

## Radical Womanhood

### Because being a biblical woman in a modern world is a radical act

April 29, 2008

#### Porn in Public Libraries

A few months ago, I received this letter from my friend, Pam. It concerned a shock she received at a local public library--a new facility in Montgomery County that is a hit with all the moms of young children in our area. I asked permission to share it with my blog readers because I was curious as to what other people had experienced.

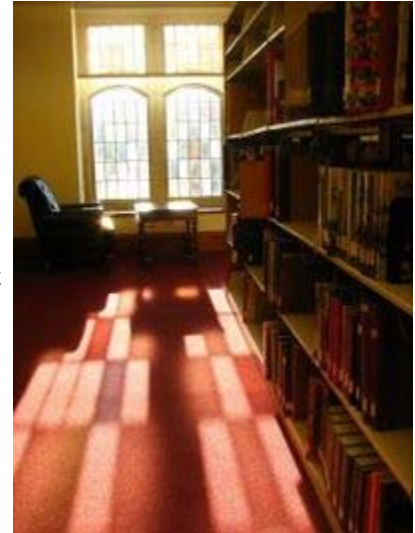
As most of you know, I am not one to go all hysterical, but I am so dumbfounded by what happened to me today, that I thought I should share it with you.

I was at the Rockville Library (without my son, gratefully), when I looked over and saw a young man watching pornography on one of the library's computers. I will spare you the details, but suffice to say it was very explicit and nobody with any sense of sanity would say what I was viewing was open to interpretation. When I complained to the librarian I was told that by law--because of his right to freedom of speech and right to information--this man had the right to watch porn on the library's computers, and that all they could do was go give the man a privacy screen. A privacy screen will block the view from the sides but still allow someone standing directly behind him to see what was on the screen. I should add that there was a group of younger teenagers sitting within sight of this computer as well.

I had a lengthy conversation with the head librarian. I asked for the library's policy in writing, and she gave me a copy of a policy paper that the American Library Association put out about internet access and the use of filters on library computers. (The ALA is against them.) While sympathetic in tone, she stated that there was nothing she could do. As I was leaving the library, a second librarian told me that at another library in Montgomery County, the library was forced to reprimand a security guard who forced a patron to stop viewing porn on the library's computer. The guard thought he was doing the right thing (imagine that!)--that patrons were not allowed to view porn at the library--but it turns out he was wrong. When the patron complained, the guard was reprimanded.

Yes, we live in a world that has somehow made what is right wrong, and what is wrong right. Maybe you all knew this already, but I pass this along because I don't want your kids to see anything that they shouldn't. I am mulling over whether there is any additional course of action I might be able to take, as this seems so insane that parents cannot do anything about this. If anyone has any suggestions for me, I would be grateful to receive them.

Pam says she appreciates this library and certainly isn't trying to cause any trouble personally for the librarians there. But she is deeply concerned about this policy. Afterward, she learned through some rudimentary research that the Supreme Court ruled in 2003 that public libraries do not necessarily infringe on First Amendment rights of free speech if they put filters on their computers, as long as they are willing to turn the filters off if an adult patron asks. The protection of children was seen as a "compelling interest," she says.



About a month after this experience, she wrote a lengthy letter to the director of Montgomery County Libraries. A few weeks later, she received a response from a library staffer, addressing specifically the issues in her letter. The library staffer indicated that they are "evaluating" their current policy and talking to other jurisdictions to see how well (or not so well) filters work in other community libraries. She didn't really indicate that the county would be changing its policy, however. "I am hoping to convince other people to write to the director of the library, as well," Pam says. "The response that I received left me with the impression that they are open to input, but I could be wrong on this."

I have to confess I have little reason to be in libraries these days, thanks to the 'Net, so I was unaware of this issue. However, it appears to be a growing problem. One librarian was recently fired from her job for reporting a man watching child pornography. A California man was arrested for viewing child pornography and police found candy, ropes, and duct tape in his car. And an investigative report by KGO-TV in San Francisco found "multiple incidents of people performing lewd sexual acts in public view at a San Jose library while viewing porn." Fortunately, I also discovered that there is an organization called Family Friendly Libraries that has taken on this issue and provides guidelines for communities that want to take action.

Is this an issue in your community, too? I've opened the comment function on this post for a few days to hear from you all on this topic. I would especially appreciate hearing from the librarians. (Comments will be moderated and, due to my schedule, will only be posted for a few days.)

Posted by Carolyn in [Comments on Our Culture](#) | [Permalink](#)

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### Comments

This is so shocking. I thought that a library could have a policy of not allowing viewers to look at porn over the internet for the sake of those around them.

This is truly saddening. A security guard reprimanded for stopping someone from viewing porn? A woman fired for reporting a guy watching CHILD pornography? What has it come too? And how is society allowing our "freedom of speech" to be taken so far?

