

Ex-deputy testifies in own defense at trial

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OROVILLE — The former Butte County sheriff's deputy on trial for allegedly arranging to meet a minor for a sex act testified in his own defense this morning.

Under questioning by his attorney, Benjamin Adams, defendant Earl William Klapperich, 28, admitted in Butte County Superior Court that it was uncomfortable watching the three-hour police interview following his arrest on May 11, 2012.

He acknowledged the interview didn't go very well and that he had lied during the interview. Klapperich said he had panicked because he didn't want his fellow deputies and others to know that he is gay.

Although he had known he was gay his entire life, Klapperich said he grew in a conservative family in a small town where such a thing wouldn't be accepted. He said only his wife and lawyer knew before today's admission.

Regarding the text messages he exchanged with an investigator posing as a 14-year-old girl, Klapperich said he thought it was fellow deputies pulling a prank on him. Klapperich said the photos sent by district attorney's Lt. Juan Diaz during the conversation didn't look like the girl he contacted during an April 2012 call.

That call led to a complaint that launched the investigation into Klapperich.

Klapperich said he played along with the texts and didn't report them to superiors because he didn't want his colleagues to get fired.

"If I stopped, it would be more suspicions that I was gay," Klapperich said.

He said he had no intention of committing a sexual act with the teen because of his orientation. However, during the interview and texts, he crafted his response as if he were heterosexual and attracted the female — whose pictures were close-up shots from Playboy magazine.

One of his claims during the police interview was that he masturbated before leaving to meet the "girl" in Chico because he didn't want his body to have an involuntary reaction.

During cross-examination by deputy district attorney Stacy Edwards, Klapperich acknowledged he has had sex with women before, including his wife.

He had a relationship with a young woman who testified last week, but said it was after she

turned 18.

The woman testified she and Klapperich had a 2-1/2-year relationship involving sex starting when she was 15 and when the defendant was 21. She said they would also send each other sexually explicit photos.

Klapperich said today he disagreed with the woman's testimony.

Two photos, allegedly of the woman while she was underage, are part of a second count where Klapperich is charged with possessing media depicting sexual conduct of a minor.

The photos were allegedly on Klapperich's iPhone, associated with a third-party application geared to keep photos private.

Klapperich said one of the photos depicted another woman. He also didn't know when he acquired the app or if he put photos in the application.

The jury is expected to begin deliberations in the case this afternoon, following closing arguments.