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RESILIENCE  
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THE TRANSFORMATIVE  
TRIBE

# Bringing Gray to the Party

by Pam Robbins

**A** couple of months ago, I decided to “bring gray to the party,” as my old hairdresser used to say. I’m only 52, so I’m pretty young to be sporting a full head of gray hair.

When I told my husband, he nearly wrecked the car. (Granted, I probably shouldn’t have told him as we were zipping down I-26!) He didn’t have an issue with it, he assured me; he was just shocked. I’d been toying with the idea for years – usually as I was paying my monthly salon bill – but I hadn’t planned to do it until I was in my 60’s...or 70’s...or 80’s. I was too young to go gray.

Or so I’d been told.

Then I got to thinking... If, supposedly, I’m too young to go gray, why am I? Bodies age. That’s what they do. Why was I improvising to look young? Why do most women? And what else was I – were WE – doing to meet others’ expectations?

A few years ago, Reddit asked its users to identify some of the things women are generally judged more harshly for than men. Being overweight – and I’d expand that to include being anything other than society’s definition of “beautiful”

– made the top five, along with having too many sexual partners, having a messy home, being blunt or assertive, and not having children.

I’ve been married since I was 23, so promiscuity has never been an issue for me, but I do feel more pressure to keep a clean house than my husband does. I’m also more likely to “bite my tongue” than my husband and hesitate a moment longer than my husband when asked if I have children (I don’t).

One characteristic that didn’t make the list, surprisingly, was the expectation that women take care of others’ needs before their own. Whereas it’s OK for a man to read the paper after breakfast, relax before dinner, or hang out in the “library” just reading (one of husband’s favorite pastimes), I feel guilty if I’m not doing something productive all of the time – and, by “productive,” I mean something I feel has to get done, not something I necessarily WANT to do.

My crazy work ethic, I now realize, is an attempt to prove to society – and myself, I suppose – that I can take care of everyone else’s needs AND prioritize my own. In truth, it’s just not possible.

Unfortunately, society’s double-standards have taken their toll on me. I still feel slightly ashamed of my gray hair; I sacrifice precious play time to do household chores; I often defer to others’ opinions rather than speaking my truth; and I still feel a little awkward admitting that I don’t have children.

What about you? How do you improvise to try to meet others’ expectations? And, more importantly, what might you be willing to change?

If you’re going gray but hiding it by coloring your hair, for example, perhaps you could consider your motivation. If it encourages you to remain active, great; if you just want to look younger, perhaps it’s time to rethink your decision.

As for me, each day I get a bit more comfortable looking at the older woman in the mirror. My next challenge? Leaving my studio when I’m ready, not when it’s time to make dinner. We’ll see how it goes! *Oh!*

*Pam Robbins is a life coach and owner of Purple Crayon. In addition to providing space for women hobby artists, the studio offers monthly workshops to help women find their authentic selves through their art.*

*Purple Crayon will be celebrating its one-year anniversary on Saturday, October 13th, from 10 AM-2 PM. In addition to cake, there will be an art sale and a gently-used art supplies sale.*

@ [pam@purplecrayonavl.com](mailto:pam@purplecrayonavl.com) • [purplecrayonavl.com](http://purplecrayonavl.com)

