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COMMENT

APPROACHING LGBTQ STUDENTS’ ABILITY TO ACCESS LGBTQ WEBSITES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS FROM A FIRST AMENDMENT AND PUBLIC POLICY PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................ 348
I. LGBTQ STUDENTS’ REALITY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS .................................... 352
   A. The Numbers Add Up ................................................................. 352
   B. LGBTQ Students’ Experiences and Stresses In High School ...... 354
   C. School Policies Alter LGBTQ Students’ Self-Image and Truancy Rates ........................................................................................................ 356
II. MAKING SENSE OF FIRST AMENDMENT PROTECTIONS .............................. 356
   A. Speech Not Protected By The First Amendment ..................... 357
   B. Speech and Expressive Activities That May be Regulated .......... 357
   C. A Fractured Idea: A Student’s Right to Receive Information ...... 358
   D. Public School Students’ First Amendment Rights In Schools ..... 360
   E. The Forum Matters .................................................................. 362
III. A COURT’S DILEMMA – RESOLVING JOHN AND JANE’S INABILITY TO ACCESS LGBTQ WEB SITES WHILE AT SCHOOL ................................................. 364
   A. John’s Problem – A School’s Politically Motivated Decision Guised As A Curriculum Choice ................................................................. 364
   B. Jane’s Inability To Access LGBTQ Web Sites Constitutes Viewpoint Discrimination ................................................................. 369
   C. Solving John’s Inability To Access Important Web Sites By Embracing and Acknowledging Public Policy Reasons Including Legitimate Pedagogical and Safety Concerns for LGBTQ Public School Students ........................................................................... 370
CONCLUSION .................................................................................................... 373
The vigilant protection of constitutional freedoms is nowhere more vital than in the community of American schools.1

INTRODUCTION

John lived in a rural town, had questions about his sexuality, and feared asking his mother about the topic. One day, John tried learning more about sexuality on a computer at school by trying to access websites that discussed sexuality and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ)2 issues. His school’s Internet filtering system,3 however, blocked access to these websites. In fact, John later learned his local school board required abstinence only sex education and told teachers to not discuss or teach any issues that surrounded sexuality or LGBTQ issues. Frustrated, John continued to question his own sexuality, and his questions consumed his mind. After fully understanding his sexuality and building up the courage, John came out4 to his parents and they decided to sue John’s school for violating John’s First Amendment rights.

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2. Many do not include “questioning” within the LGBT abbreviation and instead use ‘Q’ to represent “queer”; however, I use the ‘Q’ to represent “questioning” because many adolescents are discovering their true gender identity, sexual orientation and sexuality during their high school years. However, throughout this paper “LGB” (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual) or “LGBT” (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender) may be used instead of “LGBTQ”, which is done because the cited study or quote used that given abbreviation when discussing its data. I use the acronym the study used hoping to accurately portray the cited study. Still, adolescence is “typically the time in which individuals begin the process of identity formation.” Beth Kivel & Douglas Kleiber, Leisure in the Identity Formation of Lesbian/Gay Youth: Personal, but Not Social, 22 LEISURE SCI. 215, 216 (2000). Thus, I use LGBTQ for my analysis because it is the best acronym to fully encapsulate public school students who are at different stages of their gender identities, sexual orientation identities or sexual identities but may seek out information on these subjects on the Internet through their schools’ computers.

3. Internet filters are software tools that allow network administrators to monitor web content viewed by certain individuals on a particular computer or network. In a public school, school administrators often use Internet filters to protect kids from viewing inappropriate material on the Internet and to grant access to web sites students may visit. SAFETY & SECURITY CENTER, http://www.microsoft.com/security/resources/internetfilters-whatis.aspx (last visited Nov. 7, 2012).

4. “Coming out” short for “coming out of the closet” is a term that describes when an individual uses a speech act to assert the speaker’s sexual orientation or gender identity, and this act brings the person into a new self. By coming out, the individual alters his or her own social reality because she or he begins to establish a community who recognizes the person’s sexual orientation or gender identity. Deborah A. Chirrey, ‘I hereby come out’: What sort of speech act is coming out?, 7 J. SOCIOLINGUISTICS 24, 25 (2003). This act is momentous and involves individuals disclosing their “innermost sexual desires and feelings in the presentation of their public persona.” Id. at 35.
Jane Doe went to Camdenton High School in rural Missouri. She wanted to access a website on LGBT issues but knew her school’s Internet filter system blocked all websites expressing a positive viewpoint toward LGBT individuals. Jane could have, however, accessed many websites at her school that expressed negative views toward LGBT individuals. Additionally, Jane could have sent an e-mail to her school’s superintendent requesting permission to access a specific LGBT website or used her school Internet user-name to put in a request each time she wanted to access a blocked website.

Teenagers’ inability to access websites that discuss sexuality and LGBTQ issues at their schools is not an issue to be taken lightly. Today, youth use the Internet to find information on mental health, birth control, pregnancy, drugs and alcohol, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Similarly, LGBTQ youth rely on the Internet to find information on same-sex attraction and sexual health. In one focus group, a youth said, “I went to Google and typed in ‘how do I know if I’m gay?’” Another teenager stated, “I just read and looked at things [online]. It helped me realize I was not alone. I wasn’t bad or wrong or sick. I am just human. It helped me come to terms with who I was and am today.” In fact, almost half of the LGBTQ youth who are not “out” of the closet at school still access and use online LGBTQ communities that address LGBTQ youth issues.

Rural LGBTQ students receive the highest levels of anti-LGBT language and victimization, and are less likely than their urban or suburban counterparts to have access to LGBT-related information through the Internet.

7. Id. at 892.
8. Id. at 891.
11. Id. at 240.
12. Id.
using school computers.\footnote{See id. at 107, stating that only 34.8% of the rural students surveyed were able to access LGBTQ-related information through the Internet using school computers. The sample size for this study was 7,261 students. Id. at xvi. Rural students composed 24.9% of this population or 1,808 students. Id. at 11. Thus, of the 1,808 rural students only 629 (1,808 x 34.8%) of them were able to access LGBTQ-related information through the Internet using school computers.} In addition, with only 50 percent of rural Americans having access to broadband Internet services at home,\footnote{John Horrigan, Federal Communications Commission, \textit{Broadband Adoption and Use in America} 39 (Feb. 2010), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-296442A1.pdf.} rural students may be less likely to access information on LGBTQ youth issues at home.

