

Would a Ban on Porn help Cure America?

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ENGL 1121: College Writing and Critical Reading

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April 5, 2024

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Porn. The subject that nobody wants to talk about. Some of us think it's okay; some of us say it isn't okay but use it; and some of us completely despise it. Regardless of our opinions, many individuals feel pornography should be banned entirely. But others say this is not a good idea, and it isn't the solution to porn's problems. These opponents of the ban claim that criminalizing porn goes against our founding American principles. They claim that it's just a product on the free market which capitalism promises, and banning porn goes against the First Amendment's freedom of expression. Furthermore, they make the point that adults watching sexual content causes no harm, and if anything, it really only helps people by providing sexual education. Now I do agree in a sense that banning an American product may go against our founding principles, but I believe there's more to the story. Government regulation and/or restriction is essential in a capitalist society, especially when certain products it produces can cause addiction. Additionally, it has been shown to incite sexual violence, which truly does go against the First Amendment's protections. Not to mention it gets into the hands of children and harms relationships. But for me personally, when I look around at my peers, I see a problem that affects so many of us that rarely ever gets talked about.

But nevertheless, some porn advocates bring up how a ban on it goes against our American founding principles. One fairly constitutionalist writer for *Newsweek*, Brandi Love (2020) calls it an "assault on the Constitution's Bill of Rights", pointing out that pornography is just another good that can be bought and sold on the free, capitalist market, and shouldn't be interfered with. In other words, she believes it goes against the free enterprise part of our American ideals. Another writer, Addison Hosner (2021) of *Counterpunch*, makes the claim that banning porn is an attack of the First Amendment, saying that pornography is really freedom of expression and banning it would "result in the degradation of [...] expression of free will". So, in

sum, opponents of the ban feel an attack on porn is an attack on both capitalism and our freedoms granted in the first amendment.

But while it may be true that government intervention is the enemy of free enterprise, capitalism would destroy our people without it. Basic economics upholds this idea. One widely used economics textbook written by several authors with PhD's in economics brings to light the “market failures” that occur in a market system (capitalism) without government intervention, including under-allocation of our society’s resources, environmental destruction, and monopoly power (Brue, McConnell, & Flynn, 2022). So, without intervention, more of our natural resources would be going towards producing things that us Americans don’t necessarily want (under-allocation). Not to mention the uncontrolled level of environmental damage and unfair income inequality sprouting from monopolies. To put it in perspective, imagine the U.S. today without any restrictions for drilling oil on American soil. Exports would boom, as would the economy, but greenhouse gases would significantly rise in the United States, thus harming the environment. Capitalism is crucial for economic growth, but without a tool like government intervention, things like the environment, which Americans frequently put before the economy, would suffer. Similarly, government regulation of addictive goods and services, such as drugs and pornography is also vital to our nation. Without intervention, people would have full access to an ever-growing industry of drugs, which is great for free enterprise, but devastating to consumers. These highly addictive substances such as cocaine, heroin, opium, and others rewire our brains, forcing us to keep using them. It’s addiction 101, and porn follows the same suit. Psychologists have found that the repeated use of these addictive, dopamine explosions from these products overstimulate “the nucleus accumbens [which] progressively weakens its connectivity to the prefrontal cortex, [the] seat of executive functioning” (Psychology Today, n.d.). Another source points out that pornography use can cause “brain chemistry imbalance

[because] it often raises serotonin and norepinephrine levels" which are hormones known for guiding mood and sexual behavior (PhychCentral, n.d.). In other words, addiction takes over our control over ourselves and alters our brain chemistry in unhealthy ways. Pornography shares the same addictive effects. Now the vast majority of highly and semi-addictive substances are already restricted by the government, and in a sense, porn is technically restricted too, but only for people underage. However, the power of pornography to addict its users doesn't only apply to teenagers, it applies to everyone. When a person is addicted, they don't usually control it, it controls them. This is precisely the reason we need the government to protect us from abusing drugs, and with its same effects, porn should fall in that category too. But if porn doesn't hurt anybody but it's addictive like cigarettes, why don't we just restrict it rather than going so far as to ban it? There are several reasons why tighter regulations alone won't solve the consequences of pornography.

The first of which is it has been shown to incite violence. One point some make, as I mentioned earlier, is that criminalizing pornography goes against our First Amendment rights. Adult entertainment actors and producers would no longer get to express their freedom of expression on the internet, which the First Amendment technically protects. But what it doesn't include is if this freedom of speech or expression incites imminent violence among others. As some research has shown, pornography use tends to correlate with sexual violence. One large study conducted by the leading activist against porn, Andrea Dines (2010) found that the most popular pornographic videos watched were about rough, forceful acts made upon women who she described were depicted as "sex objects" rather than human beings (as cited in Bindel, 2010). Now one may make the claim that labeling this as an issue is debatable and that people have different sexual preferences. But studies have shown that porn use correlates with real-life sexual abuse. Several researchers conducting studies from the United States and five European

countries amounting to over five thousand people found a “major positive correlation” between viewing pornography in adolescence (in particular) and “forced or coercive (pressured)” sex (as cited in National Library of Medicine, 2023). In other words, semi-willing or forced sex against partners is a correlated outcome of pornography use. So, it begs the question, does sexual preference really come before sexual abuse? Similarly, several online sites have been shown to offer a haven for child pornography and child sex trafficking. A 2020 police report in the United Kingdom found a total of over ten thousand cases of online child sex crimes (as cited in NSPCC, 2020). Should children be subjected to sexual abuse just to satisfy sexual preference? No, and luckily for them, they too, are protected by the First Amendment.

