---

61 Behrens. The 20th Century: 1921 to 1930, A Decade to Behold. p. 87.
peer group. The universities then provided a venue for the shared experience of the new cultural environment.

Young people formed peer communities and enjoyed their own unique culture. They considered the extracurricular activities in the campus, such as gaming and dating, more important than the academic activities. The editor of the school newspaper of UCLA said, “The entire campus life can be divided into two domains: the academic domain and the entertainment domain. While learning and the intellectual aspect are controlled by the professors, the domain of entertainment is left in the hands of the students,” stressing that a unique culture was being formed in the campus. An editorial by the Sun even deplored that “in Cornell University, the students who entered the university to learn but who have come to value sports activities or election to leadership positions in student groups more are now considered a shame.”

The universities rose as important venues for moral experiments. Smoking, drinking, and dancing spread even more as they carried out a social function: that of establishing kinship in peer groups. Within the society in the university campus, freewheeling activities can be endorsed and supported by peer groups. The reason that smoking by young women was widely accepted throughout the 1920s despite the fierce controversies it engendered was that the young women then had already become accustomed to smoking in the university campus. The same can be said about dancing: dancing parties were a fun form of entertainment for young people as well as a venue for meeting others in their peer group.

---

The university campus was conducive to the unofficial mingling of the different sexes. Such ready access to the different sexes stimulated gender equality among the different sexes, and triggered a heightened interest in sexual attraction. Dating was one of the most significant changes; the young students in the campus enjoyed dating as if it were a club activity, and such experience not only liberated them from the restraint that their parents imposed on them but also trained the women to perceive themselves not as individuals who were dependent on men but as men’s equal partners. The sociologist Ira Wile noted that such relationship increasingly became an aim rather than a means for dating, and suggested that the young people then were opening their eyes to eroticism and had grown to accept it.

As a result, young people, now incorporated into the institutional education system such as high schools and universities, started to experiment with new norms and challenged the conventional practices by capitalizing on the relative freedom available in the campus. The dramatic growth of co-ed state universities promoted an environment where young men and women can create new patterns in courtship and relationships with the opposite sex, and a unique culture of students was formed within the campus. Coupled with the growing number of university students, the unique culture that was shared by them played a key role in leading the youth culture throughout the society.

The flappers embodied the typical cultural characteristics of the young generation in such an environment. They received the benefit of higher education thanks to the postwar prosperity, and had a sense of identity as a generation that had grown up in this new environment.

63 Woloch. Ibid, p. 403.
64 Fass. Ibid, p. 265.
Their sense of identity as a young generation helped them separate themselves from the antiquated values and escape from the perspective of the old era. The flappers rose as icons representing the culture of the young generation through such process.

The significance of the flappers as symbols of modernity can also be found in the consumption culture. The consumption culture is the key value that defines the modernity of the West and is an essential characteristic of the Western culture. The American consumption culture can be traced back to the 1920s. The American society then was progressing into a genuine industrial society with the emergence of the factory mass production system, which contributed greatly to the production of consumption products, while enabling the realization of the ideology of consumption for the first time in the history of America.

The transition to an industrial society and the development of a consumption culture are closely connected with each other via important links across several aspects. The materialistic affluence brought about by industrialization not only changed the economic value of the Victorian era but also triggered the transformation of the shape of the ideal femininity. The transformation that started with the family economy system in the pre-industrialization era via the early industrial society and that was completed with the defamilialized consumption economy of the 20th century fundamentally changed the role of women.65

The participation of women in the labor market signified that the women had escaped from their traditional domain — the home — and had entered the domain of men, and that the

values of the old era, which had been preserved for a long time, had finally been lost. In the modern society, intelligent and active women who were economically self-reliant were preferred. Living a life in accordance with the past ideal of femininity meant that one was unable to adapt to the changed society.

The flappers were leading the consumption in the 1920s. As the society became increasingly tolerant of unmarried female workers, a growing number of women were forced to live separately from their family and were able to use a substantial portion of their wage for their preferred purposes. Unlike the poor female factory workers who were responsible for feeding their family members, the flappers, who were consumed by the desire to express themselves, spent much money on enhancing their appearance, including their dresses and cosmetics. The women in the professional world became potential or actual buyers with much more occasions to spend compared to the women in the older age. Moreover, the fact that the women rose to become the most important buyers in America was again proven by the result of a survey that over 80% of the buyers in department stores, cosmetic shops, home appliance stores, and even men’s product stores were women.66 The flappers were children of prosperity and enjoyed luxurious lives. There were many items that they felt they needed to have (e.g., silk stockings, cosmetics, jazz records, etc.) to enjoy the modern (i.e., stylish and urban) life that they envisioned for themselves. The flappers knew exactly what they needed to buy to attract attention and remain popular among the people around them.