In 1996, Congress started a federal funding program known as E-Rate, a program designed to offset telecommunication and Internet costs for schools and libraries.\footnote{Euna Park, Hansa Sinha & Jing Chong, \textit{Beyond Access: An Analysis of the Influence of the E-Rate Program in Bridging the Digital Divide in American Schools}, in 6 J. INFO. TECH. EDUC. 387, 387 (2007).} E-Rate was implemented to ensure equitable access to the Internet for rural, urban and suburban areas, and for poor and rich students.\footnote{Id.} After E-Rate’s implementation and since 2005, nearly 100 percent of public schools have access to the Internet.\footnote{John Wells, Laurie Lewis & Bernard Greene, U.S. Dep’t of Educ. Nat’l Ctr. for Educ. Statistics, \textit{Internet Access in U.S. Public Schools and Classrooms: 1994-2005} 4 (Nov. 2006), available at http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007020.pdf.} High schools have increasingly used the Internet to aid classroom instruction and to grant student access to the Internet in school libraries and computer labs.\footnote{Kelly Rodden, \textit{The Children’s Internet Protection Act in Public Schools: The Government Stepping on Parents’ Toes?}, 71 FORDHAM L. REV. 2141, 2141 (2003).}

Yet, as high school students gained unfettered access to the Internet, Congress grew concerned with students’ ability to access pornography on the Internet through a public school or library computer.\footnote{See generally, Consortium for School Networking, \textit{Making Progress: Rethinking State and School District Policies Concerning Mobile Technologies and Social Media} (Apr. 2012), available at http://www.aasa.org/uploadedFiles/Resources/MakingProgress.Doc.pdf; Federal Communications Commission, \textit{Consumer Guide Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA)} (Feb. 1, 2013), available at http://transition.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/cipa.pdf.} In 2000, President Clinton signed into law the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA).\footnote{JASON CIANCICOTTO & SEAN CAHILL, LGBT YOUTH IN AMERICA’S SCHOOLS 123 (The University of Michigan Press 2012).} CIPA “requires that schools and public libraries receiving federal support adopt and implement ‘technology protection’ measures on all modem–equipped computers as a condition of receiving federal funds.”\footnote{Kathleen Conn, \textit{Protecting Children From Internet Harm (Again): Will the Children’s Internet Protection Act Survive Judicial Scrutiny?}, 153 ED. LAW. REP. 469, 473 (2001).} CIPA is designed to prevent students from using school computers to access visual depictions that
are obscene, child pornography, or harmful to minors. Schools often restrict websites that discuss sex education or gender issues, even though CIPA does not cover these websites. In an attempt to comply with CIPA, some public schools restrict the most well-known positive LGBTQ websites and online resources that are vital to the LGBTQ youth.

The inability of public high school students to access LGBTQ websites has profound implications and raises First Amendment questions. This Note addresses First Amendment issues surrounding public schools’ use of Internet filters to deny their students access to LGBTQ websites through the Internet on public school computers. It specifically discusses the question: to what extent, if any, can a public school use Internet filters to block their students from accessing LGBTQ websites through the school’s computers and Internet.

Part I of this Note discusses the LGBTQ teenage realities in public schools with particular emphasis on how these students fall behind in education and face increased mental health problems because of bullying. Part II outlines the case law behind the First Amendment’s Free Speech Clause. This part includes


25. See generally Electronic Frontier Foundation, Internet Blocking in Public Schools A Study on Internet Access in Educational Institutions 1-2 (2003), https://www.eff.org/sites/default/files/filenode/net_block_report.pdf (stating that “schools that implement Internet blocking software even with the least restricting setting will block at a minimum tens of thousands of Web pages inappropriately.” In contrast, if a school uses an Internet filter at its most restrictive setting then it will block 70 percent or more of the web sites in one search result); CIANCOTTO, supra note 22, at 124 (stating a national LGBTQ organization found approximately 20 percent of LGBTQ youth advocacy sites were blocked when using software purchased by public schools); Filtering Software: Better, but still fallible, CONSUMER REPORTS, June, 2005, at 36-37 (explaining popular Internet filters block websites discussing health issues, sex education, civil rights, politics and that “[m]ost unwarranted blocking occurred with sites featuring sex education or gender-related issues”).

a detailed discussion of what the First Amendment does and does not protect, when the government may regulate speech, rights with respect to public school students, and access to the Internet in public places. Part III discusses how John and Jane Doe’s situations fit into current First Amendment case law. It will also discuss how a court’s understanding of the concept of heteronormativity could alter its view of John’s case. Finally, Part III advocates that courts should embrace public policy reasons to ensure public school students access to LGBTQ websites in school. This access provides a way for LGBTQ students to reach informative websites they may not otherwise be able to access.

I. LGBTQ STUDENTS’ REALITY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

LGBTQ students negotiate daily teenage life stresses while often coping with a family and school system that might not be empathetic to LGBTQ youth. LGBTQ students often have a brutal high school experience and harassed LGBTQ youth maintain lower grade point averages than students who do not experience harassment. Since LGBTQ students’ daily life has a direct impact on how they perform and why they turn to LGBTQ websites, it is important to fully understand these teens. This includes the number of LGBTQ students in the United States, how they experience additional stresses in high school, and how schools can shape policies that create a more positive environment for all students.

A. The Numbers Add Up

In 2011 the United States saw a rash of suicides among LGBTQ teens. A high LGBTQ suicide rate is common, with LGBTQ teens and adults “almost twice as likely as heterosexuals to report a suicide attempt in the past year.” Though the national media reported the suicides, individuals may wonder how

27. Samuel A. Chambers, Telepistemology of the Closet; or, The Queer Politics of Six Feet Under, in 26 J. AM. CULTURE 24, 26 (March 2003) (stating, “Heteronormativity means, quite simply, that heterosexuality is the norm— in culture, in society, in politics. . . Heteronormativity emphasizes the extent to which everyone, straight or queer, will be judged, measured, probed, and evaluated from the perspective of the heterosexual norm. It means that everyone and everything is judged from the perspective of straight.”).


many LGBTQ students there actually are in U.S. public schools. Answering this question is dependent on how the study defined and determined sexual orientation, reported sexual experiences, fantasies or actual romantic expressions, and whether it is by the participant’s self-identification. Though LGBT youth are coming out at an earlier age than in the past, with some coming out as young as twelve-years-old and many out by the age of fifteen, LGBTQ teenagers still go through six stages called the “Cass Stages.” The Cass Stages recognize individuals go through different stages in the developmental process as they discover and identify as a LGBTQ individual. If, for example, a study tries to quantify LGBTQ youth, it may have numbers that are under-representative depending on which Cass Stage the participating individuals are in.

In 1989, an estimated 10 percent of adolescents in the United States, three million total, were LGBTQ. The 1996 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, which was composed of more than 12,000 youth, however, found that 6 percent of participants between the ages of thirteen and eighteen reported same-sex attraction. A 1999 Safe Schools Coalition of Washington State review of eight studies found that 4 to 5 percent of secondary school teens identified as LGB, engaged in same-sex sexual activity, or experienced same-sex sexual attraction. The 2001 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey stated that 5 percent of its respondents self-identified as LGB or had same-sex sexual experience. Comparatively, the 2011 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that 1 percent of its surveyed high school students reported themselves as gay or lesbian, 4 percent as bisexual, and 3 percent as

33. CIANCiOTTO, supra note 22, at 4.
34. See generally Vivienne C. Cass, Homosexuality Formation: A Theoretical Model, 4 J. HOMOSEXUALITY 219-235 (1979). In this groundbreaking article, Cass proposed that sexual identity is acquired through a developmental process and there are six stages an individual goes through to acquire a homosexual identity. The six stages are: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride and identity synthesis. See Sexual Identity: The Case Model, MULTICULTURAL.USF.EDU, http://multicultural.usf.edu/pdf/safezone/support_identity.pdf (last visited Nov. 1, 2012) for a synopsis of the six-stage model and what an individual goes through at each stage.
37. CIANCiOTTO, supra note 22, at 13.
questioning. Though it is hard to exactly quantify how many public high school students are LGBTQ, these studies indicate that out of 15 million U.S. students in grades seventh through twelfth, approximately 1.3 million to 2.5 million may identify as LGBTQ.

