

The Age Fad

Jennifer K. Stuller

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My 30th birthday is right around the corner, and did you hear? Thirty is the new 20. And 40 is the new 30. And 50? You guessed it -- the new 40. I have been thinking a lot about this "new" age fad and what it means for a woman just about to leave her 20s.

Then again, it's not that hard to think about -- from NPR to E! News to the New York Times, the mass media is busy promoting this semantic trend with a seemingly endless parade of base 10 combinations. Ted Casablanca, gossip columnist for E! News' The Awful Truth asserts that "40 is the new 30" thanks to the hot women of TV's Desperate Housewives. Apparently it's still a shock to Hollywood that women over 30 have appeal. And this brings up the root of the issue -- the focus of the age trend is on women (and often women who don't look quite natural).

"In Hollywood, 40 is the new 30 and 50 is the new 40, but only it seems, when that new 40 and 50 have been surgically enhanced," writes Manhola Dargis in a recent piece in the New York Times. She also points out that "most of the obviously altered faces are female [and that] most female actors are invariably damned for looking old and damned for doing nothing about it."

I worry that this emphasis on our youthful looks will affect our attitudes towards aging, as well. I don't want to ever feel embarrassed by my age.

In pushing our ages younger and younger, either physically or semantically, we are denying ourselves the grace of aging. We are all on different paths, with different levels of experience and ma-

turity. Age should be a marker of these levels -- a celebration -- not something to be ashamed of. When we endorse statements like "30 is the new 20" we may be tempted to romanticize who we were instead of honoring who we are.

At 30, I am not who I thought I would be at 20 -- who is? But when I stop and meditate on where I am geographically, educationally, personally, I'm exactly where I should be. And I am proud. I see gray hairs and there are laugh lines around my eyes. I have freckles and spider veins and my feet are flatter. These are markers of my personal victories; maturity manifested in visible physicality.

My father recently gave me a copy of a little book called *The World According to Mister Rogers*. In it, he'd marked a passage that he hoped would resonate with the aging me: "Grandparents are both our past and our future. In some ways they are what has gone before, and in others they are what we will become."

I've been thinking about this quote a lot lately. Not just about how it reflects the strength of my own matrilineage, but also that of our collective grandmothers -- of the relationships between older and younger women. Who are the women who represent aging as I want to age? Who will I model my own ideas of grace after? What does aging mean for women in the past, present and future? Who were we and what will we become?

Life is so unexpected. Why would I negate the years that formed me into a better human being by trying to live them over again-- physically or experientially? I enjoyed my 20s, but I certainly wouldn't want to live them again. Why would anyone?

So I say to women everywhere let's act our age. Let's make 30 the "new" 30.