

Man's dating site blackmail ploy lands him in state prison

Written by BILL SCHANEN IV

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A 19-year-old man was sentenced to 1-1/2 years in prison Tuesday for attempting to blackmail a Town of Port Washington woman he met through a college dating Facebook page by threatening to post provocative photos of her and a recording of a phone sex conversation on the Internet.

Jeremiah D. Olson of Gays Mills, who pleaded no contest to felony counts of threatening to communicate derogatory information and threatening to injure or accuse of a crime in December, was also sentenced to two years extended supervision and two years probation by Ozaukee County Circuit Judge Joseph Voiland.

Voiland followed the recommendation of District Attorney Adam Gerol and rejected a request from Olson's lawyer and a plea from his mother to withhold a prison sentence, saying Olson's punishment should serve as a deterrent to people who think they can prey on those who use the Internet.

"The world basically lives online," Voiland said. "People want to know they can be safe on the Internet."

Reacting to a comment Olson made about having to live with his felony convictions for the rest of his life, the judge noted that derogatory information posted online can be particularly insidious because it seemingly exists forever in cyberspace.

"The Internet has made it so there are just some things that will never go away," Voiland said. "Sometimes people just can't go on with their lives because you can always find it on Google."

According to the criminal complaint, the 19-year-old Town of Port woman told an Ozaukee County sheriff's deputy that on July 18, 2013, she began communicating with Olson via a Facebook dating page used by students at the college she attends.

The woman said she and Olson, who claimed he was 22 and lived with his 2-year-old son in La Crosse, exchanged sexually explicit text messages.

On July 20, she said, Olson asked her to send him a photo of her wearing underwear with her hair in pigtails. She did, and in return Olson sent her a photo of what he said was his penis, according to the complaint.

The next day, the woman said, she and Olson had a sexually explicit phone conversation. Shortly after it was over, Olson texted her with a blackmail threat, the complaint states.

Authorities looked at a series of text messages sent by Olson, starting with one that said, "I

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think I'm going to blackmail u." When the woman asked why, Olson responded, "Because I'm an ass. Gonna need some cash from you I have you doing (expletive) on the phone plus pics. What do you think this would do to your college hopes?" according to the complaint.

When the woman asked what would happen if she refused, Olson responded, "Then I'll post pics and recording ... everywhere." When she asked how she would know that he erased the photos and recordings if she paid, Olson wrote, "If you want me to erase it, I may need more cash," the complaint states.

Olson eventually demanded \$300. When the woman balked, he said, "\$125, or I'll go to the cops with this. Your choice. You would go to jail for sending nude pics I'm going to school for pre-law. U would be locked up now," according to the complaint.

The woman reported the blackmail attempts to the authorities, who set up a sting. They transferred \$125 to Olson and were waiting for him in Prairie du Chien when he attempted to pick up the payment.

"What this case boils down to is the defendant's manipulation and exploitation of a vulnerable victim," Gerol said. "He demonstrated no respect for the victim as a human being."

Olson's lawyer, Robert Olmr, who noted that his client has made good use of his time in jail awaiting trial by earning his high school equivalency diploma, argued that Olson was initially looking online for a date, not a victim, but then saw an opportunity to make money.

"It wasn't as if Mr. Olson was out there as a predator," Olmr said. "This was more a matter of opportunity than a diabolical plot."

Not buying that argument, Voiland said Olson played on the fears of the woman with his blackmail demands.

"She probably thought, 'My life is over. This will never go away. He will do this to me forever,'" he said.