In February, we got cinema "X", reportedly the first hard-core film theatre in Montreal! Receiving widespread publicity, the theatre promised much, in anticipation of changes in Quebec censorship laws. It hoped to show an array of X-rated films. Then amidst much pressure from anti-pornography groups, the laws were not changed and Cinema X delivered little. Interestingly enough, elsewhere in the city, Bonnie Sherr Klein's anti-pornography film, Not A Love Story was also enjoying vast media coverage. The film is an important study which elicits provocative discussion of the problems pornography poses for society. Women, unfortunately, are the pawns in the porno controversy.

Pornography means megabucks! Whether it be Cinema "X" or boxes on supermarket shelves, Sex Sell! Advertisements continuously use sex symbolism to sell their products - so much so that consumers in our culture have subliminally equated buying power with being sexually desirable.

Adding to the porno debate is the apparent success of the video recorder and its alliance with pornographic film. It is rapidly gaining popularity as a new form of entertainment for an upwardly mobile segment of the population. However, is the VHR going to affect the sexual mores of our culture? The jury is still out on this question, but one disturbing observation is the fact that porno films are brought into the home via the VHR, but the kinds of porno films now mainstreaming into everyday culture.

There are fantastic selections of sadomasochistic films stressing brutality of every dimension and exploiting women at every opportunity. (One can find ads for these films in "adult magazines" to illustrate this point.) Cinema X may bring a new notoriety to Papineau and Beaulieu, but the "true-blue" theatre fans are, in a certain sense, a lonely minority. The VHR is bringing it all back home!

Pornography has become insidious, permeating almost all aspects of everyday life. Problems spawned by the industry - film censorship, the disputed association between pornography and crime, are all controversial issues encountered by society. How are some Montreal women reacting to this burgeoning porno market? Do they feel about all this sexual hype and its effect on today's culture?

Eight Montreal women, of whom were married, one was divorced, were interviewed and shown seven samples of pornographic images to prompt a discussion on pornography and its imprint on their lifestyle. Their responses proved to be interesting reflections on the middle-class sensibility in confrontation with this phenomenon.

"Pornography affected the women in various ways. Some found it to be a strictly political issue, others were concerned that pornography placed a great deal of emphasis on cosmetic distortion. The women thought pornography was not only exploitotive, but echoed the feeling expressed by Kate Millet in Not A Love Story. "It's so ugly." All expressed a certain degree of anger toward..."

Questions

The questions asked elicited a perspective on sexuality, pornography, and the media - film being the predominant issue. Twenty-nine questions comprised the original text, ten of which are listed here.

Oral sex has come to be a staple of pornographic literature and film. This motif has been most sensationalized and exploited in the pornographic film Deep Throat. This film, therefore, was singled out for the interviews for it is one of the most notorious of its genre. Susan Griffin, author of Pornography and Silence says:

"Pornography is like a film that's projected on a blank screen and that blank screen is silence."

Here are eight women talking back!

Did you ever see a porno film? What was your reaction?

"Yes. I was turned-off, ridiculous, no art form, no eroticism in it."

Miriam S., housewife, age 35, B.Sc.

"Yes. It was a turn-off, ridiculous, no art form, no eroticism in it."

Carol D., auctioneer's assistant, age 45, B.A.

"I was nauseated - I walked away. I was bored.

"Sure - in a theatre in Denmark was the first time I saw one. It was a film plus a live sex show - it was pure embarrassment. Now when I see one, I become bored."  

Phyllis K., teacher, group dynamics, age 31, B.A.

"I always feel personally attacked when I see a "nude" magazine staring back at me. On television and billboards you are subtly bombarded with an ass sticking out at you, as well as a nude torso! Calvin Klein jeans make me sick and other jean ads as well!"

Phyllis Y.

"Yes. It was a turn-off, ridiculous, no art form, no eroticism in it."

Carol D., auctioneer's assistant, age 45, B.A.

"I have seen some porno films - real hard-core porno. Hard-core films don't appeal to my sense of aesthetic tastes or lifestyle. Voyage En Douc e was a soft-core film of a subtle lesbian relationship between two women. This was a film I liked."

Maxine B., sex counsellor, age 38, B.A.

"All the time. It does not hurt to have a hard-core film. I have seen some porno films - hard-core films. Hard-core films don't appeal to my sense of aesthetic tastes or lifestyle. Voyage En Douce was a soft-core film of a subtle lesbian relationship between two women. This was a film I liked."

Linda C., housewife, age 35, high school graduate

Do you feel that the media in general, and pornography in particular, victimize women?

"Vic timsation exists, but I find men are being exploited too. I think it is an area which feminists use as their platform for political purposes. Porno films include both men and women. I am not opposed to sensual items, for too long we have hidden our sexuality."

Maxine B., sex counsellor, age 38, B.A.

"Pornography dehumanizes people. It makes me sick the message that we are getting. I deal with teenagers a great deal in my profession. I feel what they are getting at home and what they are getting from the media is a double-bid situation. This upsets me. It leaves the kids in a real state of confusion. You're just not cool if you don't fuck! The media tells them. Yet, at home they get, "don't fuck - it's immoral, it's not allowed!" The media, however, tells them, to be in you have to wear tight clothes, have big tits, and fuck like crazy. I feel the media bombardment of sexuality and its desirability is in direct contradiction to the adults who say don't. There is a major discrepancy between biological and cultural demand."

