

Portrait of a mother in multiple shades

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Beverly

Recently there was a makeover contest in a local Boston parenting magazine. To enter you simply had to write an essay about some aspect of your parenting life that needed renovation. It could be anything: Organizing, cleaning, cooking, or perhaps even showering daily and wearing a clean outfit — if, for example, that was where you struggled most.

I stared at the ad. They wanted me to choose?? I had a toddler and a nine-week-old baby. How could I choose between organizing the piles of laundry I erratically flung down the basement stairs and the creation of a dinner schedule to avoid having yummmmy pasta and broccoli again? Should I choose between a much needed wardrobe overhaul or a new hairstyle? I mean what, really, was the point of having hip clothes if my hair was pulled up in my daughter's furry, red, Elmo hair-band?

My list of potential makeover categories was so long as to make choosing nearly impossible. In the end, my deer-in-the-headlight indecision didn't matter. Just one week later, for Mother's Day, my husband sent me to a beauty store to buy new makeup — something I'd wanted for a while and probably the makeover I needed most.

I had tried to visit makeup boutiques in the past, but the walls of products and colors and creams, not to mention the hundreds of small brushes and wands, had always overwhelmed me. The sheer variety made me run back to the comfort of the makeup aisle at Walgreens.

But this time I managed to walk, and stay, in. I was immediately struck by the stunning, glowing sales women in chic black outfits with product aprons slung just so over their narrow hips. They, in turn, seemed struck by me in my flip-flops, jeans and fleece jacket. I faltered for a minute. Then I took a deep breath and announced that I was ready to be made over. They smiled at my magic words and welcomed me into their lair.

I was assigned a 'technician' wearing bright purple eye shadow, false eyelashes and a nose ring. She had hair extensions that were platinum blond over her otherwise brown hair. Both colors were thrown up in a funky orchid hair clip. She looked glamorous and beautiful in a rock-star sort of way. I explained that I wanted to look glamorous and beautiful in a stay-at-home-mom sort of way.

She said, "Well let's start with what you consider 'neutral' to be." She pointed to over 100 eye shadows lined up in a little case. "Tell me which one you think is a base tone."

This felt easy to me. Many of the shades seemed infused with something toxic. There were bright greens, oranges and purples that seemed like they belonged on a HAZMAT list. Clearly they were not neutral. I stared at the creams and beiges and settled on a basic, creamy, skin tone.

“Wow!” my technician laughed. “Well, I guess we can work with that.” I was puzzled; empirically I had chosen a neutral color.

I asked, “But what else might someone think was a good pallet base?”

“Oh you know, some clients might say,” she pointed to a deep, but still wildly electric plum, “that this was their neutral.” I stared at the shade. Where, I wondered, did you go if electric plum was your neutral base?

“Hmmm,” I said. Then I firmly reinforced that my creamy-skin color really did represent my neutral. Really. Really. She seemed to get my point and moved on to the excitement of building a pallet around my chosen base. The first step was to establish what sort of look I was going for.

She asked, “So for example where might you go on a typical day?” I answered, “Well, for example I might go to the grocery store.”

She thought about it and together we picked out an eye shadow that I guess will stand up to those harsh lights back in the dairy section. We then worked on appropriate eye shadows for play dates, a perky pick-me-up bronzer for running errands, a shiny festive lipstick for changing diapers and a really fancy eyeliner for the end of year sing-a-long at my daughter’s pre-school.

So . . . what’s for dinner tonight? It’s a safe bet that pasta and/or broccoli will be involved. Laundry? In a pile to my right. But when I get around to dealing with those things I’ll do it in my domestic bliss eye shadow — just a few shades up from my neutral, which, by the way, matches my daughter’s Elmo hair clip perfectly.

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