A column of international perspectives on queer Berlin by expats on rotation

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"a swift downhill slide into frumpiness"

> I'm in my 30s – 33, to be exact. As I write that, I feel, in spite of myself, a tiny, deep-down twinge of something. Embarrassment? No, it's shame. I am, after all, a product of the society I was raised in, a society that teaches us that women cease to be interesting, useful, or attractive once they lose the radiance and beauty of youth. And for many, the big 3-0 is the milestone that signals the beginning of the end, a swift downhill slide into frumpiness, saggy tits, and irrelevance.

Men and women do share one kind of 30s anxiety: the oh-christ-what-have-I-done-with-my-life-so-far existential panic. The one where you recall how the teenaged you imagined your life would look at 30 – great career, financial stability, all your shit figured out – and then you look around to realize nothing's turned out as you'd expected, and time is running out. Mortality beckons.

But for women, getting older is much more deeply fraught than that. It's ageism wrapped up in a nice, thick layer of misogyny, which tells us that women are only worthy human beings when they are beautiful, sexy, and can be objectified and desired – or when they're useful. That is, when they are birthing and nurturing children. Amongst so many women I know, 30 to 35 is the subconscious mental deadline to find love and settle down, because they believe that as youth and beauty fade, their chances of finding someone who will love them, wrinkles and all, fade even quicker. Biological clocks begin to tick loudly and ominously. Last chance! scream our ovaries – last chance to achieve the happiness that only fulfilling our nature-given role – being a mother – can provide. Miss your chance and you're condemned to a lonely, sexless life with only a brood of cats for company, who will probably gnaw on your corpse after your death goes unnoticed.

If this all sounds like tired old heteronormative bullshit, that's because it is. Yet why is the fear of 30s alive and well amongst the queer women (and men) I know? I think the queer community focuses so heavily on questioning the norms surrounding gender and sexuality that we've forgotten to question our views on aging as well. Being queer forces us to reform the heteronormative happily-ever-after ideal of marriage and kids that society indoctrinated us with. But the work shouldn't stop there. For women and their feminist allies, there should be more effort to reject the conventional belief that turning 30, 40, 50 or older diminishes our worth, our beauty, our sexuality. This belief is deeply rooted in misogyny and we're doing ourselves and our community a great disservice if we perpetuate it. I'm writing this for all the 30-something women I know but also for myself, so that when I turn 40 in six-and-a-half years, someone can wave this article in my face and remind me to get over myself. <