

At the beginning of the semester, I was very passionate about the complete freedom of the Internet. Growing up in the early 2000's, I always pictured the Internet as a wild-west, anything goes type of interaction. From pornography to beheading videos, I thought it was all acceptable, and there was no need for punishment or repercussion for the speakers. However, this class has changed my thoughts on the consequences of the Internet.

I have been reflecting on myself recently. As previously mentioned, I grew up with the computer and the Internet. My mother is quite literally technologically illiterate, so I had unlimited access to anything at any time. If I had children, I would not give them the same privileges. We were asked in class, "Does desensitization make someone more tolerant?" In an utilitarian framework, possibly, but does being 'tolerant' make someone virtuous? Wouldn't it be better to accept something than be tolerant of it?

Section 230 is infamous for being the law that 'censors' the Internet. The law's policy is to remove disincentives for the development and utilization of blocking and filtering technologies that empower parents to restrict their children's access to objectionable or inappropriate online material (Legal Information Institute). Yet, I do not have a problem with this. Looking through the lenses of Social Contract Theory, we as a society know what information is harmful. I wholeheartedly believe that society would agree to ban content like child pornography. However, John Barlow disagrees. He states, "You are terrified of your own children, since they are natives in a world where you will always be immigrants. Because you fear them, you entrust your bureaucracies with the parental responsibilities you are too cowardly to confront yourselves" (Barlow). I disagree with this statement. I do not think parents are 'terrified' by their children's findings, but they are ignorant. As said before, I had a mother who was technologically illiterate, and I guarantee that I am not in the minority of those who lack parental supervision.

Speaking of John Barlow, he had a late 90's attitude toward the Internet—the Napster, Limewire, and LiveLeak eras. He wrote, "We are creating a world that all may enter without privilege or prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force, or station of birth" (Barlow). I really related to this at the beginning of the semester, and I thought that the Internet was this 'hippy-dippy' place for self-expression. However, this statement can be disproven easily. For example, the quote above talks about having no privilege or prejudice on many identifiers but does not mention gender.

On the topic of gender, women probably get the most hate on the Internet. I never really took that into account from my previous perspective, and that is something I am very thankful for learning in this class. In class, we talked about Kelly Marie Tran being harassed for "ruining Star Wars," Ryan Lin's intensive cyberstalking of a young woman, and #Gamergate. The culture of the Internet is inherently toxic because of "Geek masculinity." In the 1990s, computers were marketed to boys, and it created a "He-Man Woman Haters" type of community. Massanari quotes, "Spaces dedicated to geek culture and STEM interests (like Reddit) may exhibit the tendency to view women as either objects of sexual desire or unwelcome interlopers or both—making them doubly unwelcoming for women" (Massanari). The Internet is objectively not a safe place for women. The harassers do not get repercussions because "boys will be boys."

Harassment has reached new heights. The Internet provides anonymous attacks. Anyone can truly be themselves without any consequences of being a terrible human being. Places like Reddit encourage this behavior with the use of "Karma Points." Simply, the more controversial someone is, the more likely their voice is heard. This is a problem because someone can easily socially engineer people to do their bidding. After all, #Gamergate came from one man harassing his girlfriend online, and this evolved into harassing many women in the gaming industry. If social engineering can cause irreparable damage, someone with computing expertise can cause a hellish nightmare. I mentioned Ryan Lin, who got away with swatting, creating pornographic deep-fakes, and spamming with the help from a VPN and the Tor web-browser. There are many tools to get away with "technological murder."

I was a computer repairman last semester, and most of my customers were senior citizens. It was grueling to see these elders get hacked, DOS'd, DDOS'd, and robbed. There was no way to alert authorities because the culprits are completely anonymous. The only thing I could say to the elderly was, "that is just the Internet, and you have to be careful." Why do the elderly have to be careful on the Internet? Why is it not just a safe place?

The Internet used to be a place for infinite possibilities. I knew that it was rough around the edges, but this class has helped me look past my rose-tinted glasses. Obscenities, harassment, and cybercrimes are all things that the Internet provides. As a white man, the demographic tailor-made for the Internet, I never critically thought about how these injustices affected others. I never even considered an ethical dilemma for myself on if the 'wild-west' should be censored. This class has given me more insight to critically critique how the Internet affects our society and myself. I recommend Bo Burnham's song, "Welcome to the Internet," for a satirical, sinister look at the Internet.

### Works Cited

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