

**FLAPPERS LIFESTYLE AS REFLECTED IN  
'THE GREAT GATSBY (2013)' MOVIE**

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**ABSTRACT**

The era of the 1920s, or often referred to as 'The Roaring Twenties' can be regarded as one of the golden era of the United States after World War I. The result of the golden age was a lifestyle of the women known as 'flapper'. Flapper can be identified by the way they dress and carry themselves, two of which are bob haircut and slim black dresses. Flapper lifestyle is one of the subcultures of the United States is still remembered until today.

The writing of the thesis is aimed to identify and analyze flapper's culture in The Great Gatsby movie produced in 2013. To obtain the desired result, the writer use textual method with library research as data collecting method. The writer will use definitions and characteristics found in a book titled Flappers: a guide to an American subculture written by Kelly Boyer Sagert. Through analyses in this thesis, the writer concludes that as a long faded American subculture, the culture of flapper still can be seen in The Great Gatsby movie.

Keywords: Flapper, 1920, American subculture

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Movie as one of literary works has the function to reflect and influence society. From a movie, we can see what is going on a society. The movie ‘The Great Gatsby (2013)’, a movie adaptation of a novel with the same title, reflects the society of American society in the 1920s. The novel was written by F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1925.

The movie ‘The Great Gatsby’ tells the story of a businessman named Jay Gatsby from the point of view of Nick Carraway, another character in the movie. The movie starts with a scene where Nick tells the story about Jay Gatsby. Jay Gatsby lived next to his house and held a huge party every week. Later, it turned out that Jay Gatsby held the party so that he could meet Daisy, Nick’s cousin who was also Jay’s former lover. The story took places in the US in 1920s, the years of the Flappers.

The word ‘flappers’ were popping up in the United States after the First World War (WWI) ended. In the (WWI), the men were sent to war so that the women waiting at home were forced to play the male roles, such as working. It caused the women of needing practical appearances, as well as daring and dynamic attitudes. After the First World War ended in 1918, the U.S. government made policy over female workers. Increasing the number of female workers on a large scale led to the term ‘flapper’.

Later, the meaning of flappers developed into a sub-culture of the United States that were identical to the young women who love to live a glamorous life. According to Kelly Boyer Sagert in her book *Flappers: A Guide to An American Subculture* (2010), the flappers could be recognized through the physical appearance of the young women, who were always depicted with short bobbed hair and wearing open dresses, that exposed their shins. The flappers also tend to act more freely and ‘bold’ than women in previous eras. Flapper were not shy to dance and smoke in public.

The writer is interested in studying Flappers as one of American Sub-Culture. However, since the Flappers began to disappear after the 1920s, the study of the sub-culture can be done through literary works from the era. The movie ‘The Great Gatsby (2013)’ is very interesting to be studied because it is an adaptation of a literary work, a novel, from the era of the Flappers.

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## **II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

There are some narrative elements I would like to explain in this thesis, which are theme, character, and setting. The theme is the idea that is controlling the whole story.

“The theme of a piece of fiction is its controlling idea or its central insight. It is the unifying generalization about life stated or implied by the story” (Perrine, 1956:40).

Since it contains elements of the story, a film must have characters that are part of the story. It is mentioned by X.J. Kennedy in ‘Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense’, that characters are unreal characters who live in the story (1983:45).

To give a life to the story, each character has their own characterization. The characterization of the characters is told in two different ways, direct presentation and indirect presentation.

Aside from theme and character, one of the intrinsic elements is setting. Barnet (2008) mentions that the setting is more important, it gives us the feel of the people who move through it. According to Abrams (1999), there are three different types of setting, namely setting of place, time, and social environment. Setting of place can be observed from city or country where the story takes place. Setting of time can be implied from date or year the story takes place. Social environment can be seen from what happened in the society where the story takes place and how far the event in the society can affect the story.

In cinematic elements, there are visual elements and audio elements. In this thesis, I explain about distance of the camera and *mise en scène* as parts of visual elements.

