

North Carolina sex police: Charging teen as adult for being a minor

written by NARSOL | September 2, 2015

By Robby Soave . . . A North Carolina 17-year-old caught in a sexting scandal faces charges of sexually exploiting a minor that could land him in jail for up to 10 years, since the law considers him an adult. But one of the minors he supposedly exploited *is himself*—which raises an obvious question: how can a teen be old enough to face adult felony charges, but not old enough to keep a nude picture of himself on his phone?

Unfortunately, that's the Kafka-esque nightmare in which Fayetteville-area high schooler Cormega Copening finds himself after exchanging private nude photos with his girlfriend—with whom he is legally allowed to have sex, but not to sext.

[I wrote about Copening's story on Tuesday](#). Since then, I've learned new information that makes the local sheriff's office's actions seem even more ludicrous.

But first, to recap: Copening and his girlfriend—now identified as Brianna Denson—are like other teenagers in that they have more than a passing interest in sex. Indeed, when they were 16, they exchanged racy sexy photos via text message. Denson sent pictures to Copening, and Copening sent pictures to Denson. It appears that no one else saw the pictures until local authorities searched Copening's phone and discovered them.

Why did they search his phone? It's not clear, but local news reports claimed that it had nothing to do with the sexts themselves. The Cumberland County Sheriff's Office did not respond to a request for comment. According to fayobserver.com, there is no record of a search warrant being

issued for Copening's phone.

Both teens were charged with sexual exploitation. Denson pleaded guilty to a lesser charge and was given 12 months of probation.

Copenig, however, is still facing two counts of second-degree sexual exploitation and three counts of third-degree exploitation. As *Ricochet's* Tom Meyer [points out](#), the third-degree charges—which constitute a majority of the total charges—actually stem from the pictures Copening had of himself. The implication is clear: Copening does not own himself, from the standpoint of the law, and is not free to keep sexually-provocative pictures, even if they depict his own body.

But consider this: North Carolina is one of two states in the country (the other is progressive New York) that considers 16 to be the age of adulthood for criminal purposes. This mean, of course, that Copening can be tried as an adult for exploiting a minor—himself. (See full article on [Reason.com](#))