B. LGBTQ Students’ Experiences and Stresses In High School

Many LGBT students do not come out to their families or at school because they are afraid of their families’ reactions, fear they will be treated differently or judged at school, or even bullied. Regardless of whether an LGBTQ student is out or in the closet, these youth negotiate daily teenage life stresses and cope with family and school systems historically apathetic to LGBTQ youth. In a 1996 study, only 11 percent of gay and lesbian youth experienced supportive responses after coming out to their parents. The study found that 20 percent of the mothers and 28 percent of the fathers were rejecting or completely intolerant. One student’s story exemplified the emotions and fear many LGBTQ students have in high school:

“Derek Henkle, a gay student[,] . . . was a victim of harassment in the Nevada public school system, [and w]hile at school, Derek reported being shoved against lockers, spit on, and punched in the face. During one episode of harassment, a lasso was thrown around his neck, and the harasser threatened to drag him behind a pickup truck. After Derek escaped from the student, a teacher laughed at Derek because he was so upset.”

This student went on to express his fear not only from fellow students, but also from a high school teacher, a common experience for many LGBTQ high school students. In fact, in a two-year survey, three-fourths of participants stated their high school teachers had negative attitudes toward homosexuality. Eighty percent of the participants stated that few to none of their teachers viewed homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle. In 2009 nearly two-thirds of

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41. CIANCIOTTO, supra note 22, at 14; Holmes, supra note 32, at 55.
42. PETER DEWITT, DIGNITY FOR ALL SAFEGUARDING LGBT STUDENTS 17 (2012) [hereinafter DIGNITY FOR ALL].
44. Mallon, supra note 28, at 1.
45. CIANCIOTTO, supra note 22, at 33.
46. Id.
47. FOSSEY, supra note 29, at 1 (citing Henkle v. Gregory, 150 F. Supp. 2d 1067 (D. Nev. 2001)).
50. Id.
students heard homophobic remarks from school employees, suggesting that school personnel’s disregard toward LGBTQ students continues.

LGBT youth who have not disclosed their sexual orientation to their school peers or school staff have higher levels of depression than LGBT students who have come out to their peers and school staff. Those that do come out to their parents and teachers may be physically and emotionally sound, however daily life in school is often physically and mentally exhausting and brutal. In a 2009 study, nearly nine out of ten of surveyed students heard “gay” used in a negative way. Nearly three-fourths of students reported hearing derogatory and homophobic comments, such as “faggot” or “dyke.” Similarly, almost half of LGBTQ students are verbally harassed at school because they are LGBTQ, and 37 to 47 percent of all surveyed students were physically harassed at school because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation.

When harassed by peers, LGBTQ youth have significantly higher mental health problems, truancy, depression, and drug issues than their heterosexual peers. Harassment by peers has a real effect on LGBTQ youth. One study found a statistically significant relationship between verbal, physical and sexual harassment and mental health issues. Harassed LGBTQ youth maintain lower grades than students who experience less harassment, and 28 percent of the students who experienced harassment dropped out of school. Furthermore, LGBTQ youth attempt suicide at rates higher than their heterosexual peers, a likely result of the added pressure, harassment, and depression.

52. Id. at 51.
53. Id. at 16.
54. Id.
55. CIANCOTTO, supra note 22, at 45.
56. FOSSEY, supra note 29, at 2 (stating 37 percent of students were physically harassed because of their sexual orientation).
57. Kosciw, supra note 14, at 26 (stating 46.9 percent of LGBT students were physically harassed).
58. Holmes, supra note 32, at 57 (stating “Such [anti-gay harassment] abuse can have devastating effects on the children targeted, including higher rates of suicidal ideation and attempted suicide, higher truancy and drop-out rates, substance abuse and running away from home. In a 1999 Massachusetts study, almost 49 percent of lesbian, gay and bisexual students said they had considered suicide during the previous year.”).
59. CIANCOTTO, supra note 22, at 52.
60. FOSSEY, supra note 29, at 1.
61. Steven A. Safran & Richard G. Heimberg, Depression, Hopelessness, Suicidality, and Related Factors in Sexual Minority and Heterosexual Adolescents, 67 J. CONSULTING & CLINICAL PSYCHOL. 859, 859-866 (1999) (reporting that 30 percent of LGB youth versus 13 percent of heterosexual youth had attempted suicide); Robert Garofalo, R. Cameron Wolf, Lawrence S. Wissow, Elizabeth R. Woods & Elizabeth Goodman, Sexual Orientation and Risk of Suicide Attempts Among a Representative Sample of Youth, 53 ARCHIVES PEDIATRIC & ADOLESCENT MED. 487, 487-493 (1999) (finding that LGBTQ high school students were 3.4 times as likely to have attempted suicide within the last 12 months as their heterosexual peers).
C. School Policies Alter LGBTQ Students’ Self-Image and Truancy Rates

School policies can greatly alter LGBTQ students’ experiences. Their attendance rates improve when specific anti-harassment policies are in place, when teachers intervene in anti-gay bullying, and when information and support related to sexual orientation and gender identity are available.62 School administrators set the tone, culture, and attitude for the school population. An accepting administrator creates a greater air of openness and acceptance toward LGBT students.63 One study illustrated a school’s effect on their LGBTQ students, finding that LGBTQ students with access to a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) group and supportive teaching staff are likely to miss fewer days of school than LGBTQ students without these resources.64

Schools unwilling to take a public stance on perceived “controversial” topics, such as anti-bullying or LGBTQ-inclusive policies, should create opportunities for their students to access LGBTQ information and resources online. In 2012, only 30 percent of students were able to access information on LGBT history, people or events on school Internet.65 In rural areas specifically, only 22 percent of students had access to LGBT resources via school Internet.66

II. MAKING SENSE OF FIRST AMENDMENT PROTECTIONS

First and foremost, the “First Amendment [to the United States Constitution] means that government has no power to restrict expression because of its message, its ideas, its subject matter, or its content.”67 The First Amendment was originally only applied to restrict the Federal Government.68 In 1925 the United States Supreme Court ruled the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution applies the First Amendment’s Free Speech Clause to the States.69

If the First Amendment does not protect an individual’s particular words and expressions, those words and expressions may be narrowly regulated or restricted by the government.70 Thus, the first step in any First Amendment analysis is to determine whether the First Amendment protects an individual’s restricted or prohibited speech.71

62. Cianciotto, supra note 22, at 35.
63. Dignity For All, supra note 42, at 17.
64. Fossey, supra note 29, at 9.
65. Cianciotto, supra note 22, at 93.
66. Id.
67. Police Dep’t. of City of Chi. v. Mosley, 408 U.S. 92, 95 (1972).
68. U.S. Const. amend. I.
A. Speech Not Protected By The First Amendment

