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—Allen H. Neuharth
Chairman and Founder
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DEBATE

Face-off: 'Swimsuit' magazines

Stop treating women as slabs of meat

By Ann Simonton
Guest columnist

SANTA CRUZ, Calif. — *Sports Illustrated's* images of athletic prowess pale next to all the images of authentic "good girls" who do their traditional stretch and flaunt for the nation's sports lovers this time each year. Women clamor for the opportunity to be sold as sex objects. Men eagerly purchase the masturbation fantasy that women exist solely for men's sexual pleasure.

Rape is another American tradition — the most rapidly growing, most underreported and least-convicted crime. We're the undisputed world leader — 2,000 reported daily and as many as 10 times more unreported.

It's terrifying to realize what a popular sport rape has become. Convicted rapists constantly say they rape women because they see them as objects, not people. Real men stand up for their First Amendment right to view women as sex objects, yet the lives and safety of their daughters, lovers and wives are put on the line when anyone reduces a woman to a slab of meat.

I'm not against sex and nudity. I dream of a culture that views public breast-feeding as a normal, non-sexual act, and where at least half the images of women are of working, valuable, participating human beings.



Ann Simonton, who posed for the cover of the 1974 *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue, is coordinator of *Media Watch*.

come aware of the consequences of viewing women predominantly as sex objects. Women are winning lawsuits when subjected to posters such as *SI's* in the work place. Men and women both are finding it worthwhile to challenge sexist jokes and images. Chances to expose the lies which profit advertising are everywhere.

And isn't relating with real women more fulfilling than two-dimensional images of the latest sex tease?

Sports Illustrated didn't create rape. Nor are all its readers rapists. Yet recent studies found 25% to 60% of high school and college-age men willing to consider rape if they could get away with it. Sixth- through ninth-graders said women were asking to be raped if they dressed seductively or had money spent on them.

SI has a responsibility to society not to perpetuate rape by showing women as sex objects more often than it shows women as real people or serious athletes. But we can do more than boycott advertisers and write letters. Be-

By Sherry Roberts
Guest columnist

GREENSBORO, N.C. — I schedule all my dentist appointments for February. No, the Novocain is not more bearable in winter, and the hygienist still harps about flossing. The appeal is strictly in the sizzling waiting-room literature: the sports magazines' swimsuit issues.

I'm one of the almost 13 million women — triple *Sports Illustrated's* usual weekly female readership — who are irresistibly drawn to its swimsuit issue.

As I ponder bikinis instead of cavities, I realize there are certain techniques: It can be productive to stare at a woman reading the swimsuit issue. For some reason, women always feel as if everyone in the room is looking at them when they are looking at other women with very few clothes on. While thumbing through a swimsuit issue, men obliviously shovel chips in their faces, carry on conversations and listen to music. Women are not so nonchalant. So, persistent staring may encourage the current holder to relinquish her copy.

It's also good to know when to give up hope. If I see a woman slide the swimsuit issue slyly inside a copy of *Southern Living*. I know I'm not getting a gander at that issue until the next appointment.



Sherry Roberts is a free-lance writer.

It never pays to be surprised at who you'll see at the dentist's this month. A feminist friend who uses lots of "d" words in discussing swimsuit issues — degrading, disgusting, downright exploitative — schedules her checkups in, of all times, February.

Swimsuit issues are among the pieces of literature most likely to be pilfered, according to a librarian friend, who admits she used to look at the swimsuit issues more than her husband did. Why are women attracted to swimsuit issues, I asked. "Envy," she said. Is that it? Do we covet bodies that make men drool, not to mention the fashions most of us will never touch, thanks to our conservative local store buyers?

Someone's breathing over my shoulder. Three women have sidled up to me — and the issue in my hands. Across the room, a man is salivating, waiting for me to drop the magazine. When it's my turn for the dentist, I firmly pass it on to one of the women, a large one, with beautiful eyes and a mouthful of braces that glimmer when she smiles like sundrops on a wet, sexy swimsuit.