



Hair colour a grey topic

Anne Kreamer claims to have experienced a moment of truth at the age of 49 when she looked at a photograph of herself with her daughter and a good friend called Aki. Her daughter and her grey-haired friend looked real to her but she, with her “much too darkly shellacked helmet of hair”, seemed to be pretending to be someone she wasn’t. She grew curious to know what she would look like, and what it would be like, to stop dyeing her hair.

And so *Going Gray*, a meditation on the question of “to dye or not to dye”, was conceived. Kreamer, a New-York columnist famed for being part of the founding team of *Spy* magazine, wrote a piece about her greying adventure for *More* magazine, and the book developed from that.

In it she explores her own and others’ attitudes to ageing and greying, striving not to sound like a “born-again zealot proseletizing for a life of back-to-nature poverty and austerity”.

Kreamer succeeds in this because, as she acknowledges herself, she is “at least as vain as the next person”. This former senior executive and happily married mother of two worries as she greys



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that she will lose her sex appeal. With the support of her tolerant and funny husband, writer Kurt Andersen, she does some online dating, comparing the number of winks she receives as a brunette and as a grey-haired woman. She visits nightclubs wearing wigs of various colours, and commissions some research. She is overjoyed and surprised to discover that hair colour matters less to men than she imagines. She is dismayed to find, alas, that grey hair is a real liability in many professional worlds.

I, who went grey several years ago with a minimum of fuss, found some of the hand-wringing in *Going Gray* tedious and irritating. I was also surprised to read that “Today it seems as if the most provocatively political statement a woman can

AGEING/BEAUTY

GOING GRAY: What I learned about beauty, sex, work, motherhood, authenticity and everything else that really matters. By Anne Kreamer. Little, Brown. 206pp. \$35.

Reviewer: **SHELLEY McINNIS**

make with her hair is to let it be naturally gray”.

In my case, going grey was all about the convergence of cash-flow issues with the realisation that colouring chemicals were wrecking my fine hair.

After I went grey I, like Kreamer, was pleasantly surprised that I didn’t look as awful as had I expected. Three years down the track my hair has taken on the appearance of an out-of-control grey Afro but frankly, my dears, I no longer give a damn.

Readers who are serious sausages should probably give this book a miss. It touches on subjects which have depth potential, such as the relationships between our preoccupations with appearance, our personalities, and our collective fears about ageing and death, but doesn’t do much drilling-down. To Kreamer, hair is a sort of “personal flag” with talismanic, personality-enhancing qualities. Reflecting on her own hair-colouring behaviour, she observes that “consistent hair color meant nothing in my life was really changing”. And that’s about as deep as she goes. I feel an advertising slogan coming on.

Despite its limitations, *Going Gray* has its charms. It is easy to read and full of amusing phrases, lines, and trivia. You could be stimulated to

work out how much money you might have saved if you hadn’t for the past few decades fronted up to the hairdresser every month or so for “cosmetic rebooting”.

You might be interested to learn that the redoubtable Nora Ephron, a friend of Kreamer’s, believes that hair dye has done more for women than feminism or aerobics.

You might be scandalised to discover that both Nancy Pelosi and Hillary Clinton have had botox injections. And finally, you could end up grateful that you live in good old Australia where we are so much less neurotic about ageing than our great American friends. That’s true, isn’t it?

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Glamorously grey . . . British actress Helen Mirren on the red carpet.

Picture: AAP