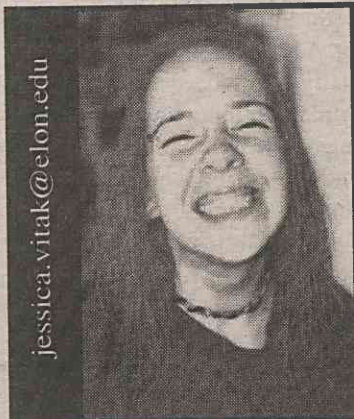


# Stretching the boundaries of the First Amendment: Should Web sites condoning controversial lifestyles be allowed on the Internet?

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With the passage of the Constitution in 1789 and the subsequent ratification of the Bill of Rights two years later, Americans suddenly experienced a wealth of new rights and freedoms. Over the years, many of these freedoms have been used as a defense in court, as a protection of the inherent rights of humans and as a support of democratic ideals.

Perhaps the most controversial and heavily-debated of these amendments is the First Amendment, guaranteeing people the freedom of speech, religion and assembly. In the 1960s and 1980s, the breadth of the First Amendment was heavily debated over when several people said the amendment gave them the right to burn the American flag, a symbol of patriotism and the country's struggle for independence.

A 1989 Supreme Court case ruled in favor of Texan Gregory Johnson, convicted of violating a state law by burning an American flag. This case was a high point for freedom of speech; however, many would argue that the amendment should not be interpreted so liberally.

Yes, all Americans should have the ability to express themselves. But should they be al-

lowed to do so at the expense of national ideals?

Another area where freedom of speech has been constantly challenged lies in the field of print journalism. As far back as 1735, freedom of speech was challenged in print. John Zenger, a writer for the *New York Gazette*, was charged with seditious libel against the king of England.

Truth prevailed, however, and Zenger was given a not-guilty verdict. His article may have upset the king with its strong accusations against the monarchy, but Zenger only printed facts. This was the first of many victories in American history for free speech.

Since then, free speech has been a stable, if sometimes questioned, part of print journalism. Virtually all major newspapers offer opinions' sections where writers and reporters can voice their thoughts on a topic, as long as the opinions are based on fact.

Controversy arises, however, over issues that go against the mainstream or promote anti-American sentiments.

For example, papers will not print anarchist articles, or those like the Ku Klux Klan that sanction harm to other groups. Is this a violation of these people's First Amendment rights? Or does this type of free speech provide a "clear and present danger" to the public, as termed by Supreme Court justice Oliver Wendell Holmes in the 1919 Schenck v. U.S. case?

Today, the widespread use of the Internet has made free speech an even more difficult topic to regulate. With virtually millions of pages on the Web, and creating a new page easy enough for a child to do, sites on any topic imaginable are available with the click of a button. Because access to all this content is rarely censored, the question of free speech becomes monumental. Should people be allowed to place any content on the Internet where a young child can read it?

While pornography attracts the most media attention, there are sites containing recipes for making drugs and bombs, selling academic papers to students and promoting all kinds of illicit activities. The fundamental questions arises then: Where is the line drawn between expressing one's First Amendment rights and endangering others through that expression?

As I signed online Monday to check my e-mail, I saw a headline that caught my eye. It was about pro-anorexia Web sites. This stopped me dead in my tracks. Pro-anorexia Web sites? They exist? After reading more of the article and doing a quick search on Yahoo!, I quickly discovered that these sites not only exist, but they are very easy to find. On one of the more popular of these sites, anorexiation.com, there is an extensive list of ways to become anorexic and maintain the "waii" look. It offers anorexics encouraging ideas to fight off hunger, from punching themselves in the stomach to putting Ajax on their food so it will be unappetizing.

The site even refers to the potentially-fatal eating disorder by the name, "Ana," making it almost human. This probably disturbs me the most because young girls, already inundated with countless advertisements proclaiming that being thin is the only way to be liked, will not see anorexia as an eating disorder.

By having a human name, it can instead be viewed as a friend, a companion. Some of the literature on the sight proclaims that even if you lose your friends, Ana will always be there for you. What is this message doing to today's children and teens?

While statistics vary, it can not be denied that there is an obsession with weight in American. Jean Kilbourne, in her recent

speech, "Deadly Persuasion: Advertising and Addiction," said that at least one in five women has an eating disorder and a recent survey revealed that 80 percent of fourth graders were on a diet. With the constant barrage of media images of ultra-thin men and women, what young child would not aspire to be like that to fit in?

With Web sites like anorexiation.com available on the Internet, these young children can easily learn the best methods to starve themselves. Unfortunately, doing this can cause major internal damage to their bodies and even death.

What can be done? Do the creators of this Web site and others like it not have the freedom to do so under the First Amendment? Where is the line drawn? Being a journalist, I have always been a strong proponent of free speech. Since Monday, however, I have had to rethink my stance on the topic.

Whether or not you are affected by these specific examples, consider how they could affect your friends, your family or others around you. Stop and consider when freedom of speech is taken to far. And if you agree, help protect others from exposure to these potentially hazardous sites by lobbying for stricter guidelines on the Internet. Make a difference, if not for yourself, then for your children.

## LETTERS

### Student questions the criminalization of marijuana

To the Editor:

Why is marijuana illegal? There is no logical reason why this plant should be. Marijuana has many uses that have nothing to do with the abuse of the plant. Some of the uses are also much more environmentally friendly than commercially grown plants or medically efficient than lab-produced drugs.

Marijuana can be used as a safer and cheaper alternative to paper and cotton. It takes up much less room than trees, doesn't require any chemical pesticides that would harm the earth, is easier to grow and doesn't deplete the soil like cotton plants do.

As a pharmaceutical, marijuana quells symptoms of nausea and pain in cancer, AIDS and

glaucoma patients. Many doctors have recommended that patients smoke marijuana once or twice a day in order to alleviate their symptoms, especially with those patients who do not respond very well to traditional forms of therapy.

There is no real reason why marijuana should be illegal. Aside from the environmental and medical benefits of marijuana, it can be smoked as a safer alternative to the other mind-altering products on the market. Marijuana has less debilitating effects

than alcohol (such as in car crashes), cigarettes or chemically-produced drugs such as cocaine, heroin or ecstasy.

Marijuana is an extremely useful, safe and efficient product. It is a safe alternative to more dangerous drug, and it is beneficial to the earth, the patients to whom it has been prescribed and the people who chose to use this plant as a mind-altering drug.

Caleb Bruce  
Student

### Write to The Pendulum

Letters are welcomed from all readers. They must include name, title and phone number. Maximum length is 300 words. All letters are subject to editing and will not be returned. No anonymous submissions will be printed.

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