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Kids on the sex-offender registry: fuelling terror and ruining lives

Posted on July 22, 2011 by Cory Doctorow

Lenore “Free Range Kids” Skenazy talks about the insanity of sex-offender registries, citing the case of two fourteen year olds who sat on some other kids’ heads and are now on the registry. For the rest of their lives, they’ll have to register with the police four times a year, turn off their lights during Hallowe’en, live a set distance from bus-stops, schools and libraries and every potential employer will know that these people are on a list of “sexual predators” but will not know why. What’s more, these kids’ neighbors will be forever terrified to know that “predators” are in their neighborhoods. Kids as young as 13 have been added to these permanent blacklists, as have people whose “sex offense” was urinating in public or other minor offenses.

“These lists were originally conceived by most of the voters who cheered them on as lists of people who had some sort of psychological compulsion to sexual predation,” explains Walter Olson, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute. People assume anyone on it is “a permanent menace.”



These guys are more like Dennis the Menace, which is why we have to change the criteria that land folks on the registry. These young men were never “predators.” And as the years go by, the idea that they pose a danger to children will become even more ridiculous. When you’re 20, 30, 40 — 80! — you don’t do the things you did as a 14-year-old trying to impress your buddies. Why is Megan’s Law blind to human nature?

If it were making kids safer, maybe we could overlook how obtuse it is. But a 2008 study found that, in New Jersey at least — where little Megan Kanka, for whom the law is named, was murdered — the law showed no effect in reducing the number of sexual re-offenses or reducing the number of victims.

New Outrage: Sex Offender or Teenage Jerk?

(Image: *To Offend*, a Creative Commons Attribution (2.0) image from vek’s photostream)

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Mr Jones 1 day ago

There was no sexual element to the kids unruly behavior. They should no be on the register. But if you get caught speeding (a danger to adults and kids alike) then you should go on the reckless driver register. And if you drink,

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you should go on the potential alcoholic register. And if you draft laws that "catch" the people you are trying to protect, you should be banned from practising law for life, and placed on the stupid lawmaker register.

12 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)

Brian Burwell 1 day ago

I think the real question is, why have judges allowed this law to be applied so broadly? It's their duty to interpret the law. Aren't judges suppose to have common sense?

8 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)

travtastic 1 day ago in reply to Mr Jones

There was no sexual element to the kids unruly behavior.

I don't have the link because it was in the old comments, but yes, there was a major sexual element to their behavior.

1 person liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)

That_Anonymous_Coward 1 day ago

Actually it was stated differently, that it MIGHT have happened.

The main thing they set out to do was sit on the kids head.

http://blog.nj.com/njv_editori...

"The trial court found that while the boys placed their buttocks on (or above) the victims' faces, at least one of the boys' penises touched the lips of a victim and might have parted the lips. Although that contact was unintended, it raises the act from horseplay and bullying to a more serious offense."

This was not someone being held down and forced to participate in oral sex.

Was this a stupid stunt? Yep

Should they be sex offenders? Most likely not.

Will ruining these kids lives for LIFE make the world a safer place?

Is that what the victim wanted?

Did they need to end up doing a bunch of community service, and taking classes explaining to their underdeveloped brains that this was really stupid? Yes.

This most likely won't be seen as you can no longer register on BB, or post Anon and all of the other comments from this thread are lost in the transition.

2 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)

Palomino 1 day ago

I was caught urinating in an ally. I had finished and zipped up but the puddle was still forming. I fought the charges and every time I didn't take a plea deal, the charges were increased.

1. Urinating in public2. Attempted lewd conduct. WTF?3. Lewd conduct4. Indecent exposure (he never saw my junk)5. And then 6 months later, the police suddenly remembered there were "children in the area".6. If I didn't agree to the original charge, then it would have increased to "indecency with a child", gone to trial and I would have been charged and registered as a sexual offender. 7. I agreed and had to pay a fine of \$200.00 and entered a diversionary agreement not to walk through that particular ally for a year and then it would be erased. The problem is, THE ARREST RECORDED DOESN'T GO AWAY, NEITHER DOES THE STATE PATROL RECORD AND NOTHING STOPS THE REPORTING AGENCIES FROM STORING IT AND REPORTING IT. This happened in 1999 and I didn't get a job in 2009 because the ARREST showed up in a background search. All applications that ask "Have you ever been arrested" should be illegal. ANYONE can be arrested for ANYTHING, it could be mistaken identity, false charge, and you may be found not guilty later; but the ARREST still exists.