Ascher and Pincus (1999) stated that there are several types of shots distance, which is also known as ‘field size’. Four of them which are often used are long shot, full shot, medium shot, and close up. While three of them that are rarely used are extreme long shot,  $\frac{3}{4}$  shot (also known as ‘American shot’ or ‘cowboy shot’), and extreme close up (also known as ‘Italian shot’).

*Mise en scène* itself consists of couple elements, namely lighting and costume. In this thesis, the writer will focus on costume. Costume reflects the character and the group she or he belongs to.

Costume itself needs to be made in accordance with the setting of the show. Covey and Ingham (1992) states that costume should be made after doing analysis measured from, including geographical location, time setting of the show, and social status of the character. Makeup is also a component that cannot be separated from costume since it serves to support the costume to embrace the character according to Bordwell and Thompson in their book entitled Film Art: an Introduction(2008).

Audio elements as one of cinematic elements are functioned to create atmosphere within the film. Audio elements can be divided into several types, including dialogue and music. Dialogue is conversation between two or more people, communicating by using

spoken language, while music is functioned to fill the silence in the film. According to *Film Art: an Introduction* (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008), the sound of music can help the audience to build and interpret the image of the film.

The flappers were popping up in the United States after the First World War (WWI) ended. In the (WWI), the men were sent to war so that the women waiting at home were forced to play the male roles, such as working. It caused the women of needing practical appearances, as well as daring and dynamic attitudes. After the First World War ended in 1918, the U.S. government made policy over female workers. Increasing the number of female workers on a large scale led to the term 'flapper'. Later, the meaning of flapper developed into a sub-culture of the United States that were identical to the young women who love to live a glamorous life.

The flappers looked different from the women in previous era, which in this case is devoted to the Gibson Girl, the women in the 1910s.

According to Sagert (2009), the flappers could be recognized through the physical appearance of the young women, who were always depicted with short bobbed hair and wearing open dresses that exposed their skins. The flapper also tends to act more freely and 'bold' than women in previous eras. Flapper were not shy to dance and smoke in public.

Flappers' trend to cut their hair bobbed and wear clothing that shows several body parts such as the shoulders and knees were very popular at that time so that the article on how the flapper's looks appeared in various magazines and newspapers, such as *Vogue*, *Time*, *New York Times*, and *The Flapper*.

The flappers love to attend parties, to dance and chat with other flappers. They also usually smoke. At the party, they like to drink alcohol beverages and get drunk. They really love to dance so that they created their own dance moves called 'The Charleston'.

Aside from dancing which has been mentioned as one of the flappers' activities, it is also mentioned by Sagert (2009) that they also enjoy other entertainments such as listening to the radio, watching silent movies or drama, and taking a ride in the Sunday afternoon.

The presence of many fashion magazines featuring flapper issues of that time, such as the latest fashion trends and makeup, in magazines such as *Vogue* or *The Flapper*, shows that there were flapper readers. So it can be concluded that in addition to the entertainment mentioned before, the flappers also made reading magazines as one of their entertainment in the spare time.

The 'good life' emphasized by the hedonists, the perpetrators of hedonism, is a life that is always a matter of excitement. They don't value that life may contain anything else besides sheer pleasure.

There are also differences between pleasure, which is valued in hedonism, and happiness. Feldman (2004) mentioned that pleasure can be felt even though you are not happy. While being happy is experiencing lots of pleasures in your life.

Feldman (2009) also mentions three principals of hedonism, which is called as 'Default Hedonism'. First, every pleasure is good; every pain is bad. Second, the intrinsic value of an episode of pleasure is equal to the number of hedonism of pleasure contained; the intrinsic value of an episode of pain is equal to the number of pains. And finally, the intrinsic value of a life is entirely determined by the intrinsic values of pleasure and pain contained in that life, in such a way that one life is intrinsically better than another if and only if the net amount of pleasure in the one is greater than the net amount of pleasure in the other.

There is also a part of hedonism which is known as attitudinal pleasures. It is a pleasure that you feel towards object(s).

