

Turning 40

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Grossman says.

Unlike tribal cultures where elders are looked up to for their wisdom, American society is plagued by ageism, which is prejudice or stereotypes based on a person's age.

It isn't just skin deep. Older people face real world consequences and discrimination, particularly in the workplace where youth usually trumps experience. Sixty-four percent of women say they've experienced age discrimination in the workplace, according to a 2018 AARP study. Aging employees are often seen as less competent, less likely to be considered for promotions and more susceptible to layoffs.

Hollywood historically shunned older women, but they are pushing back

The fear of aging is especially potent in Hollywood. For female stars, aging used to signal the end of coveted roles. "It used to be when you were 40 your career was done ... and I mean really done," Halle Berry, 54, tweeted in August.

But "women today, like Beyoncé, are changing the face of 40," Wolanin says.

Jennifer Lopez, Dolly Parton, Janet Jackson, Helen Mirren, Salma Hayek and Rita Moreno are all showing that not only have their careers not ended when the clock struck 40, they've thrived more than before.

Even celebrities as high-profile as Duchess Meghan are "fighting back" against the stigma of aging, Grossman says, and "setting the stage for people that come after them."

Meghan, who turned 40 on Aug. 4, launched the Archewell initiative "40x40" on her birthday to "help women regain confidence and rebuild their economic strength" after finding her own strength to publicly speak out against scrutiny from the British tabloids and allegations of racism in the royal family. She told Oprah Winfrey that it was "liberating" to "be able to speak for yourself" in a bombshell interview in March.

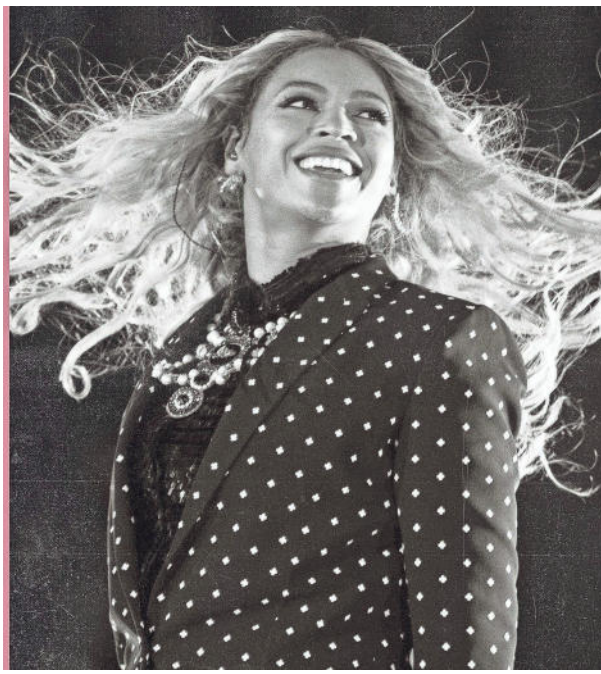
"It shows how much they believe in themselves," Grossman says. "Even when the world stops believing in you because you've turned a certain age, you don't have to fall into the trap."

Britney Spears, who turns 40 on Dec. 2, also spoke out for the first time against her "abusive" 13-year long conservatorship managed by her father, Jamie Spears. "I just want my life back," she said in June. "I deserve to have a life ... and just, you know, do what I want to do."

Wolanin says "we begin asking ourselves, what (are) our own desires, dreams and joys" after 40, because "we have lived our lives for others, and now we are gaining the confidence to engage in deeper self-inquiry."

With age comes wisdom. While 20-year-olds may invest energy into meeting others' expectations, once you hit 40, it's easier to determine what you value and what's important to you.

Katherine Heigl said 40 feels "like a certain kind of



Beyoncé hit the milestone on Sept. 4. ANDREW HARNIK/AP

freedom."

"Freedom from all the self doubt, insecurities, self-loathing, uncertainties and anxieties of my 20s and 30s," Heigl, now 42, shared in 2018. "Not to say I don't still have those moments, but I just feel like 40 makes me older and wiser."

40 is an opportunity to take stock of your life

Turning 40 is no longer written off as the beginning of the end – it's a chance to reinvent and grow.

"If you are not happy about turning 40, it should be a wakeup call that you can find your way back to your values," Grossman says. "The people who are the most freaked out about hitting certain milestones are the people who are not living their life to the fullest."

It's time to start doing more of what makes you happy, experts say. That may mean evaluating relationships, careers, friendships and finances.

