

COSMO GIRL
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HOT FOR TEACHER?



School is supposed to be the place you go to learn and become a better, smarter person. But what happens when the people you're learning from are abusing their power?

¶ Police in Wilmington, Delaware, won't say exactly what happened between 34-year-old science teacher Rachel Holt and her sixth-grade student, but the case file paints a grim picture. In one document, Holt confesses that during a single week in March 2006, she performed oral sex on the 13-year-old boy and had intercourse with him 27 times. Holt also admitted to police that she called the boy's home, pretending to be the mother of one of his friends, and asked his father's girlfriend if he could spend the night at her condo. When the boy arrived with one of his friends, a 12-year-old, Holt says she gave them beer—and then had sex with the older boy while his friend watched. A few weeks later, when the boy's dad overheard some phone calls between his son and Holt and then caught him in a lie about where he'd spent that night, he called police. Holt was arrested and placed on leave from Claymont Elementary School, where, according to local papers, she was known as a hip, caring teacher who took a personal interest in her students. ¶ When Holt's story hit the local news, parents were horrified. Suddenly the adults they'd looked to as caretakers of their children became potential sexual predators. But the sad truth is that sex between students and teachers is not that uncommon. According to Charol Shakeshaft, Ph.D., a researcher at the U.S. Department of Education, 10 percent of students are the target of some form of educator sexual misconduct by the time they graduate from high school. Experts say that the increasingly casual environment at schools has opened the door to more inappropriate behavior. "The boundaries between teachers and students are blurring," says Bob Shoop, author of *Sexual Exploitation in Schools: How to Spot It and Stop It*. "Some teachers feel the best way to connect with kids is as a friend. But while the progression from mentor to molester is subtle, it happens." And lately, it seems to be happening a lot. →

BY JESSICA DULONG
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN KUCZALA

One middle school teacher from Chicago says she's definitely noticed the climate change in the classroom since she started teaching 10 years ago. "Kids come to you with quasi-confessional stuff all the time," says the 31-year-old teacher, who didn't want to be named. "I've had kids whisper 'I love you' into my ear and sometimes I just don't know what to do with that." Part of the problem might be that kids have more access to their teachers than ever before. With e-mail, cell phones, and text messaging, students can communicate with their teachers 24 hours a day. "I've responded to student e-mails as late as one o'clock in the morning the night before a test," says the teacher. That access can sometimes

apartment. Brenda, who had been there before with friends, was flattered when he called her cell and asked her to come over alone. "All the girls at school thought he was so hot," she says, adding that even another teacher had once confided in her that she thought the aide was "beautiful." When Brenda got to his apartment, he told her how hot she looked—and then he kissed her. As things quickly progressed, Brenda, who was a virgin at the time, decided to just go for it—and she had sex with him. "I didn't want any bad vibes between us," she explains. "That's why I said yes." As Brenda and her teacher had sex, a million thoughts ran through her head: I can't believe this is happening. He's a teacher! When it was over, Brenda says

Brenda had to transfer schools. And today, while the aide awaits trial, Brenda is still dealing with the repercussions of that night. She won't get close to anyone romantically because she thinks all guys want is sex. "I should have had more respect for myself," she says. "This whole thing wasn't worth it."

DOUBLE STANDARD

It's pretty clear that society doesn't tolerate male teachers preying on female students. But according to Shakeshaft, about 30 percent of reported teacher-student sex cases involve female teachers and male students—and for some reason, society seems to take that kind of abuse less seriously. "We have this notion in our country that sex for

SHOCKING BEHAVIOR FROM THESE FIVE TRUSTED ADULTS



DEBRA LAFAVE, 25
Accused of having sex with her 14-year-old student in Florida, LaFave got three years house arrest and seven years probation.



KEVIN PONIS, 36
The Colorado teacher and tennis coach was sentenced to 11 years to life in prison for having sex with a 17-year-old student.



AMBER JENNINGS, 32
After allegedly having sex with a 16-year-old student, the Massachusetts English teacher was given two years probation.



DANIEL ZDRODOWSKI, 28
The Florida band teacher has admitted to having sex with a 17-year-old student. At press time, he was awaiting sentencing.



RACHEL HOLT, 34
At press time, Holt was awaiting trial for allegedly having sex with her 13-year-old student while another boy watched.

breed temptation, especially for new teachers who are just a few years older than their students. "In my early years of teaching, when I was still almost a teenager myself, I found the vulnerability in my students compelling," she says. "When a student is engaged in learning, it's an energy, a passion. It's hard to separate sexuality out."

FALSE PRINCE

When Brenda*, now 18, was a junior at her Indiana high school, she became a victim of the unclear boundaries between teachers and students. It all started in January 2006, when a 24-year-old teacher's aide, who was known for hanging out with students and even smoking pot with them, invited her to his

she felt like a "whore" and rushed home to shower. "I just felt dirty," she says.

Brenda didn't tell any of her friends what happened that night. But a week later, the female teacher who had previously told Brenda how attractive she thought the aide was approached her at school one day and jealously asked Brenda if she had slept with him. When Brenda broke down and admitted that she had, the teacher told school officials, who called the police. The aide lost his job and was arrested. When the story made the TV news, the whole town found out about Brenda's fling. Suddenly everyone who used to gossip about wanting to hook up with the aide turned on Brenda for doing just that, calling her a slut. Things got so bad,

males is always a good thing," says Shakeshaft. "Having sex with your teacher is seen as just another way to score." Although it's unquestionably wrong for a woman to have a sexual relationship with a young boy, somehow it's easier to believe that a woman might actually be in love with her victim—whereas male predators are nearly always viewed as child molesters. Ten years ago, when 34-year-old teacher Mary Kay Letourneau was having an affair with her 13-year-old student VIII Fualaau, everyone was shocked. But today they are married and have children together—and to some that makes the beginnings of the relationship almost okay. People think, I guess they really are in love after all. And when the

*Name has been changed.

teachers are attractive women—like recently accused predators Amber Jennings and Debra LaFave—how can the guys they had sex with be thought of as victims? After all, the guys' friends probably consider them lucky.

