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## Female sex predators hard to understand

**By Sara McDonald**  
 The Daily News

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Schoolboys may have always harbored crushes on attractive teachers, but experts say more than ever before, flirtations between boys and women are developing into sexual affairs that lead to criminal charges, convictions and jail time.

This month, Friendswood police arrested a 26-year-old private school teacher on charges that she had sex with a 17-year-old student along a deserted road.

Days before, a 29-year-old Galveston City Hall worker was charged with sexually assaulting of 13-year-old boy who was a longtime friend of her stepson.

Within the same week, a Deer Park High School teacher was charged with having sex with a teenage student.

None of these woman have been convicted of any crimes.

### Getting Brazen

Although experts agree there's a noticeable spike in the number of women arrested for sexually assaulting minors, explanations for that increase differ.

One explanation offered by California law activist Bonnie Russell, is that older women used to be more discreet in their sexual pursuits and have become more open.

"Male sex offenders have always been brazen," she said. "Females doing this, or at least getting caught, used to be very uncommon. Now they're getting brazen, flaunting obvious law-breaking."

Or perhaps, as licensed psychotherapist Tina Tessina suspects, the crimes are just being reported more.

"Police would laugh at you 30 years ago if you reported a teenage boy being victimized by his teacher," Tessina said. "Police departments have gotten much more aware and now, a lot of people are mandated to report this."

The allure of attractive teachers has always been there for students, Tessina said.

But it's the older person who has the responsibility to stop the flirtation.

"She's the one who's supposed to put the breaks on it," Tessina said. "Instead, she remains passive and keeps the whole thing going. Eventually, she might get aggressive. Obviously, she's not thinking rationally."

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Sexual relationships between women and underage boys, whether becoming more common or not, shock many people more than news of men assaulting young girls because it's against the stereotype, said Frederic Reamer, a sociology professor at Rhode Island College and a member of that state's parole board.

"This pattern is so far outside the box that we ordinarily live in, we can't help but be alarmed by this," he said. "This scenario has the capacity to shock the conscious and we struggle to understand."

#### Mixed Motives

Female sex offenders are less prevalent than their male counterparts, which is one reason why research into women sexual crimes has been largely overlooked until recently, Seattle University criminology professor Elaine Gunnison said.

"In the past, society tended to accept the fact that males were committing sexual offenses against young girls," she said.

"More recently, the public is becoming aware of the fact that women, despite their feminine demeanors, can be sexual predators."

Understanding the motives of well-educated women who enter into a sexual relationship with young boys isn't easy because no cases are exactly alike, Reamer said.

"You take 100 different offenders, and they'll have 52 different motives," he said.

Overall, experts agreed that women who pursue underage boys for sex are often emotionally immature, lonely and can be trying to relive their youths.

"I don't think teachers set out to find students and lure them," said therapist Debbie Mandel. "It starts subliminally and the attraction becomes overpowering."

"When you're looking at a certain age group of young teachers, you're absolutely finding that the teacher is not mature in that sense. It's like 'let me do this again. I want to go back to the past and make it better. I wasn't popular and I didn't have the confidence then and now I do.'"

Mandel said the relationships can also be a power-grab for the older women.

"The younger man adores her," she said. "She becomes very attractive to him. She molds him. She shapes him into what she needs."

But in cases like the two recent Galveston County arrests, the women are rarely pedophiles, Reamer said.

Instead, the women are mentally close in age to their victim and rationalize their pursuit.

"In her mind, she's relating to a guy her age," he said. "Developmentally, they are much younger. They got stuck in older teenage years."

Reamer said it's important for parents to notice who their children spend time with. When it's unusually long amounts of time with teachers or other adults, parents should intervene on their child's behalf when teenagers aren't able to stop themselves.

"It's almost like a moth to a flame," he said. "He is almost titillated by it. It's like 'Oh my gosh, look who is into me.'"

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