

## Sex offenders' behavior hard to explain

One psychologist says, 'It's ... very smart people doing very stupid things.'

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**What causes successful, high-profile individuals to risk so much for seemingly so little?**

Local psychologists say people who commit sex-related crimes often are driven by an obsessive streak and deluded by denial into thinking their crimes aren't serious and they're unlikely to be caught.

"I'm just continually shocked about how many people go for (stings). Everybody knows sting operations go on all the time," said Frederick L. Peterson Jr., a Dayton-based clinical psychologist and sexual health practitioner. "It's a great example of very smart people doing very stupid things.

"It's the addiction that doesn't let you see it, what the shrinks call cognitive distortion. You start thinking you're going to be safe; this isn't a cop."

Centerville psychologist Richard Bromberg put it this way: "You have the denial and almost an arrogance: 'I'm smarter; nobody's going to detect this in me because I do it better.' "

It's not easy to understand why anyone commits a sex crime, particularly when the victim is a juvenile. Yet it's particularly puzzling when the accused individual has so much to lose: spouses, children, careers, family reputation.

Chaminade Julianne girls basketball coach Marc Greenberg was arrested and charged last week on federal charges of using the Internet to transmit obscene material to individuals younger than 16.

In February, Troy teacher Chad Widener pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge of contributing to the delinquency of a minor for sending inappropriate text messages to a 15-year-old girl.

Both Greenberg and Widener hail from prominent families. Greenberg is the son of the late Stan Greenberg, well-known local attorney and UD basketball star who played for the 1962 NIT champions. Widener is the son of Miami County Commissioner Ron Widener.

As a Kettering attorney, Greenberg certainly would have been well aware of the risks of his alleged behavior. According to court records, his Internet exchanges with an undercover agent — whom he believed to be a 13-year-old girl — contained the passages, "I can go to jail," and, in the very next exchange, "I'm sure you're not gonna tell. But you could be a cop."

Peterson said literally dozens of sex offenders "have told me, 'I knew it was probably a set-up.'" One man told Peterson he knew his Internet "date" was a cop, but he couldn't stop escalating the relationship to see how it played out.

"That's the quintessential quality of a sex addiction," Peterson said. "You keep doing something you know you shouldn't be doing, even in the face of increasingly adverse consequences."

Peterson said sex offenders have become "the modern lepers of American contemporary culture." Not all offenders are alike, he said, and not all belong in already crowded prisons. Offenders are so stigmatized that "we've almost made it easier (for them) to re-offend and go back to prison than to get treatment."

He doesn't believe that all people caught in sting operations are dangerous, because some people will say things on the Internet that they'd never actually do. "It's like a fantasy game."

Bromberg said offenders typically have long-standing problems with their sexuality that go unnoticed, even by people close to them.

"It's likely this has been an issue with them for the better part of their life, and they had a secret they've been able to contain," he said. "It's usually something that's been nurtured along for many years."

Bromberg said he has been scratching his head to understand why the problem seems to be more prevalent today than 30 years ago. "Certainly, the Internet is giving people more opportunities," he said.

Typically, family members, friends and colleagues are dumbfounded by the accusations. "There are definitely little clues, but people usually aren't able to piece them together," Bromberg said.

Beavercreek girls basketball coach Ed Zink, for instance, said he thought he knew Greenberg well. "I would never have seen this coming," he said.

Former Northmont Middle School teacher Jason Simmons is serving a prison sentence for his sexual relationship with a 14-year-old female student he met on a school trip. When the allegation surfaced in 2007, Superintendent Gale Mabry called Simmons — former captain for the OSU football team — "one of the nicest people you could meet."

In another example, Jared Wolfgang beat out dozens of other candidates for the post of assistant band director for Troy schools. He garnered acclaim in his previous job as high school music director for the Newton Local School district, which was chosen as one of the 100 best communities for music education by the American Music Conference.

"This community puts so much stock in its music program and wants to see it succeed," Wolfgang said in a May 2005 Dayton Daily News interview.

Less than three years later, a Meijer store employee called 911 to report an adult male "loving on" an underage female in the furniture department. Police said they found love letters from the 15-year-old girl in Wolfgang's car. He was sentenced to 30 days in the Miami County Jail.

Solomon Fulero, a Centerville psychiatrist who assesses criminal defendants for the courts, said it's nearly impossible to predict who may fall from grace. "These people come from every walk of life," he said. "I don't think anybody has any kind of systematic typology as to who these people are."

When it comes to teachers and coaches, Fulero said there are two kinds of offenders: those who have direct contact with students through such traceable means as texting and those who wouldn't think of seducing a local youth and seek a long-distance Internet relationship instead. "They see it as safer than coming on to somebody who's on their team," he said.

In cases where a local coach is caught trying to establish a long-distance tryst, local students almost never come forward with allegations, in Fulero's experience: "There may be exceptions, but it's certainly not the rule."

Fulero and Bromberg said it's very difficult to successfully treat sex offenders. "It's not very encouraging, the treatment for these people," Bromberg said. "It's actually pretty discouraging."

Bromberg is convinced of one thing: "This is just the tip of the iceberg. Unfortunately, I believe the problem is much more common than people acknowledge."

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