

Is Netflix Promoting Child Exploitation?

“Disgusting.” “Nauseating.” “Disturbing.” “This should be illegal.”

That’s how average moviegoers described the controversial new film *Cuties*, which began streaming on Netflix last week.

The movie has earned only a 5% approval rating among audiences on the Rotten Tomatoes website. Yet it received a 90% percent approval rating among film critics. And when it was screened at the Sundance Film Festival in January, it was awarded a Best Director prize.

Netflix subscribers immediately launched a #CancelNetflix hashtag on Twitter after they learned about the film. So far more than 600,000 people have signed a petition asking the streaming service to take the film off its site. And thousands of viewers have canceled their Netflix subscriptions, causing the company’s stock to drop 2.5%.

Cuties is a French film directed by a Senegalese woman named Maïmouna Doucouré. Known as *Mignonnes* in French, it is the tragic story of an 11-year-old girl from a Muslim background who joins a competitive dance team in Paris. The girl allows pressure from her peers, as well as internet culture, to pull her into the world of sexually explicit dancing.

Doucouré says she made the film to explore how young girls are being sexualized by modern smartphone culture. Though that is certainly a serious problem to expose, *Cuties* crosses a dangerous line. Some people fear the movie will attract pedophiles, or indirectly cause more child abuse.

Since this is a family-friendly publication, I won’t describe in detail what the children do on stage in this film. I’ll

just say that prepubescent girls imitate the explicit dance moves of Cardi B or Nicky Minaj. You get the idea. "Disgusting" isn't a strong enough word.

When viewers demanded that the film be removed from its lineup, Netflix released a statement saying that *Cuties* is "a social commentary against the sexualization of young children"—and then added that it is "award-winning."

Meanwhile, conservative commentators have released blistering reviews. Nancy Grace, a Fox News commentator who specializes in crime reporting, said she was "very disturbed" when she watched clips of the film. "It seems to be sexually exploiting little girls in the name of exposing sexploitation," Grace said. "I guarantee you every pedophile who can afford Netflix is going straight online ... to watch *Cuties* right now."

And black conservative activist Anthony Brian Logan, broadcasting on his YouTube channel last week, said he had already canceled Netflix because he saw this trend coming.

"This should not be on Netflix," Logan said. "This should not be anywhere. ... I think the best thing for anybody to do if they have Netflix is go ahead and cancel it. They are exploiting children on their platform."

As a father who raised four daughters, I felt sick when I learned that the director of *Cuties* auditioned 650 pre-teen girls for parts in her film (with parental approval, I assume) before choosing the small cast. And even though I share Doucouré's desire to stop the sexual exploitation of girls, I don't believe she used the right strategy to do it. Her film could cause more harm than good—while Netflix makes lots of money in the process.

Cuties was the No. 4 film on Netflix on Sept. 12. That says a lot about where we are as a country. We say we are against child sexual abuse, but we are OK with supporting an entertainment company that is making lots of money exploiting

children to make a movie that denounces child exploitation.

Here's an idea: Instead of asking 650 young girls to gyrate on a stage so you can make a film about child exploitation, maybe someone at Netflix could ask adult entertainers like Cardi B, Nicky Minaj, Shakira, Beyoncé and Jennifer Lopez to admit that the sleazy videos they produce are having a sickening impact on young girls today. These girls didn't learn these moves on their own.

When I prayed about this film and its impact, I was drawn to Matthew 18:6 (NASB): "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."

Before Jesus said those sobering words, he called a child to stand near Him. He wanted everyone to see how much He cared about kids—and how serious He was about defending them from abuse. In this age when our culture is abandoning almost every moral boundary we once held sacred, pray that we will never, ever glamorize pedophilia, trivialize it or legalize it.

Our nation is doomed if we do. {eoa}