The United States Supreme Court established speech that is categorically not protected by the First Amendment including obscene or lewd materials, libelous words and fighting words.\(^9\) In \textit{Miller v. California} the Court created a test to determine whether speech is obscene.\(^3\) The three-part test was developed to help lower courts determine whether a given speech or expression is obscene, rendering the speech unprotected by the First Amendment and subject to regulation.\(^4\) The \textit{Miller} Court cautioned, however, that courts must remain sensitive to any infringement on genuinely serious literary, artistic, political or scientific expression.\(^5\) The Supreme Court also ruled that child pornography is unprotected under the First Amendment, regardless of whether it is obscene.\(^6\) The Supreme Court cautioned that States banning child pornography must adequately define it in applicable laws.\(^7\)

B. Speech and Expressive Activities That May be Regulated

If the government restricts protected speech, such restriction must be justified by a compelling governmental interest and must be narrowly tailored to achieve that end.\(^8\) The U.S. Supreme Court recognizes three categories of regulations on speech: content neutral, content based, and viewpoint based.\(^9\) The Court created tests for content-neutral and content-based determinations.\(^10\) Viewpoint discrimination by a state actor, however, is regarded as necessarily violating the First Amendment, a right the Court considers one of the United States’ most cherished constitutional rights.\(^11\) The government cannot silence

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\(^{72}\) \textit{Chaplinsky}, 315 U.S., at 572.

\(^{73}\) \textit{Miller v. California}, 413 U.S. 15, 39 (1973) (explaining that the \textit{Miller} test has three parts: Whether “the average person, applying contemporary community standards’ would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest,” whether “the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law,” and “whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.”).

\(^{74}\) \textit{See id.} (explaining that previous courts have struggled to maintain a true definition for obscene and adopting a the \textit{Miller} test, which has three parts: Whether “the average person, applying contemporary community standards’ would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest,” whether “the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law,” and “whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.”).

\(^{75}\) \textit{Id.} at 23.


\(^{80}\) \textit{Id.}

one viewpoint to enhance another. 82 “Viewpoint discrimination exists (1) when the government discriminates against offensive, unpopular or disfavored views, or (2) when a competing perspective has been removed from a forum or debate.” 83

“The First Amendment’s hostility to content-based regulation extends not only to restrictions on particular viewpoints, but also to prohibition of public discussion of an entire topic.” 84 As a general matter, “the First Amendment means that government has no power to restrict expression because of its message, its ideas, its subject matter, or its content.” 85 The Supreme Court has only narrowly approved content-based regulation. 86

The government, however, can restrict certain speech or expression if it meets the “content neutral” standard. 87 For content neutrality, the principal inquiry is whether the government adopted a regulation of speech because of disagreement with the message it conveys. 88 Content neutral regulations are constitutional if they are “justified without reference to the content of the regulated speech.” 89 A regulation of expressive activity is content neutral even if it has incidental effect on some speakers or messages but not others, and if it serves some purpose unrelated to the content of regulated speech. 90

C. A Fractured Idea: A Student’s Right to Receive Information

In Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School Dis. No. 26 v. Steven A. Pico, the Supreme Court, in seven fractured opinions, discussed a school board’s authority to remove books from the libraries of their schools. 91

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82. See Buckley v. Valeo, 424 U.S. 1, 48-49 (1976) stating that “the concept that government may restrict the speech of some elements of our society in order to enhance the relative voice of others is wholly foreign to the First Amendment, which was designed ‘to secure the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources’ and ‘to assure unfettered interchange of ideas for the bringing about of political and social changes desired by the people.’”

83. Kozlowski, supra note 79, at 178.


85. Police Dep’t of Chi. v. Mosley, 408 U.S. 92, 95 (1972) (holding a municipality could not exempt labor picketing from a general prohibition on picketing at a school even though the ban would have reached both pro- and anti-union demonstrations).


87. See Ward v. Rock Against Racism, 491 U.S. 781, 799 (1989) (stating that regulation of the time, place, or manner of protected speech could be narrowly regulated to serve the government’s legitimate, content-neutral interests).


89. Clark, 468 U.S. at 295.

90. Ward, 491 U.S. at 791.

In *Pico* the board of education removed books from its high school and junior high libraries because it alleged the books were “anti-American, anti-Christian, anti-Sem[i]tic, and just plain filthy.” A school board has the broad ability to manage school affairs, however, the Court recognized there are constitutional limits on the State’s ability to control the curriculum and classroom.

The *Pico* school board attempted to rationalize its book removal decision with its “duty to inculcate community values,” but the Court decided this emphasis was misplaced. The *Pico* school board attempted to extend their “absolute discretion beyond the compulsory environment of the classroom” into the school’s library, where students could voluntarily inquiry and read any book. The constitutionality of the school board’s decision to remove a book from its libraries depends upon the motivation behind the school board’s actions. The *Pico* board exercised its discretion “in a narrowly partisan or political manner,” and a school board cannot remove books because it disagrees with the ideas within the book. If, however, the school board removed the books because of education reasons, then removal may have been permissible. *Pico* only addressed a school board’s decision to remove books from its libraries. *Pico*, though, did not affect the local school board’s authority to determine what content could be added to the school’s libraries.

Notably, *Pico* was distinguished from other cases analyzing a school board’s authority over its curriculum because the *Pico* library books were optional reading rather than required reading. The Court emphasized a school library is a “principal locus” of freedom for students to “always remain free to inquire, to study and to evaluate, to gain new maturity and understanding.”

92. Id. at 853.
93. See, e.g., *Meyer v. Nebraska*, 262 U.S. 390, 402 (1923) (noting a state has the power to “prescribe a curriculum for institutions which it supports”); *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510, 534 (1925) (affirming the state can regulate all of its schools); *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968) (reaffirming that public education in the U.S. "is committed to the control of state and local authorities").
94. See e.g., *Meyer*, 262 U.S. at 403 (striking down a state law that forbade teaching of foreign languages in public schools); *Epperson*, 393 U.S. at 103 (holding that a state law that prohibited teaching Darwinian theory of evolution in public schools as unconstitutional); *Griswold v. Connecticut*, 381 U.S. 479, 482 (1965) (recognizing that a “State may not, consistently with the spirit of the First Amendment, contract the spectrum of available knowledge").
96. Id.
97. Id. at 871.
98. Id. at 870.
99. Id. at 871.
100. Id.
101. Id. at 871-72.
102. Id.
103. Id. at 869.
104. Id.
the goals of public education to remove a book and disrupt “a place dedicated to quiet, to knowledge, and to beauty.” 105

D. Public School Students’ First Amendment Rights In Schools

_Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School Dis._ established students do not shed their “constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.” 106 In _Tinker_, several students wore armbands inside the school during class time to protest the Vietnam War. 107 The Court ruled the students’ expression was “closely akin to ‘pure speech’. 108 It stated that in order for the school to justify prohibition of a particular expression (viewpoint discrimination), the state must show the action was caused by “something more than a mere desire to avoid the discomfort and unpleasantness that always accompany an unpopular viewpoint.” 109 The Court reasoned that students retain their First Amendment rights in school and can exercise these rights if they do so “without materially and substantially interfering with the requirements of appropriate discipline in the operation of the school and without colliding with the rights of others.” 110

