



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on April 27, 2011

New York Public Library Policy Allows Patrons to View Porn

Officials of the New York Public Library (which has branches in the boroughs of Manhattan, The Bronx, and Staten Island) say that it's all right for patrons to view porn on the library's computers. According to a report in the *New York Post*, library officials said that the First Amendment protects the rights of patrons to look at whatever they want — including pornography — at the city's 200 branch facilities.

"Under U.S. law," reported the *Post*, "all libraries that take federal funding only must install filters on publicly used computers to block content containing illegal obscenity and child pornography, and New York City officials say they comply to the letter." Libraries that want to further restrict viewing of certain materials must enact a specific policy, said the report, something the NYC library has decided not to do, in part because of the resulting legal challenges they fear from porn-viewing patrons.



"In deference to the First Amendment protecting freedom of speech, the New York Public Library cannot prevent adult patrons from accessing adult content that is legal," library spokeswoman Angela Montefinise told the paper.

Even with porn filters, "anyone 17 or older can turn them off and troll for whatever sexual content floats their boat — no matter how deviant," reported the *Post*. According to official NYC library policy, "The library cannot and does not guarantee that the filtering software will block all obscenity, child pornography, or materials that are harmful to minors."

"What they're doing is publicly funding an appetite for the most debased fare available," said Bill Donohue of the [Catholic League](#). "It's not like a *Playboy* centerfold anymore — it's far worse."

A [UPI report](#) noted that one library patron, 60-year-old Daisy Nazario, was disturbed when she discovered that "an elderly man sitting next to her at a library branch was viewing Internet pornography. Nazario said the privacy shields at the side of the computers protected her from seeing the images 'but I could still hear the voices.'"

Patrick Trueman of the New-York based group [Morality in Media](#) challenged the NYPL policy, arguing that the First Amendment does not protect a supposed "freedom" to view porn in public libraries.



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“The New York City Public Library System is more than 10 years out of date and wrong on its porn-on-every-library-computer policy,” said Trueman, noting that in 2000 Congress passed the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA), which stipulates that libraries may, indeed, ban porn from computers.

“The New York library authorities seem too much influenced by the pro-porn American Library Association, which unsuccessfully and unwisely challenged CIPA,” said Trueman, who pointed out that in 2003 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled, in *United States v. American Library Association*, that the First Amendment does not preclude libraries from blocking porn.

Trueman emphasized that the federal law gives libraries the freedom to institute policies allowing patrons to disable Internet filters for legitimate research or other lawful purposes, but not to view porn. “Libraries are not red-light districts,” he pointed out to the [Christian Post](#). “Their function is to provide public information and materials, but library materials are censored. People don’t find hardcore pornography on the shelves or vile pornographic magazines in the magazine section. They filter that out.”

The *Christian Post* reported that policies listed on the [Brooklyn Public Library’s website](#) (which serves that borough exclusively) appear to contradict what NYPL officials were saying. “The library states under its Technology Use Policy that users must request for filtering technology to be disabled,” reported the *Post*. “Even then, that doesn’t mean they are free to watch porn.”

The [Brooklyn Public Library’s website](#) announced that its policy “forbids users to access materials that are legally defined as obscene, as child pornography, or, in the case of persons under 17, as harmful to minors.”

Trueman questioned the message the New York Public Library is sending to patrons, particularly its younger visitors. “Porn is demeaning, depicts violence, particularly rape, and portrays girls and women as mere sexual objects with no self worth,” he said. “Parents should storm library board meetings demanding protection from the scourge of pornography and until a policy change comes, keep their kids away.”

Photo: One of the famous “library lions” outside the main branch of the New York Public Library



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