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# Woman's obsession for b

By Karen S. Peterson  
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Why would a 35-year-old mother of four have a baby with a 13-year-old boy, serve jail time for child rape — and then violate a court order not to see him again after her release?

Experts speculate there is more than sex involved in the behavior of Mary Kay LeTourneau, the former grade-school teacher in Seattle who had sex with one of her pupils.

Mental health professionals talk about a woman's moral development, a misconception of what constitutes love, an abuse of power between teacher and pupil, a romantic obsession with a troubled teen, the attraction of forbidden fruit, and a specter that society won't face: a female sex offender.

And they address the nation's fascination with the case. "We are drawn to the issue, beyond the prurient interest, not only because it challenges our conventional moral standards, but because it makes us take a look at ourselves, what we believe about sex and relationships," says Evergreen, Colo., sex therapist David Schnarch. "It makes us try to understand what is happening here." Schnarch is author of *The Sexual Crucible and Passionate Marriage*.

None of the experts will diagnose a woman whom they have never met. But Schnarch theorizes that her passion was not an act of love, however much both of them think it might have been. "That flies in the face of what love is. This was clearly not in his best interests."

Young people "should be protected from exploitation by adults," says John Bancroft, director of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction, in Bloomington, Ind. "Even if a minor falls in love and wants to be with an adult, he is at an age when he needs and deserves to be protected until he is old enough to take responsibility for such a crucial part of his life."

The line was crossed "from



Pool photo by AP/Wide World

**Convicted:** Mary Kay LeTourneau was sentenced to six months in jail for the rape of a teen. After her release, she was caught with the boy and arrested.

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healthy behavior when she first took the risk to her career, her family, her freedom," says Theresa Crenshaw, past president of the American

Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists. "Her judgment was impaired and her behavior toxic."

order to avoid the boy after her release from jail.

LeTourneau was arrested Tuesday during a predawn rendezvous with the boy. It was the first time they had seen each other privately since her February arrest for rape. Both his lawyer and her lawyer say she met with him because the boy asked her to.

"He was having troubles at school, troubles at home. He needed somebody who he could talk to. He initiated the contact," David Gehrke, LeTourneau's attorney, told *The News Tribune* of Tacoma.

"She's just all torn up realizing what's going on."

Their 9-month-old daughter lives with the boy's family.

LeTourneau met the boy at the elementary school where she was a teacher and he was a pupil. He was 13 when they began having sex in the summer of 1996.

They say they love each other. The boy says they shared rings and wanted a baby. The boy, now 14, is now in eighth grade. He has not been to school since Jan. 28.

Feeling troubled Tuesday, he paged the woman during a sleep-over at a friend's house. She defied court orders to stay away and drove to see him. Police looking for a stolen car noticed the pair in a vehicle with foggy windows.

Gehrke said the two were clothed and merely talking.

"They weren't trying to hide," Gehrke said. "They were sitting in Mary's car parked in front of the house she was staying."

She was arrested one month after being released from King County Jail in Seattle, where she served two months of a six-month sentence. On Wednesday she was under suicide watch in the same jail.

LeTourneau will admit breaking the conditions of her suspended sentence but will ask for leniency — electronic home monitoring, a stay in a halfway house, perhaps a short jail term, Gehrke said.

Asks Schnarch: "What are we talking about here? Selfishness? About a woman willing to deny everyone and everybody to get what she wants? About her moral development, about exploitation? About an anti-social personality who is not capable of truly bonding with anybody, making her willing to perform high-risk behaviors and to defy the court?"

It is possible, Schnarch says, that such a person may be "emotionally

fused" with another and be "unable to function as a whole individual without using another person to maintain emotional equilibrium."

Sexologist Robert Kolodny, author of *Heterosexuality*, cites a possible "forbidden fruit syndrome. The very fact this boy was off limits may have inflamed her desire, and her 'romantic obsession' — to put it nicely — had nothing whatsoever to do with sex at all." Kolodny is with the Be-

tional time on for good behavior.

Her time in treatment may not have been adequate, experts suggest. Although he does not know LeTourneau's case, psychologist Eli Coleman, director of the Program in Human Sexuality at the University of Minnesota Medical School, says an effective program takes two to four years.

He also sees a "double standard" for female sex offenders in treatment. "Female offenders are somehow often able to wiggle out of the system," Coleman says. Often less stringent with women than men, the judicial system is more apt to let a woman go "before successful completion of treatment."

Many experts also say there's a second double standard, a "gender bias," as Schnarch calls it. If this case, involved an older man with a much younger woman, it would garner much less attention.

In general, "when an older woman chooses a younger man, it is a scandal," Crenshaw says. She recalls when singer Jerry Lee Lewis married a teen-age cousin. "It wasn't considered an obsession, but bad judgment," Crenshaw says.

Bancroft adds, "If this were a man 20 years older than a girl, nobody would pay any attention to it."

Experts do not expect an outbreak of this type of behavior. "This type of obsession with an individual does happen." Bancroft says, but "it seems out of the ordinary."

Says Crenshaw, "This is an aberration, not a trend."