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### **III. RESEARCH METHODS**

In analyzing this film, the writer uses social psychology approach. Social psychology approach focuses on the reasons of human activity in society, like William McDougall states in Wendy Roger's Social Psychology – Experimental and Critical Approaches, "Social psychology should be recognized as the rightful domain in which study the springs of human action, the impulses and motives that sustain mental and bodily activity and regulate conduct" (2003: 12).

In addition, the writer is using the theoretical framework about Flappers contained in the book Flappers: A Guide to An American Subculture by Kelly Boyer Sagert. The writer is applying the theory of hedonism by Fred Feldman in his book Pleasure and the Good Life - Concerning the Nature, Varieties, and Plausibility of Hedonism.

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### **IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

'The Great Gatsby' takes place in the United States in the 1920s who is told from the perspective of Nick Carraway, a simple yet humble young man. In this movie, Nick Carraway met with Jay Gatsby, a wealthy young businessman who likes to throw a party for the upper middle class just to draw attention of Daisy Buchanan, a former lover who is now married, who is also the cousin of Nick Carraway.

Ultimately, the story of Jay Gatsby's love for Daisy Buchanan does not manifest, Daisy still chooses to be with her husband. This can be seen at the funeral of Jay Gatsby, Daisy Buchanan which is the indirect cause of the death of Gatsby run away with her husband.

Regardless of the end of the love story of Jay Gatsby and Daisy Buchanan, the film is characterized by the glitter of life in the United States in the 1920s. This film shows a scene that takes the background of New York at that time both the day and night. The scenes show how the city of New York is built into a city that is so luxurious and sparkling. People who are in the city of New York is also shown really enjoy their life, regardless of white or black. The black man has a dream, the American Dream, to receive equal treatment with the whites. In the movie 'The Great Gatsby', there is a scene where Nick was amazed to see a black man driving a car driven by a white man.

In various scenes in the film, including the residence of the party scene in Gatsby, the film director wanted to show clearly how the lifestyle of the people at that time. Look at all that a party at the residence Gatsby shown many times in the film, showing the audience habits party in this film represents the community in the United States in the 1920s. They love to dance, listen to jazz, smoking, and drinking.

Of course the partying habits of various circles in New York cannot be separated from the nature of hedonism. Party held by Jay, which is described as a party with a background major city in the United States in the 1920s. The party is just for sheer pleasure. It was very clearly seen in several scenes in the film that this party is a very great and messy party. All people from all over come to visit. They are the officials, workers, and even students. The women come dressed in fancy clothes and jewelry. Their mutual reason to come is to have fun and forget the sadness and pain.

The film 'The Great Gatsby' takes setting in several major places. It takes places in couple cities in the United States of America, namely New York City and Long Island. In New York City, the film takes place in several different places such as hotels in downtown, on the highway, the gentleman's club, and a luxury cafe on the top of building's roof. All of the pictures are taken using the long shoot which is used to define the setting.

The film 'The Great Gatsby' taking backdrop of the 1920s, after the first world war ended. This is evidenced as the male character in this film is a war veteran who had just ended a few years ago.

There is a scene where Jordan told Nick that Jay Gatsby and Daisy had a relationship before finally Jay Gatsby sent to war.

*JORDAN Well... I don't know quite where to start. You see... I met Gatsby, five years ago, in Louisville... (00:45:33).*

*NICK Five years ago Gatsby found himself at Daisy's house by colossal accident. (01:21:42)*

From Jordan's quote, we can conclude that Jay Gatsby was not sent to war until five years ago. The First World War started from 1914 to 1918. It can be concluded that 5 years after the end of the first world war was in the 1920s.

Although this film also shows several scenes that show the lower middle class life represented by the character Myrtle and her husband, the movie 'The Great Gatsby' more emphasizes on the social setting of the upper middle class life represented by Jay Gatsby, Tom and Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker, and the fancy party in New York City in the 1920s.

Those characters always look neat and clean, unlike the minor characters that live in the connecting road between Long Island and New York City, as Myrtle Watson and her husband. The major characters, such as Jay Gatsby and Daisy Buchanan as major characters, look fancy and it is not uncommon to see they use jewelry in several scenes. It shows that they are, or try to be, a part of upper middle class.

