

BAD BOYS

**Glen Ridge boys.
Spur Posse.
"Whirlpooling."
Gang rape.
What is it about
guys in groups
that makes
them behave
like animals?
And what makes
them prey on
girls? Michelle
Stacey reports**

Earlier this year, after a highly publicized trial, three of the boys—twins Kevin and Kyle Scherzer and Christopher Archer—were found guilty of sexually assaulting the girl, and a fourth defendant, Bryant Grober, was convicted as a conspirator in the attack.

Last spring in Lakewood, California, a middle-class suburb of Los Angeles, a teenage girl told her father that she had been forced to have sex with a boy from her high school. When the sheriff's office started investigating, it found many girls with similar stories. All were victims of the Spur Posse.

Like the Glen Ridge boys, the members of the Spur Posse were among the most popu-

She knew the boys well. She had grown up with them, and now she took part in after-school sports at the same place as them—Glen Ridge High School, in New Jersey. Still, she couldn't call them friends. Good-looking and athletic, they were the most popular guys in the school. She was mentally retarded, in special education classes, an outcast, someone about whom the boys would crack jokes. She wanted desperately to be accepted by them.

In March 1989, she encountered the boys—thirteen of them—in a park. One lived nearby, and they asked if she'd go with them to his house. Coaxing and cajoling, they said they wanted to go there just to talk, and finally promised her a date with one of the cutest boys if she agreed—which she did.

In the basement of the house, they surrounded her, and several of them proceeded to sexually assault her, shoving a baseball bat handle and a broomstick into her vagina.

lar and athletic boys in the town's high school. Sex for them was literally a game. Every sex act was equal to one point, and all the boys kept a tally. Questioned by investigators and reporters, the boys insisted that all of the girls involved were willing participants and added that they were known throughout the school as "sluts." But that wasn't the story some of the girls told. They described sexual harassment, intimidation, coercion, even gang rape. Most of the girls were fourteen, fifteen, or sixteen years old, but one was ten when she was sexually assaulted. Of the twenty-one guys whom detectives identified as Spurs, nine were arrested on suspicion of rape by intimidation, forcible rape, and forced oral sex. Felony charges eventually were filed against three Spurs; at presstime, two had pleaded guilty and one was scheduled to go to trial.

In New York City last summer, scores of teenage girls were afraid to swim in public pools because of "whirlpooling." Large groups

of teenage guys would lock arms and surround a girl, churning up the water and then molesting her, sometimes stripping off her bathing suit. In one case, as many as fifty boys created a floating posse for nearly two hours, moving through the water and assaulting one girl after another.

Ever since the Glen Ridge case grabbed national attention, there has been a barrage of news stories that share a chilling theme: groups of guys acting together to violate girls. In addition to the cases described above, there was, in North Carolina, a "copycat" crime that echoed the Glen Ridge case, and in two separate incidents in New York City suburbs this year, teenage girls have been sexually attacked by groups of boys.

One of the most disturbing aspects of these assaults is that the predators often know their victims. They have grown up in the same neighborhoods and are schoolmates. It

presents a depressing and scary picture of girls being used by guys for no other purpose than to prove their masculinity, and it implies a sad new standard: Maybe you just can't trust guys, even the ones you thought you knew.

