

Lewd in the Library!

by Roz Warren

The Sports Illustrated Swimsuit issue just came out, and all over America librarians are flipping through its pages and rolling their eyes.

The swimsuit issue, which isn't actually about swimwear at all, but, is, instead, about young, beautifully shaped female bodies, is the single most stolen item in any public library. Shelve it in your magazine section like any other periodical? It'll vanish. Like magic. Always. But hide it behind the Reference Desk and make your patrons sign it out?

Is that just good sense? Or is it censorship?

Every year, the swimsuit issue gets a bit more lascivious -- the bikinis skimpier, the poses more provocative, the expressions on the models' faces less about "Look at my strong, healthy body!" and more about "Do me! Now! Right here on the beach!"

This year's cover shows three stunning young woman, topless, their backs to the camera, smiling happily at the viewer over their shoulders, their gorgeous rumps more revealed than concealed by itty wisps of fabric.

Is this really what we want to display on our library's magazine rack?

Of course, the collection of my suburban Philadelphia library contains all three books in the Shades of Grey trilogy, and numerous other examples of sexy contemporary "literature." (And the sex scenes in the romances we circulate are hot hot hot.)

We librarians tend to be fans of the First Amendment. I'm a card-carrying member of the ACLU myself. I even subscribe to Playboy -- for the articles and interviews, of course.

What I'm saying is that I'm all for pornography.

But there's a time and a place for porn. I wasn't sure this was the time or the place. I'm in charge of processing and then shelving incoming magazines. Before putting this one out on the floor, I decided to consult my supervisor.

Carol and I perused the issue together. "OMG!" "Would you look at that?" "Yikes!" "Do you even SEE a swimsuit in this picture?" "Oy!" "I hope her mother never sees that shot."

This was pretty hot stuff.

We were inclined to stash it behind the reference desk, along with the other stuff that patrons like to steal. The Tuesday "Science" section of the New York Times. The Morningstar weekly stock market updates.

But first, we brought the issue to the head of the library.

Our boss took a look, then said, "Just shelve it. Don't treat it differently than any other magazine. It's no worse than what they can see every day on television."

That woman sure loves the First Amendment.

And, of course, the truth is that we're living in an era where anyone, of any age, can view all the naked tushies they want, whenever they want, online.

"Put a security tag on it, of course," she added. Although we all know how easy it is to remove those tags.

Before I shelved it, my co-workers passed it around. The consensus? We weren't exactly shocked. But we weren't exactly thrilled either.

We're all middle-aged women. Many of us are grandmas. Still, in our heyday, we too were hot chicks. But you can be a hot chick and not want to share that aspect of yourself with the entire world. The kind of young woman who is drawn to library work is rarely the kind of young woman who ends up spilling out of her bikini on the cover of a magazine.

We librarians don't tend to let it all hang out.

Which means that we are, increasingly, at odds with our culture. Modesty? How retro is that? Dignity? Forget about it.

Still, we proudly stand behind the First Amendment. Perhaps, to a fault. And while I wasn't exactly elated about adding that little touch of smarm to our quiet reading room, I went ahead and shelved the swimsuit issue, just like any other magazine.

Within 24 hours, it was gone.

(www.facebook.com/writerrozwarren.)