Costume and makeup take as important roles in the film since the film takes the setting in 1920, so that the fashion style is totally different from the current era. The costume and makeup should make the characters look like they really live in America in 1920s.

We can see that both Daisy and Jordan have bobbed hair style. The hairstyle is very popular in the 1920s. The hairstyle is also reflecting how the women of that era were very fond of freedom, so they cut their hair short to free them to move. They also wear open dresses that show their bare arm.

The other female characters' appearances are very similar to Daisy and Jordan's. The film is trying to show that their appearances are the appearance that is very popular in the era so that every female character in this film wears it.

The other component of *mise-en-scène* besides costume and hairstyle, which is also very important to determine the character's appearance and behavior is make up. Jordan Baker is always seen wearing a bold-colored makeup, such as thick eyeliner and red lipstick. Her bold makeup shows that she wants to look flashy.

The dialogue helps the writer to find out what a character thinks or wants. In observing flapper lifestyle in this film, the writer will use several dialogues to find what the characters think of themselves or other character.

*JORDAN*      *Well I don't care; he gives large parties - and I like large parties, they're so intimate. (00:28:10)*

*JORDAN*      *At small parties there isn't any privacy. (00:28:12)*

From the dialogue, we can conclude that Jordan Baker, as one of the female characters in the film, likes to party, especially large party so that she has some privacy.

This music is using several songs namely 'Bang Bang' sung by Will.i.am and 'A Little Party Never Killed Nobody' sung by Fergie. Both of the songs are played during the party scene. Party is identical to festive atmosphere. The vibrant beat in both songs is used to build and take the audience to feel the festive image of the party at the Gatsby's. Both of the music also played with saxophone, which is very identical with jazz music, one music genre popular in the 1920s.

This proves that in the movie 'The Great Gatsby', the woman characters that come to Gatsby's party, which has been categorized as the flappers, make dance as one of their entertainment at a party, in addition to smoking and drinking.

There are many aspects raised in the film 'The Great Gatsby', one of which is hedonism. Hedonism can be defined as actions taken solely for pleasure and self-satisfaction.

Party held by Jay, which is described as a party with a background major cities in the United States in the 1920s, not much different from the party which was held on the 21st century. The party is just for sheer pleasure. It was very clearly seen in several scenes in the film that this party is a very great and messy party. All people from all over come to visit. They are the officials, workers, and even students. The women come dressed in fancy clothes and jewelry. Their mutual reason to come is to have fun and forget the sadness and pain.

All the characters in the film, including the female characters, love to party. Party can be one way to feel pleasure. In the party, you feel pleasure and forget all of your pains. But you cannot guarantee that everyone in the party feels happy.



In the previous chapter, it is also explained one of the forms of pleasure which is attitudinal pleasure that can be associated with hedonism. The writer has found a couple of aspects shown by the characters that can be reflecting attitudinal pleasure, such as their love of party and luxurious things. How do they express their love of the things of luxury and pleasure, is to enjoy the party and put the items they consider a luxury.

In the movie, especially in the party scene, we can see that all of the major and minor characters, especially the female ones, are wearing the similar outfit and jewelry – they all look flashy.

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## **V. CONCLUSION**

Flapper is a sub-culture of the United States that emerged in the 1920s. Flapper itself is the young woman at the time who likes to look inconspicuous, such as using open dress and have a bob haircut; love smoking and dancing.

The Great Gatsby movie, a film taking setting in the era, shows lots of the characteristics of the flappers through physical features, such as appearances, supported by costume and makeup using in the film; through the figures of young female characters who are the part of the story, like Daisy Buchanan and Jordan Baker.

Through these characters, it can be concluded that the flappers have striking and very interesting style; like a bob haircut, slim body, and flashy makeup. The flappers also make a habit of smoking. The flappers also like to do things that are not identical to their own sex, such as sports and work. They are also very casual in relationships with men.

The film is trying to show the flappers in high class society. It is proven by the scenes that showing the flapper lifestyle only in high class social environment, such as Gatsby's party, Long Island, and New York City.

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