After _Tinker_, courts widely accept that neither students nor teachers “shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.” 111 Though neither students nor teachers shed their speech rights, students, in particular, do not have unfettered rights in school. 112 First Amendment case law for students in public school has developed four relevant questions for courts to consider:

a. Does the student speech pose a substantial and material disruption to the school, 113 or
b. Is the student speech vulgar and lewd speech such that it undermines the school’s educational mission, 114 or
c. Is the speech part of a school sponsored function, but causes the principal to have legitimate pedagogical concerns, 115 or
d. Is the student’s speech advocating for illicit drug use? 116

If a student’s speech falls under one of these four questions, a court may allow the public school to restrict the student’s speech; though any restriction

105. _Id._ at 868 (citing Brown v. Louisiana, 383 U.S. 131, 142 (1966)).
107. _Id._ at 514.
108. See, e.g., _id._ at 505.
109. _Id._ at 509.
110. _Id._ at 513.
111. _Id._ at 506.
113. _See Tinker_, 393 U.S. at 511.
115. _See Kuhlmeier_, 484 U.S. at 273.
still must be narrowly tailored to achieve the end. In contrast, if schools are depriving students of First Amendment freedoms, then such deprivation “unquestionably constitutes irreparable injury” and students are entitled to legal remedies.

After *Tinker*, the Supreme Court further defined and restricted when students in public schools may exercise their First Amendment rights. In *Bethel Sch. Dist. No. 403 v. Fraser*, a high school student was suspended for giving a lewd speech that contained non-obscene sexual innuendos when nominating his friend for student body vice president. The *Fraser* Court ruled that the school was within its permissible authority in imposing sanctions upon Fraser, holding the First Amendment does not protect “vulgar and lewd speech” that undermines the “school’s basic educational mission.” The Court stated neither an assembly nor a classroom is a place for sexually explicit monologues directed at unsuspecting teenage students. *Fraser* showed both the Court’s willingness to meticulously examine a student’s speech or expression, and its continued to disallowance of the First Amendment as a protector for lewd or sexually explicit speech. Moreover, the Court solidified the fact that “the constitutional rights of students in public school are not automatically coextensive with the rights of adults in other settings.”

In *Hazelwood Sch. Dist. v. Kuhlmeier*, the Court ruled that the high school paper published by students in journalism class did not qualify as a “public forum.” School officials retained the right to impose reasonable restrictions on the student speech in school newspapers. *Kuhlmeier* found the high school principal’s decision to remove two pages discussing student pregnancy did not violate students’ speech rights. The pages were removed on the ground that they unfairly impinged on privacy rights of pregnant students and others. Agreeing with the principal’s decision, the Court held a school must retain authority over speech that is “ungrammatical, poorly written, inadequately researched, biased or prejudiced, vulgar or profane, or unsuitable for immature audiences.”

Then in 2007, the Supreme Court examined whether the First Amendment protects a student advocating illegal drug use. In *Morse v. Frederick*, the student unveiled a banner off campus during a school-sanctioned event, which

119. *Fraser*, 478 U.S. at 678.
120. *Id.* at 685.
121. *Id.*
122. *Id.* at 682.
124. *Id.* at 261.
125. *Id.* at 274.
126. *Id.*
127. *Id.* at 271.
read “BONG HiTS 4 JESUS.” Morse, the student, was suspended because of this banner. The Supreme Court stated Morse’s banner constituted a school-sponsored event and his banner was promoting illegal drug use. Accordingly, the Court held that the First Amendment does not require schools to tolerate student expression that advocates illegal drug use while at school events. The Court found that this type of speech is particularly dangerous for teenagers.

E. The Forum Matters

The type of restrictions that can be placed on protected speech depends on the forum in which individuals engage in speech. There are three categories of forums: (1) traditional, or “quintessentially” public, (2) limited public, and (3) nonpublic.

A traditional public forum is for the free exchange of ideas. “Speakers can be excluded from a public forum when the exclusion is necessary to serve a compelling state interest and the exclusion is narrowly drawn to achieve that interest.” Restrictions to access of a public forum for expression must be minimal, because the purpose of that forum is the free exchange of ideas. In a nonpublic forum, government may control access by restricting identifiable subjects or speakers if the restriction is reasonable and viewpoint neutral.

An Internet access system in a library is neither a traditional nor a limited public forum. “Control over access to a nonpublic forum can be based on subject matter and speaker identity so long as distinctions drawn are reasonable in light of the purpose served by the forum and viewpoint neutral.”

The government violates the First Amendment, however, when it denies access to a

129. Id. at 397.
130. Id. at 398.
131. Id. at 410.
132. Id.
133. Id.
135. Perry Educ. Assn. v. Perry Local Educators’ Assn., 460 U.S. 37, 45 (1983) (holding a traditional public forum is a forum which “by long tradition or by governmental fiat [has] been devoted to assembly and debate.”).
136. Id. (stating a limited public forum is a one that is “generally open to the public even if [the state] was not required to create the forum in the first place.”).
137. Id. at 46; see also, Geoffrey R. Stone et. al., The First Amendment 286 (1999); G. Sidney Buchanan, The Case of the Vanishing Public Forum, 1991 U.Ill. L. Rev. 949, 950–51.
139. Id.
141. Id.
143. Cornelius, 473 U.S. at 806.
It is important to note the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) only requires schools to use “‘technology protection’ measures on modem–equipped computers as a condition of receiving federal funds.” The technology is meant to protect children using school computers from viewing visual depictions that are obscene, child pornography, or harmful to minors. The fact there is regulation of speech to protect children from exposure to sexually explicit material does not foreclose inquiry into its validity under the First Amendment. In 2001, a lawsuit challenged CIPA’s constitutionality.

In United States v. American Library Association (ALA), the Supreme Court stated that First Amendment public-forum principles, which would have required the Court to apply strict scrutiny, did not apply because Internet access in a public library is neither a traditional nor a limited public forum. The Court analyzed the traditional role libraries assume and noted that libraries historically do not include pornography within its collection. Additionally, the Court stated a library’s primary purpose is to help the public obtain appropriate material for educational and informational purposes. The Supreme Court, in two analogous contexts, held “the Government has broad discretion to make content-based judgments in deciding what private speech to make available to the public.” Some courts read ALA to say that if a school or library decides to exclude all resources on a certain subject by employing an Internet filter or book filter, then the standard articulated in ALA should be used. Specifically, the intention and effect of a library’s decision “controls the analysis, and not the medium of the resource nor whether the decision can be characterized as an addition or removal.” Seemingly, the test is whether the library’s removal of certain subject matter was appropriate “in fulfill[ing] [its] traditional role of obtaining material of requisite and appropriate quality for educational and informational purposes.”

144. Id.
149. Id. at 205.
150. Id. at 212.
151. Id. at 196.
152. Id. at 195.
154. Id. at 901.
III. A COURT’S DILEMMA – RESOLVING JOHN AND JANE’S INABILITY TO ACCESS LGBTQ WEB SITES WHILE AT SCHOOL

Courts often follow the maxim, “[j]udicial interposition in the operation of the public school system of the Nation raises problems requiring care and restraint.”156 Yet, Jane Doe and John both had a problem at their schools – they were unable to access LGBTQ websites while using their schools’ computers, and both decided to take their issues to court. Though both students were unable to access the LGBTQ websites, the schools’ probable underlying reasons to block the websites result in starkly different constitutional analyses.