But experts say that guys who have sex with their teachers are victims—and they will be psychologically affected by the sexual experience whether they know it or not. "It's hard for boys to think of themselves as victims," explains Richard Gartner, a New York City psychologist and author of *Beyond Betrayal: Taking Charge of Your Life After Boyhood Abuse*. "But when it's a caregiver there's a real betrayal." And according to Gartner, the damage often surfaces later in life.

That's exactly what happened to Brandon*, a 24-year-old from Colorado. After becoming involved with his 40-something teacher when he was just 14, he thought he was on top of the world. "She bought me clothes, cooked for me, and gave me sex whenever I wanted," Brandon has said. "I thought I had it all." Brandon enjoyed the attention—even though it meant he didn't have time for other things that most boys his age did. "I wasn't doing what guys are supposed to do—having fun with my friends, experimenting with girls my age," he has said. It wasn't until years later that Brandon saw how that sexual relationship had affected him. He flunked out of college freshman year and couldn't hold down a job or keep a girlfriend for long. And now, six years later, he believes his teacher is to blame for his troubles. "She said she loved me, but how could she really have cared about me?" he has said. "I believed her and I even wanted to marry her. But now I see I was just a creepy fixation for her."

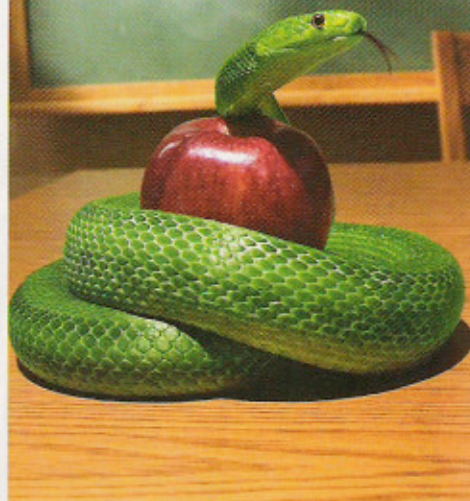
Gartner says the research he's done on young men who have been abused shows they often have romantic troubles later in life. "Kids who have had relationships with adults frequently become sexually compulsive later in life, seeking anonymous partners or spending too much time on the Internet searching for porn," he says. "Because they've learned about relationships through exploitative ones, they often either become exploiters, or they take the victim role again and find women who exploit them in some way."

Yet when it comes to punishing the predators, the legal system seems to be less harsh on female teachers than it is on the men. According to Shoop, male teachers rarely receive just probation, while that is the sentence that is frequently given to women. "It's clear that society does not view the molestation of a male student by a female teacher nearly as seriously as the molestation of a female student by a male teacher," says Shoop, who worries about the message this double standard is sending to boys. "They're being taught that the main thing they have to offer is sex," he says. "And the bottom line is that teachers are raping these children, whether they're boys or girls."

AVOIDING TEMPTATION

There's no doubt that the responsibility of setting boundaries in the classroom falls on the shoulders of the adult. But many teachers wish they had some help figuring out exactly how to do that. Our 31-year-old Chicago middle school teacher says she wishes there were some specific training courses for teachers to provide help for those who are confused by their relationships with their students. Experts agree that some type of training would help. "That's part of the problem," says Shoop. "We need to educate the educational community. For both teachers' and kids' protection, there should be clear rules."

According to Shakeshaft, there are some such programs currently being developed; in the meantime, there are things students can do to protect themselves, like avoiding certain situations that might put you at risk (check out the tips at right). And just remember, even if you are attracted to your teacher, if he or she hits on you, that teacher is not someone you want to be around. Because the fact is, says Shakeshaft, any adult who wants to be sexual with a teenager is clearly disturbed: "What kind of person wants to have a relationship with someone much younger, who is their student, over whom they have power? Any teacher who does that is emotionally delayed or impaired. Even if there is some real connection between a teacher and a student, the teacher should know to wait until the student is an adult before acting on any feelings. Anything short of that is unacceptable." **O**



DON'T LET YOUR TEACHER CROSS THE LINE!

When it comes to your relationships with your teachers, it can be difficult to know the difference between a teacher who's simply being nice—and one who is being nice in a creepy way. So to make sure you're never in a situation where inappropriate behavior could happen, follow these tips from Bob Shoop, author of *Sexual Exploitation in Schools: How to Spot It and Stop It*.

1. Don't make a habit of meeting a teacher outside of school for a meal, a soft drink, or a cup of coffee.
2. Don't take rides from teachers in their own vehicles, even if they offer.
3. Never talk to your teachers about romantic or sexual activities.
4. Don't visit teachers in their homes unless it's for an official activity sponsored by the school.
5. If a teacher makes comments about your body, tells sexual jokes, or shares sexually oriented material, report him or her immediately to the principal and tell your parents.
6. If a teacher touches you inappropriately in any way, report him or her immediately to the principal and tell your parents.

● Remember, you do need to respect teachers and other authority figures. But that doesn't mean you have to do things you know are wrong just because they tell you to.

ADULTS



EL HOLT, 34 time, Holt was trial for alleging sex with her student while boy watched.

hing," says with your mother way to questionably ave a sexual g boy, somehow a woman might her victim—s are nearly molesters. Ten ar-old teacher as having an ld student Vill shocked. But and have chil-some that makes relationship nk. I guess they ill. And when the