

JENNIFER ERNISSE

Madonna taking pulse of society

Madonna. The name is synonymous with sex. She certainly knows how to push all the right buttons. Businesswoman or boy-toy? Irregardless, her effects on your culture are too pervasive to overlook.

Madonna to me is becoming increasingly more curious ever since her lucrative \$60-million Warner Bros. Inc. deal, her self-styled role in "A

League of Their Own," her new record and video titled "Erotica" and a book, atop the best seller list no less, that is so racy you can't flip through it at the bookstore.

Madonna is so intriguing because I cannot determine what she epitomizes. I don't think anyone else can either, which is probably why so many people abhor her. Is she simply mimicking society, dishing out in excess the things it desires most? Or, is she so in tune with the pulse of the United States that she intuitively recreates the morality front of society with the things she single-handedly exposes us to?

In response to theory No. 1, fan or not, Madonna is a sex symbol. She has at least the capacity to be one of the most beautiful and enticing female icons of the late 20th century. Her Marilyn Monroecisms take mimicry to new heights.

It's one thing to clone the airy, breathy, dizzy aura and the hazy line between enticing sexual innocence and full-blown carnal know-how. It is another thing entirely to caricature these personality traits in part homage and part parody so it seems as though Madonna reinvented Marilyn. So is Madonna, in essence, doing the same

with our society in her accurate but overblown magnification of our cumulative psyche as Americans, so that, in effect, we are buying into a mirror of ourselves?

If you opt to agree with theory No. 2, Madonna as cultural student turned teacher, it is more than fair—imperative is more like it—that the implications of the woman's power come to light.

Look at Madonna's career in general. Riding on the coattails of MTV's inception, the material girl had her first hit in 1983 with "Holiday," spawning a new type of music genre—Dance Pop. Her 1984 hit, "Like a Virgin," her first No. 1 single, was also the first of a series of grand slams that were so anti-mainstream that they became hits. She upset the fundamental traditional values associated with marriage and chastity.

After several pop-formula dance hits, virtually all reaching the top of the charts and making music history, Madonna proved herself to be the equivalent of what Stephen King and Danielle Steele are to novels—commercialism personified.

Madonna's anti-cultural icon days started in full swing in 1988's "Like a Prayer"—by wearing lingerie and flanked by a Black Savior and burning crosses, a full-blown affront to her Catholic roots. In this video she stomps on conventional religious imagery in the same pattern of mocking reverence.

And the hits continued with "Express Yourself," a so-called feminist manifesto and finally, the Blonde Ambition tour, which some might argue is an oxymoron, not unlike the woman herself. Contradiction is her essence.

The culmination of coquettish child

and self-determined woman can be seen in her autobiographical movie, "Truth or Dare."

Her final cultural assault, "Erotica," is so racy it was banned from MTV's normal rotation hours, a marketing ploy Miss M has been successful with in the past (See Economics 211—Law of Supply and Demand). The video's explicit material includes bondage, homosexuality and sadomasochistic procedures.

After seeing the video, I started to realize how uncomfortable I was with the content. I feel this same burning lump in my throat every time I view another Madonna spectacle. But yet, like every first, the shock wears off and you become numb to the initial feelings a video or song of hers elicits. And, it is this shock value that makes Madonna stand alone in the music industry and allows her power. Even if, like me, you feel Madonna has crossed a line into a distasteful, unsolicited, sex-sells mindset, it's easy to concede that she piques interest in herself to the point of massive sales disguised as idolatry.

It's as if Madonna is playing a collective poker game with society, upping the ante every round as she introduces more taboo subjects to the game we all play by engaging in mainstream ideology. So, it is in this way that she has the power to metamorphosize us, changing, molding our traditional views into a head-on confrontation with the fantasies and freaks in the recesses of our own minds, begging the acceptance of the tangential and arcane elements of a society she sees as whole and without the moral dictation and ignorance that creates divisiveness.

Ernisse is a senior pre-med major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.



SAM KEPFIELD

Reflecting the cycles of life at 29

Something is in the chill November air, the bare branches swaying in the wind against a slate-gray sky, that makes one reflect on the cycles of life, of its progression and ending.

And I'm only 29. Gads. I'm too young for this morbidity.

But, approaching the milestone of the beginning of my fourth decade on this mortal coil, I have begun to see things more clearly than I could have 10, or even five years ago. I think not in terms of next semester or next year, but the next five years. I differentiate people not as freshmen, sophomores, graduates or undergraduates, but along generational lines.

