



## Pornography, Our Youth, and Cultural Health

Cultural rot is often the prelude to a nation's demise.

With this in mind, Americans should be concerned about the rapid growth of pornography made possible by online use. The pornography business is a multi-billion-dollar, international business. Youth are easy targets for this industry. Lawmakers are fighting back on the federal and state levels by calling for age requirements to view online pornography. It has been an uphill battle, as opponents of these laws—the porn industry, libertarians and progressives—wrap themselves in the clothing of the right to free speech.

### How Big is the Porn Industry?

Online access has allowed porn sites to gain worldwide audiences. The National Institutes for Health (NIH) reported in 2023 that the Covid-19 pandemic exponentially increased porn viewing, which was already on the rise.<sup>1</sup> NIH researchers looked at searches for the most popular porn websites in advanced industrialized nations. What they found was extraordinary. One of the most popular sites, *PornHub*, reported over 39 billion searches and 42 billion visits in 2019 alone.

*Psychology Today* in another 2023 study compared traffic in the three largest porn sites—XVideos, PornHub and XNXX—with viewership on the mainstream sites Amazon, Netflix, Yahoo, TikTok, OpenAI, LinkedIn, Netflix and the Weather Channel.<sup>2</sup> They found that people visit porn sites more often and for longer than non-porn sites.

The comparisons of monthly visits to porn sites versus popular mainstream sites are shocking. For example, *XVideos*, the top-ranked pornography site, had 700 million more total visits than Amazon, and around a

billion more visits than each of TikTok, OpenAI, LinkedIn, Netflix and The Weather Channel. Moreover, visitors to porn sites stay on longer and download more materials than they do from mainstream sites. Viewership of porn sites was higher in the U.S. than any other country.

Of those watching porn on PornHub, the global audience was approximately 80 percent male and 20 percent female. Data show that nearly half of porn site visitors are between the ages of 18 and 34. The study did not look at underage viewership.

Virtual reality porn is an expanding sector of the market. Virtual reality porn provides a three-dimensional experience through goggles for porn, real or produced by artificial intelligence, to be viewed. VR Porn Industry Statistics projects huge growth of the already \$1.52 billion industry. The industry projects that it will grow to \$124.5 billion, expanding its current 3.4 percent share of the entire \$45 billion porn market. One of the largest porn creators, Mindgeek, rebranded as Aylo, has released virtual-reality-compatible videos on one of its main platforms, PornHub.

### PornHub Controversies

PornHub is the second most visited website after XVideos. PornHub has been under attack nearly since its inception. In 2013 CBS refused to air a short PornHub commercial during Super Bowl Sunday. The 20-second spot featured an older couple sitting on a park bench. That same year, PornHub was blocked by China, and the following year by Russia. Three years later the Philippines followed suit. Next came bans in Thailand and Utah. In 2022, Instagram banned the website indefinitely.

The breaking point for PornHub in the United States came in 2020 when the *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof charged that the site was full of rape videos of young children, spy cam videos of women showering, and footage of women being asphyxiated in plastic bags. He found that a search for “young under 18” or “under 14” on the site led to 100,000 videos.<sup>3</sup>

When a 15-year-old girl went missing in Florida, her mother found her on 58 sex videos on PornHub. In another incident, sexual assaults on a 14-year-old California girl were posted on PornHub. These assaults were reported by a classmate who saw the videos. Offenders were arrested for these assaults, but PornHub escaped responsibility for sharing the videos.

Most of the 6.8 million new videos posted each year on the site involve consenting adults, but many reportedly have depicted child abuse and nonconsensual violence. PornHub allows videos to be downloaded directly from its website, so that even if a rape video is removed, it is already too late because the video can be uploaded and shared over and over. In response to Kristof’s column, Mastercard and Visa cut their services to PornHub.

### Porn Industry Strategy

In spring 2023, PornHub was acquired by Aylo, formerly called MindGeek. Aylo is a multinational pornographic conglomerate owned by a Canadian private equity firm with the questionable name Ethical Capital Partners. Aylo’s compliance officer Solomon Friedman, a former defense attorney and former rabbi, told the press that the goal of the company was to create a “safe space” for “sex-positive expression between consenting adults.”<sup>4</sup> While Friedman claims that Ethical Capital Partners is pledged to crack down on child sex abuse on its site, it is also committed to free speech, to defending sex workers and to promoting “sexual health and mental health.”<sup>5</sup>

PornHub is only one player in a huge online porn industry. Another is the skyrocketing OnlyFans. CEO Amrapali Gan said that its subscriber-based porn reported revenues of \$2.5 billion in 2022, a huge jump from \$97 million earned in 2019. Based in the United Kingdom, OnlyFans reaches more than 100 countries. CEO Gan, speaking at a web summit for the company, said that the company seeks major growth in Latin America and an opportunity for porn creators to “get exposure to a global audience.”<sup>6</sup>

