



Walmart and Abduction: America's Favorite Things!

Sometimes I can't tell if I'm overly trusting or if the world is the opposite, and here's a perfect example:

At the end of December, a 64-year-old man shopping with his wife at a Florida Walmart grabbed a 4-year-old's wrist and, according to the media and local law enforcement, attempted to kidnap him.

If you Google "Daily Mail Walmart kidnapping," you can see the security cam video. It's super grainy (why does all security footage look like the moon landing?) and strange. The man does grab the kid by the wrist and takes a step or two. Supposedly he told the child, "Let's go."



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At which point, the little boy's sister intervened and led the boy away. Simple as that.

The sheriff's office is quoted as saying: "Deputies tirelessly worked alongside our Real Time Intelligence Center Analysts to identify the suspect." Tirelessly, that is, for an hour, which is how long it took from the incident to showing up at the man's house to arrest him for false imprisonment of a child.

"I never want anyone in Lee County to feel unsafe, especially going on a simple shopping trip," the sheriff's office went on. "My team will stop at NOTHING to ensure criminals like this face the consequences of their actions."

But ... but ... Was this man really trying to abduct a boy who was standing near his sister and mom? From a store filled with cameras (however grainy) and shoppers and security guards? Was the man's wife going to be just fine with a new, rambunctious addition to their home? Is she just resigned to her husband's offbeat hobby? She did tell the cops that her husband is always joking with kids. But maybe she's a kidnapper, too?

Or — work with me here: Are law enforcement and the media maybe so obsessed with stranger-danger that they believe this admittedly weird incident was an actual crime? Or at least are they willing to pretend it was, for the sake of a "good story"?

The commenters at The Daily Mail (yes, yes, The Daily Mail — I know, but that's where I first read the story), mostly believe the man was a kidnapper/trafficker. Prison for life is about the most lenient punishment they suggest. But once in a while, someone writes something like this: "Please, innocent till proven guilty. Unpopular opinion but this guy had no intention of capturing the child. His wife is there and she is not moving at all nor does she try to run away. The old man could have dementia."

And: "If he really wanted to take a kid he'd be less likely to do it right next to the family and his own wife watching."

I tilt toward the "nothing horrible happened" interpretation, for a couple of reasons. First, nothing



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horrible happened.

Second, one of the rarest crimes in America is a child being snatched by a stranger from a public place. In fact, David Finkelhor, director of the Crimes Against Children Research Center, told me that the number of kids snatched that way for sex trafficking purposes is zero. So if this guy was a predator pouncing in a public place, he was as rare as a reindeer ordering the cheese fries at a Shake Shack.

Finally, it seems that there's nothing our culture likes more than an anger, fear and outrage sandwich, slathered with moral superiority. Anyone hearing that a man was about to snatch an innocent child gets to gorge away: How dare that guy! I would never do that. I'm better than him. And I'm even, uh, more better for suggesting we throw him in a viper pit!

The story got a ton of play when it happened, but there has been no follow-up. I'm guessing nothing's happening because ... nothing happened.

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