Another related issue that comes to light with this debate is porn exposure to people under eighteen years old. While some may bring up how pornography is technically restricted for people under eighteen years of age, I believe that it’s not enough, and a ban is the only way to keep porn out of young people’s lives. But nevertheless, today the restriction is incredibly easy for underage youth to access. Personally, I was one of many kids first exposed to pornography under the age of eighteen. In eighth grade, when I was only thirteen, a close friend of mine found out how to get easy access to porn using our phones. We were just curious kids, but (arguably) this was not the way to learn about sex. Even though the restrictions on online porn were the same back then as they are now (eighteen years or older), lying about our age was (and is) extremely simple to do. All we had to do was either select that we were at least eighteen years old or click the ‘X’ in the corner of the screen. That was it, and we were in. Aside from my small sample, large studies have found the same type of exposure among youth. One report conducted by several experts surveyed teenagers from thirteen to seventeen years old and found that (according to their sample) around seventy-three percent of underage respondents admitted to having seen pornography; just over a half of them viewed it under fourteen years of age; and a

startling fifteen percent of kids under eleven years old had been exposed to pornography (as cited in Common Sense, 2023). Another less recent study found that over ninety percent of boys and around two-thirds of girls had seen porn before eighteen years of age (as cited in Orenstein, 2021). By default, these major online porn sites such as Pornhub, Xvideos, XNXX, and others don't verify any ages when viewers click that they're eighteen or older, and thus allow millions of Americans to view pornographic material underage.

But alternatively, one point several opponents of the ban mention is that pornography teaches sexual education. One writer for the *Washington Post*, Peggy Orenstein (2021) even advocates for a “porn literacy curriculum” for students. Furthermore, opponents make the point that traditional sexual education in the school system doesn’t fulfill its intended purpose in teaching and preparing students for romantic relationships. And in fact, one survey of U.S. schools found that under half of American high schools teach the full sum of topics regarding sexual education that are recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (as cited in Planned Parenthood, n.d.). Another report surveyed 1,500 Americans and found that ninety percent of participants stated that their “sexual education hadn’t prepared them for real-world sexual experiences” (as cited in Gordon, 2023). So, in other words, our top medical experts have moderate disapproval for our sexual education system, and people are unprepared for their experiences, which is part of the purpose of sexual education.

While yes, there are definitely flaws with sexual education in the United States, pornography is not the answer. It pushes unrealistic views about sex into young people’s minds, and ultimately harms relationships. One expert on this subject, an actual porn director, shares the same concerns. In an interview, porn director Jackie St. James (2019) expresses concerns that people think they should be applying things in the films on pornography sites in their own sexual experiences, and even states, “pornography is not sexual education, and it should never be

looked at that way" (as cited in Lonsdorf, 2019). Unrealistic education has no place in people's minds, and it doesn't help prepare people for real life. The objective of a good sexual education is to further prepare young people for their future intimate relationships. Pornography effectively does the opposite. I believe porn is all-around harmful to relationships. Case in point, one report found that one in five couples have encountered conflict with pornography in their relationships; one in four men were hiding their porn use; and one in three dating women expressed concern about men being more attracted to pornographic material (Wheatly Institute, 2021). Moreover, one researcher, Beáta Bőthe (2021) studied the connection between porn use, motivations, and intimate well-being in relationships. She found that men who use pornography for some sort of emotional or stress relief encountered lower levels of arousal in the bedroom (as cited in Patrick, 2021). Porn effectively works against relationships. It offers a false narrative about sex that people use in real life, and couples pay the price.

So, to sum up, banning porn wouldn't destroy our free market or founding principles, it would help limit sexual violence, keep graphic content out of the eyes of youth, and improve relationships. Now one thing I did leave out is that a large chunk of the population feels that pornography is, in general, morally acceptable. Specifically, over forty percent (43%) of us, as most recently sampled by *Gallup* (2018). This begs the question then, if the moral aspect of viewing sexually explicit content is heavily controversial, why should we ban it? I mean, it would leave many Americans unsatisfied only to fulfill others' ideological principles. But the real reasons I believe that pornography should be banned have little to do with ideology or morals. This isn't a debate on what's right and wrong, it's a proposition that objectively cures part of the mental, emotional, and physical health of Americans. For some, using pornography doesn't seem like a huge deal. But for others, it could be a significant factor that ended their relationship, or the reason they have trouble getting intimate with the ones they love most, or

maybe even the reason they were abused. So, when this issue that impacts seven in ten Americans actually gets brought up, vote yes to wipe out the virus of pornography that plagues our people.

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