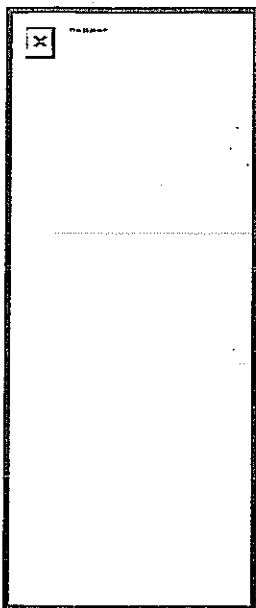


# A FLAPPER'S APPEAL TO PARENTS

BY ELLEN WELLES PAGE

The following article by Ellen Welles Page appeared in *Outlook* magazine on December 6, 1922. The illustrations which accompany this piece did not accompany the original article, but are added here for your viewing pleasure. Also, *please note*: the term "make love" meant to "sweet talk" someone in the 1920's - it did not have it's current connotation.



If one judge by appearances, I suppose I am a flapper. I am within the age limit. I wear bobbed hair, the badge of flapperhood. (And, oh, what a comfort it is!), I powder my nose. I wear fringed skirts and bright-colored sweaters, and scarfs, and waists with Peter Pan collars, and low- heeled "finale hopper" shoes. I adore to dance. I spend a large amount of time in automobiles. I attend hops, and proms, and ball-games, and crew races, and other affairs at men's colleges. But none the less some of the most

**A JAZZ AGE FLAPPER** thoroughbred superflappers might blush to claim sistership or even remote relationship with such as I. I don't use rouge, or lipstick, or pluck my eyebrows. I don't smoke (I've tried it, and don't like it), or drink, or tell "peppy stories." I don't pet. And, most unpardonable infringement of all the rules and regulations of Flapperdom, I haven't a line! But then--there are many degrees of flapper. There is the semi-flapper; the flapper; the superflapper. Each of these three main general divisions has its degrees of variation. I might possibly be placed somewhere in the middle of the first class.

I think every one realizes by this time that there has been a marked change in our much-discussed tactics. Jazz has been modified, and probably will continue to be until it has become obsolete. Petting is gradually growing out of fashion through being overworked. Yes, undoubtedly our hopeless condition is improving. But it was not for discussing these aspects of the case that began this article.

I want to beg all you parents, and grandparents, and friends, and teachers, and preachers--you who constitute the "older generation"--to overlook our shortcomings, at least for the present, and to appreciate our virtues. I wonder if it ever occurred to any of you that it required brains to become and remain a successful flapper? Indeed it does! It requires an enormous amount of cleverness and energy to keep going at the proper pace. It requires self- knowledge and self-analysis. We must know our capabilities and limitations. We must be constantly on the alert. Attainment of flapperhood is a big and serious undertaking!

"Brains?" you repeat, skeptically. "Then why aren't they used to better advantage?" That is

exactly it! And do you know who is largely responsible for all this energy's being spent in the wrong directions? You! You parents, and grandparents, and friends, and teachers, and preachers--all of you! "The war!" you cry. "It is the effect of the war!" And then you blame prohibition. Yes! Yet it is you who set the example there! But this is my point: Instead of helping us work out our problems with constructive, sympathetic thinking and acting, you have muddled them for us more hopelessly with destructive public condemnation and denunciation.

Think back to the time when you were struggling through the teens. Remember how spontaneous and deep were the joys, how serious and penetrating the sorrows. Most of us, under the present system of modern education, are further advanced and more thoroughly developed mentally, physically, and vocationally than were our parents at our age. We hold the infinite possibilities of the myriads of new inventions within our grasp. We have learned to take for granted conveniences, and many luxuries, which not so many years ago were as-yet undreamed of. We are in touch with the whole universe. We have a tremendous problem on our hands. You must help us. Give us confidence--not distrust. Give us practical aid and advice--not criticism. Praise us when praise is merited. Be patient and understanding when we make mistakes.

We are the Younger Generation. The war tore away our spiritual foundations and challenged our faith. We are struggling to regain our equilibrium. The times have made us older and more experienced than you were at our age. It must be so with each succeeding generation if it is to keep pace with the rapidly advancing and mighty tide of civilization. Help us to put our knowledge to the best advantage. Work with us! That is the way! Outlets for this surplus knowledge and energy must be opened. Give us a helping hand.

Youth has many disillusionments. Spiritual forces begin to be felt. The emotions are frequently in a state of upheaval, struggling with one another for supremacy. And Youth does not understand. There is no one to turn to--no one but the rest of Youth, which is as perplexed and troubled with its problems as ourselves. Everywhere we read and hear the criticism and distrust of older people toward us. It forms an insurmountable barrier between us. How can we turn to them?

In every person there is a desire, an innate longing, toward some special goal or achievement. Each of us has his place to fill. Each of us has his talent--be it ever so humble. And our hidden longing is usually for that for which nature equipped us. Any one will do best and be happiest doing that which he really likes and for which he is fitted. In this "age of specialists," as it has been called, there is less excuse than ever for persons being shoved into niches in which they do not belong and cannot be made to fit. The lives of such people are great tragedies. That is why it is up to you who have the supervision of us of less ripe experience to guide us sympathetically, and to help us find, encourage, and develop our special abilities and talents. Study us. Make us realize that you respect us as fellow human beings, that you have confidence in us, and, above all, that you expect us to live up to the highest ideals, and to the best that is in us.

*The flapper) symbolized an age anxious to enjoy itself, anxious to forget the past, anxious to ignore the future"*

Jacques Chastenet, "Europe in the Twenties" in *Purnell's History of the Twentieth Century*

The loosening of restrictions on women was one of the most significant legacies of the 1920s. In both America and certain countries in Europe, women were voting for the first time. Victorianism and the turn of the century Gibson Girl were out, and in her place was a saucy, booze-drinking, cigarette-smoking, knee-length-dress-wearing flapper. Youthful rebellion was certainly not unknown before the 1920s, but flappers and flaming youth struck at the very foundations of tradition and morality. Black-influenced jazz music as well as dance styles (ie. the Charleston and the Black Bottom) captivated white youth to the dismay of parents, especially fathers flirting with membership in the Ku Klux Klan. Young women were wearing dresses and shockingly tight bathing suits that showed leg skin from the knee on down—an unprecedented flaunting of flesh. They were caking on makeup, rouge no less, with the aplomb of streetwalkers—and mothers despaired. Women wanted to be "smarty" like the poet and short story writer Dorothy Parker or freewheeling like the dancer Isadora Duncan. Talking about Freud and sex were signs of hipness. While showing feminine flesh, flappers also sported an androgynous look, cutting their hair like boys (bobbed hair), but adding a feminine touch through shingling. Young men, the flaming youth, wore raccoon coats and drove around in old used Model Ts. Having a copy of H.L. Mencken's radical *American Mercury* magazine handy was also a sign of coolness and rebellion. The 1920s was the decade in which dating as we know it today was invented. The unchaperoned date was something new, and when flappers and flaming youth got together, the results could be explosive. Parents worried about "petting parties," where eager, youthful hands explored the nether regions of the opposite sex. Car rumble seats were also notorious spots for necking or "petting in the park," and "billing and cooing" (to "bill and coo" was to whisper sweet nothings while "making whoopee").



For more information about flappers and flaming youth, check out the following links:

Check out Fad Mag Online's wonderful [Flaming Youth](#) pages.

The Louise Brooks Society has a page on: [Flapper Culture](#). (Check out the rest of their excellent site as well).