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The Prohibition of Pornography

As technology rapidly evolves, the effects of pornography on internet users have become a concerning factor, sparking a contentious debate about societal consequences and prompting calls for regulation or outright ban. Acknowledging the complexities and diverse viewpoints surrounding this issue, this essay contends that the banning or strict regulation of pornography is justified due to its detrimental effects on society, particularly on children growing up in an age of emerging technology, instant access, and instant gratification. By synthesizing evidence from recent research and literature, we aim to explore the effects of pornography and build a compelling case for regulatory measures to address the potential harm it poses.

Delving into this topic prompts personal reflection: “When I was a child, I would visit the local video store each weekend to rent out a new movie. However, there existed a distinct section in the back, blocked off with heavy curtains, boldly labeled as the ‘Adult Section.’ An employee, with a watchful eye, stood guard, checking IDs of anyone daring to enter.” Today, that restricted section is plastered all over the internet, with unprecedented accessibility. Anyone, anywhere, can effortlessly access a wealth of explicit material. An inexperienced teenage boy can now witness more graphic and sexual acts than anyone from a century ago could have even comprehended. The ease of access raises questions about the potential impact on the perceptions and understanding of intimacy among the youth in our technology-driven age.



And that is where the main concern lies, with the future generation. A national survey conducted by Common Sense sheds light on the dangerous realities of teens and online pornography. They report that three-quarters of teens say they've seen porn by the age of 17, and the average age of first exposure is just 12 years old (Robb and Mann). Besides unhealthy feelings of shame, this report also revealed that the top reason teens intentionally consumed pornography, was that they thought pornography could better help them understand their sexual preferences. About half (45%) of participants said that pornography gives helpful information about sex, and the other half said they watch to "find out what arouses and excites them" (Robb and Mann). This is alarming because a different 2021 study found that, at least 1 in 3 and potentially as many as 9 in 10 porn videos show sexual violence or aggression (Vera-Gray et al. 1). So, while teens are turning to pornography to learn about sex, instead, they are learning unhealthy, toxic, and violent views on sex.

There was huge study released this year, a report by the Children's Commissioner for Free England. They took 500 transcripts from two different sources in the country, one being witness evidence for when criminal proceedings are being conducted. So, these are actual charged crimes being investigated, and the transcripts are from interviews with children who have been sexually harmed and children who have harmed another child. The other source is a sexual assault center in England (SARC – Sexual Assault Referral Centre), where they document cases of children who were sexually harmed by other children. So that's, accumulatively 500 transcripts from two government sources, all of people under the age of 18, mostly between 10-16, reporting child-on-child sexual crimes. In the analysis of the report, they parsed through those instances to explore a correlation between pornography and sexual behavior in children,

particularly focusing on the influence of pornography of the form of harmful sexual behavior exhibited by children.

They found a 50% instance of very specific pornographic descriptors mentioned, sometimes the children literally saying “Oh, I watched this, then I did this.” The report, authored by Dame Rachel de Souza, describes that “In the sample of cases where children were abused by another child from the ABE interviews, 50% contained at least one term referring to an act of sexual violence commonly portrayed in pornography. The most common acts were name calling involving the names “s**t”, “wh***”, “b***h”, “worthless”, “c***”, or “s**g”, punching, or name calling as shown in Table 5. The most common category of sexual violence was physical aggression, with 35% of cases involving slapping, strangulation, hairpulling, gagging, spanking, whipping, punching, or kicking. While most cases involved one category of sexual violence, as defined here, 9% of cases involved both an act of physical aggression and an act of humiliation (but not an act of coercion)” (de Souza 40).

There does seem to be some correlation between early exposure and the viewing of more violent stuff to kids enacting those things on each other. It’s difficult to say pornography is causing them to do the crime to begin with, but looking at such a wide range of data, with specific instances, you can, from common sense, come to the conclusion and say, yes, it looks like these children are doing the things they were exposed to.

A potential fix to this problem would be to put all pornography behind a paywall. Then a child on their own will not be able to access it without stealing a credit card, or being shown where to go. This would make the barrier to entry much greater, constricting the ease of access. Some professionals estimate that 90 percent of exposure would be reduced to children, as a lot of this exposure is accidental or child-to-child.

To play devils advocate, compelling an entire industry to require paywalls, for everyone to access a certain thing, would probably significantly reduce the pornographic industry in the United States, especially from an economic stand point. While there is a wide range of evidence suggesting how pornography can impact the brain, harm relationships, and affect society, there are studies to numerous benefits of viewing pornography. Such as positive influence on adults' sexual wellness, mental health, relationships, body acceptance, and self-acceptance in LGBTQ+ individuals. And from a legal standpoint, advocates against the banning of pornography argue that it is a form of expression protected by the freedom of speech provisions. They emphasize the importance of allowing people the right to produce, distribute, and consume pornographic content as a matter of personal expression.

So, there is conflicting data out there, and this seems to be a matter of weighing whether the pros outweigh the cons. At the end of the day this is a multifaceted argument, that requires careful consideration and research on both sides. But there are irrefutably detrimental effects of pornography on the youth, and the prohibition of pornography would significantly reduce children's exposure to explicit content.

Works Cited

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