OnlyFans operates on a business model in which content creators set a monthly subscription price, typically ranging from \$5 to \$50, for access to their exclusive content. OnlyFans takes a 20 percent fee from each subscription, with the remaining 80 percent going to the creator.<sup>7</sup> Content creators can make huge profits. Brianna Coppage, a St. Louis-area school teacher who lost her job when it was discovered she was a content creator for OnlyFans, claimed that she had made *a million dollars* from uploading porn content to the site.<sup>8</sup>

### State Responses

The porn industry is about profit and has an interest in changing sexual mores, especially among the youth. In late 2023, a secret video recording of PornHub employees, including technical product manager Mike Farley and Dillon Rice, a senior script writer for Aylo, let the cat out of the bag as to industry strategy.<sup>9</sup> In the recording, the employees bragged that the corporation’s websites are easily accessible to children, and that gay and trans porn can help kids find their “kink.”<sup>10</sup> Farley is heard on the recording stating that steering children and straight men to gay and trans porn content encourages “conversion.”

In a separate recording Rice lauded one of the company’s websites, TransAngels. Rice said that trans videos are especially important for children because they are more “pliable.” Rice explained that the goal was to “push stuff that’s . . . less accepted, like putting a trans male or a trans female in a scene.” He added, “See if you get a bigger audience with it, see if you can convert somebody, right? Like maybe somebody who’s never looked for anything like that. Bi[sexual]stuff is usually marketed towards women,” but we want to “get more men, straight men, in on it [TransAngels].”<sup>11</sup>

PornHub allows anyone to upload pornographic videos if the uploader shows identification such as a driver’s license. If the video does not show a face, which is common, PornHub does not verify that these videos contain consenting adults. Farley admitted that he was concerned about this loophole, but he takes comfort that government regulators, in this case Canadians, are “dumb.”<sup>12</sup>

PornHub finds itself under pressure from state legislatures across the U.S. blocking access by requiring age identification for those seeking to view a pornographic site. As of this writing, 19 states have

enacted laws requiring ID from those seeking to upload pornography.

In 2022, Louisiana became the first state to introduce and pass a law requiring websites that host adult content to verify that users are over 18 years old. The language of the Louisiana law was directly used in other state laws that followed.<sup>13</sup>

When Louisiana's law first went into effect on January 1, 2023, only individuals were allowed to sue on behalf of minors for damages. In August 2023, Louisiana enacted another law that empowered the state attorney general to proactively investigate websites for compliance with the age-verification mandate.<sup>14</sup> This law allows the state to impose fines up to \$5,000 per day of non-compliance. In addition, companies can be fined up to \$10,000 per violation if they are found to have knowingly failed to provide age verification. Other state legislators have followed suit and some states have upped the ante.

### The Ongoing Battle

**P**ornHub and other porn sites are fighting back. Following passage of Texas legislation requiring ID, porn sites and free speech advocates sued Texas in the summer of 2023. More than a dozen companies charged that the Texas law was targeting “free speech” and violated the U.S. Constitution and the federal Communications Act.<sup>15</sup> Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton fought fire with fire by suing Aylo Global Entertainment and Aylo USA Inc. The lawsuit alleged that the companies published and distributed sexual material through websites like PornHub and failed to comply with the law.

In November 2023, after ruling in favor of the state, the U.S. 5<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals lifted a temporary injunction that blocked implementation of the Texas law. Attorney General Paxton touted his victory by tweeting, “Sites like PornHub are on the run. . . .” PornHub closed its site in Texas. However, the U.S. Supreme Court in July agreed to hear an appeal questioning the lower court's standard of scrutiny of the ID requirement of the Texas law.

There are loopholes and problems in age-verification laws passed by some states and other countries. One concern is having private firms collect age-verification data. Such data can be hacked by cyberattackers, who

then might blackmail those registered to a site. In addition, there are various ways to circumvent age-verification laws.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, these laws have driven many porn sites out of the states with such laws.

State legislation requiring age verification should be seen as a victory in the fight to protect our children from greedy adults, child sex abusers and child sex traffickers. Legislation requiring age verification to upload pornography has gained momentum, and supporters of such legislation are calling for federal legislation. Terry Schilling, president of the non-profit think tank American Principles Project, told Fox News that federal legislation is needed because “kids in America should be protected everywhere.”<sup>17</sup>

The porn industry is not backing down. They assert that this is a free speech issue. They have been joined by libertarians. Emma Camp, writing for the libertarian magazine *Reason* in April 2024, attacked Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear for signing a “controversial bill” requiring age verification for individuals seeking to access pornography websites in the state.<sup>18</sup> She disputes the claim that pornography is a public health issue, and argues that the industry will get around the law by creating other platforms that will evade the law. As a result, platforms such as PornHub—a site she describes as willing to “engage in at least some moderation”—will be driven out of the market, while other less-law-abiding porn companies pop up.