Posted by: [Christina](#) | [April 29, 2008 at 12:33 AM](#)

I had a similar experience in 1998, I discovered a group of young boys (maybe 8 or 9 years old) watching porn on a public library computer. With no parents in sight, I notified the librarian. She told me she had no control over the situation and that the library was not responsible for "supervising" the boys. Last I checked, it's illegal for children under 10 to even view a rated R movie much less watch free porn at their public library... which was within walking distance of many families with young children. My research at the time found similar results. The ALA just does not recognize the hazards of this "free speech" on our children, both as victims of it's content and it's consequences.

Posted by: [Andrea](#) | [April 29, 2008 at 01:30 AM](#)

This is going to be one of those "why I love Missouri" posts. We frequent two libraries. I did some quick checking on their websites, and both have policies in place.

Library number 1:

[Library name] while recognizing the false security and inadequacies of Internet filters, have unanimously voted to place Internet filtering software on public access terminals in order to (1) be in compliance with the Children's Internet Protection Act so that federal funding will continue to be available and (2) to offer limited protection from offensive sites. We have

requested that library staff make patrons aware of the filters and believe that, for minors, parental control continues to be the best protection.

Library 2:

Inappropriate Images—Use of the library's Internet computer to access material that is obscene, child pornography, or "harmful to minors" is expressly prohibited. Public display or printing of offensive or explicit sexual material is a violation of RS MO-573.060 and will result in suspension or revocation of library services and appropriate penalty under law.

I was curious about Library 1's policy. If there is a federal "Children's Internet Protection Act," why aren't these other libraries worried about it?

Posted by: [Staci at Writing and Living](#) | [April 29, 2008 at 07:01 AM](#)

I believe that our public libraries have two sets of computers - one set that sits between the teen and children's sections and another set that is in an alcove (the monitors face the wall so there is no problem with people walking by behind the monitor) in the adult book section. The children's computers have filters, the adult's computers do not.

It seems like such a simple solution.

Posted by: [Ellen](#) | [April 29, 2008 at 07:17 AM](#)

What is unfathomable to me is why, when child pornography is illegal, and a person can be arrested for having it on their home or office computer, it is not illegal to view it in a library. Why aren't library staff arrested for having it on their computers? Is it simply because said computers are "public"?

Posted by: [Lucie](#) | [April 29, 2008 at 08:29 AM](#)

Yes, this is very disturbing. It's also very unfortunate that some librarians and/or library staff members have chosen to interpret the clause in the Child Internet Protection Act (CIPA) that allows for adults to request access to unfiltered Internet access at their libraries as a "green light" for porn surfing. What it really means is that adults who are needing to access sites that are blocked by a filter pertaining to topics that are necessary for scholarly research should be granted access to those sites.

Filters are generally not sophisticated enough to judge intention, and tend to "over-block" when there's a chance that a site is inappropriate; thus, someone doing research on breast cancer might be unable to access a site that has photos of breast cancer victims, etc. This scenario is exactly what CIPA allows in its clause for adults requesting unfiltered access, but people with an agenda or those who are terrified of litigation have taken it to mean a free ride for porn surfers.

I am a librarian in Georgia, and in our library, we don't allow porn surfing at all. If someone has managed to find a site with inappropriate content that the filter has missed -and that \*does\* happen; once again, because filters can't judge intent- we kick them off the machine and remove their Internet privileges. Our policy is that, while adults can choose to browse for porn, they don't have the right to do so in our public facility, which would put it in full view of others who don't want to see it.

Very disturbing, indeed, that some would sacrifice the rights of the many for the rights of the few...

Posted by: [Kell Carpenter](#) | [April 29, 2008 at 10:23 AM](#)

In the library I worked out for nearly five years patrons had to sign a form agreeing to comply with the library's acceptable internet use policy. It included NOT viewing sexually explicit material. I know of about 1/2 dozen people who were suspended from using the internet because of violating this agreement after viewing pornography.

The library had used privacy screens for a couple of years before deciding to remove them. They found people had a false sense of privacy and were viewing very explicit sites that could be seen if you were standing directly in line with the computer screen.

When we found children viewing porn they were also suspended from using the internet. They do have filters on the young adult computers, but children have found ways around this. Because I was not in the administration and did not attend library board meetings I do not know how they reconciled their policies with the ALA position on filters, but I am certainly glad they took the stance that they did.

From first hand experience I know that libraries are sadly not always a "family friendly" place. Christian parents must be vigilant. However, if parents are wise, the local library can be a useful and enjoyable resource for Christian families.

Posted by: [Jacque](#) | [April 29, 2008 at 10:49 AM](#)

At our public libraries here in northern Alberta it is against policy to look at porn on the computers and can result in loss of

library (or at least computer) privileges.

Posted by: Dorothy | [April 29, 2008 at 11:16 AM](#)