

Is censorship an effective way to protect children media essay



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“ The state must declare the child to be the most precious treasure of the people. As long as government is perceived as working for the benefit of children, the people will happily endure almost any curtailment of liberty.”

(Hitler, 1943, p. 403)

Whose responsibility is it to protect children? The answer may seem obvious, but people in influential positions in politics and the media want the government to be in charge of deciding what our children should or should not see. With ‘ new media’ such as the Internet and video games exposing our youths to sex and violence in unfamiliar ways, many parents are at a loss on what they should do in order to protect their children from harm. With government censorship, parents would not have to worry about their child seeing objectionable material, because it would be blocked before they could get to it. But is this right? How would the government know what is bad enough to be blocked? How do they know what your child can handle? Parents are in the best position to know what is best for their child. While I don’t think that children should be exposed to any and every bit of sex and violence out there, it is the parents’ sole responsibility to decide what is and isn’t suitable for their own children.

Censorship is an issue that affects not only children, but people involved in the media as well. As such, some of the opinions that I have reviewed in this discussion are from journalists. Whenever the topic of government censorship arises, there is immediate conflict with the First Amendment. I feel that journalists would have particularly valuable opinions about restricting free speech since it is something that affects their own livelihood.

This first group of experts believe that censorship not only threatens the First Amendment, but it also presents additional danger to children. First is Charles Taylor, a journalist who has contributed to the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, Newsday, and Bloomberg News. He specializes in popular culture, and he is a member of the National Society of Film Critics. His writing focus gives him an additionally strong perspective on the effects of censorship on the film industry. In his article (2005) he asserts that society should not censor free expression in order to protect children, and doing so can in fact harm them in other ways. Marjorie Heins is a writer, lawyer, and the founder of the Free Expression Policy Project. She has been battling against censorship for the sake of free speech for many years. In her article (2007) she insists that there should be evidence of real harm caused by internet pornography before moving to censor it.

Taylor believes that censorship stems from the false assumption that children need to be protected from being harmed by vulgarity and obscenity. Since he thinks that adults can't distinguish between what is actually harmful and what is just inappropriate, children are exposed to more dangers than what they were intended to be protected from. To illustrate this point he uses sex information, particularly birth control, as an example. Considering the dangers of AIDS and other STDs, he feels that parents that deprive their children of this information are further endangering their children.

Heins argues that protecting children from online pornography and other harmful or offensive media does not help them. Especially during adolescence when children grow into adults, she feels that they need access to this information in order to be functioning members of society. She is <https://assignbuster.com/is-censorship-an-effective-way-to-protect-children-media-essay/>

concerned about the intellectual freedom of the young people, which she feels is dismissed by “ child protectionists”. She feels there is a need to educate children about tough issues like drugs and sexuality and violence, but until there is an accepted way to present these issues the quick fix approach of censorship will prevail. Exposure to these issues will help them to develop intellectually.

On the contrary, the following experts believe that censorship is important. Jonah Goldberg is a conservative syndicated columnist and author who is known for contributions on politics and culture. He has frequently appeared on political television shows such as Hardball and Larry King Live, and wrote the New York Times #1 seller Liberal Fascism. His article (2006) argues that censorship is not always a threat to personal freedoms, and that it benefits society. Roger Kimball is a conservative art critic and social commentator. He is also the editor and publisher of The New Criterion magazine and publisher of Encounter Books. In his article (2002), he is in favour of government censorship and argues that parents have no power to censor the entertainment industry. Leeland Yee is currently a California State Senator. He was once the President of San Francisco’s school board, and as such he has a vested interest in the protection of children. In 2005, he wrote a law that would ban the sale of M rated video games to children under the age of 18. That law was overturned in 2007, but in April, 2010, the state of California appealed that decision. In an interview with the Los Angeles Times (2010), he defends his stance that children should not be allowed to access ultra-violent video games.

Goldberg argues that censorship is not always a threat to personal freedoms, and that it benefits society by regulating things that would degrade society. His article revolves around child pornography being an obvious case of needing censorship, and states that censorship already exists anyway.