A. John’s Problem – A School’s Politically Motivated Decision Guised As A Curriculum Choice

John is a hypothetical person, but his situation is not out of the realm of possibility. His inability to access any information on sexuality on the Internet through his school’s computer was his school board’s policy decision, or their attempt to comply with a state statute. Typically, there are three types of statutes or school board policies that restrict discussion of LGBTQ issues within a public school’s curriculum: (1) bans on the topic of LGBTQ issues, (2) bans on teachers’ expressions that being gay, lesbian, or transgender is acceptable, or (3) requirements that teachers emphasize that life as a gay, lesbian or transgender person is unacceptable.157

Authors have argued that school boards that decide to not educate students on same-sex sexual education violate students’ First Amendment rights to receive information.158 One federal appeals court noted there is no strong consensus regarding the application of the First Amendment to school board’s selection of curricular materials.159 This is an important issue, however, this Note assumes John’s school did not violate the Constitution when the school board decided to avoid the issue of sexuality completely; however, in supra Part III.A.i. it is argued that it is not practically possible to exclude all websites discussing sexuality or issues relating to LGBTQ individuals. John’s predicament hinges on whether the Internet is part of his school’s curriculum and whether John tried to access the LGBTQ websites in a classroom or his school library.

158. See id. at 1641-42 (stating that anti-gay slant to public school curriculum violate students’ First Amendment right to receive information); Sarah Conrey, Hey, What About Me? Why Sexual Education Classes Shouldn’t Keep Ignoring LGBTQ Students, 23 HASTINGS WOMEN’S L.J. 85, 102 (2012) (discussing, in part, how parents might use the First Amendment to challenge districts for not discussing LGBTQ issues in sexual education classes).
159. Chiras v. Miller, 432 F.3d 606, 616 (5th Cir. 2005).
The *Pico* plurality emphasized the voluntary nature of the school’s library and of the reading material within. 160 *Pico* noted that if students were required to read the removed materials, then the school district would have been choosing its curriculum and the books’ removal may have been justified. 161 If applying *Pico*, it is necessary to determine if it was a mandatory activity for John to access the Internet.

John’s attempt to discover and learn more about sexuality was a voluntary inquiry on his own part and not a mandatory activity. In fact, his inquiry was the direct opposite of the school’s sexual-education curriculum. Still, John’s inability to access this information on the Internet in a classroom would seem to reflect the “school’s curriculum [which] necessarily reflect[s] the value judgments of those responsible for its development. . . [and] is not prohibited by the First Amendment.” 162 The analysis and analogies become convoluted and complex, though, if John attempted to learn more about LGBTQ issues through the Internet on a school’s computer in a library.

If John went to his school’s library and logged onto a computer for the sole purpose of finding websites discussing sexuality and LGBTQ issues, his experience is analogous to a student wandering into a library doing optional, rather than required, reading. Moreover, the Internet itself has been compared to a “vast library,” 163 and that blocking images from a website would be “analogous to taking a book out of a library.” 164 A court deciding John’s case would need to determine if the particular website John tried to access is part of a school’s curriculum even though John tried to access the website in a school library, without being required to do so for a class. If it is part of the school’s curriculum, is the school’s blocking of websites more analogous to choosing not to add certain ideas or viewpoints to its curriculum or is it more analogous to a school’s decision to remove certain books from its library?

Ultimately, “the First Amendment precludes local authorities from imposing a ‘pall of orthodoxy’ on classroom instruction which implicates the state in the propagation of a particular religious or ideological viewpoint.” 165 John’s inability to access websites discussing sexuality could be analogous to a school adding a new library (the Internet) with lots of books (websites), and then deciding to remove certain books (websites). Still, a court evaluating John’s case would need to determine if his school removed the sexuality websites in a “narrowly partisan or political manner” 166 because the school disagreed with the ideas and views within the websites.

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161. Id.
162. Downs v. L.A. Unified Sch. Dist., 228 F.3d 1003, 1012 (9th Cir. 2000).
i. Analyzing LGBTQ Issues In a Heteronormative Society

At the heart of this problem is the tension between deferring to state and local school board authority to best educate children, and courts’ responsibilities of ensuring the State does not violate students’ First Amendment rights. Moreover, it is important to remember that appellate level courts would review findings of “constitutional facts” de novo.167 Reviewing facts de novo means an “appellate court must make an independent examination of the whole record.”168 Since all court levels will make an independent examination of the facts in a case similar to John’s or Jane’s, it is important for the tensions and paradoxes of these situations be exposed.

Without a doubt, a public school has a difficult task. The school must educate America’s youth, ensure safety within the school, and “walk a tight rope between competing constitutional demands made by parents, students, teachers and the school [districts’] other constituents.”169 Whether a school is able to “exclude all resources on the subject of LGBT issues, whether by employing an Internet filter or by book selection or removal,”170 has implications for a court’s legal analysis. If a school is able to exclude this subject, then the standard articulated in ALA should be employed. If, however, a school district cannot exclude all resources on the subject of LGBT issues, but still restricts access to LGBT material, then it is likely the school is preferring a certain viewpoint and its decision should be viewed from the exacting scrutiny of Pico and Pratt.

In John’s case, the school may be able to limit John’s access to LGBTQ websites if the school excluded all resources on the subject of sexuality. Yet, this is the first paradox a court would have to resolve. It is unlikely a school could restrict the subject of sexuality from its curriculum. For example, John’s school mandates abstinence-only sexual education, promoting no sexual relations until marriage. By teaching abstinence only, John’s school is implicitly preferring one view of homosexuality – mainly that its gay students should never have homosexual sex, even as adults, because currently most states do not recognize gay marriage171 and are explicitly exploring sexuality from the confines of heterosexuality.

168. Don’s Porta Signs, Inc. v. Clearwater, 829 F.2d 1051, 1053 n.9 (11th Cir. 1987).
171. Though in United States v. Windsor, 133 S.Ct. 2675 (2013) (Docket No. 12-307) the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the federal Defense of Marriage Act is unconstitutional, the decision did not say there was a constitutional right for gays and lesbians to marry, and states still determine whether a marriage between same-sex individuals is valid. Currently, there are 36 states that ban marriage between same-sex individuals completely. Where Gay Marriage Stands In All 50 States, MSN News, http://news.msn.com/us/where-gay-marriage-stands-in-all-50-states (last visited September 5, 2013).
Additionally, a court should give pause to the notion that a school could “exclude all resources on the subject of LGBT issues.”\(^{172}\) For Derek Henkle\(^ {173}\), the previously mentioned gay student, the “issue” was harassment and teacher indifference.\(^ {174}\) In fact, many websites that Jane Doe was unable to access involved more than just LGBT issues. Many dealt with gender and human equality,\(^ {175}\) or happiness and individual potential.\(^ {176}\) For a school to argue that it has no stance on LGBTQ issues or does not deal with LGBTQ issues within its curriculum underestimates a LGBTQ student’s high school experience and needs. A gay high school student, for example, may not only be interested in learning about same-sex sex, but also on how to deal with bullying in high school, or depression. Though a LGBTQ student may access information about these issues from a “LGBTQ” website, LGBTQ students’ issues cannot be reduced just to “the subject of LGBT issues.” Their issues are often issues heterosexual high school students also face. Thus, for a high school to exclude all resources on the subject of LGBT issues, the school must exclude categories so broad, such as bullying, that the helpfulness of the school’s curriculum and Internet would be significantly reduced.

