

# Barbaric consequences to “show me yours and I’ll show you mine” in a digital world

written by Sandy | April 19, 2018



By Sandy. . . Imagine being fourteen years old today, in a world where technology is changing the rules faster than they are being written.

John Grasso, a criminal defense attorney and a former police officer, [has captured that situation](#) with the brilliant and apt metaphor of stepping into quicksand. You don't know it's there until you are in it, and if you don't go in over your head with the first step, one slight move in the wrong direction will pull you to the bottom, cutting off air and light and squeezing the life from your helpless body.

This is exactly what putting a fourteen-year-old on the sex offender registry does, and this is what the Barrington, Rhode Island police did when they chose to charge a fourteen-year-old boy with distributing pornography for his participation in a sexting situation.

Rhode Island law allows this, but it also gives other choices. The fourteen-year-old girl who sent the sexually explicit selfies to her boyfriend was granted the benefit of one of those other choices. He was not. His foolishly passing them on to some friends of the same age is being charged the same as if he were a fully-grown man involved in a massive child pornography ring.

If convicted, he could go to prison, bad enough in itself, but the true, life-destroying punishment will kick in when he is forced to register as a sexual criminal on the Rhode Island sex offender registry. If convicted, that will happen whether he goes to prison or not.

And to what end?

Even though scientific studies show quite clearly that sex offender registries and all of the baggage that goes with them do not further the cause of public safety, let's pretend for a moment that they do.

What is there about this boy-child that the public needs to be protected from? If another girl-child sends him nude selfies, is he likely, given what he is going through now, to again send them to his friends? Is he at risk of graduating from teenage stupidity to molesting children in the park? Will he stay fourteen forever, locked for life into the hormone-driven, impulsive poor-decision making that characterize the teen years?

Or is he so traumatized by this situation that he has, without doubt, learned all the lessons he needs to learn and some that he didn't?

And what of the police department that is choosing to charge him with felony child pornography? One choice, the most lenient, would almost certainly have been sufficient to assure this behavior would not be repeated by him. Even the choice bestowed upon the young lady who took and sent the selfies in

the first place would have been kinder. A conviction for sexting, the crime with which she is charged, is not a felony, and it precludes sex offender registration.

The third option, the one being visited upon the fourteen-year-old young man, is not lenient; it is not kind; it is, by anyone's standards, cruel, even malicious. It is what happens when those in authority decide that the collateral consequence of a young life is worth their showing how tough they are on crime.

Possibly they do not know that true strength is shown through kindness, not cruelty.