

Growing up too fast

Technology-based culture causes loss of tween years in children

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In common culture, a “Tween” is defined as a child who is anywhere from eight to 12 years old. Although by every standard tweens are still considered to be children, they are behaving more and more like teenagers according to Mason Intermediate Principal Greg Sears.

Sears said that in his years in education, he has witnessed changes in tween behavior patterns, trending towards more mature interests and behaviors.

“I think that kids are wanting to grow up much faster,” Sears said.

Sears, who has a tween-age daughter, said that there big differences between being a child in today’s world as opposed to several years ago.

“I have a nine year old at home and I see that what she’s doing versus what I was doing when I was nine are very different things,” Sears said.

These changes are spawned in part by differences that have occurred in our modern age, including technology, according to Sears. Sears said he believes that technology allows kids to access information that they might not have otherwise been privy to.

“Technologies like cell phones, iPads and iPods have a lot of versatility to them,” Sears said. “And now students have the tendency to be exposed to things at an earlier age than they once were.”

While technology plays a role in aging kids at a faster rate, the marketing and advertising could be viewed as some of the biggest culprits for changes in behavioral patterns. According to businessweek.com, the term tween actually originated in the marketing sect, in order to categorize children of that age range. And while the tween demographic is a major target for advertisers and marketing, they are also commonly targeted by the media.

Senior Lauren Deluca has seen the effects of the media on younger kids first hand. Deluca has 7 year old sister, on the fringes of officially qualifying as a tween and Deluca says that the television shows she watches have a huge impact on her younger sister’s behavior.

“You can tell after she’s watched TV because then she tries to act like the people she sees on TV,” Deluca said. “She’ll see people on the TV shows she watches gossiping, and then later she’ll be sitting down playing with Barbie dolls and she’ll be making them gossip, repeating exact lines off the TV show.”

According to Deluca, today’s television shows are being intercepted by audiences that they are not intended for, which is another example of tweens reaching beyond their current age in an attempt to be more like teens.

“Kids aren’t interested in cartoons and things that are targeted towards them,” Deluca said. “My sister will say, ‘What’s Nick Jr.?’ and I’ll say, ‘It’s TV for kindergarten and first graders.’ She’ll say, ‘No way, that stuff is for

babies!’ And she’ll list all of the stuff she watches, and it’s the same as stuff kids a few years older are supposed to be watching.”

The content of kid’s television shows today has also shifted, according to Deluca, and the topics and behaviors they depict are not ideal for developing children to be exposed to.

“I think that shows I watched on Disney Channel and Nickelodeon are a lot different than the shows that are on there today,” Deluca said. “The girls on those shows are bratty, they’re unrealistic...I don’t understand why they would want to be instilling these values in little kids.”

Tweens are not only influenced by things they see on television-- they are also shaped by the people who surround them. Maria Sanchez, a fourth grader at MI, said that the person who influences her and her interests the most is her older brother.

“All younger siblings are like copycats, so I usually just try things [my brother] tries,” Sanchez said. “I usually just end up copying him, and it turns out to be really fun.”

Other tweens, such as nine year old Lucas Teufel who is a fourth grader at MI, say that their biggest influences are their friends. Teufel said that, along with the internet, his best friend is responsible for introducing him to the majority of the things that he likes.

“My friend Dale shows me lots of cool stuff,” Teufel said.

While being a tween in today’s society can present potential challenges that previous generations may not have had to face, there are also some very positive changes occurring within the age group.

Seventh grade teacher Mark Campbell gets the opportunity to see today’s tweens make the transition into full-blown adolescence. After teaching for fifteen years, Campbell said that the new students he is receiving in recent school years are much closer to being teenagers than generations he taught when he first started his career as a teacher- and in Campbell’s opinion this can be a great thing.

“I’ve seen a shift in priorities and responsibilities,” Campbell said. “There’s a level of maturity in kids now that wasn’t always there.”