Kimball is in favour of government censorship. He argues that parents have no power to censor the entertainment industry. "The existence of a right to do something doesn't mean it's morally/socially acceptable'. Censorship is not the enemy of freedom.

Yee claims that violent video games influence the people who play them. He claims to have seen individuals who have played these games inflicting acts of violence against hookers and police men. "These are the direct result of someone pushing a button and making a conscious decision." He feels that video games are more dangerous than music or film, because it is an interactive medium that involves a decision from the person playing the game. He doesn't believe that these games should be banned outright, but he wants to make a law that will make it illegal to sell these games to children under the age of 18. "Otherwise, video games are just as worthy under the 1st Amendment as movies."

This last group of experts aim to present alternatives to censorship. Thomas K. Capozzoli is an associate professor of organizational leadership at Purdue University. R. Steve McVey is a research associate at the National Center for the Management of Workplace Violence. Prior to that, he served for twenty-six years in the FBI where he participated in psychoanalysis of criminal behaviors. Together, Capozzoli and McVey wrote an article about preventing

school shootings by understanding the causes of the violence (2004).

Marjorie J. Hogan is a pediatrician, and director of pediatric medical education at Hennepin County Medical Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Hogan's article focused on parents monitoring their children's media habits, and urges parents to become media educators for their family (2004).

Marjorie Heins, with her associate Christina Cho from the Free Expression Policy Project, together wrote that teaching media literacy is an alternative to censorship (2006).

In Capozzoli & McVey's article, they focus on various triggers that could cause a child's violent behavior. Media influence is one of the triggers they highlight. When a child does not know how to resolve a conflict he is involved in, he may turn to examples of conflict resolution that he finds in books, movies, video games and the like. In these media, violence is often used as the way to resolve conflict. Young people can have trouble distinguishing fantasy from reality, so constant exposure to these influences can become cemented as real, legitimate solutions to resolving a conflict. Without balancing these influences with positive behavioral responses, this could cause violent behavior. The authors also point out that the internet provides access to a lot of dangerous information, such as gang sites, hate sites, and instructions to create explosives. They suggest that just by monitoring a child's habits, PARENTS CAN SEE IF SOMETHIN IS GON' BROW UP.

Hogan feels that parents should be models and monitors of healthy media habits for their children. As parents, they understand the personality and special needs of their children and can tailor their media exposure to those needs. Hogan believes that leaving television and other media unmonitored <https://assignbuster.com/is-censorship-an-effective-way-to-protect-children-media-essay/>

is just like having someone else in your house telling your kids what to like and how to act. She thinks that media education is an effective defense against those influences. “ For families, media education is the process of becoming selective, wise, and critical media consumers.” She considers media education a lifelong skill that will make one a better media consumer, regardless of what media one ingests. Some media education techniques she suggests are: discussing a newspaper article at the dinner table; discussing a billboard you pass while driving that advertises alcoholic beverages; and co-viewing a popular sitcom with YOUR KIDS TO TALK BACK TO THE CHARACTERS FOR THEIR OFFENSIVE LANGUAGE.

Heins & Cho’s article about media literacy further support this idea. Their definition of media literacy is “ to possess the critical thinking skills needed to ‘ read’ mass media communications.” Passive media consumers would just take everything media presents to them at face value without giving it much thought. Teaching media literacy would help children to recognize the agenda and constructed realities of what they are seeing. They may also discover ways that large corporations censor and control information in their messages.

All of these experts believe that children should be protected from BAD MEDIA INFLUENCES, but where they diverge is when deciding whose job it is to actually protect them. Some think that censorship is the best option, while others think that censorship can cause further problems for a growing child. It’s quite easy to say ‘ it’s the parents’ fault’ or ‘ the parents should be doing this’, but then providing solutions for them to do this effectively isn’t always so quickly offered. From the perspective of the pro-censors, I can empathize <https://assignbuster.com/is-censorship-an-effective-way-to-protect-children-media-essay/>

with parents who think it's just too hard to keep up. But leaving it up to the government to decide what is or isn't appropriate doesn't just rob you and your child of making that decision, it affects everyone.