

September 4, 2015

Featuring fresh takes and real-time analysis from
HuffPost's signature lineup of contributors

HOT ON THE BLOG

[Kenneth Roth](#)[Lawrence H. Summers](#)[Melinda Gates](#)[Mark Shriver](#)**[Nigel Barber](#)**[Become a fan](#)

Biopsychologist; blogger, Psychology Today's 'The Human Beast'

Why Conservatives Spend More on Cyber Porn

Posted: 08/21/2011 7:27 pm EDT | Updated: 10/21/2011 5:12 am EDT

Use of pornography by political and religious conservatives is intriguing because most are so strongly opposed to it. Recent research concludes that Christian college students are somewhat less likely to use online pornography than the general college population but still found that the "majority of males had some involvement in Internet pornography".

It is hard for religious people to admit to behavior of which they so strongly disapprove and this introduces unreliability into such self-reported data. A Harvard study provided objective evidence about actual consumption of online pornography by paying customers. This study found a consistent pattern of more conservative, and more religious, states spending more on pornography.

The biggest consumer of Internet pornography was Utah with 5.47 subscriptions per thousand home broadband users compared to Montana the lowest state with 1.92 subscribers per thousand. Study author, Benjamin Edelman of Harvard Business School focused on broadband users because pornography is a bandwidth hog. Edelman was also careful to rule out the age distribution of the population, income, education, population density, marriage rates and other characteristics that might make state comparisons unfair. Utah still wound up at the top of the heap.

Utah's top ranking surprises many. One can think of different adjectives to describe the state, religious, conservative, family-oriented, outdoorsy, clean-living, but few would have guessed top-pornography-consuming. Many would find it easier to attribute such interests to western neighbor Nevada, a center for bricks-and-mortar gambling and prostitution. Nevada didn't even make it to the top ten.

States that banned gay marriage (implying conservative political views) had 11 percent more porn subscribers. The level of agreement in a state with the statement that "Even today miracles are performed by the power of God" predicted higher pornography consumption. States claiming to have old-fashioned values about family and marriage purchased substantially more adult-content subscriptions. Eight of the top ten pornography consumers were red states in the last Presidential election (Utah, Alaska, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Arkansas, North Dakota, Louisiana, and West Virginia) with blue states, Hawaii (#4) and Florida (#9) bucking the trend.

In addition to the conservative states' avid consumption of Internet pornography, there have been numerous examples of prominent conservative politicians and public figures whose lofty statement of values in sexual matters was cruelly undercut by their own actions: Anthony Wiener, Larry Craig; Newt Gingrich; Mark Foley, Bob Livingston, Henry Hyde, and Bob Packwood, among scores of less recognizable names. It is not just conservative politicians who fail their own moral tests. The parade of prominent evangelical preachers similarly disgraced, including Jim Baker, Jimmy Swaggart, and Ted Haggard is equally striking. Episcopal minister Marshall Brown was recently fired for accessing online pornography at work.

Many words have been used to explain the apparent contradiction between ideals and practices. Hypocrisy is the obvious one. Accessibility is another issue and the illusion of anonymity that the Internet offers. Edelman cites repression, pointing out that if people are told they can't have something they want it more.

Although his findings might appear new and shocking, not much is genuinely new under the sun. Many decades ago, sociologist Laud Humphreys, author of the book *Tearoom Trade*, wondered what kind of men would stop off in a public restroom for a few minutes of casual sex with other men, on the way home from work. He jotted down their car license numbers and tricked the local motor vehicles department into divulging the men's addresses. Without mentioning the true intent of his study, Humphreys interviewed the men in their homes. Most seemed happily married. Their homes often had the U.S. flag on the wall and a Bible on the mantelpiece.

Humphreys had the impression that their aura of respectability was overdone. He referred to this as the "breastplate of righteousness," or a defense against accusations of sexual impropriety by seeming very righteous.

The bottom line, then, is that however much conservatives trumpet their sexual morality, they are not better than the rest of us. Indeed, the evidence suggests they are slightly worse.

MORE: [Nevada](#) [Repression](#) [Conservatives](#) [Porn](#) [Sexual Behavior](#) [Hypocrisy](#) [Religious Conservatives](#) [Utah](#) [Benjamin Edelman](#) [Laud Humphreys](#)

Huffington Post Search

[Advertise](#) | [Log In](#) | [Make HuffPost Your Home Page](#) | [RSS](#) | [Careers](#) | [FAQ](#)
[User Agreement](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Comment Policy](#) | [About Us](#) | [About Our Ads](#) | [Contact Us](#)
[Archive](#)

Copyright ©2015 TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc. | "The Huffington Post" is a registered trademark of TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc. All rights reserved. 2015©

Part of **AOL Lifestyle**