

# Icon or stereotype?



**MADONNA**, on tour with her Sweet and Sticky tour, is in Vancouver for her first-ever concert in the city.

- Getty photos

I was 10 years old and in the car with my dad when I heard "Like a Virgin" on the radio for the very first time.

I had no idea what a virgin was but, thanks to Madonna's lyrics, I knew it was some embarrassing 'birds-and-the-bees' thing that I definitely didn't want to discuss with my dad. I squirmed through every excruciating "touched for the very first time" until relief finally came with Corey Hart's "Sunglasses at Night."

Thus I credit Madonna with contributing to my sex education. The Queen of Pop continued to

push the envelope for my generation, singing about abortion ("Papa Don't Preach"), showing interracial relationships and challenging religion ("Like a Prayer").

She promoted girl power long before the Spice Girls, telling women, "Don't go for second best," ("Express Yourself") and toyed with female stereotypes by parodying blonde bombshell Marilyn Monroe ("Material Girl").

Recently, she bent gender roles by "doing things girls are not allowed to do" in the 2001 "What it Feels Like For a Girl" video, in which a woman goes on a violent car chase/crime spree, which incidentally MTV only aired once.

But does all this make her a feminist icon? Are women in a better place because of Madonna?

"She pushed a lot of boundaries. She's played a role in rewriting some sexual codes for women," says Ann Travers, assistant professor of sociology at Simon Fraser University, who once aired *Truth or Dare* to a class on feminism and post modernism.

But do feminists grab their crotch and gyrate with sweaty men?

"It depends on how you define feminist," says Travers. "[Some say] she defined herself as a sexually powerful woman on her own terms. [Others say] her sexuality still remains on male terms."

Either way, she broached taboo topics, says Travers, citing "her queer sensibility, her openness about sex, her resistance to Catholic norms."

Bottom line: "She has both

reinforced stereotypical notions of women and completely blown them open."

And while few parents in the '80s likely held her up as a role model - "seeing a bunch of 13 year olds dressing up like Madonna wasn't exactly my idea of a positive," says Travers - by today's standards, she was a saint.

Her cone-shaped bras were prudish compared to the prostitute-clad Pussy Cat Dolls, whose lyrics - "Don't cha wish your girlfriend was hot like me" and "When I grow up ... I wanna have boobies" - aren't exactly empowering young women.

But was Madonna in it as a feminist or to sell records?

"Her politics are probably genuine," says Travers, but she has "used shock value for commercial reasons."

And while her Madge-sty is far from coming down from her controversial throne (irking the Church as recently as 2006 when she hung from a cross on the Confessions tour) she is slowing down. Causing some to cry, "sell out."

Travers isn't surprised. It's the "too sexy or not sexy enough," double-edged sword, she says, combined with the fact that, "options for older women in our culture are quite minimal. Beautiful women ... have power but there's a time limit."

And with the clock ticking, Madonna seems to be channeling what's left of her influence into Malawi orphans.

As for me, was it better to have learned about sex from a female pop icon than fellow fourth

grader Jonathan Drummon, who followed me home one day that same year singing a dirtier version of Olivia Newton John's "Let's Get Physical?"

I know which is still playing on my iPod.

- Carly Krug, 24 hours

## IN CONCERT

■ Madonna plays B.C. Place tonight. She hits the stage at 9 p.m.