The reason that the flappers are considered important in the discussion of the consumption culture is that they are distinctive people who promoted the consumption culture

but who were also affected by such culture. To understand such special relationship, it is necessary to consider the close interrelationship among the flappers, advertisements, and industrial development. The manufacturers, who understood the importance of the consumers for their business, were also aware of the importance of advertising. Furthermore, the young middle-class women who had a desire to make themselves up as well as to obtain the financial means to realize such wish were the greatest consumers of all time. The businesses then did their best to capture the minds of the flappers, who had become their best customers. The advertising industry started to develop at full-throttle, and the advertising professionals exploited the psychology of the young female consumers. They knew very well how much the flappers aspired to be loved and to look gorgeous to other people, and they exploited such desire. As a result, the U.S. advertising industry grew twofold in the 1920s as it targeted the female consumer group, which was their key potential market. The fashion and cosmetics industry as well as the washing machine and vacuum cleaner manufacturing businesses started to develop at an astounding pace. 67

The flappers in the advertisements looked like their key interest was in fashion, beauty, and sexual attractiveness. A soap advertisement published in *Ladies Home Journal* in 1929 was a typical advertisement that incited the flappers’ desire to spend. Whereas the previous soap advertisements stressed the functionality of soap by focusing on the products themselves, the key image in the 1920s’ advertisements was the satisfied face of a woman after using the product being advertised as well as the lovely look of a woman that captivates men as she passes by them. By the late 1920s, almost all the advertisements of cosmetic products had been focused on

highlighting women’s stylishness or taste rather than women’s appearance. Advertising professionals selected the modern woman as an agent of taste or fashion trends, and the modern woman who was thus selected was the flapper. Advertising professionals have already been using the very essence of the consumption economy, that what one consumes represents what one is: his/her values, tastes, and social memberships.68

Such characteristic of the consumption culture is well identified with the mass culture society, in which the tastes and desires of the masses play an important role. Given that the change that had been in progress for an extended period infiltrated the urban popular culture that put emphasis on pleasure, consumption, sex, and individualism, it was notable that the flappers had a critical impact on the popular culture. The flappers, who were the consumers loved by the mass media and the consumption society alike, played a leading role in building the concrete details of the mass culture, and in leading it.

The development of mass media spread the flapper phenomenon across the nation. Although the “flapper phenomenon” was purely urban in nature, newspapers, magazines, movies, and radio narrowed the gap in the behavior in the urban and rural areas. The newspapers at that time were busy publishing a series of articles that praised the flappers or expressed reservation of the older generation, along with an endless stream of informative pieces on the flapper style almost on a daily basis. In particular, stories on the various practices of the flappers, including their smoking, petting, and fashion, which were published in leading newspapers such as The New York Times and The Saturday Evening Post, played a critical role in amplifying the public interest in the flappers (fig.14).

The advancement of the film and advertising industry also played a critical role in spreading the flapper phenomenon. Watching a movie was itself already significant as a new type of cultural activity, but more important were the messages that the movies were conveying to the moviegoers. Following the pure virgin and femme fatale of the Victorian era, the flappers played the roles of the heroines in the new Hollywood movies in the 1920s. Celebrity actresses acted as spokeswomen of the contemporary women then, with their beautiful appearances and liberal behaviors, and majority of the women were busy emulating the styles of movie heroines like Clara Bow. The young girls were heavily influenced by Hollywood movies as these taught them how to dress well, look attractive to others, and get romantically involved with a gentleman, as well as how to kiss and shop well. Advertising jumped on the bandwagon, further spreading the image of the flappers. As mentioned earlier, advertisers were mindful of the young women who had newly risen as the leaders of consumption. They knew they had to buy such young women’s minds and create new trends to boost their sales. It was in the 1920s when the product brand, catch phrase, and brand slogan were invented.

The flappers played the role of agents facilitating the key elements of the mass consumption society. They were the heroines of advertisements as well as those who were influenced by them. Those who failed to see the advertisements had to emulate other flappers so that they could catch up with the latest trends introduced in such advertisements. Louis Brooks, a popular star in the 1920s, frequently appeared in fashion advertisements; her stylish look, characterized by bobbed hair and lips with red lipstick, completed the flapper look. The product catalogue, designed to promote the sales of mass-produced clothing and cosmetics, played a key role in spreading the flapper look to the women living in the local areas.
What is most important is that the flapper culture of fashion was created thanks to the flappers’ proactive attitude. The flappers created their own subculture so that instead of merely imitating the existing culture, they reflected the new values and perspectives. It was an unprecedented development in American history that the young women, themselves a minority group, created their own unique culture and spread it throughout the society. The aspect that mass media played a central role in the process of spreading the flapper fashion testifies to the modernity of the flapper culture.

