

Playboy stylist unfazed by protest over issue



DTH/ANDREW SYNOWEIZ

Hair and makeup artist Chelo relaxes during interviews for Playboy's "Girls of the ACC." Chelo has worked at the magazine for eight years.

BY LINDA SHEN
STAFF WRITER

Woody's Tar Heel Tavern and Grill opened one hour late Thursday morning to accommodate a Playboy photo shoot.

On the tables, black cables mingled with condiments. There wasn't a single customer in sight.

The second floor had changed into an impromptu salon, with boxes of jewelry overflowing into trays of eye shadow. Chelo, a hair and makeup artist for Playboy, was lost in an ocean of sparkling cloth and high heels.

With an 18-year career in the industry under her stylish belt, Chelo is never more at home than when she is with her three cases of cosmetics and styling products and someone's face as a canvas.

She's calm about the recent uproar about Playboy's "Girls of the ACC" pictorial. About 20 members of Feminist Students United gathered April 5 to protest the spread, saying it sexually objectifies women.

But Chelo, who has worked with Playboy for eight years, said the controversy has become mundane.

"Society wants to make the woman's body something to be ashamed of and something to be used negatively when God's original intention was for beauty," she said.

"I don't think it's something to be ashamed of, but I guess that came from working with Playboy models."

At 16, Chelo entered beauty school and started platform work, a live exhibition of hair and makeup techniques.

When she was 19, the creators of

Tigi Bed Head hair care products took her under their wings. With her career taking off, Chelo was busy, happy and successful.

At 23, she was raped. "It affected me as a person, as a woman, very much," she said. "It closed me off quite a bit."

Soon after the assault, she began to stutter and struggled to speak to crowds. Working through the fear left her angry. "I had to become comfortable with my body and myself," she said.

Chelo credits her faith with helping her to overcome fears and to move past the experience, but she also drew confidence from her work with Playboy.

"The models are really comfortable in themselves in their bodies," she said. "I would look at that, and

I would think, "That's nice, I wish I could be like that."

Chelo said she works with many people at Playboy who strive to combat sexual violence. Protesters' recent claims that Playboy supports a rape culture disturb her.

"That is the one thing that makes me shake with anger," she said. "It actually disturbs my sleep. It's so untrue."

As she travels for Playboy, her past doesn't cloud her future. In the coming years, the mother of four said she hopes to bring her family on the road with her.

"I love what I do," she said. "I can do this till my hands stop working."

Contact the Features Editor at features@unc.edu.

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