

(Free pdf) Posing a Threat: Flappers, Chorus Girls, and Other Brazen Performers of the American 1920s

## Posing a Threat: Flappers, Chorus Girls, and Other Brazen Performers of the American 1920s

Angela J. Latham

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Angela J. Latham : Posing a Threat: Flappers, Chorus Girls, and Other Brazen Performers of the American 1920s before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Posing a Threat: Flappers, Chorus Girls, and Other Brazen Performers of the American 1920s:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The American culture in transition: Flappers and Gibson Girls of

1920s By Rama Rao This book is partly historical in nature that discusses as how the women in 1920s redefined sexuality and feminist movement. The expression of sexuality and nakedness as flapper girls on Broadway and Hollywood movies of 1920s paved the way for women's revolution; for expressing themselves as women using emerging fashion of that time. The "flapper look" was as much a pose as it was a particular style of clothing that women wore. It was a frank and free expression and the allure of beauty at its core. The ladies started looking for autonomy for their financial, moral or physical well-being; it was a sisterhood of mothers, daughters, sisters and wives who needed to look out for each other and protect their interests. Specific arguments against fashionable displays by women in 1920s by clergy, politicians, and self-proclaimed community leaders seemed, more often, as red herrings. Women struggled against enormous odds to define a nebulous entity in terms of their own identities. They received multiple and conflicting messages about who they should be. Everyone wanted to control women's clothing. The controversies that raged about women's fashions throughout 1920s do indeed mark this era as important one in which to assess the interplay between conflicting social and ideological agendas inscribed on the bodies of women. The performance of fashion raised troubling questions. Case in point; the one-piece bathing suit popularized by Annette Kellerman, professional swimmer and vaudeville star was legally banned in many countries, and she was arrested for indecent exposure at Boston Revere Beach in 1908. For the "guardians of moral values" the less restrictive clothes went hand-in-hand with diminishing morals of women. Some sociologists suggested that sexual mores were changing. In one chapter the author discuss the power of performance about brazen femininity by examining the play, "Ladies Night in a Turkish Bath," originally written by Charlton Andrews and later reworked by Avery Hopwood. The story is about a gentleman who undergoes a homeopathic treatment to cure his bashfulness lands in a Turkish bath on ladies' night. It was censored in Chicago for its unbashful display of women. The play violated unwritten and yet powerful codes of personal intimacy by the close proximity of using nudity. The bedroom farce of this play had moved one step closer to raw humanity and the fact the whole play was set in a bath was threatening to many folks. The author's careful examination of this play and how it was received by general public makes a very interesting read. The author concludes that American 1920's represented a high-water mark in female autonomy using fashion and body display and changed the attitudes towards morality. Women presented their fashion and body as a site and not a symbol; femininity is sacred. This focus complicated our perception of what it meant to be a woman in 1920s; even now after almost 100 years, the attitude towards fairer sex has not significantly changed. 19 of 20 people found the following review helpful. An interesting look at life for women in the 1920s. By V. Richmond The author's basic premise is that in the 1920s, women used display to resist, while at times seeming to conform to, those who would have squeezed them into the molds of how society would have them appear. In the first few chapters, she does a good job of this. Especially insightful is the example of her own grandmother, who as a young woman in this time period, disguised both her bobbed hair and her married state so that she could continue in her chosen profession as teacher. However, in the latter two chapters of the book, the author seems to focus more on the exploitation of women by the theatre industry and it's effects. In this, she seems to stray too far from her theme. It would have been better if she had had more examples like that of her grandmother which supported her theme, rather than diverging off of the topic. I really do recommend this book at least for the initial chapters, which are an interesting look at the attitudes of an era that has been very much stereotyped. It gives you an idea of the some of the restrictions that would have been felt by a woman who was, not a Greta Garbo or Clara Bow, but an average person trying to live from day to day.... 6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Too Academic and Without Focus By Jadel I got this book and I have to say that I read the introduction off of and wanted to read more stories such as that of the author's Grandmother. The book was WAY too dry and academic which is not necessarily a problem but the author seems to have lost focus. By the closing of the book, the author seemed not to be sure just how to tie up the book. While some aspects of the book were interesting with very good illustrations within, other aspects such as the end chapters dealing with the bathing suit controversies and the chorus girl criticism seemed overwrought with angry feminist analysis from the author. It seemed as if one was trying to figure out if this was the author's own personal opinion or one based off of careful research into the topic. The author was trying to make the case that the 1920s was not an age of hedonistic freedom that is sometimes presented in other books on that time the fact is that from much of her illustrations and footnotes it can clearly be seen that in contrast to the age previous (the Edwardian) age the 20s was in fact an age of Hedonism which has of course been exposted in other books only to come to an end with the economic crash of the 30s. The author failed also to actually analyze the biographies of actual "flappers", chorus girls and others to actually posit her thesis which really failed miserably. Her analysis was simplistic.

New definitions of American femininity were formed in the pivotal 1920s, an era that vastly expanded the "market" for sexually explicit displays by women. Angela J. Latham shows how quarrels over and censorship of women's performance -- particularly in the arenas of fashion and theater -- uniquely reveal the cultural idiosyncracies of the period and provide valuable clues to the developing iconicity of the female body in its more recent historical phases. Through disguise, display, or judicious appropriation of both, performance became a crucial means by which women contested, affirmed, mitigated, and revolutionized norms of female self-presentation and self-stylization.

Fashion was a hotly contested arena of bodily display. Latham surveys 1920s fashion trends and explores popular fashion rhetoric. Resistance to social mandates regarding women's fashion was nowhere more pronounced than in the matter of "bathing costumes." Latham critiques locally situated contests over swimwear, including those surrounding the first Miss America Pageant, and suggests how such performances sanctioned otherwise unacceptable self-presentations by women. Looking at American theater, Latham summarizes major arguments about censorship and the ideological assumptions embedded within them. Although sexually provocative displays by women were often the focus of censorship efforts, "leg shows," including revues like the Zeigfeld Follies, were in their heyday. Latham situates the popularity of such performances that featured women's bodies within the larger context of censorship in the American theater at this time.

In her engaging analysis of women's dress in the 1920s . . . Latham plumbs the age's agendas regarding women's clothing and their bodies. -- Lois W. Banner, Professor, History and Gender Studies, University of Southern California  
Latham offers a lively and provocative analysis of women's ways of testing the boundaries of gender definitions during the Roaring Twenties. -- Kathleen J. Turner, author, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press*  
"In her engaging analysis of women's dress in the 1920s, Angela Latham is the first analyst in recent times to address at any length the important issue of the meaning of the flapper for the United States. Drawing her information from conservative moralists, feminists, and men and women of the stage, Latham plumbs the age's agendas regarding women's clothing and their bodies." (Lois W. Banner, Professor, History and Gender Studies, University of Southern California)  
"Melding resources as diverse as newspaper reports, women's magazines, sermons, and theatrical reviews with sophisticated theoretical concepts, Angela Latham offers a lively and provocative analysis of women's ways of testing the boundaries of gender definitions during the Roaring Twenties." (Kathleen J. Turner author of *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press*)  
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