ii. In the School’s Defense

John’s school board may be in a state where school boards are elected and their decision could have been politically motivated.\(^ {177}\) Nonetheless, the school could offer compelling arguments on why its decision was constitutional. First, while it is unlikely the school would argue all websites discussing sexuality were obscene materials, child pornography, or contained fighting words,\(^ {178}\) the school may argue it blocked websites discussing sexuality in order to comply with CIPA. This argument is likely without merit. CIPA requires schools to block visual depictions that are obscene, child pornography or harmful to

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173. *See supra Part I-B.*
178. A school and its technology experts would most likely perform a quick Internet search and find many Web sites discuss sexuality and cannot fit into an unprotected category such as child pornography. For an example of a website discussing sexuality from a psychological view see: [http://www.apa.org/topics/sexuality/index.aspx](http://www.apa.org/topics/sexuality/index.aspx).
Second, the school may try to regulate access to all LGBTQ websites using the justification from *Fraser* that the speech is “plainly offensive” or that the websites are “sexually explicit, indecent, or lewd speech.” This argument may apply to some websites, but a school cannot argue that all LGBTQ websites exhibit such speech. Furthermore, it is unlikely that a court would accept the notion that the school blocked these online resources because the school was safeguarding the students from “speech that can be reasonably regarded as encouraging illegal drug use,” as discussed in *Morse*.

John’s school board may rightly want to avoid the issue of sexuality because it views the issue as controversial in its district and wants to inculcate its students with a heteronormative view of society. The school district may argue that a reasonable person would view access to certain websites as speech that bears the imprimatur of the school. This “imprimatur of the school” argument would implicate the *Hazelwood* standard, and forcing John’s school to allow access to websites that discuss sexuality would be inconsistent with the school’s basic educational mission. Moreover, the school is retaining a viewpoint-neutral restriction – it is restricting all websites on sexuality and not just ones on homosexuality. Also, the school is restricting students’ access to the Internet, which is a limited public forum, so regulation thereof can be based on subject matter.

A court may be most persuaded to allow the school’s blocking of all sexuality and LGBTQ websites if John’s school argues its case is similar to *ALA*. The *PFLAG* court, in fact, stated it would use the *ALA* standard “if the Court were examining a decision by Camdenton [school district] to exclude all resources on the subject of LGBT issues.” Under the *ALA* standard, John’s school would show that removing the entire subject matter of sexuality from the Internet at school was reasonable and appropriate “in fulfill[ing] [the school’s] traditional role of obtaining material of requisite and appropriate quality for educational and informational purposes.”

John’s case illustrates complexities the Internet poses to courts when determining what is the appropriate amount of discretion to yield to local schools while simultaneously ensuring students’ First Amendment rights. John’s case is distinct from *ALA* because *ALA* involved the community library

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183. See *supra*, Part II.B for a discussion on viewpoint-neutral restrictions.
denying access to pornography on its computers, a subject matter traditionally not included in public libraries.187 It can hardly be said, however, that libraries’ “traditional role” would not include obtaining books and material on sexuality. Given Pico’s emphasis on the special nature of a school’s library, and though a school may be afforded the ability to limit discussions of sexuality within its school curriculum, it seems unlikely a court would allow a school to block all websites discussing sexuality. After all, “[n]otwithstanding the power and discretion accorded them, school boards do not have an absolute right to remove materials from the curriculum.”188

B. Jane’s Inability To Access LGBTQ Web Sites Constitutes Viewpoint Discrimination

Jane’s situation requires a different analysis than John’s case because it is clear her school district, Camdenton, was purposefully discriminating against pro-LGBTQ viewpoints.189 The Camdenton district blocked websites that expressed positive views of LGBTQ individuals while simultaneously allowing access to web pages that had a negative view of such individuals.190

Jane’s inability to access these positive LGBTQ websites is similar to Pico. Camdenton, in essence, was trying to “prescribe what shall be orthodox in matters of opinion,”191 and this purpose goes against several precedents.192 Specifically, in West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette, the Supreme Court stated:

“If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion.”

Moreover, when local authorities exclude a book because of an ideological viewpoint, courts often determine that a valid First Amendment claim exists.194

When reviewing Camdenton school district’s actions, the court found that the school board wanted to discourage access to “websites saying it’s okay to

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187. Id.
190. Id. at 892.
191. Id. at 901.
192. See Keyishian v. Bd. of Regents, 385 U.S. 589, 603 (1967) (stating “the First Amendment . . . does not tolerate laws that cast a pall of orthodoxy over the classroom”); Epperson v. Arkansas, 393 U.S. 97, 104-105 (1968) (reaffirming a school can not “cast a pall of orthodoxy over the classroom”).
be gay. In fact, even after the school’s superintendent received a letter of complaint from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) about Camdenton’s Internet filtering system, the superintendent still took no steps to ensure positive LGBT information would be available on the school’s computers through the Internet. By allowing access to websites that held only a negative view on LGBTQ issues, the school was discriminating against a positive LGBTQ view.

Though Jane’s school did not present this argument, the Camdenton district could have argued that it declined to allow access to pro-LGBTQ Web sites for legitimate pedagogical reasons, such as concerns about the accuracy of the websites. The school board would have relied on the accepted position that the First Amendment does not prohibit a school from removing books from its libraries if the books contain factual inaccuracies, and by extension, the First Amendment should not protect websites that contain factual inaccuracies. Yet, a scrupulous court would analyze Camdenton’s school board minutes and understand Camdenton removed the websites not because of any real or perceived factual inaccuracies, but because it intended to deny school children access to points-of-view with which the school board officials disagreed.

C. Solving John’s Inability To Access Important Web Sites By Embracing and Acknowledging Public Policy Reasons Including Legitimate Pedagogical and Safety Concerns for LGBTQ Public School Students

i. A Court’s Decision Embraces Research That Shows The Effects Harassment has on LGBTQ Students

This section analyzes Harper v. Poway United School Dist. not for its precedential value, but because the case highlights how a court combined recent data on LGBTQ teenagers and past legal precedent to create a solution benefiting LGBTQ high school students. This Ninth Circuit opinion was a split decision and was ultimately vacated, however, the order to vacate was due to procedural reasons.