The fact that the flappers assumed a leadership role in the development of the mass culture and that they themselves were influenced by the mass society does not necessarily signify that they took over the entire culture. To this day, their culture is still a topic of active discussion. What is more important, however, is that in the critical juncture of the historical transition to a modern society, the flappers, who were liberal and freed from traditions, rose as the new leaders of the popular culture. It is also noteworthy that flapper fashion and culture did not remain “in their own league” but wielded social influence. Although the flappers were young middle-class women, the new standards that they created were actively copied by the female factory workers or by the older women. A photograph shows the participants of the 1929 labor strike in a textile factory in the South. The workers participating in the strike in the photograph had bobbed hair and wore tight hats and cashmere coats, with shaved hair, just like the flappers. The young female workers chanted slogans while driving around the town and chatting in the car. The newspapers described the first strike as a festival. Given that the 1920s was the period when the American culture, which is now sweeping through the cultural scenes around the world, was
born, the importance of the flappers as a symbol of modernity and cultural presence feels greater than ever.

III. Conclusions

The flappers seemed to have disappeared with the economic recession in the wake of the Great Depression. During the Great Depression, which started with the crash of the stock market in October 1929, the people were hit with a series of massive layoffs, and most of the homes were left behind with growing economic pressure. The flappers were not immune to severe economic shock in the middle of a recession. Most women were forced to scale back their leisure or social activities outside their homes, and the divorce rate fell, highlighting the importance of the home. The social atmosphere that praised modernity turned back and pursued stability. As a result, social values based on the Puritan ethics were revived, and such shift in social mood was supported by the Roosevelt administration.  

What must be remembered is that the flapper culture and its diverse implications did not only herald the beginning of the modern American society but also played an important role in forming the American culture. The significance of the flappers is that they are the first symbol of modernity in the history of America. Modernity arrived at the scene at the time when the traditional beliefs and world view of the Americans based on the providence of God and the social system started to crumble with the proliferation of scientific knowledge and technology, industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. The Victorian establishment of the era that ruled

69 Sagert, Kelly Boyer. Ibid, p. 60.
the society failed to adapt to the changed reality. The rise of modernity, however, was characterized by escape from traditions as well as individualization, freedom, self-expression, and diversity, coupled with the spread of a perception that the social, economic, and moral values that the modern people had put their trust in were no longer suitable to the modern society, provided compelling standards of values in the contemporary age.

The behavior and way of thinking of the flappers showed the changing American society in the 1920s, including the rise of modernity, in a nutshell. The traditional values were shattered after the war, and even more so among the young women. The postwar economic prosperity opened new opportunities for women, and they took these proactively. With the arrival of the mass society, an overall social atmosphere favorable to the young women was created. The flappers were soon able to rise to the center of the American culture while interacting with the popular culture. Furthermore, the flappers not only frequently appeared as the heroines of movies and fiction novels but also led the fashion trends. The long reach of flapper fashion on the young women in their early twenties and on other groups of women, either older or younger than the flappers, was formidable and comprehensive.

Accordingly, the most prominent characteristic of the way of thinking and behavior of the flappers was modernity that departed from the traditions. The flappers provided the key characteristics of the 1920s while fighting against the culture and customs inherited from the past. They longed for individual and social freedom, and they lived their lives pursuing pleasure. Such behaviors of the flappers were represented in iconoclastic fashion, including their donning of short skirts and sporting of bobbed hair as well as their preference for silhouettes that stressed the feminine curves. Sometimes, the flappers’ longing for freedom was interpreted as a rebellious
mindset against the older generation that fostered an oppressive atmosphere, but amidst their rebellion lies their firm will to depart from the old convention and to participate in the new modern society. As a young generation, they made it possible to speak up against the older generation. The identity of the flappers can be gleaned through such protest.

The fact that the flappers had individualistic tendencies is one concrete example of the characteristic departure from tradition represented by modernity. The urban living conditions shattered the family and community-centered values inherited from the Victorian era and triggered a break-up of moral authority. With the dwindling interest in the community represented by the family, the perception of the women’s status as a group also weakened. Replacing the primary control and intimate face-to-face relations that had been applied to the home, church, and community, individualism rose as a new way of life.

