

Multiple Massachusetts women cyberstalked, exploited for sexually explicit interactions, photos

"Defendant used anonymous Instagram accounts to target, harass and intimidate victims.

A Georgia man was sentenced today in federal court in Boston for engaging in a cyberstalking and extortion campaign in which he used anonymous social media accounts to harass and victimize women, including a Boston-area woman whom he cyberstalked and extorted for videos, photographs and communications of a sexual nature.

Gary E. Leach, 25, of Athens, Ga., was sentenced by U.S. District Court Judge Angel Kelley to 42 months in prison and three years of supervised release. In December 2021, Leach pleaded guilty to two counts of cyberstalking and one count of extortion through interstate threats. Leach was arrested and charged on April 23, 2021 and has been on home detention since he was released from custody on May 18, 2021.

"Justice was served today. Mr. Leach is a coward who hid behind anonymous online accounts to harass, exploit, and terrorize women for his own sick gratification. His disturbing and calculated conduct caused immeasurable trauma on multiple victims – one of whom was kept in a persistent state of fear for over a year," said United States Attorney Rachael S. Rollins. "Cyberstalking is a serious offense that has profound consequences for victims – many of whom are women. My office and our law enforcement partners will not stand idly by. Everyone has a right to feel safe and secure in their community – whether that community is in-person or online. The

cloak of internet anonymity is not impenetrable. Bad actors who cyberstalk and victimize innocent individuals will be identified, prosecuted and brought to justice.”

“The victims in this case did not let fear silence them. They courageously came forward and worked with the FBI to help bring Gary Leach’s cruel cyberstalking campaign –one that inflicted intense trauma–to an end. We’d like to encourage other victims of online threats to do the same,” said Joseph R. Bonavolonta, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI Boston Division. “Sadly, the FBI is seeing a surge in sextortion cases, with people of all ages being targeted. It’s a serious crime, and we will continue to work hard to unmask predators like Leach to ensure they are held accountable for their cowardly acts.”

From October 2019 until his arrest in April 2021, Leach, then a graduate student at the University of Georgia, targeted a Boston-area woman in an online cyberstalking and extortion campaign. Leach used anonymous Instagram accounts to obtain private video calls and photographs of a sexual nature from the victim – falsely promising payment in exchange – and surreptitiously recorded the victim during these calls. Leach subsequently resurfaced under a different anonymous account and threatened the victim that he would send the recording to the victim’s family if she did not comply with his demands. These demands included participating in sexual and degrading acts over video calls with Leach and sending photographs similar in nature upon his request. In exchange for her unwilling compliance, Leach promised the victim that he would delete the previous recording. However, during the subsequent interactions, Leach surreptitiously gained additional recordings and photographs of the victim which he used to repeatedly extort the victim for more sexual and degrading interactions under new Instagram aliases.

Leach also cyberstalked other women on social media, including a woman residing in Canada. Leach recorded a video call of a

sexual nature with this victim and sent the recording to her roommate. He repeatedly contacted the victim and used the recording to attempt to solicit additional interactions with her. Throughout 2019 and 2020, Leach attempted to solicit video performances of a sexual nature from at least a dozen Instagram users. Additionally, Leach initiated unsolicited video calls with at least 20 other Instagram users for the purpose of exposing himself masturbating and sent unsolicited photographs and/or videos of himself masturbating to users who did not answer the video calls.

U.S. Attorney Rollins and FBI SAC Bonavolonta made the announcement. Assistant U.S. Attorney David M. Holcomb of Rollins' Securities, Financial & Cyber Fraud Unit prosecuted the case." -Massachusetts Department of Justice.