My soul is caught between two worlds, balanced on the cusp between the baby boomers and their younger siblings. My musical tastes show an affinity for the older generation. Give me a good dose of early Stones, Janis Joplin, Eagles or Doobies any day over Madonna, Megadeth or any rap artist.

This doesn't mean, though, that I have any sympathy for the yuppie angst that was constantly gushed forth on "thirtysomething." I cheered when it went off the air.

Listening to a bunch of ex-flower children and war protesters cry about how unfulfilled they felt in their spanking-new condos, with their Volvos and Cuisinarts, made me violently ill. It must be real damned tough to be that successful. If success means being that whiny, give me poverty! Thank God I don't have the boomer psyche.

However, the new generation that follows the boomers leaves me equally cold. When I think and talk about them, I worry I'm turning into my father. They dress funny. They talk incomprehensibly. Their music is weird—I have no idea who Pearl Jam is, I have little use for Nirvana and look askance upon the antics of Guns 'N' Roses.

Moreover, I refuse to be considered a part of any demographical group that includes moussed mall rats, inca-

pable of finding the United States on a map, who mindlessly spout the MTV-derived new social consciousness slogans about environmentalism, racism and every other "ism" known to humanity. Despite my acquired skepticism, I can't buy into their gloomy mentality of "we'll never have it as good as the previous generation, so why try to excel or dream?"

Two things brought this generational gap home. The first was my recent acquisition of a significant other, some eight years younger than I am. When we began talking about memories of famous events, I realized how large such a gap could be. I voted for president for the third time this month; she for the first. When the Challenger blew up, she was in the eighth grade; it was my last semester of college. I watched the first moon landings; she wasn't even born yet. Had we fallen in love at any other time, I would be in jail.

The second thing that crystallized my thoughts on this and made me think was a book called, naturally enough, "Generations," by William Strauss and Neil Howe. It takes a different view of U.S. history by tracing the progress of different generations through their life cycles. The authors make some astonishing findings, altering my view of the past. Things I had intuited before became clearer. Anyone serious about history must read it. I will try to do the theme justice here, but I suggest you get a copy of your own and pore over it.

Strauss and Howe make a few predictions about the future based on what has gone before. What lies ahead? We're in for big trouble, folks. Better yet, we can blame it all on the baby boomers and feel good about it.

The boomers are what Strauss and Howe call idealists. Their generational type came of age in a spiritual awakening, the '60s, where consciousness was raised for everyone. As they move into midlife, boomers are still comfortable in making high moral pronouncements, telling the rest of us how to live—witness the health food and exercise revolution or the puritanical crusade against "politically

incorrect" behavior. The seemingly logical inconsistency of ex-hippies spearheading anti-drug and anti-drinking campaigns is more readily understood in this light.

Boomers have little use for my generation, which they see as lacking any moral compass. Translation—we didn't have anything like Woodstock, so we're all soul dead.

The boomers' idea of government is one that does more to be "socially responsible." They talk of apocalyptic problems—the environment, for one—and equally severe solutions. Boomers have no trouble using government to tell others what to do, nor are they troubled by bringing on a "cultural war." Liberal or conservative, they're of a type.

That generational type has in the past brought us the Civil War, the War for Independence, and things like Prohibition. Think on that for a minute, and then remember who we will have sitting in the White House in a couple of months. A boomer, with an entire administration of generational cohorts. Feel that shiver up the spine yet?

However, all is not lost. Strauss and Howe predict, based on the past, that the crisis to come won't occur until the year 2020—crises come every 80 years, as do the spiritual awakenings, so there's plenty of time to lay away canned goods and ammo. When the boomers have brought us to the brink of disaster, then what? Who will save us?

My generation, that's who. The scorned mall rats and head-bangers will rise to pull everyone's chestnuts out of the fire.

Will we get any thanks or gratitude for it? Probably not—the boomers aren't big enough to admit when they have made an incorrect judgment. However, my generation is used to abuse, and we will suffer society's ingratitude in silence, with the inner satisfaction of knowing we did what all the harmonic convergences and guitar playing failed to do—we saved the world.

Keplefield is a graduate student in history, an alumnus of the UNL College of Law, and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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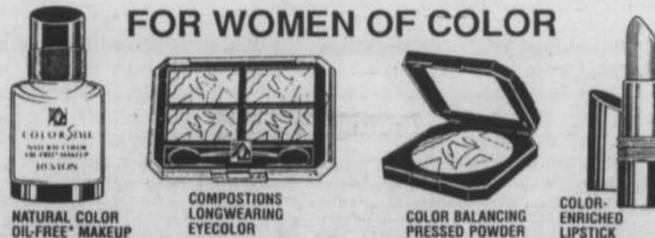
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