

# Violent porn

## Local women's leader educates area citizens

By MARTHA WAGGONER

The slide flashes on to the screen. The picture defies delicate description. It is a drawing of a woman's genitals being pulled apart grotesquely by a metal apparatus. The breast is clipped with a ring and linked and pulled toward the genitals in an excruciating position. It is an example of what is called "violence against women in pornography," and it is something Carole Moussalli is fighting.

Moussalli is vice president in charge of programming for the Chapel Hill chapter of the National Organization of Women. She began working on the show last fall and presented it for the first time in December 1979. "I found it very difficult to approach the material," she says. "I'm not the same person that I was a few months ago."

She presents her slide show of examples of this violence to any group that requests—with one qualification. All those who attend the presentation must be women.

Moussalli admits she has received some negative feedback from her decision to exclude men, but she stands by her decision. "I felt it was necessary for women to see what was being produced," she says. "Most women have never seen this material and it's quite a blow to them."

The material Moussalli uses is not the kind many women will see in their life times, despite the fact that all of the slides were made from pictures in magazines bought in the Chapel Hill area. "I wanted to let women know what kind of porn there was in this area," Moussalli says. "I wanted to see how the national issue connected to our lives."

The national movement to which Moussalli refers has been spearheaded by such famous women leaders as Susan Brownmiller, author of *Against our Will—Men, Women and Rape*. Marches led by Brownmiller and others in New York's Times Square have gained media coverage and consequently public attention for the fight against violent pornography.

To make the connection between the national movement and Chapel Hill, Moussalli and three other women went to the adult book store on U.S. Highway 15-501 toward Durham. "It was like going into enemy territory," she says. "The men

did not take their eyes off of us...we knew we disrupted their sales."

The women bought magazines at the bookstore, but were not sure what they were buying since the magazines are in brown paper covers and cannot be unwrapped until the customer pays. The average cost of the magazines is \$5, which helps keep the porn industry income at \$4 billion a year.

But Moussalli draws a line between violent pornography and explicit pornography. She has examples of pornography which show very graphically men and women in sex acts. Although Moussalli said she would not buy such material for herself, she is not trying to stamp it out. "It's not violent in that it's not degrading," she says. "No one is in a position of power. It's just explicit."

But Moussalli has many examples of pictures which show men in a power position—a position of life and death in some cases. "This type of pornography is overwhelmingly male against female," she says. But Moussalli adds she has not seen very much homosexual pornography and does not know what situations it depicts.

The slides Moussalli uses in her show present not sexuality, but power, she says. The formula used to prepare the audience for the porn is what Moussalli calls objectification, fragmentation and the inevitable violation of the women in the pictures. Objectification involves removing the woman's identity from the picture. In the pictures, the model is blindfolded, gagged and has fishnet or something stronger, such as rope, tied around her limbs. "These are all elements aimed at erasing this woman's identity," she says.

Then comes the fragmentation. The picture described at the beginning of this article does not show the woman's face or anything else that would depict her as a person—the picture is just the genitalia. Other slides included in the show show breasts confined with metal rings with clothes pins on the nipples. One magazine carries a feature called the "Grabber of the Month" and one month ran pictures with the caption "Just a mouthful is not enough." A cartoon shows a man with a framed picture of his first dollar made and a picture of a bloodstained sheet which has underneath it "My first virgin."

Another cartoon shows a husband, son and unattractive wife in the kitchen. The son has just swallowed some poison and the husband is trying to make the boy vomit. The husband says to his wife, "Quick, Noreen, show him your pussy."

"The idea is that women's sexual organs are disgusting," Moussalli says.

After the objectification and fragmentation, the porn audience is prepared for the violation of the woman. We are prepared to see spiked heels grind into breasts, and a magazine titled *Virgin Foxes* which runs the headline "Cherry Sweet and Ready to be Popped." We are ready to see, inside this same magazine, pictures of 12-to-14-year-old girls masturbating. We are prepared to see a father and his two daughters engaging in various sex acts. We are ready to see two women hold another one down while she is slashed with razors in an X-rated movie.

Other examples include a magazine called *Interracial Spanking*, which is a series of pictures of a white man beating a black woman. One picture carries the caption "submissive snatch" and another magazine ran a series of pictures titled "Tied Thais." The women are tied to make male penetration more accessible.

