

home mother became a difficult and fraught minority choice. And according to a 2005 Procter & Gamble survey, 65% of women had colored their hair in the previous year, which is why going gray has become a difficult and an equally fraught choice for modern women to make.

Both debates are about endlessly self-obsessed boomers dealing with self-worth—about work and children in the late 1980s and '90s when the median boomer was in her 30s and about authenticity and aging now that the median boomer is 52. And both conflicts are about the right ways to interpret the legacies of feminism. If the personal is the political, as the women on the barricades made us believe, then even choices about how to face old age are going to be loaded. Barbara Kass, a New York City psychotherapist and definitely a citizen of Woodstock Nation in the '60s, feels twinges of guilt about dyeing her long hair at 53. She says, "The young me would find it shocking that I dye my hair."

Today, most baby-boomer women have held on to the hedonistic part of their Woodstock dreams a lot more tenaciously than to the open-and-honest part. And in doing so, they have presided over a narrowing of the range of acceptable looks for women. Women may be CEOs and Cabinet officers and may openly indulge their sexual appetites—but only if they appear eternally youthful. And a main requirement is a hair color other than gray or white.

But wait! Is it not feminism that allowed these women to become CEOs, Cabinet officers and TV-news anchors in the first place? Before women entered business and the professions in large numbers, they didn't feel as compelled to fib about their age by means of hair dye. So what is the right way, when it comes to hair, to honor women's progress? Conversations with women across the U.S. expose a raw nerve. "If a woman is really old and the dye job is extreme," Cathy Hamilton, 51, a recently gray-haired managing editor of BoomerGirl.com from Lawrence, says, "I do think, 'Who is she trying to kid?' I'm a bitch, I'll admit it." And on the other side of the fence is Catherine Clinton, 55, a dyed-red professor in Greenwich, Conn., who says, "I have seen friends who have stopped dyeing their hair, and although one or two look really good, others mainly look more drab and less vibrant."

Name 10 American female celebrities with gray hair. Umm ... Meryl Streep. But only in character and only occasionally, such as in *The Devil Wears Prada*. O.K., how about Emmylou Harris and Jamie Lee Curtis ... and ... O.K., but that's show business.

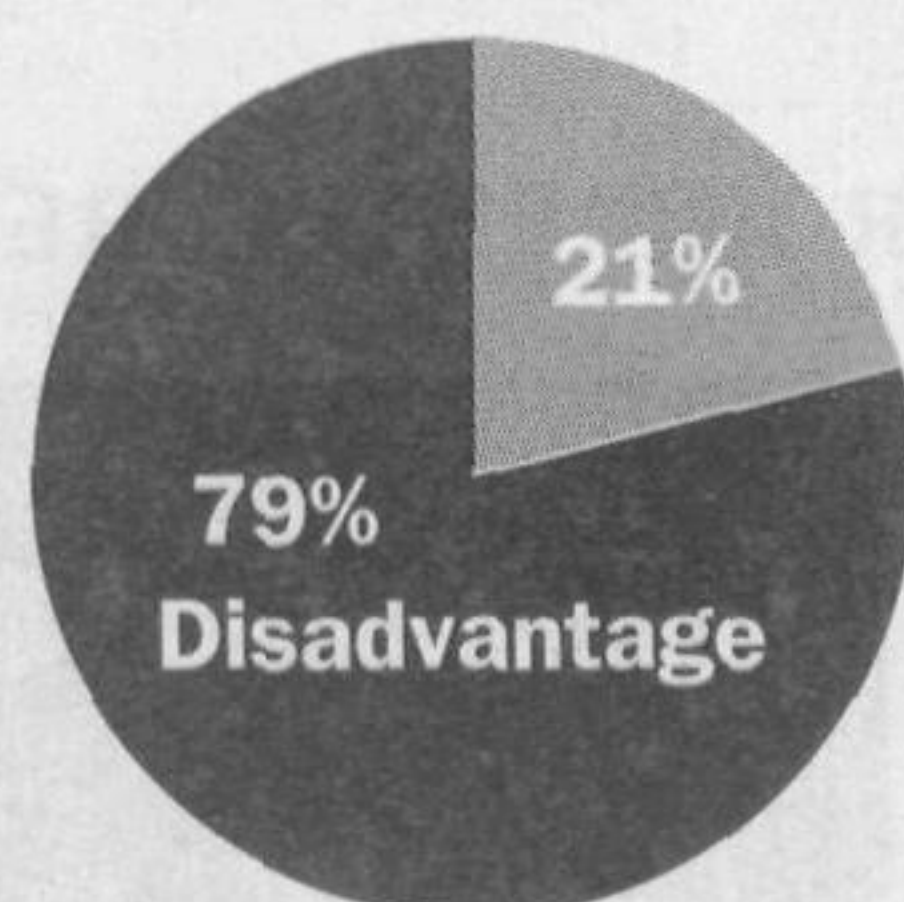
Kreamer's book *Going Gray: What I Learned About Beauty, Sex, Work, Motherhood, Authenticity and Everything Else That Really Matters* will be published in the U.S. this month by Little, Brown & Co.