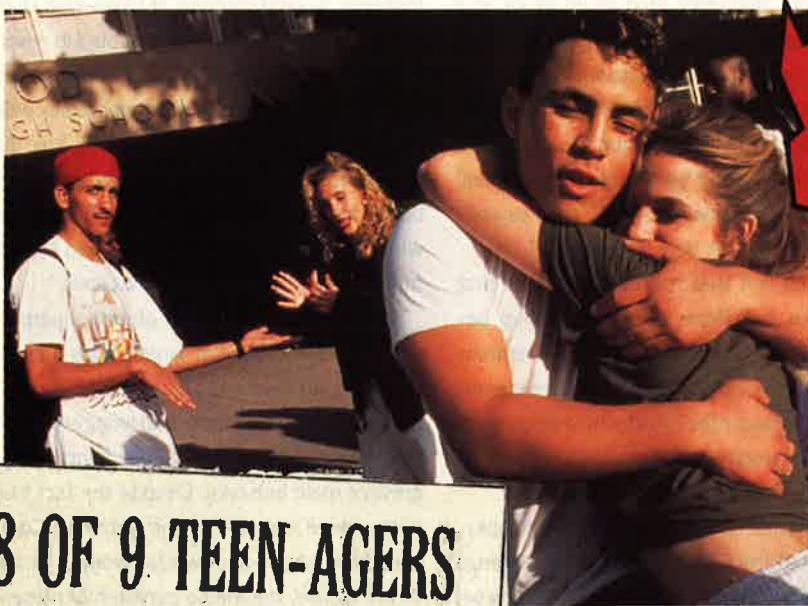
Obviously, the overwhelming majority of boys are not committing sexual crimes. Despite the frequent news stories, these incidents don't occur every day. But they raise important and frightening questions. What is it that happens when guys gather in groups, making them do things they wouldn't do on their own? And why does that behavior often turn to sexual assault and rape, perpetrated not on strangers but on friends?

It's no secret that when a group of guys gets together, they behave, well, differently. "I hate it when guys get together, because they're all trying to show off for each other," says Jessica Cherry, seventeen, of Richmond, Texas. "I had a boyfriend, who, whenever

I was around him and he was with his friends, he'd act like a jerk and call me names and everything. Then when we were alone he'd be real nice and even apologize for the way he'd acted earlier." In a recent article in *The New York Times* about the tensions between high school girls and boys, one guy was quoted as saying, "If you dis a girl you get respect. Like, 'Yeah, you dissed her, you're the man.'"

Recent studies and surveys—including one by *seventeen* (see the May 1993 issue)—show that sexual harassment occurs frequently in high schools, with boys yelling propositions or sexual comments to girls in the hallways or even grabbing their breasts or buttocks as they walk by. These actions are almost always urged on by—and performed for the benefit of—a guy's friends.

What makes an otherwise nice guy capable of acting this way? It has a lot to do with the psychology of group behavior. Michael >



the Spur Posse

Lakewood High School, in California, became infamous last spring as the home of the Spur Posse, a group of guys who kept track of their sexual exploits with a point system. Jim Townsend (left, foreground) and Damon Walty (below, in black shirt) admitted to being Spur Posse members

8 OF 9 TEEN-AGERS FREED IN SEX CASE

2 Others Accused of Trying to Scare Potential Witnesses

By **SETH MYDANS**
Special to The New York Times

LOS ANGELES, March 23 — One boy was arraigned today as residents of the suburb of Lakewood took sides in a scandal over a competition among high school boys to score points for sexual conquests.

But despite the highly publicized arrests on Friday, the eight other boys who were taken into custody



Top rap stars join city campaign

WAR ON POOL PUNKS



More than a dozen teenagers were arrested in a public swimming pool in New York City last week. The police say the group was part of a 'whirlpool' gang that is active in the city. The police say the group is active in the city. The police say the group is active in the city.

Last summer in New York City, packs of teenage guys made headlines after surrounding and attacking girls in public swimming pools. The "whirlpooling" incidents drew public outrage, and Mayor David Dinkins launched a campaign to condemn—and put a stop to—the assaults

RAGING DAVE DECLARES 'WHIRLPOOL' WAR

By DAVID SEIFMAN and LARRY CELONA

Mayor David Dinkins yesterday he has declared war on an urban epidemic: the swirling pool—also known as the "whirlpool"—and he has enlisted a top group to support the effort. It is an unlikely, and it will be considered in the city as a major effort to stop young girls, a outraged Dinkins said in the "whirlpool" incidents here public after gang up to last last girls.