The violation part of the pornography is where women become nothing more than a thing, Moussalli says. "You don't violate a human, you violate a thing, or what you perceive as a thing. You don't recognize the person as a complete entity...it's just a tit or genitals. Men feel like they can do anything to perpetrate their S and M (Sadism and Masochism) fantasies."

"This has to do with power, sexism, sadism, violence against women, hatred of women."

A question which always arises when any group wants to get rid of a kind of literature—be it pornography or high school reading material—is whether the First Amendment extends press freedom to that material. And when Moussalli is asked this question, she becomes annoyed, perhaps even angry.

"There's no complete answer to that," she says. "It's almost a way of baiting the talker. Strategies are made by people deciding what is possible. To develop a sound strategy will take getting together the skills of the theoretician, politician, lawyer, economist."

"We're finally talking about pornography as a feminist issue," she says.

Moussalli admits it will take time to solve the problem and comes down on those who want an answer immediately. "There's almost a compulsion to get to the answer right away. The effective action is to go in there (the bookstores)...this situation will continue as long as women are ignorant and afraid of pornography."

"When we attack a system that's very highly developed, we're going to have to be careful to achieve our objective without getting shot down," she says. "Once we start making trouble there is going to be a backlash."

But when Moussalli gives her presentation to the groups of women, no one thinks to mention the First Amendment, she said. And her statement held true at a meeting of the Durham chapter of NOW, where Moussalli brought her slide show in February. None of the women mentioned the First Amendment.

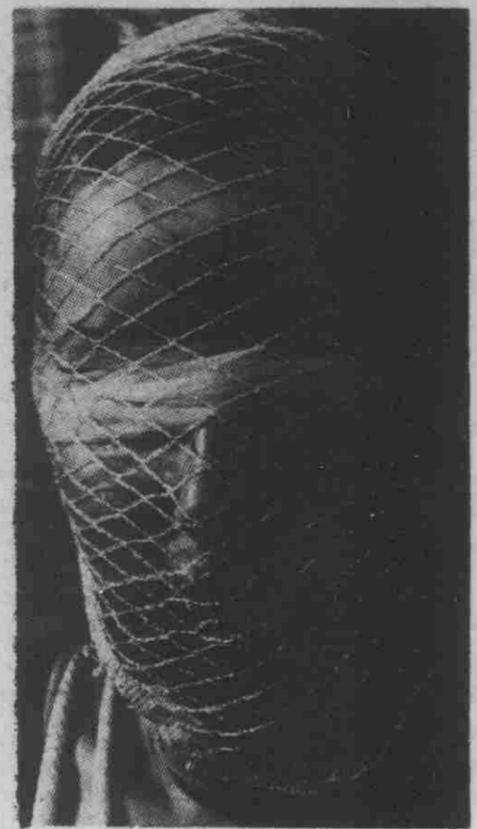
In fact, for the first few minutes after Moussalli finished her talk, there was complete silence except for the breathing.

Finally one woman spoke. "I had no idea that that stuff was that bad. A lot of the women look like crime victims."

Another said, "I had to look at the wall a couple of times. I found myself trying to avoid what was on the screen."

And Moussalli said, "I still have a chill down my back and I've been doing this for a month."

One feminist whom Moussalli quotes in



Binding and gagging hides identity

her presentation suggests that the definition of obscenity be changed so that it focuses on violence and not on sex. The women at the Durham meeting seemed to agree with that and that economic structural changes rather than legislative changes are what is needed to get rid of the violent porn.

"The economic route is going to be the most prevailing because this is such a money-oriented society," Moussalli said. "An economic system which impoverishes women makes it able to exploit women."

Moussalli uses not only graphic porn in her show, but also some subtle examples of male power shown in high fashion magazines. One picture is that of a man standing behind a woman tying her bow tie. The man is in a position that makes it very easy for him to choke her. Another picture is of a man with boots and a whip riding on a woman's back. Moussalli's contention is that sort of subtle, almost subconscious violence prepares people for the type in *Playboy*, then the kind in *Hustler* and then for the really violent sadism-masochism, painful physical violence found only in the adult bookstores.

"We are set up to accept this as a plausible condition in our culture. Throughout the entire culture, we're made into objects, then fragmented and violated."

"The pervasive message is that men have power over women. The stage is set in our day to day lives on very low levels of violation. This pattern begins with the insidious and ends with the explicit." □

Martha Waggoner is news editor for *The Daily Tar Heel*.