15 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)

travtastic 1 day ago in reply to That_Anonymous_Coward

"It just popped in, your honor! I was only trying to do some forced head-sitting, honest!"

[Like](#) [Reply](#)

That_Anonymous_Coward 1 day ago in reply to travtastic

And I am guessing the victim of this was able to give his statement, and the court still found that it was not the intended action.

The registry's are a new scarlet letter, we are not happy that they have been in jail. We need to continue to punish them and keep them out of society and then feign surprise when they don't fit in. We add more and more things to the requirements to get on the list, giving DAs powers to get convictions to show they care, rather than actually protect society.

Yes there are dangerous predators out there, but there are not as many as the hype would have you believe. We currently live in a society where a father can not take his children to the park because he must be a pedophile! (See the case of the woman who decided a father was stealing his own daughter in broad daylight and maced him.)

I think someone peeing in an alley, or mooning people need a ticket, not a life ruined by being labeled a sex offender. We are a society terrified of our children seeing a body part and them becoming warped freaks. The case of the woman walking her child to school, they walked by a house where the homeowner was in his own home and went to make coffee and was not dressed. The mother flipped out and reported him as a pervert. He was nearly convicted... because he didn't notice the curtain was open and because her SON saw another penis.

We like the sausage of feeling safe protected from these perverts with every conviction reported, but we don't look to see that the person we think is a horrible child molester.... yeah it was a 15 yr old who shoved away a 14 yr old girl and happened to push a breast.

2 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)

KanedaJones 1 day ago

some interesting comments were lost during the blog software switchover.. damnit I was following some of that.

3 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)

jimbell 1 day ago

I can see both sides of this. My daughter was assaulted on a school bus at 13 by a 16 year old male. It was just tittle twisters and we thought, why make a big deal out of it and ruin his life, so we agreed not to press charges as long as he left her alone. He was already on probation for some other minor offense and right after that ended he broke into a home and stole a semi-automatic gun (similar to an uzi) and brought it to my place. I took it away from him after a struggle (don't mess with a Mama bear) and called the sheriff. We put him in jail for the sexual offense til he was 21, and he's on the registry (which helps me feel safer cause I can track his location). Sometimes these laws are to remove a dangerous person from society because it's so hard to get long sentences for the stuff that's REALLY scary, like laying in ambush with an uzi. I didn't want to wait til he killed one of us to put him away.

I think what that kid really needed was to get away from his crazy, bible thumping family. So the time in juvenile detention was actually good for him. He's been out for many years now and we've had no problems, and it really helped me to know that he was closely monitored after his release.

I hate to see such a useful law abused. Kids need to be allowed to be kids. When I was a girl, my Dad would have just beat the shit out of the guy, but you can't act that way now.

5 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)

Chas Warner 23 hours ago

The fact is that there are 14 year olds who do belong on the list. Maybe the judge did a bad job of interpreting and thinking about the consequences of his actions, but these laws themselves aren't wrong. A 14 year old who babysits and violently sexually assaults like 5 different kids DOES belong on a list. The simple message here is don't do violent, evil sexual stuff.

Also, I love BoingBoing, but this was framed in a misleading manner. Obviously if you just sat on someone's head, it would be overboard to call it sexual. Upon looking into it it's obvious there was a lot more to it than that...

I'm actually pretty disappointed by this article - I feel it's deliberately misleading and sensationalized - something I would expect from FOX but not BB. You're violating a journalistic standard that you frequently write about here on BB. For shame.

4 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)

Jill Harness 22 hours ago

While I agree that someone can be a rapist at 14, I think a lot of teenagers have unresolved rage issues paired with raging hormones that make them particularly dangerous at that age. That being said, there's no reason someone that young can't work past their problems and should end up on a sex offender registry for the rest of their lives.

