

Getting old, it's all in your head

Shannon Linden | Posted: Saturday, July 18, 2015 7:00 am

Let's turn back time, to February, when Madonna took a terrible tumble off the stage at the 2015 Brit Awards.

Falling awkwardly backward, she rolled sideways, landing hard at the foot of a small staircase.

The most successful solo artist in history could've been seriously hurt, yet disturbing numbers took to Twitter, not to offer concern, but barrage the brilliant artist with crude comments about her age.

Never mind one of her backup singers tugged her malfunctioning cape, pulling her off course. Who cares she got right back up to continue her performance despite injury?

Let's not even talk about her enviable state of fitness.

At 56, Madonna maintains the body she had when she broke into the biz (and famously showed it off on the cover of that February's Rolling Stone).

Sure she stumbled in her stilettos, but on the heels of the release of her new album, Rebel Heart, the iconic star stood tall, eloquently arguing against ageism (the stereotyping of and discriminating against people on the basis of their age).

"It's still the one area where you can totally discriminate against somebody," she told Rolling Stone, "and talk shit. Because of their age."

She said we all know it's not OK to degrade someone because she's black, but it's OK to ridicule a woman's age.

"They're judging me by my age," she said about the rude comments.



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And that's ridiculous.

As blogger Kyle McMahon pointed out, this is a woman who performed at the Super Bowl and got more views than the game itself.

Having just celebrated my birthday, age is on my mind.

A dear friend of mine turning 50 is lying about it to her coworkers (like surprise parties are held for her every year) while the author of a blog post I read on Boomerly admitted, "I've been 49 for years."

I've got a few more to go — I turned 47 for the record — but when I tell people this, some reactions have me reeling.

"Oh! You'll be 50 before you know it. It's all downhill from there..."

Yuck-yuck, that sort of thing.

Really? First of all, let me enjoy my 40s, thank you, and secondly, let me go with grace, not fear.

While our culture idolizes youth as the prime of life, I beg to differ. Having raised great kids into their late teens, I am relishing newly found freedom and fun. You can bet your boots I will do my best to look and feel fantastic, but living with an ER physician, who shares sad stories nearly every day, I am acutely aware nothing will age you faster than getting sick.

Cherishing our health is one key to growing older gracefully and according to Dr. Sharon Horesh Bergquist, internalizing aging stereotypes is actually harmful to our health. Citing a 2001 study involving 660 participants ages 50 to 80 (all involved in the Ohio Longitudinal Study of Aging and Retirement), researchers from Yale and Harvard looked at how self-perception of aging impacted survival. They found the way we perceive aging can influence our longevity more than blood pressure, cholesterol, even weight and how much we exercise. People who viewed aging positively (which included doing things to feel useful and happy) lived more than seven years longer on average.

Researchers found attitude about our physical and cognitive decline influences our ability to maintain daily activities. Even if functional health was initially compromised, Horesh Bergquist told CNN, the participants who embraced aging with a positive self-perception fared better over the course of eighteen years.

Apparently our thoughts about aging are self-fulfilling. For example, believing heart disease is inevitable leads to lack of commitment to healthy habits, just as believing we will age healthfully leads to the likelihood of regular check ups, balanced diet, exercise and following doctor recommendations.

Bergquist said study participants 60 and older who focused on negative stereotypes about cognitive aging

had a 30.2 per cent greater decline in memory performance than their more positive counterparts.

Still struggling to stay elated about getting older? She suggests thinking like Buddhists, who view aging as a rebirth.

Or, like me, you can adopt role models like Madonna, who suggests at a certain age, generally women accept they're not allowed to behave in a certain way, but those gals have it all wrong.

"I don't follow the rules," the sassy star said. "I never did, and I'm not going to start."

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