TIME POLL

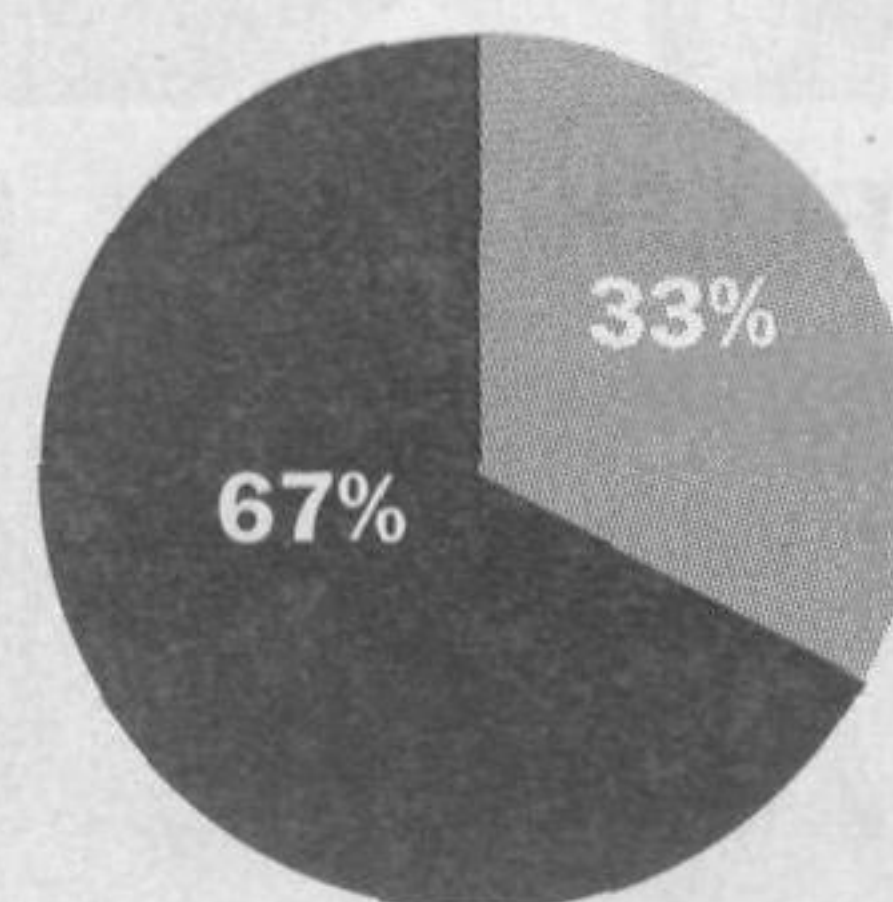
Gray Areas. What we see in silver hair depends on what we're looking for

Do you think having gray or white hair is an advantage or a disadvantage ...

