

Name: _____ Class: _____

Forever Young: America's Obsession with Never Growing Old

By Dale Archer
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According to Dale Archer, our culture puts a high premium on youth—looking and acting young. Why is this the case? In your opinion, has it gone too far? As you read, take notes on the causes and results of this phenomenon.

- [1] Today's culture is so obsessed with looking and acting young, it's difficult to believe that our founding fathers powdered their wigs gray in order to appear older and wiser. That's right—being old was in. No more! From hair dyes to Botox to Viagra to wrinkle creams to a plethora of surgical procedures, the race is on to remain forever young.

We are bombarded daily with images via magazines, billboards, television and the internet. It's all about the look and the image, not about the experience and wisdom behind the eyes. Virtually every public figure from politicians to actors to TV talking heads have had "work" done to their face or body. This mirrors our superficial culture, where anything important can be defined by 140 characters or less.

There are many reasons America is so obsessed with youth, but perhaps nothing has done more to further the cause than the technological revolution. Let's face it—the old are by and large slower and not as connected. How many over 60 do you know that have Twitter, Facebook or a cutting edge smartphone? But is this a bad thing?

As the world continues to speed up, the wisdom of the ages can be Googled by anyone. The analogue world has been replaced by the digital age. Who needs to ask an old guy for advice when you can become a superficial expert on any topic after 30 minutes on the computer? Few have time to slow down and become a true expert at anything anymore. Why, that could take (gasp!) days, weeks, or even months!

- [5] This constant access to information leaves the impression that a tidbit of knowledge, or a sound bite, is enough to be relevant. It suggests that a quick ten-minute read or video is equivalent to wisdom gained from years of hard-earned experience.



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There's a mindset that it's better to multi-task three things at once rather than take the time to do a single project perfectly. This ever-shortening attention span is a direct result of the ever-present smartphone, a 500 channel TV culture, video games that provides escape on demand and the 24-7 media cycle which provides never ending information.

Throughout the advance in technology the quest to remain young has accelerated at warp speed. Why, when previously gray hair and wrinkles coincided with patience, self-awareness and wisdom? As Hannibal Lecter told Clarice in 'Silence of the Lambs', "We begin by coveting what we see every day."

Ads and social media portray youth as sexy, attractive, cool, and oh-so-connected. Look at any magazine, movie, video game, or TV show and it's easy to see. In 2011 alone, Americans spent \$10.4 billion on cosmetic surgery. Annually over \$1.2 billion is spent annually on liposuction, \$800 million on hair transplants and \$11 billion on vitamins and supplements. And there is no greater compliment we can pay another than to say, "Wow! You look so much younger!"

There is no doubt that being young is fast, fun, and exciting. But there is a time and a season for all things. Trying to hang onto the fast lane too long deprives us of the introspection, self-understanding and deep thoughts that usually accompany growing older.

- [10] Just because we can cling to youth a bit longer while life flies by at breakneck speed doesn't mean it's the best way to live. Frank Sinatra (remember him?) said it best in his introspective song "It Was A Very Good Year" that traces life from teens to twenties to thirties and beyond: "But now the days grow short, I'm in the autumn of the year. And now I think of my life as vintage wine, from fine old kegs, from the brim to the dregs. And it poured sweet and clear. It was a very good year."

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. What is Dale Archer's argument? Support your answer with evidence from the text. [RI.6] [RI.1]

2. What is the tone of this article? Support your answer with evidence from the text. [RI.4] [RI.1]

3. According to the author, what is different about growing old in modern society? [RI.3] [RI.1]
Support your answer with evidence from the text.

4. According to the author, what is the effect of technology? Support your answer [RI.3] [RI.1] with evidence from the text.

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. Do you agree with the author's argument? Why or why not? Support your opinion.

2. Is youth something that should be valued? Explain your answer.