

This Fad is Bad

By Reg P. Wydeven
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When I was a kid, I remember that neon was a hot fashion statement. We wore neon shoelaces, wristbands, sunglasses and hats. When neon went out, then came safety pins with beads on them that you stuck through your shoelaces. After that we wore buttons on jean jackets. I had Gumby buttons, Spuds McKenzie buttons and Buckwheat and Alfalfa buttons. Some of my buddies and I even started wearing plastic batting helmets backwards, but that one never caught on.

Fads have been around forever. My dad told me he was the first person in America to actually stick a penny in his penny loafers. In the 1980s, my sister and her friends had more lip gloss than the glove box in a tour bus for a hair band. After our crazy fads came Cabbage Patch Kids, then Garbage Pail Kids, then pogs, Beanie Babies, PokÉmon cards and Jibbitz that you shove in the holes of your Crocs.

Most parents don't grasp the allure of any given fad, and that's part of the appeal to kids. It's no surprise that the more adults try to suppress a fad, the more popular it becomes. That's why the newest trend, Silly Bandz bracelets, are probably going to be bigger than Rock 'n' Roll, Tickle-Me-Elmo and skateboarding in public combined.

School districts in several states, including New York, Texas, Florida and Massachusetts, have officially banned Silly Bandz. Silly Bandz are stretchy, rubber band-like colorful bracelets that school kids are wearing by the dozen. The bracelets are made by BCP Imports LLC, a small business located in Toledo, Ohio.

Since the Silly Bandz craze caught on, BCP has increased its workforce from 20 employees to 200 in the past year alone and recently added 22 new phone lines to accommodate orders. The company sells millions of packs a month, which come 24 to a pack and sell for about \$5. BCP receives about 500 pieces of fan mail each week showering the company with praise for Silly Bandz. The bracelets are so popular, Macy's is even considering creating a Silly Bandz float for its annual Thanksgiving Day parade.

Robert Croak, the president of BCP, claims that the inspiration for Silly Bandz was a cute rubber band created by a Japanese artist that Croak saw at a product show in China. Croak believes BCP was in the right place at the right time, as the bracelets are very affordable for kids during a difficult economy.

School administrators, however, claim the bracelets are a distraction from their students' learning. Kids play with them during class, trade them with one another and even fight over them. The parents of kids who attend schools with the bans are asserting the bans are unconstitutional because they violate the kids' freedom of expression. As a concession, many schools have compromised by allowing a monthly Silly Bandz day when kids are allowed to wear as many bracelets as they want.

While no parents have officially challenged the Silly Bandz ban in court, I'm sure it's only a matter of time. And if a judge eventually decides that the bans are unconstitutional so kids can wear them again, I'm sure the kids will have long since moved on to a new fad. If not, nothing kills a fad quicker than acceptance by parents.