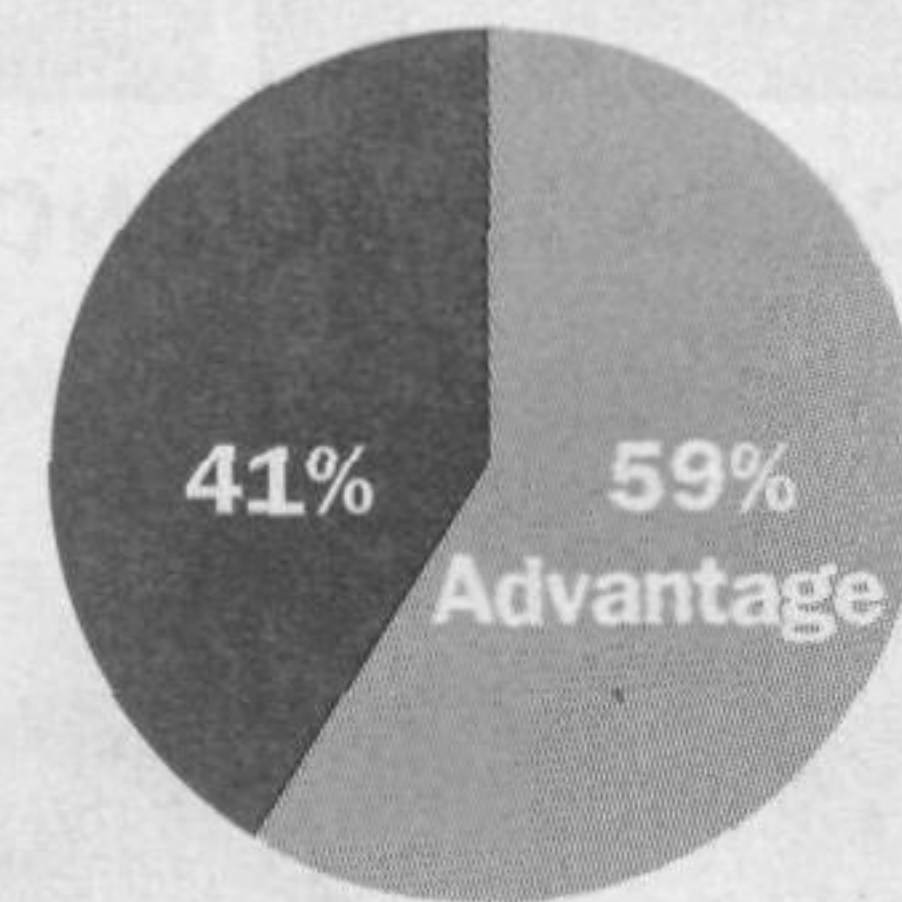
... in personal or social life



... in the workplace



... in running for political office



Poll respondents were shown photos of famous people as they are now and as they would appear with gray hair.

Does gray hair make the person appear more or less ...

... intelligent — More
Less
Same

... attractive — More
Less
Same

... believable — More
Less
Same

... distinguished — More
Less
Same

Note: Respondents for this TIME poll were selected from participants in the eRewards Online Panel and invited to answer the questionnaire. The survey was conducted Aug. 8-11 on the Internet. A total of 1,013 interviews were completed. The data have been weighted to reflect the demographic composition of U.S. adults. Because the sample is based on those who initially self-selected for participation in the panel, no estimates of sampling error are provided.

Surely there are nationally famous gray-haired women in more workaday fields? In fact, the U.S. has almost no high-profile, female, gray-haired role models.

Ironically, it's feminism's success that has driven today's widespread camouflage of gray hair. Meg Reggie, 49, a public relations executive in Atlanta, believes having dyed hair is essential to her career. "Since I am in the image business, it is very important that I look as current as my clients and the products and services they sell and I promote. In the South, if [a woman] is not well maintained, one will hear whispers of 'Bless her heart.'" It makes sense that gray hair might be a no-go in public relations, but women in all kinds of professions report feeling similar pressure. Dr. Lillian Schapiro, 43, an ob-gyn in Atlanta, deconstructed things very clearly for me. "People want their physician to look mature but also professional. My male colleagues gain respect with gray. If I kept my hair past my shoulders, as I wear it now, and went gray, I would look like a more alternative doctor. Most people want a conventional doctor. Gray hair on a woman is not conventional."

Electoral politics is a professional area in which maturity and gravitas would seem to be among the most important attributes for the job. Yet of the 16 female U.S. Senators—

the highest number ever—who range in age from 46 to 74, not a single one has visible gray hair. Of the 70 female members of the House, only seven have gray hair. Political professionals say that candidates and officeholders don't dare publicly discuss the obvious double standard. In an interview before her death last year, Ann Richards, the famously white-haired former Governor of Texas, told me, "You can't appear to be too flashy because it will send the wrong message, but at the same time, you need to appear energetic. The issue is much more significant for women because the hurdle is higher in our society."

Interestingly, women apparently aren't as fearful of the negative professional implications of gray as the personal ones. Clairol research reports that the 71% of women who dye their hair do so in order to "look and feel more attractive." Another powerful motivator for gray-haired women to dye, according to Clairol's in-house creative director of color and style, Marcy Cona, is to live the fantasy that they're still 30 or 35 instead of 45 or 60. But rather than sell it as a fantasy or a lie, the postmodern beauty industry casts artificial color as a means of expressing a deeper truth about who one is. As Rose Weitz, author of *Rapunzel's Daughters: What Women's Hair Tells Us About Women's Lives*, put it, "Even if,

FROM LEFT, TOP AND BOTTOM PHOTOS TOGETHER: REBECCA COOK—REUTERS (2); CARLOS OSORIO—AP (2); JIM COLE—AP (2); BENJAMIN TESSIER—REUTERS (2)