Phyllis K.

"No, I don't feel pornography victimizes women because I always feel that there are dynamics that happen between people - it is hard to tell which is the victim."

"I do feel, however, the myth in media is that if you buy the products you will become beautiful and handsome and you will live happily ever after. The only reason magazines are put out is to make money. They make money through advertising. You cannot blame the magazines, the blame should be placed on the consumer - they are buying this shit."

Phyllis Y.

"Pornography has become insidious, permeating almost all aspects of everyday life. Problems spawned by the industry - film censorship, the disputed association between pornography and crime, are all controversial issues encountered by society. How are some Montreal women reacting to this burgeoning porno market? Do they feel about all this sexual hype and its effect on today's culture?"

Gayle Cohen
the media - television in general, and the advertising field in particular.

Perhaps the most interesting observation was the manner in which the women "digested" the images at the end of each interview. A few of them were somewhat shocked at some of the illustrations and their comments were either severely curt, or extremely humorous. In some cases, however, embarrassment masqueraded as humour. When confronted with the actual pornographic detail, their gut feelings were revealed. The pictures, thus, proved to be a more succinct evaluation than the questions themselves.

All the women opted for freedom of choice, speech, and thought. The very same freedom enjoyed in our society fosters a liberal attitude toward pornography and its effects on society. This may be the "Catch 22." Some people feel this liberal attitude and the freedom we all cherish makes it difficult for a culture to distinguish works of art from garbage. The women welcomed the opportunity to discuss their thoughts on the subject. The interviews prove the need for films like *Not A Love Story*, a film that raises our consciousness about this timely issue.

In society we realize pornography presents many definite problems; unfortunately, there are no clear-cut solutions. Pornography is many things to many people; it is stimulation, compulsion, domination, obsession, and victimization. Pornography is also the perverse end of the economic scale that exploits women for maximum profit and marketability.

Beauty - making cookies, washing floors - all carefully made up! All this to make her husband more potent! When I see women on *Dallas*, I want to puke! Their tits are sticking out, the jeans are tight to the girl's ass - the girl is a young adolescent! What kind of images are we creating? Is all this sexual hype fact or fantasy?

Belle

"When you see a woman abused in a porno film or in a magazine, I feel it victimizes her. I feel, however, it is the women that are at fault. I feel it is the same as prostitution - it's their choice to go into it for the money. I cannot feel sympathy for them. Some women make themselves out to be scapegoats."

Miriam

"Pornography exploits women, women are portrayed as meat. I think the media in general sets up women to see them..."
selves in these unrealistic ways and images. Women are constantly striving to mimic these images. This causes more unhappiness and frustration and produces, unfortunately, billions of dollars in sales. Women are hooked into commercial purposes, but these women earn good money. It becomes almost a status - The Pet of the Year. There is an ambivalence to the victimization. On the other hand, after seeing Not A Love Story, I really was overcome with a sense of being totally victimized and manipulated by males for Women are posed or dressed in a certain way - in perfume, jeans, cuff links, and so on. Lipsticks are not pouting your mouth is not open, you're not a woman.

On another slant, I can't stand those nauseating commercials on TV which present the woman on another level - a sexless, sloppy drudge. It victimizes the women by intimating in order to fulfill their desires, the woman have to be a good housekeeper with an excellent knowledge of washing floors and cleaning toilets! Roslyn

Phyllis Y.

Can you define "female eroticism"?

"Old films, forties films, are at times sexless, sloppy, but I think it is completely irrelevant in today's lifestyle. In essence I agree with the rating system. In reality, however, it becomes silly - a film becomes restricted because of one or two explicit sex scenes and not because it may be violent." Roslyn

Carol

"No. An important aspect is that it is completely ineffectual. It is controlled by economics. How can we control economics?"

"I don't think the rating system works, maybe there is a purpose to it. I do not think there is any way of forbidding a child or adolescent to buy, to read, to see a thing that you do not approve. You cannot start to guide a child's behavior at the age of twelve, it is too late."

Belle

"Not at all. It presents a somewhat different view when kids are involved. As for adult censorship, you end up getting these silly, uptight people doing the censoring. It takes away from my freedom of speech. I find this repulsive. Censors are trying to 'protect us while we are being destroyed'. What do they know? Don't you like the films - don't sit through them!"

"Yes. I agree with the rating system, it gives you a clue."

Phyllis K.

Pornography causes distortion. Conditions of performance at certain levels.

"Pornography does not cause distortion. Pornography is a view of something that happens, it emphasizes one part of life. Only the individual could decide whether it would be a distortion or not."

Carol

"The way pornography is presented is a kind of Aphrodite figure. A hyper-feminine, super-slim, super-fit, super-hairless; yet odorousness and hairiness are not sexually attractive to many men. Women have to be submissive/permissive and constantly available."

Belle

"It depends on how it is done. If porn is handled well: sadomasochism exists in The Story of "O", I do not believe that as a guide it would cause distortion by children, it would."

