

The idea of the government controlling the mass populations is as uncomfortable as it is necessary. The concept of a no-government United States has often times crossed my mind—but immediately halted. There is no way that the US could run efficiently and grant its citizens the freedoms invested to them in the Constitution if every person was free to do exactly as they pleased with no regulations to control them. When the issue of whether or not to regulate school computers arises, this method of higher authority becomes a bit controversial.

There are hundreds of laws that are solely there to protect the nation's citizens as a whole. For example, hard drugs such as cocaine and meth are illegal because they not only affect the user but also the people around them, causing a negative externality. Drinking and driving is illegal because it not only endangers the person driving but also any passengers or fellow drivers sharing the same road. Regulating a school computer, however, dismisses any personal freedoms or liberty that students are constitutionally granted and forces them to adhere to a policy that doesn't even have widespread positive effects. If student A uses the computer to watch music videos, how does that affect student X who's learning in an adjacent classroom? It may affect student B, if he or she is sitting next to student A, but a simple interaction between the two, asking if student A could stop listening or turn the music down, could solve the problem. The majority of one's arguments for school regulation are to deter student distraction; yet students these days are so technologically inclined that they will be able to find some other on-computer distraction aside from facebook, myspace, or youtube. In the case of *United States v. American Library* (2003), it was argued that, "to fulfill their traditional missions of facilitating learning and cultural enrichment, public libraries must have broad discretion to decide what material to provide to their patrons. This Court has held in two analogous contexts that the Government has broad discretion to make content-based judgments in deciding what private speech to make available to the public" (*US v. American Library*). It is my belief that it should *not* be up to the government to determine what private speech should be made to the public. My argument changes a little when thinking about public libraries (and wondering how a small child would react if he happened to pass an adult watching pornography), but at a high school library, everyone is old enough to respond maturely to an awkward situation. I also doubt that a student at a high school library would even dare to make his private thoughts aware to everyone else unless he were alone in the library—and in that case, what harm would that cause any one else? According to the *US v. American Library Association* case, Justice Stevens agreed with my belief that "[a] federal statute penalizing a library for failing to install filtering software on every one of its Internet-accessible computers would unquestionably violate [the First] Amendment." Part of the First Amendment states the following: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press...". A law that penalizes a library for restricting access to certain websites definitely prohibits the ability of a citizen to do what he wants as he pleases.

In a high school library, many sites are blocked that "may contain inappropriate content". As stated when a "youtube.com" URL is directed on *this* high school library, inappropriate content includes but is not limited to: adult-orientated content, illegal material, racist or hate-orientated material, and school cheating material. The problem with this filter is that numerous sites get blocked that are not offensive at all. Why is it fair that one board of people can determine what they believe can be used inappropriately? Limiting a pornography site is much different than limiting youtube, for example, whose users are not even allowed to post pornographic videos. It soon becomes an issue of control, exercising unjust power over an individual so that they are not free to spend their free time or online access time doing something they feel could rehabilitate them after a stressful day, entertain them for a few minutes, or even help them with a school project or assignment.

High school libraries should not limit access to websites on its network. There are many laws which protect individuals' rights and lead to a better organized, controlled society, but there are others that are simply over the top. As humans we should be free to believe what we want, when we want, and where we want. Is this not the beauty of free speech? High schools should rethink their processes of limiting certain sites because this is definitely an issue that bothers the majority of the students at public institutions. It not only pre-judges what American high school

teens will be doing on the computers, but also enforces unfair control over perfectly capable minded students, individuals, and citizens of the United States of America.

Sources:

United States v. American Library Association. Caselaw.com.  
<<http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/cgi-bin/getcase.pl?court=US&navby=case&vol=539&invol=194>>