

Calif. man gets 4 years for stalking on Facebook

July 22 2011, By JUDY LIN , Associated Press

(AP) -- A Northern California man who trolled women's Facebook pages searching for clues that allowed him to take over their email accounts has been sentenced to more than four years in prison.

Superior Court Judge Lawrence Brown on Friday said George Bronk's actions were equivalent to a peeping Tom who peered into people's homes.

Prosecutors say once he took over women's email accounts, Bronk searched their folders for nude or semi-nude photographs or videos they had sent to their husbands or boyfriends and distributed the images to their contact list.

The emails went to their family, friends and coworkers. Women in 17 states, the District of Columbia and England were victimized.

Bronk pleaded guilty in January. Brown sentenced the man from the Sacramento suburb of Citrus Heights to four years in state prison for the charges related to the Facebook and email offenses, and added eight more months for charges related to child pornography.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. Check back soon for further information. AP's earlier story is below.

A 23-year-old Northern California man who trolled women's Facebook pages searching for clues that allowed him to take over their email

accounts and then made nude pictures of them public is expected to be sentenced Friday.

George Bronk pleaded guilty in January to charges of computer intrusion, false impersonation and possession of child pornography. Prosecutors said he violated the online privacy of women in 17 states, Washington, D.C., and England.

The state attorney general's office wants him to serve six years in prison, while a probation officer is recommending four.

His defense attorney, Monica Lynch, has said Bronk should get probation. She says her client was simply acting out and didn't realize the damage he had done.

Bronk was living in the Sacramento suburb of Citrus Heights with his parents, who said he had a drinking problem while he was stalking the women.

A judge is expected to hear the state's recommendation on whether he should be sentenced to a prison term or receive some alternative punishment. He underwent an evaluation by the state corrections department.

Between December 2009 and last September, prosecutors said Bronk changed women's email passwords to take control of their accounts, taunted some of the women in online exchanges, and coerced at least one woman into sending him more explicit photographs by threatening to distribute the pictures he already had.

Investigators say Bronk made a hobby of trolling women's Facebook pages, looking for their e-mails and gleaning enough personal information to answer basic Internet security questions, such as the name

of their elementary school or favorite color.

Once he had taken over their email accounts, he would search their folders for nude or seminude photos and videos the women had sent to their husbands or boyfriends, then distribute the images to the women's contact list. The women said they were embarrassed and felt violated as their photos were distributed to co-workers, family members and friends.

One victim told The Associated Press earlier this year that she was able to contact the person who had hacked into her email account and asked him why he was doing this. Bronk's reply: "Because it's funny."

Investigators said they found 172 email files with explicit photographs on Bronk's computer. Lynch said her client was immature, unemployed and bored while he cared for his ailing parents.

After a hearing earlier this year, his mother, Joyce Bronk, said her son told them he needed help for a drinking problem, then began attending Alcoholics Anonymous and taking classes to be trained as an emergency medical technician.

"This was an Internet persona he created when he was a drunk," she said at the time as a way to explain his actions.

Authorities caught up with him two months later. Their investigation began after one of Bronk's victims called Connecticut State Police, which referred the complaint to the California Highway Patrol.

Victims turned up in Alabama, Arizona, California, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, Virginia and Washington.

George Bronk has been jailed on \$500,000 bond since his arrest in October and will have to register as a sex offender.

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