

Comparing the Flapper to the Gibson Girl

Read the following information and organize the information on page EB-12 so that you can compare the flapper to the Gibson girl. By completing this exercise, you will be able to see the drastic change in the women's movement during a very short period in history.



There were very few opportunities to get an education. The widespread attitude was that a woman should be at home, raising children, catering to every whim of her husband, and taking care of the house. Women often got married in their late teens.



Much of the action and fun and games took place on the college campuses, or were carried on by the college students. Young men and women were sent off to college, to some of the best colleges and universities in America, and they simply went wild.



Bathing costumes totally covered the woman from her wrists and neck all the way down to the ankles. The women wore bloomers as a light pair of slacks for the water.



They did wild and crazy things that were incomprehensible to their parents and elders. The young women took part in dance marathons; one lasted 119 days. The dance marathon was brutal, leaving the contestants exhausted and nearly unconscious on their feet, with swollen legs and blistered toes. The young women loved jazz because it was wild and exciting, and the youth loved the movement and rhythm, the action, the beat, the sound. There was a thrill to the wildness of the dance floor.



They went the limit in putting on bathing attire that was quite abbreviated and revealing, and many young women were arrested for what police charged was "indecent exposure."



Women always wore white silk gloves when in society or at a party, and they left calling cards when they paid visits to other homes and families. Women loved to play bridge.



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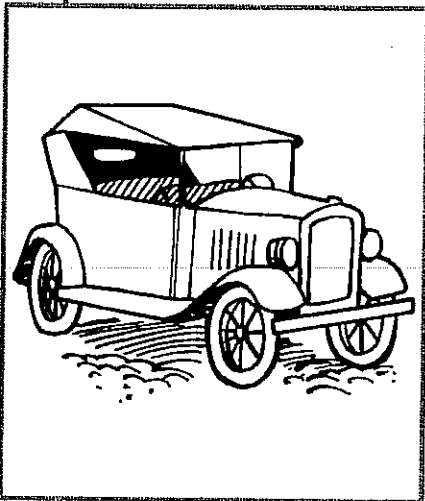
What was a dance or a party without the flask? Every young man carried a hip flask filled with liquor. Women had flasks, too, often tucked into the garters of their stockings, and a simple hoist of the skirt had the flask in hand for a quick snort. Wild and crazy “party crashing,” especially on a Saturday-night or over the weekend, became all the rage. Young people would drive from one city to another, crash a party, and drink all the liquor in the house without even knowing the name of the host or hostess. Drinking in public became acceptable, and during Prohibition more and more women ordered cocktails and joined male companions in the speakeasies. The idea that a saloon or bar was the private preserve of the male came quickly to an end. These women drank, and they could sock it away with the best of the male drinkers.



These women were urged by their mothers to wear corsets, too, but as soon as the pretty young things got to the dance or the fraternity party, they all made a beeline for the ladies room, and off came the corsets and any other restraining undergarment.



Women bobbed their hair and kept it short. Along with the bobbed hair, they wore skull-hugging hats called *cloches*.



Women drove their own roadsters and automobiles and showed they were quite capable behind the wheel. They liked the wildness and excitement of the speed. Jumping into a roadster and careening down the highway with their boyfriends was thrilling and exciting.



Women wore corsets made of whalebone that gave them figures shaped like an hourglass.

Women’s clothing had a touch of elegance, with dresses and gowns made of silks and brocades, accentuating the bodice and tightly sculpting the female figure. The dress covered the body completely, reaching down to the ankle, with collars that came to the neck and sleeves that embraced the wrist.



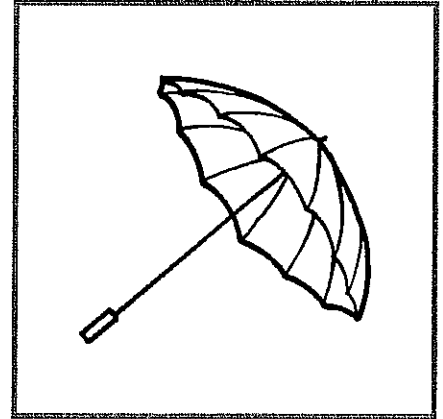
Prior to the First World War, the waltz was king. There was charm and elegance to holding your partner, waltzing and flowing along to the melodies that gave dancers a grace and unparalleled beauty.

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The length of the dress or the skirt climbed to shocking heights. Short skirts and high hemlines were the rule. This went along with the low waistlines to set a trend. The dresses and garments were loose, with a low beltline that slithered downward off the hips. The style dictated that the knees, and even a portion of the thigh, would be provocatively and alluringly revealed. It became a fad to roll down stockings to the knee. When dancing the Charleston, the looseness of the dress material moved and swayed and would fly as high as it could go. The young women were not ashamed of showing off their shapely legs encased in silk stockings.



Diamonds, a short strand of pearls, and exquisite jewelry were permissible adornment on social occasions. Ladies carried small drawstring bags that invariably held a linen handkerchief, a small case with a bit of powder for the face, and a small purse for loose change. Ladies carried parasols to shield them from the rays of the sun, and they were demure and coquettish, twirling the parasol and flirting with the young men who were clearly longing for just the glimpse of a finely shaped ankle.



This young lady was the idealization of the female at this time. The hair flowed in abundance and was swept upward into an alluring coiffure. A woman preferred her hair gathered in the back and carefully sculpted into a bun.



This woman wore long strings of beads that were the rage. She carried large handbags for car keys and wallets, lipstick, mascara, rouge, face powder, and the whole assortment of makeup, plus bills and loose change, cigarettes, cigarette lighter, cigarette holder, an extra pair of stockings, and whatever other garments might be needed in an emergency. Women loved the beach and sun and hid no more.



These women were described as brash. They were brassy, saucy, and flirtatious. Women became very outspoken and advanced their own opinions, quite loudly in public and in mixed company. They liked to kiss and pet. The automobile offered a place for heavy petting and kissing. Inhibitions melted away, and these women were far from being repressed females. These women smoked in public. Suddenly it was no longer “unladylike” to light up a cigarette and smoke anywhere and everywhere a young woman chose to do so!



The Jazz Age, the decade right through the twenties, was a “time for youth,” filled with young people looking for thrills, excitement, and parties. The college crowd played Mah-jongg, and they didn’t want to be bothered by “ideals” and “causes.” “Social justice” simply meant that everyone had equal access to the spiked punch bowl at the fraternity party.

Comparison Chart: The Flapper and the Gibson Girl

Using the information on the previous pages, write the key words to describe each type of woman in the chart below.

Category	Flapper (1920s)	Gibson Girl (1890s–1900s)
College		
Bathing Suits		
Dancing and Music		
Parties or Social Callings		
Liquor		
Undergarments or Underwear		
Hair		
Transportation		
Skirts and Dresses		
Accessories		
Conduct and Behavior		