



# GREY HAIR

## TO DYE OR NOT TO DYE AND WHY IT MATTERS

Being in lockdown for nearly 100 days without a hairdresser in sight has meant that what was a few pesky greys poking through has now become a wave of colour (or colourless). Yes - there are various home methods I can try but I've been holding off and examining whether this may be my new normal. So why am I considering not booking the very first appointment I can after lockdown or whipping down to the supermarket for some L'Oreal -dark medium brown?

Why am I reluctant? Primarily it's because I want to be authentic about who I am. I think we need to change the perceptions of ageing and the obsession with youth.

On the other hand, I still don't feel like myself with grey hair. I have had dark hair for so long that it feels strange to see the change. I have deep seated feelings about grey hair and what it means, particularly about feeling old, being perceived as old and most of all feeling invisible (this is another story but something I've noticed as a woman in midlife).

Why should you care? I think the current state of my hair is actually everyone's problem! Those of us approaching midlife or moving through midlife will at some point notice changes to their hair. Big deal? It's not the grey hair itself it is what it represents.

Cambridge University Press published a report in 2010 regarding women's reasons for dyeing or not dyeing their hair. Interestingly the following are the key perceptions the women had of people with grey hair - ugliness, dependence, social disengagement, and cultural invisibility. No offence to those with grey hair, as it turns out the women interviewed said that applies to their OWN grey hair, they were ok with the grey hair of others. They dyed their hair to make themselves appear more youthful and reject ageist stereotypes associated with older women. Interesting I thought. That was 10 years ago so surely that has changed and really it's just me.

So, I embarked on my own extremely scientific research i.e. I emailed a few friends. Here's some of their observations:

'I straight away relate it to aging and yes there is a negativity in my thoughts about it - things like "letting themselves go" "not making an effort" "unkept".'

'This definitely depends on the person. I might automatically think 'old, slow, less confident, technophobe, on the wind down, boomer, set in ways, boring'. Whereas when I see other older people with grey hair I might think 'experienced, confident, knowledgeable, sorted, bold, wise, stable'.'



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'This completely depends on the total 'look' of the person. If they are well groomed, their hair is well managed and stylish and the person's overall appearance is polished - I love it and it makes me think that the person is comfortable in their skin and has 'chosen' to have grey hair as part of their overall personal style package. ' The benefits of dyeing were generally about looking better - 'more polished', 'enhance my current colour ' plus my own 'feel like myself'. Interestingly in response to the question about whether they would go grey or are in the process of it there was more of a relaxed approach and most were ok with it at the right time. With one exception that time was always somewhere in the distant future.

The negative aspects/perceptions of ageing and our ageist attitudes was definitely a factor in their views. All of those who responded said that there were definitely different attitudes to how grey hair was perceived for men and women. 'Silver foxes v Ageing ladies. Silver haired men are seen as handsome/sophisticated think George Clooney' compared with the actress Sarah Jessica Parker who was recently criticised for 'looking old' while she was having lunch with a man her own age with white hair. Why the hypocrisy?

To quote one friend 'women are often valued highly for their looks with a youthful bias, whereas men get other values like success, and we have less role models of older women doing awesome stuff in TV, movies and media'.

Comedian Dawn French was in the news recently having traded her black bob for a shorter natural grey. Jane Fonda recently embraced her natural colour at the age of 83. Why was this news? Was it news when the same thing happened to Pierce Brosnan or George Clooney?

Ageist thinking and feeling seems to be prevalent and we need to start taking the many opportunities to increase the understanding and respect between the generations for what they can offer each other.

We need to challenge and change the rhetoric that grey hair = old = a negative, particularly for women. I have total respect those who are comfortable in their own skin, rocking the silver and setting a shining example for the rest of us.