The Poway School District had a history of conflict over sexual orientation issues. The local Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) wanted to hold a
“Day of Silence” like it had done in the previous year.202 During the GSA’s previous “Day of Silence” there were a series of altercations, leading to student suspensions.203 A week after the second annual “Day of Silence,” a different group of students organized a “Straight-Pride Day.”204 This “Straight-Pride Day” resulted in students wearing t-shirts that expressed a negative view on homosexuality.205

The Poway court examined LGBTQ students’ psychological health, well-being, and educational development.206 The court was persuaded by the statistics that LGBTQ youth experience a decline in academic performance when bullied,207 and that gay students have difficulty concentrating in school because students fear their safety as a result of peer harassment.208 The Poway court accepted the notion that “academic underachievement, truancy, and dropout are prevalent among homosexual youth and are the probable consequences of violence and verbal physical abuse at school.”209 Thus, it upheld the school’s prohibition of a t-shirt that condemned homosexuality.210 Importantly, the court stated there is a political disagreement regarding homosexuality in the United States.211 The court, however, reasoned that it was not necessary to advance an argument that homosexuality is shameful by “directly condemning, to their faces, young students trying to obtain a fair and full education in our public schools.”212

202. Id. at 1171 n.3 (stating, “On the ‘Day of Silence,’ participating students wore duct tape over their mouths to symbolize the silencing effect of intolerance upon gays and lesbians, these students would not speak in class except through a designated representative. Some students wore black T-shirts that said ‘National Day of Silence’ and contained a purple square with a yellow equal sign in the middle.”)

203. Id. at 1171.

204. Id.

205. The T-shirt that was litigated over stated, “Homosexuality is shameful.” Id. at 1192.

206. Id. at 1171.

207. Id. at 1179.

208. Id.

209. Id.

210. Id.

211. Id. at 1192.


213. Poway, 445 F.3d at 1181.
ii. Using the Data on LGBTQ Students and Precedent to resolve John’s inability to access any Web site on sexuality

The Poway decision shows a court’s willingness to look at the effects of harassment on LGBTQ students and employs a novel legal concept to justify its holding.214 The most effective route for a court to follow when deciding John’s case may indeed be by relying on the vast authoritative data on LGBTQ students and their struggles in public schools.

By recognizing there are at least 1.3 million U.S. high school students who identify as LGBTQ,215 a court should understand that allowing high schools to restrict LGBTQ websites condones the “demeaning of young gay and lesbian students in a school environment.”216 The students, by being denied access to these important LGBTQ resources, are unfairly thrown into a broader societal debate about homosexuality and gay marriage. Additionally, without access to important LGBTQ websites at school, the LGBTQ students will have to rely on other outside resources available to them, such as their local LGBTQ community center. As a result, rural students will be disproportionately affected as they lack similar resources as their urban LGBTQ counterparts.217

Similar to Harper, a court needs to recognize that LGBTQ high school students like John are not seeking information from LGBTQ websites to make a political statement. Rather, they rely on the Internet to find online LGBTQ communities218 and to find information on same-sex attraction.219 LGBTQ students’ inability to access websites discussing sexuality or LGBTQ issues has broad life consequences for these students. Without access, LGBTQ youth may continue to misunderstand their same-sex feelings, continue to remain in the closet, and increase their chances of depression.220 Lack of access could also

214. See Francisco M. Negrón, Jr., A Foot in the Door? The Unwitting Move Towards A "New" Student Welfare Standard in Student Speech After Morse v. Frederick, 58 AM. U. L. REV. 1221, 1228-32 (2009) (arguing Poway is an example of a lower court molding a new Tinker standard); Kevin W. Saunders, Hate Speech in the Schools: A Potential Change in Direction, 64 M E. L. REV. 165 (2011) (stating Poway is one of the few cases recognizing schools may restrict student speech if it harms other students, even if that harm is not physically violent).
215. CIANCOTTO, supra note 22, at 14.
216. Poway, 445 F.3d at 1178-79.
217. See Kosciw, supra note 14, at 107, stating that only 34.8% of the rural students surveyed were able to access LGBTQ-related information through the Internet using school computers. The sample size for this study was 7,261 students. Id. at xvi. Rural students composed 24.9% of this population or 1,808 students. Id. at 11. Thus, of the 1,808 rural students only 629 (1,808 x 34.8%) of them were able to access LGBTQ-related information through the Internet using school computers.
STUDENTS’ ABILITY TO ACCESS LGBTQ WEBSITES

perpetuate LGBTQ youth having higher suicide attempt rates.\textsuperscript{221} Even if a court rules a school must allow LGBTQ and sexuality websites, there is no precedent denying the school from also allowing websites with a negative view of LGBTQ people. Indeed, schools may want to do this to avoid litigation based on a perceived viewpoint discrimination against anti-LGBTQ views.

LGBTQ students face difficult situations in high school, many of which are unique to LGBTQ individuals.\textsuperscript{222} Allowing students access to websites discussing sexuality and LGBTQ resources is a simple step to help these students through their journey. Ultimately, a court should look to LGBTQ studies showing the decline in academic performance, truancy issues, harassment of LGBTQ students, and LGBTQ students’ reliance on the Internet more so than heterosexual students. These studies will help courts understand and rule appropriately that there are important public policy reasons to allow access to websites that discuss sexuality and LGBTQ Web sites.

CONCLUSION

Neither John nor Jane Doe’s situation is beyond imagination. With the Internet being a ubiquitous part of the American society and an increasing recognition that LGBTQ students use online resources to discover their own sexuality and resolve internal and external conflicts, courts will likely employ First Amendment case law if students decide to litigate these issues. While some schools may use CIPA as an argument for blocking LGBTQ websites,\textsuperscript{223} the difficult issue for courts to resolve is how to grant schools and school boards sufficient discretion to make educational decisions while also protecting students’ First Amendment rights.

By focusing on \textit{Pico} and \textit{ALA}, a court resolving John or Jane Does’ case will have to analogize website access in public high schools to accessing books in a high school library.\textsuperscript{224} Yet, even if a court is able to analogize a school removing a website to a book being removed from its library, John’s case presents a situation that may be constitutionally permitted. However, by understanding heteronomativity, John’s situation seems practically impossible. Since John’s inability to access important LGBTQ Web sites may be constitutionally within the school board’s discretion, courts should follow the \textit{Harper} court’s lead and use data on LGBTQ students to help support justifying a decision that allows John, and students who are similarly situated, to access

\textsuperscript{221}. \textit{See} Elizabeth Oh, Anthony Jorm & Annemarie Wright, \textit{Perceived Helpfulness of Websites for Mental Health Information}, 44 Soc. Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol 293-99 (Apr. 1, 2009) (discussing how young people found using the Internet to access mental health information was very helpful and suggesting that online resources could often be a first stating point for teenagers who are struggling with a mental health disorder).

\textsuperscript{222}. \textit{See supra}, Part I.B. for a discussion of daily high school life for LGBTQ students.


\textsuperscript{224}. \textit{See supra} Part III.A. and III.B. for a discussion of how \textit{Pico} and \textit{ALA} apply to John and Jane’s case.
LGBTQ websites justifying its decision.\textsuperscript{225} Not only is the data widely available, it supports the persuasive argument that allowing access to LGBTQ websites is a simple, yet extremely beneficial step for LGBTQ high school students.

Combining data with legitimate pedagogical and safety concerns for LGBTQ public school students should persuade a court to adopt public policy reasons in allowing access to LGBTQ websites. In doing so, courts would continue to follow the steadfast rule that students do not “shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.”\textsuperscript{226}

\textsuperscript{225} See supra Part III.C.i. for a discussion on how a court has relied data for LGBTQ teenagers to help justify its decision.