

Primary Source Reading 7-1 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

## What Is a Flapper?

### ▣ About the Selection

The flapper was the 1920s version of the liberated woman. She was free from long skirts, long hair, and long-held ideas about a woman's place in society. In the following selection from a 1925 article in *Collier's* magazine, Samuel Crowther concludes that "the flapper is today our most important national institution."

### Reader's Dictionary



**standardized:** made the same

### GUIDED READING

As you read, take note of the outstanding characteristics of a flapper. Then answer the questions that follow.

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The real flapper is what used to be known as the "poor working girl"—who, if the accounts are true, dragged herself off day by day to work until someone came along and married her. Sometimes she was a Cinderella, but more often she graduated a household drudge.

The flapper of to-day is a very different person. In dress she is as standardized as a chain hotel—and incidentally hotel bedrooms are becoming so alike that you can remember what city you are in only by tacking a local newspaper on the wall.

Barring size, flappers at a hundred feet are as standardized as Ford cars. As far as dress goes, they are a simplified national product. . . . There is no distinction between the town flapper and the farm flapper—the automobile has wiped them out. There is no distinction in the cut of clothing between the rich flapper and the poor flapper—national advertising has attended to that. The rich flapper has better clothing than the poor one, but a block away they are all flappers.

The outstanding characteristic of the flapper is not her uniform but her independence and her will to be prosperous.

She is no clinging vine. I was in the office of the president of a good-sized bank on the Pacific Coast when his daughter and several of her high-school friends burst in—flappers all. We got to talking and I found that these girls, not one of whom had any need to work, all intended to find jobs during the summer, and they thought that most of the girls in school would do the same. They all wanted to know how to make a living—and to have a good time doing it. That seems to be common everywhere.

Girls will no longer marry men who can merely support them—they can support themselves better than can many of the men of their own age. They have awakened to the fact that the "superior sex" stuff is all bunk. They will not meekly bow their heads to the valiant man who roars, "Where is that dress I bought you three years ago?" . . .

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The flapper wants to look well, and she is willing to provide for herself—employers everywhere told me that the women were doing better work than the men, and they do seem to be mentally more alert. All of which means that the man who marries the modern flapper has got to provide for her—she will not be merely an unpaid servant. And this in turn means that the men have got to work—which nothing better could happen for the country. The flapper is to-day our most important national institution. . . .

The will to be prosperous has brought prosperity. We have practically no poverty, and I judge that at least two-thirds of what little we have is voluntary.

Source: "Aren't We All Rich Now?" *Collier's*, November 7, 1925.

**READER RESPONSE**

**Directions:** Answer the following questions on the lines below.

1. How do employers feel about flappers?

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2. What effect does the flapper's economic independence have on relations between men and women?

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3. What two traits are common to all flappers?

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4. **Critical Thinking** What do you think the writer means when he says the flapper is "as standardized as a chain hotel"?

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5. **Critical Thinking** What is the author's point of view about the flapper?

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