

Comparing the Flapper to the Gibson Girl

Read the information below and put the information into the correct column on page EA-12 so that you can compare the flapper to the Gibson girl. By completing this exercise, you will be able to see the big change in the women's movement during a very short period in history.

There were very few chances for women to get an education in those days. Most people thought a woman should be at home, raising children, waiting on 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 college campuses. 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 pants for the water.

They did wild and crazy things that their parents and other older people couldn't understand. The young women took part in dance marathons; one lasted 119 days. The dance marathon was brutal, leaving the dancers exhausted, with swollen legs and blistered toes. They loved jazz because it was wild and exciting, and young people loved the movement and rhythm, the action, the beat, the sound. There was a thrill to the wildness of the dance floor.

They went to the limit in putting on bathing suits that were shorter and showed more skin, 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 visited other homes and families. Women loved to play bridge.



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What was a dance or a party without alcohol? Every young man carried a hip flask (a small metal container), filled with liquor. Women had flasks, too, sometimes tucked into the garters of their stockings. Wild and crazy, "party crashing," especially on a Saturday night, 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 men in the speakeasies. The idea that a saloon or bar was only for men came quickly to an end. These women drank, and they could sock it away with the best of the 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 ran to 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 automobiles and showed they were good drivers. They liked the wildness and excitement of the speed. Jumping into the 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, making the most of each tight hourglass figure. The dress covered the body completely, reaching down to the ankle, with collars that came to the neck and sleeves that wrapped tightly around the wrist.



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



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The length of the dress or the skirt was much shorter. Short skirts and high hemlines were the rule. This went along with the low waistlines. The dresses and garments were loose, with a low beltline. The knees, and sometimes part of the thigh, would be shown. It became a fad to roll down the stockings to the knees. When young women were 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 wrapped in silk stockings.



Diamonds, a short strand of pearls, and beautiful jewelry were allowed on social occasions. Ladies carried small drawstring bags that held a handkerchief, a small case with a bit of powder for the face, and a small purse for loose change. Ladies carried parasols (small umbrellas) to shield them from the rays of the sun. They twirled the parasol and flirted with young men who couldn't wait to catch a glimpse of a lovely ankle.



This young lady was the perfect female at this time. The hair flowed and was swept upward into a sexy hairdo. A woman liked to have her hair gathered in the back and carefully sculpted into a bun.



This woman wore long strings of beads that were very popular. This young woman carried large handbags for car keys and wallets, lipstick, mascara, rouge, face powder and other makeup, plus bills and loose change, cigarettes, lighter, and cigarette holder, an extra pair of stockings, and whatever other garments might be needed in an emergency. Women loved the beach and sun and didn't hide themselves anymore.



These women were described as bold. They were flashy, saucy, and flirtatious. They spoke their minds and offered their own opinions, quite loudly, in public and in front of men as well as women. They liked to kiss and fool around in the back seat of the car. 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!



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 could take a drink from the spiked punch bowl at the fraternity party.