Such reasoning seems unpersuasive, yet Arizona Democratic Governor Katie Hobbes vetoed a bill passed by the Republican-controlled legislature requiring adult ID to access online porn sites. In vetoing the bill, she acknowledged that children's online safety was a pressing issue, but “while we look for a solution, it should be bipartisan and within the bounds of the First Amendment, which this bill [is] not.”<sup>19</sup>

### The Fight for Values

**M**ake no mistake: The online porn industry is about profit, but it also has an agenda to change cultural and sexual mores among our youth. The porn industry and its supporters claim that pornography is not a public health issue. This is debatable. An extensive review of the scholarly literature on the subject in *Psychology Today* in 2018 concluded

that there was “growing evidence” that pornography is probably doing “more harm than good and is heading in the wrong direction.”<sup>20</sup>

This conclusion confirmed an earlier lengthy review of psychological studies of the effects of pornography, especially on the young.<sup>21</sup> This systematic review showed that *pornography use among adolescents was associated with more “casual sexual behavior, greater sexual objectification of partners, greater risk of sexual aggression, more permissive views of sex, and more stereotypical beliefs about gender roles.”*<sup>22</sup>

We shouldn't need studies to conclude that it is common sense to require age verification to protect minors from porn sites. Alcoholic beverage websites, among other businesses, require age verification. As for the constitutional issue of “free speech,” obscenity and pornography restrictions have been upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court on a number of grounds.

The larger issue is the preservation of a healthy culture. The great French political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville warned nearly two centuries ago in his *Democracy in America* that the greatest threat to democracy was not a dictator, a Caesar or a Napoleon, but a soft despotism that comes when a democratic people retreat into themselves, away from community and civic involvement, to engage in “petty and vulgar” pleasures.<sup>23</sup>

Pornography is certainly a retreat into “petty and vulgar” pleasures. Requiring ID to verify age for access to pornography is about more than just protecting our children. It is a battle over culture itself. Every left-wing government understands that the traditional family must bow to the state if the regime is to succeed. The

pornography industry should be seen as part of a larger leftist agenda to undermine the traditional family.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8691607/>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/everyone-on-top/202309/how-much-porn-do-americans-really-watch>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/the-children-of-PornHub/>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/PornHub-new-owner-acquired-ethical-capital-partners-mindgeek-sold-rcna75519>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> <https://leaders.com/news/entertainment/the-skyrocketing-growth-of-onlyfans>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.untaylored.com/post/how-onlyfans-makes-money-the-business-and-revenue-model-explained>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.wdbj7.com/2024/03/18/teacher-who-resigned-after-her-onlyfans-page-was-discovered-says-new-employer-fired-her-violating-social-media-policy/>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.christianpost.com/news/porn-giant-pushes-porn-that-help-kids-find-their-kink-report.html>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/2454943/PornHub-pushes-gay-transgender-videos-to-convert-straight-men-secret-recordings-suggest/>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> <https://soundinvestigations.com/PornHub-loophole/>.

<sup>13</sup> <https://19thnews.org/2024/01/states-age-verification-adult-content-online/>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/map-shows-states-where-PornHub-blocked-1879777>.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/barrycollins/2023/08/31/age-verification-for-porn-sites-why-it-wont-work/>.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/laws-protecting-children-porn-sites-winning-some-states-activists-push-nationwide-solution>.

<sup>18</sup> <https://reason.com/2024/04/11/states-keep-passing-unconstitutional-age-verification-laws-for-porn-sites/>.

<sup>19</sup> Stacey Barchenger, “Arizona Will Not Require Age Verification for Porn Sites After Governor Vetoes GOP Bill,” *AZ Central*, April 8, 2024; and <https://www.12news.com/article/news/local/arizona/katie-hobbs-vetoes-bill-would-have-forced-port-websites-verify-ages-viewers-arizona/75-58d5a009-a15f-4171-8a95-d9db5f5fb2ba>.

<sup>20</sup> Davia Sills, “Four Ways Porn Use Causes Problems,” *Psychology Today*, March 5, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Joshua B. Grubbs and Shane W. Kraus, “Pornography Use and Psychological Science: A Call for Consideration,” January 15, 2021, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0963721420979594>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> <https://oll.libertyfund.org/quotes/tocqueville-on-the-form-of-despotism-the-government-would-assume-in-democratic-america-1840>.

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