We really need to rework these laws. It is idiotic for people to be put on these lists for urinating in public or streaking and it actually dilutes the intended use of the law as people become aware of these unoffensive crimes landing on the sex offenders list and thus, stop taking the lists seriously.

[Like](#) [Reply](#)

travtastic 20 hours ago in reply to Jill Harness

If the list program did have to be kept, I think it would be a lot more fair to have it listed a set amount of time, and for that time to be decided as part of the verdict. Like parole and probation.

Like Reply

That_Anonymous_Coward 6 hours ago

jimbell - While putting him on the list might have been a good thing in the end, I think the larger issue should have been how the hell he got a weapon. I think there is something hugely wrong with a system that a tittie twister gets a longer sentence than laying in wait with a weapon. There could be great debate about is the system working, and does it need an overhaul. Rather than the firm stance that every "criminal" needs to be thrown into jail and warehoused for as long as we can to keep us safe, we might need to look at alternatives for certain things. In your case, he showed up with a gun... he needed serious help that it is very possible he would not get in the standard jail setting because the system is overflowing with people having pot and other "minor" things. Chas Warner - Judges do not always have the latitude we think they do. Laws are passed "for the children" that have nothing to do with keeping kids safe, but use that as the awesome cover of being able to flog anyone who questions it as being pro-child molester.

There was an interesting story on torrentfreak talking about copyright lobbists who use "protecting the children from being exploited" to push internet filters and other draconian measures into law that do nothing to actually make kiddy porn harder to get, but allows them to stop people sharing movies and music.
http://torrentfreak.com/the-co...

"My friends," Schlüter said. "We must filter the Internet to win over online file sharing. But politicians don't understand that file sharing is bad, and this is a problem for us. Therefore, we must associate file sharing with child pornography. Because that's something the politicians understand, and something they want to filter off the Internet."

"We are developing a child pornography filter in cooperation with the IFPI and the MPA so we can show politicians that filtering works," he said. "Child pornography is an issue they understand." Schlüter grinned broadly.

Why do we think the Patriot Act got reupped even after the massive abuses of these laws against people not even remotely considered terrorists out to blow up America? Because if you stand up and ask a question the media reports you a terrorist loving sympathizer, and the people who want the office for their own agenda will beat you to death with daring to wonder if this really was a good set of laws.

We tack more things onto the the registry laws because we only hear its "for the children". Crack cocaine is prison, powder cocaine of the same quantity is not.

Jill Harness - I think maybe there needs to be a system in place to see if this was a 14 yr olds hormones getting the better of the brain, or if this is truly someone who has real issues. I think younger offenders should be allowed to have their record cleared at 18 or 21 if they are shown to be not a threat any longer.

boingboing - can we have back the other 56 comments on this topic please? They are not showing up and we have lost a great deal of conversation.

Like Reply

cabalist 1 hour ago

If me and a co-worked went into another co-worker's office, pulled down our pants, pulled down our underwear, held them down, sat bare-buttocked/anused on their face, (and my penis breached the lips????) trust me, I would be arrested for some sexual crime.

When someone is doing something that I might do in the privacy of my home with another consenting adult, but they are doing it against that person's will then that my friend is a sexual assault. The minute the undies come off (and the other person in the room does not want them to come off) a sexual crime is not far away. It is like watching cops. If a shirtless suspect shows up they are going down hard. Like a red-shirt on Star Trek...

Like Reply

That_Anonymous_Coward 1 hour ago in reply to cabalist

cabalist - you and your coworker are not 14 I hope. This was horsing around between kids that went to far. You have a concept of cause and effect, a 14 yr old can't think that far ahead. The comparison fails when you compare an adults actions to a childs actions. This was horseplay, not 2 boys who stalked and held down another and then forced sex acts to be preformed.

Should there have been punishment, by all means. But that punishment should not be a scarlet letter on their chests that says Sex Offender. No one will look past that designation, they will assume the worst that they sexually abused a baby. But there are people on the list who - peed on a wall in an alley, cheerleader who mooned out a bus window, 16 yr old who was dating a 15 yr old and the parents objected, and a whole host of "offenses" that are not serious.

Would you like your entire life judged by something stupid you did when you were 14?

Like Reply

Real-time updating is **enabled**. [\(Pause\)](#)

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Boyd Atchison

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