The flappers evolved into independent entities who decided the criteria of their behavior as individuals, and they considered individual joy more valuable than the joy of the community. In the leisure hours that they gained as they were freed from their domestic chores, they invested in themselves. As they lost their faith in the social or communal ideal with the crumbling of the traditional values inherited from the old age, they instead turned to ambition and to the desire to achieve individual, selfish popularity or success.⁷⁰ Such development made many flappers develop a more realistic attitude. They tried to make their idea happen in reality, and such trend was materialized in the form of the pursuit of materialistic satisfaction. Spiller said that the

⁷⁰ Cowley (Ed.), Fitzgerald and the Jazz Age, p. 186.
fundamental energies that built the American civilization were idealism and materialism\textsuperscript{71}, and such philosophy is believed to have combined with the flappers’ consciousness.

The rise of the flappers signaled the emergence of an entirely new generation. American history has so far been led by men, but the flappers, armed with a liberal, individualistic, and practical mindset, have become young heroines of the American society. Despite their fierce criticism by the older generation, the flappers still proactively embraced the changes that transpired during their time, and created their own culture. They also created a new ideal of femininity by departing from the traditional ideal of women as the patronesses of morality and as mothers in stable homes. They changed the way of life of women while participating in the society as its legitimate members, and their fashion became a cultural icon representing the era and leaving a long reach in the contemporary fashion.

Of course, the limitations of the flappers cannot be entirely denied. They never strove to advance their rights, unlike the feminist reformists in the previous generation, and as not many women lived as the flappers did, they cannot be regarded as the leading power of the society then. Although the flappers’ fashion had been copied by many women, it does not mean that they also followed the flappers’ behavioral styles. Furthermore, even if the flappers had far-reaching social influence, they did not engage in any benevolent activity to lend a helping hand to the women in other classes. Moreover, their smoking and drinking did not necessarily signify their unconditional liberation, and their liberal sexual behavior was a reckless act on their part. It should be noted, however, that as the general perception of the 20\textsuperscript{th}-century culture had been mainly negative, the abnormal postwar atmosphere and moral depravation had been excessively

\textsuperscript{71} Spiller, \textit{The Cycle of American Literature}, p. 5.
stressed. Most historians did not put much importance on analyzing how meaningful the behavior of the flappers was. It would be difficult to identify the true implications of the rise of the flappers if only their external aspects were to be interpreted, and from a negative perspective.

Given the explosion of economic opportunities in the wake of World War II, the fact that many women were able to expand their roles and to gain many successful achievements, and that the young generation formed an anti-culture as well as the women’s movement in the 1960s and 1970s, cannot be explained easily without first understanding the partial changes that were led by the flappers. The significance of the flappers in American history is that they symbolized modernity while embracing and leading the changes in one period of history.
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1 Clara Bow in flapper fashion

Fig.2 “Gibson Girls” by Charles Dana Gibson in *Life* (1890)
Fig. 3 Louis Brooks in pajama

Fig. 4 McCallum’s Silk advertisement in American *Vogue* (December 1921)
Fig. 5 Willard Frederic Elmes, Golf by the North Shore Line

Fig. 6 John Held Jr.’s *Oh Margy*
Fig. 7 Flapper in *Life* (February 1926)

![Flapper in Life](image)

Fig. 8 A flapper flirts with a gentleman friend by Jacques Leclerc in *La Vie Parisienne* (20th February, 1926)

![Flapper flirts with gentleman friend](image)
Fig. 9 Flapper in evening dress in *Vogue* (1925)

Fig. 10 Cloches
Fig. 11 Corset catalogue in *Sears* (1987)

Fig. 12 Advertisement in *Sears* (1929)
Fig. 13 “Modern College Girl” in *Oakland Tribune* (19th January, 1924)

Fig. 14 Cover of *The Saturday Evening Post* (February 1922)
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Articles


Page, Ellen Welles. “A Flapper’s Appeal to Parents,” in *Outlook*, Dec. 6, 1922.


Wembridge, Eleanor Rowland. “Pettin and the Campus,” in *Survey*, July 1, 1925.


Books


Craik, Jennifer. The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion. London and New York:


Entwistle, Joanne and Elizabeth Wissinger edited. Fashioning Models: images, text and industry.


Fiell, Charlotte and Emmanuelle Dirix (Edit), Fashion Sourcebook – 1920s, Goodman/Fiell


University Press., 2010.

Gourley, Catherine, Flappers and the New American Women: Perceptions of Women from 1918


Mendes, Valerie and Amy de la Haye. *Fashion since 1900,* Thames & Hudson world of art, second edition,


Troy, Nancy J. Couture Culture: A Study in Modern Art and Fashion, MIT Press., 2003


Internet Resources for Images

Google Images

Kobal Collection   www.gettyimagesgallery.com

Mary Evans Picture Library   www.maryevans.com

Victoria and Albert Museum Images   www.vam.ac.uk