

I Feel Personally Judged by J. Lo's Body

Are we really supposed to look this good at 50 now?



By Jennifer Weiner

Contributing Opinion Writer

Feb. 4, 2020

Most mornings, things are pretty chill on my Facebook feed. There's the ongoing simmering outrage about the current administration interspersed with posts about kids, about books, about yoga. Someone's posting a pair of dresses and asking her friends to vote; someone's sharing a video of their child at the high-school talent show. Typical middle-age mom stuff.

But on Monday morning, I woke up to major mom drama. My Facebook community was convulsed in a take-no-prisoners battle, a war being waged on the tanned, taut terrain of Jennifer Lopez's body. Yes, she shared the bill with the 43-year-old Shakira, but the most intense debate was all about the seven-years-old Jenny from the Block.

In this corner: the women who found J. Lo's Super Bowl high-energy hit mash-up unnecessarily salacious, designed to titillate male viewers, performed for the male gaze. "Sponsored by Pornhub," sniffed one. "Trashy," said another. Why did there have to be a stripper pole, and why couldn't she have worn more clothes? Call them the Pearl Clutchers.

In the opposing corner: the women who found the show inspiring, a stirring political statement, a demonstration of Puerto Rican pride and also what a woman's body can do, given the right combination of genetics, effort, discipline and money. Call them the Ass Shakers.

Whether women singing and dancing in barely-there costumes or otherwise celebrating their bodies is empowering, or an assault on our ability to move through the world as men's equals, is one of those forever fights that flares up whenever sex workers' rights or pornography are debated or Emily Ratajkowski posts a topless selfie.

What gave this iteration its special sauce, however, was the age of the woman at its center.

If there was one thing the Shakers and the Clutchers could agree on, it's that Jennifer Lopez looks amazing. At 50, she is a force of nature, a woman who looks so amazing it's like evolution took a tiny step forward, just for her. "I can't believe she's 50 and looks so good!" women said. Which quickly became, "I can't believe I'm 50 and I look so bad!" ("Aside from making me feel physically deformed, that half-time show was 100!" wrote the Sports Illustrated editor Sarah Kwak.)

Some members of my social-media community were in awe. Others — myself included — were feeling personally judged by dat ass. I'm just a few months younger than J. Lo, and, with every birthday, I have asked: Is this the year it ends? Surely there's a finish line; a point we'll reach when the You Must Be This Hot in Order to Participate sign at the amusement park ride disappears, and we all get a seat on the roller coaster (right alongside the lumpy, balding, graying, potbellied men who've been riding the entire time).

That's what I always imagined. But I also thought that pregnancy would be a nine-month time out from competing in the Looking Good Olympics. Alas, I had my daughters in the heyday of the Hot Mom, an era where billowy maternity garments gave way to bump-hugging body-con styles, where celebrities left the hospitals holding their newborns, wearing their skinny jeans. No respite there. Forty was clearly too soon to surrender, given Halle Berry and Jennifer Aniston, Brooke Shields and Lisa Bonet, not to mention those ubiquitous lists of 10 Celebrities Who Are Unrecognizable Today (You Won't Believe Number 8!) that popped up every time I went online and told me that gaining weight and aging visibly were a fast road to irrelevance and mockery.

Still, I'd been picturing 50 as the year when I'd be done. I'd quit dying my hair and donate my high heels; I'd greet the occasional chin hair with a Buddhist master's zen and treat my body like a place I could exist without apology instead of something akin to a seedy apartment complex, a place I needed to constantly manage and improve, with unruly bits to be waxed and plucked, painted and dyed, trussed in Spandex and lifted with underwire.

I have always tried to tell myself that celebrity bodies are a little like art galleries. I can appreciate and be inspired by their beauty. I can acknowledge the time and money that went into their creation. When I've finished looking, I can go home, secure in the knowledge that nobody expects my living room to look like that.

Then I saw the [meme that made the rounds](#) on Monday. "50 Years Old in 1985," read one side, with a shot of Rue McClanahan from "Golden Girls," in period-appropriate feathered hair and a dowdy-looking sweater. "50 Years Old in 2020," read the other side, with Jennifer Lopez in a silver bodysuit, toned thighs gripping the pole, honeyed locks streaming, and bronzed skin gleaming, looking impossibly ... impossible. If Blanche Devereaux is now, through some cruel twist of the worst timeline, on the Not side of Hot or Not, I guess Dorothy Zbornak is completely out of the question. And Dorothy had been my plan all along!

The answer, I think, is to watch these types of performances like a man.

Women watch a 15-minute show featuring elite entertainers and, in some cases, end up feeling bad about ourselves.

Men, meanwhile, watch a three-hour game, played by elite athletes with single-digit body fat, and most won't feel a single twinge of self-doubt, or miss a single chip from the nacho platter.

Women see inspiration or goals we've failed to attain or a pretty stick to beat ourselves up with. We hear a voice (sponsored by Weight Watchers and Revlon and Planet Fitness and Jenny Craig) whispering *This can be yours, if you just work hard enough*. Men see entertainment, athletes who exist on a different plane than mere mortals. Their inner voice whispers, *Are there any more nachos?* I don't even think it would occur to them to feel bad, or try to emulate what they saw.

And so, my fellow Gen-X ladies, if you want to be J. Lo, more power to you. If you want to be Blanche, be Blanche. But if it's always been about Bea Arthur, come sit back here, with me, in your Eileen Fisher tunic and the newish bifocals you haven't quite mastered. We'll wait 'til the crowd goes home, and we'll dance like nobody's watching.

(From: The NewYork Times online [<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/04/opinion/jlo-superbowl-performance.html>] 1047 WORDS)