Phyllis Y.

Belle

"It distorts the perception of reality. Expectations are distorted, expectations as a lover are distorted. Men's expectations are distorted by women wanting to look like Vogue models. Anything
that deflates a person's self-worth or self-esteem because they do not measure up to an ideal set by society. If you are not considered to be a perfect queen, look like a fashion model, fit a tight pair of jeans, you are not successful. It dehumanizes a person's self-worth."

Maxine

"Definitely. It presents a distorted vision of what people do with that in their minds. I don't know. Whether it causes a distortion I don't think so. Most people who went to see porn films found them boring. They went to see the films, but they did not incorporate them into their lifestyles." Phyllis K.

"Yes. It is a perversion of distortion and perverted fantasy. It is certainly not a real concept. I guess there are people who want it to be real. Then again, reality, to some may even be a distortion." Phyllis K. Keller

"It is striking because it is unusual. At first viewing it is not erotic. I guess one could say that it is..." Roslyn

"I think Al Goldstein is trying to sell his home video cassettes..." Phyllis K. Keller

"I agree with Mr. Goldstein, especially when dealing with porn films. I would watch them with my husband, but not with other couples, never in mixed company!" Carol

"I don't know if I could be turned on at home by a porno film. I do watch porno films at home if it turns on them, it may add a dimension to their marriage. I carry a lot of baggage around with these films, so I may feel negatively to them. I also never had the experience of watching them alone with my husband." Linda

"Pornography would not turn me on at home or in a theatre. Objectively, I would imagine that watching a porno film in the confines of a bedroom would be very different on the emotional urges projected by the film." Roslyn

"I would agree. My husband is interested in pornography, it turns him on. The immersion in women is what I think two consenting adults, not in a crowd." Maxine

"Are men retaliating against the feminist movement by depicting women in more abusive ways in the media?" Phyllis K. Keller

"I am not an admirer of Margaret Atwood. All her men 'have teeth and bite.' In a sense, all feminists are overtly aggressive when they start to blame men for all the evils of society. On the other hand, some men may feel threatened by the movement. I feel threatened to a lesser degree, but in the movement, then, in order to make anything viable, you have to be an activist. Women are portrayed a bit too aggressively. Men are reacting by portraying women in awful ways in pornography..." Belle

"No pornography has existed for centuries where there has been a reaction against the feminist movement. Certain kinds of pornography is a violent reaction against women, but not necessarily against the women's movement." Roslyn

"Unconsciously it may be. It may not be a deliberate reaction. Men are reacting by portraying an erotic object. It is a way not to deal with women pornography. If you distance women and turn them into sex objects you don't have to deal in relationships." Phyllis K. Keller

"It is not the ad that is offensive. It is the fact that somebody is actually going to send away for it! A reflection on our society. It is done to make money, he's got consumers, he's got business!" Phyllis Y. Carol

"The sad thing is that some poor man will pay $34.95 for an imitation of what he wants it? Someone who is not sure ain't the real thing! I always buy the lipstick first viewing it is not erotic. I guess one could say that it is..." Roslyn

"It is interesting, it is not offensive. It doesn't make me angry. I think the photography is good. I think it is sensual. Done with good taste, people may not associate it with hard core sex..." Phyllis Y.

"Disgusting isn't it? The female is unattractive. She has all the attributes of a man but no body. The advertisement is a pimp in selling the doll." Phyllis K. Keller

"Erotic, men would find it erotic. Beautiful woman. I do not like films or pictures that show that part of the anatomy in that way." Phyllis Y. Maxine

"I don't know about the picture or what to make of it. They are obviously trying to portray an erotic woman - trees in background, flowers in her hair, shades on her face. I don't get it. It is not erotic. It is not a reaction against women, but not necessarily against the feminist movement. Certain kinds of pornography are being used in pornography..." Roslyn

"I'm more offended by showing children how to put on lipstick as a play toy. I feel it develops a negative set of values in very young children. The values instilled are, in order to be a complete and attractive woman you have to put on a false image. Adult women, though, can put anything in their mouths as far as I care!" Belle

"What I find most offensive is the child role model. Sick. The advertisement is completely sickening..." Roslyn

"It is striking because it is unusual. At first viewing it is not erotic. I guess one could say that it is..." Phyllis Y. Maxine

"Erotic, men would find it erotic. Beautiful woman. I do not like films or pictures that show that part of the anatomy in that way." Phyllis Y.

"I am immediately prejudiced against this picture. I know it came from Play­boy. There is no erotic vibration for me. The whole thing is very sterile, even her so-called look of ecstasy." Roslyn

"This type of pose is becoming commonplace. A man looks at Playboy and gets a message. This picture tells him this is what I should be getting. The man has been married for 30 years and his wife looks like the picture we saw in the cartoon. So therefore, pornography does distort - how can they say pornography is not a distortion?" Belle

"Disgusting: This type of thing shown in Penthouse all the time. I don't like seeing that part of the anatomy."

"Phyllis was extremely put-off and uncomfortable with the photo in front of her. She also had difficulty saying the word vagina." Phyllis Y.