Just after the end of the First World War, a new creature appeared on the streets of cities around the world. Her hair was short, as were her skirts. She smoked, wore lipstick, and went out dancing without a chaperone. No one knew what to make of her. To some, she was dangerous; to others, exciting. She was the flapper, garçonne, neue Frau, moga, modeng xiaojie, kallege ladki: all terms for what we will call the “Modern Girl.” This course examines the so-called Modern Girl of the 1920's and 1930's, considering how she reflected—and helped to create—a new “modern” lifestyle. The Modern Girl was both a fictional creation and a flesh-and-blood creature. We will investigate “her” in her many manifestations, from fiction, film, and advertisements to the sound of her heels clicking on actual city streets. Modern Girls really did exist around the world, and, while this course will concentrate on the West, we will also look at examples from Asia and Africa.

Course requirements. Class sessions will combine lecture and discussion. All students are expected to complete each reading assignment before class begins, attend each and every class, and contribute actively to class discussion. Graded assignments include 3 in-class exams (each worth 20% of the final grade), two 3–5 page papers (each worth 15%) and class participation (10%).

Late Policy. All unexcused late assignments will be marked down one full letter grade for each calendar day that they are late. In class exams can only be taken on the day designated on the syllabus. There will be no make-up exams. The only exceptions will be for documented cases of serious medical emergency (a case of the sniffles is not a serious medical emergency) and with notification before the exam takes place.

Students are expected to abide by Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy (available at http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml). Any and all violations will be prosecuted, with the typical penalty being an F in the course. Any students with the slightest bit of doubt about how to use or properly cite sources in their written work are strongly encouraged to meet with me to clarify this.

Texts. The following books have been ordered at the Rutgers Bookstore.


Additional required readings will be posted on the Sakai site for this course (accessed via https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal). All files in the “Resources” folder under the last name of the author, i.e. Fitzgerald.pdf.

Daily Reading Assignments and Due Dates

January 21 Introduction: Who is the Modern Girl?

I. Modern Life, Modern Girls
January 26  Mother of the Modern Girl: The New Woman  
Mary Louise Roberts, “Making the Modern Girl French” in MG pp.77–95

January 28  World War I and the Birth of the MG  
Vera Brittain, “War Diary” (on Sakai)  
Naomi Loughnan, “Genteel Women in The Factories” (on Sakai)  
Magda Trott, “Opposition to Female Employment” (on Sakai)

February 2  The Modern Girl in the Modern City  
Bruce Bliven, “Flapper Jane” (on Sakai)  
Katharina Rathaus, “Charleston: Every Age Has the Dance It Deserves” (on Sakai)

February 4  Morals, Marriage and the Modern Girl  
Elsa Hermann, “This Is the New Woman” (on Sakai)  
Lola Landau, “The Companionate Marriage” (on Sakai)

February 9  Flapper Comrades? The MG in the USSR  
Anne Goresuch, “The Dance Class or the Working Class” in MG pp.174–193

February 11  Modern Girls in China  
Tani Barlow, “’Buying In’ in MG pp. 288–316 (recommended)

February 16  Fascism and the Modern Girl  
Uta Poiger, “Fantasies of Universality?” in MG pp. 317–344

February 18  If Modern Girls Are So Rich, Why Are Women So Poor?  
Virginia Woolf, A Room of One’s Own, pp. 3–56

February 23  A Literature for Modern Girls?  
Virginia Woolf, A Room of One’s Own, pp. 7–114

February 25  Exam #1

II. The “Modern Girl” in Literature and Film

March 4  Flappers and Philosophers: American Modern Girls in Fiction  
F. Scott Fitzgerald, “Bernice Bobs Her Hair” (on Sakai)  
Dorothy Parker, “Mr. Durant” (On Sakai)

March 9  The Scandalous Garçonne  
Victor Margueritte, La Garçonne (The Bachelor Girl), p. 108–163  
(on Sakai—IN TWO PARTS!)

March 12  Magazines and the Modern Girl  
Barbara Sato, “Contesting Consumerisms” in MG pp. 263–287

March 16–20  Spring Break

March 23  The Moga and the Office Worker
Junichiro Tanikazi, *Naomi*, pp. 3–121

March 25  
The Perils of the Modernity?  
*Tanizaki, Naomi* pp. 122–237

March 30  
It Girls: Clara Bow, Louise Brooks, Marlene Dietrich  
**Paper #1 (on film) due**

April 1  
*Kallege Ladki* on the Silver Screen  
Prithi Ramamurthy, “All Consuming Nationalism” in *MG* 147–173

April 6  
**Exam #2**

III. Material Girls: Consumption, the Beauty Business, and Race

April 8  
**Slim and Streamlined: Modern Girl Fashion**  
Dorothy Parker, “The Standard of Living” (on Sakai)  

April 13  
We All Have to be Skinny Like Coco (Chanel)  
Margaret A. Lowe, “From Robust Appetites to Calorie Counting: The Emergence of Dieting Among Smith College Students in the 1920’s” (on Sakai)

April 15  
**Lipstick, Powder and a Tan: Cosmetics and the Modern Look**  

April 20  
**Ponds, Pepsodent and Palmolive Around the World**  
MG Research Group, “Cosmetics Advertising” in *MG* pp. 25–54

April 22  
Race and Standards of Beauty  
Lynn Thomas, “Racial Respectability in South Africa” in *MG* pp. 96–119

April 27  
**Minorities and Metropoles: MG in Australia and Okinawa**  
Liz Conor, “Blackfella Missus,” in *MG* pp. 220–239  
Ruri Ito, “Colonial Modernity” in *MG* pp. 240–262  
**Paper #2 (on advertisement) due**

April 29  
**Passing as a Modern Girl**  
Alys Weinbaum, “Racial Masquerade” in *MG* pp. 120–146  
Nella Larsen, *Quicksand*, pp. 53–62 (on Sakai)

May 4  
Modern Girls Today  
Kay Hymowitz, “It’s a Single Girl’s World” (on Sakai)

May 7  
**Final Exam**  
8:00-11:00 AM