Is it easy to get real with yourself? Not always. But with these tips, experts say you can steer yourself in the right direction.

- **Get some clarity.** Evaluate "where you are now, where do you want to go and how do you get there," Grossman says. What is important to you? What do you care about and value? "Find something that gives you a sense of purpose in life."

- **Look within.** Many people try to find happiness in things and people around us – a promotion, marriage or the perfect house. But external happiness isn't constant and can ebb and flow accordingly. "Realize happiness comes from within," Grossman says. Everyone has a different timetable. Don't wait to check off all those boxes to be happy.

- **Map it out.** What do you need to change to be happy wherever you are now? Write down your game plan to keep yourself accountable and on track. If you need help, consider working with a personal coach.

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Lake Trafford Elementary Librarian Shows the Superpower of Reading

By Sebastien Saitta

"Read! Read! Reading is my Superpower! Come to the library! Read!" These are the words students and faculty can hear loud and clear from librarian Alma McDermott as she "flies" through the halls at Lake Trafford Elementary in Immokalee, a Blue Zones Project Approved school. Wearing a yellow cape with the words "Super Librarian" in big, bold letters, arms out and a bright smile as she whizzes by, Alma has no trouble capturing the attention of everyone she passes.

"You're the best librarian ever," said a fourth grader, while another shouts, "Mrs. Mac is Super Librarian!"

These reactions from students are the fuel that keeps Alma flying. "I may look silly to the adults, but I aim to please the children," says Alma.

When Alma heard the year's theme at Lake Trafford is "What's Your Superpower?" the ideas came flooding in, and she wasted no time in preparation. "I came to school in July for a few days to decorate the library with a Batman theme, with me as Batgirl the Librarian," shares Alma. "The library is now known as the Bat Cave of Knowledge. That's very appropriate I think."

If you visited the library today, you would see a life-size cardboard cutout of Batman with the word "READ" across his chest. He is standing in front of a Gotham City backdrop with the phrase "Knowledge Is Our Superpower" written in bold at the top. At the foot of the display, shelves are filled with superhero themed books and Batman memorabilia.

Alma's hard work to keep things exciting for kids, and love for teaching and reading, has made the library at Lake Trafford Elementary anything but boring. "I tell people, 'I am not your grandmother's librarian,'" Alma explains. "The library is not a place for the stereotypical 'shhh' sound that came from old librarians with white hair in a bun, cardigan sweaters, clunky shoes, and glasses on a chain from films and books. This library is a place for fun. It's a place for everyone."

As a young girl, reading became a way of coping with constant change and bullying. "I attended two different schools per year, 20 by the time I reached high school, as we constantly moved from apartment to apartment every few months," said Alma. "Borrowing 10 books every Friday to read became my lifeline to a world without friends and filled with bullying at schools where I never belonged. Over the years reading allowed me to just 'be,' and my love for books began in a small branch of the Brooklyn Public Library."



Those weekly visits to that library led to a career as a teacher and librarian for 37 years.

"I am passionate about teaching and reading, which allows me to nourish my love of helping children find a book that gives them joy," she says. "I want to help all children get good books to enjoy, to help any who feel as if they don't belong or who feel bullied, to help all find a way to escape their everyday lives through reading a book."

When asked what is one of the most rewarding things about working as a school librarian, Alma replied, "changing their outlook when it comes to reading." When a student tells Alma that they don't really like reading, she thinks of author James Patterson's quote, "There's no such thing as a kid who hates reading. There are kids who love reading, and kids who are reading the wrong books."

"It's up to me to help them find the right book," Alma says. "I always give students a chance to wander in the library to find something on their own, but when I see aimlessness, I redirect."

Alma sets up what's called a reader's advisory session for those students who have trouble finding that perfect book among a library of 24,000.

"The other day, I had a fifth grader tell me he didn't know what to read. After talking for a while, I led him to books

that matched his interest. He opened one and said 'Wow! This is cool! I'm going to put this other book away and take these!'"

Alma notes that the "other book" the fifth grader was holding before was a random space saver to put in his desk to show he had a book, but it wasn't THE book.

"I happily took the space saver and watched him leave with several of THE books," she says. "It was a happy day for both of us."

Along with monthly decorations and book themes, library visitors will find photos of Alma with different authors and illustrators set up by the book they wrote or illustrated. "I want students to see that authors and illustrators are real people."

When referred to as a "Super Librarian," Alma responds with a proud smile, "You're right! I try everything to get students to read because reading is my Superpower, and it's so important for it to be theirs too."

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