"whirlpooling"

Resnick, PhD, a sociologist and professor of public health and pediatrics at the University of Minnesota, in Minneapolis, has surveyed some sixty thousand junior high and high school students on topics including violence, sex, gangs, and group behavior. "What can happen in a group or mob is the submerging of one's own identity to that of the group," he says. "The 'me' gets replaced by the 'we.' If the 'we' has momentum, it takes on a life of its own. You get some of that dynamic in a group of boys acting out together, where all it might take is a trigger, like one of the boys saying, 'Let's do it!'"

Teenage boys are particularly susceptible to the power of the group. Still finding out who they really are, they look to those around them to provide a sense of identity. "Adolescents have what's called a porous sense of self, which means that at any moment who you think you are is very fluid," explains Dr. Resnick. "One of the ways of capturing and crystallizing that sense of self has to do with who you hang out with, who your friends are. A boy who has that porous sense of self—and is also surrounded by a milieu that glorifies violence and looks at girls as pieces of meat—is more likely to commit these kinds of acts."

Another reason a guy may go along with a group—even when the activity at hand is one he finds disturbing—is that turning away might make the others question his mas-

culinity. Chris O'Sullivan, PhD, a social psychologist who has studied thirty-two campus gang rapes, describes what might go on in a guy's head as he gets caught up in the most extreme case of group behavior—sexual assault. "A lot of boys can't resist the peer pressure once they're in that group situation," she says. "If they won't participate in the sexual assault, they're called 'homos.' Their sexuality is ridiculed; that's very threatening."

But what is it that makes things take that dangerous turn from obnoxious group behavior—guys being loud together, embarrassing a girl with comments—to the scariest situation: group rape? And why does it seem that those worst-case scenarios are happening more often now than in the past?

Peter Scales, PhD, a developmental psychologist at the Center for Early Adolescence at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, points to the persistence of attitudes in our culture about young women as sexual objects. This way of thinking was clearly—and unapologetically—displayed by the members of the Spur Posse. They talked about the girls they'd had sex with as "sluts," and one explained his logic this way: "There's the girls that, you know, that you have respect for and that you'll romance, you'll take them out and it's like the romance scene. And then there's these other girls, you know, you're going to drive over there, you already know what's going to happen, you know, it's no romance, it's just *wham*."

While their victims were criticized, the Spurs became local heroes to some. They thought

of themselves as popular and hip, and not everyone discouraged them from thinking that way. Several students at Lakewood High School—girls included—were quoted in newspapers as saying that the victims had "asked for it" and were "proud" to have had sex with Spur Posse members. "Nothing my boy did was anything that any red-blooded American boy wouldn't do," said the father of one boy who was arrested. "He has to defend himself from these girls. They're promiscuous."

The idea that girls are sex objects is perpetuated by the culture at large. "Kids are exposed to an awful lot of sexual imagery," says Dr. O'Sullivan, and that imagery often portrays women as passive recipients of aggressive male behavior. Despite the fact that two women now sit on the Supreme Court and there is a very powerful woman in the White House, the media persistently present unenlightened messages about the sexes: Men in TV beer commercials dream about bikini-clad women; many movies portray women either as nonentities who are incidental to the action, as sex objects who bare their breasts, or as victims of stalkers, rapists, and serial killers; and images of scantily clad women are everywhere, from magazine covers to car ads.

The emergence of more and more explicit sexual imagery has coincided with an increase in the amount of violence teenagers witness. About 270,000 students carry guns to school every day, according to the American Psychological Association, and movies and TV endlessly portray, and often glorify, violent

behavior. Dr. Resnick says this pervasiveness of violence can have a numbing effect that may make the idea of group assault less shocking.

All of the messages teenagers receive about sex and violence have made for a confusing reality, a nervous balance of power between boys and girls. "I think the only answer to this would be some sort of massive change in men, in the way they're brought up to view women and in the way that men treat women," says Sarah Hammond, sixteen, of Oberlin, Ohio.

Indeed, many psychologists feel that how a guy is raised can help determine whether he'll be prone to participating in a group assault. Attitudes about men and women are transmitted powerfully by parents' words and actions. For instance, a father who suggests to his son that women are adversaries and sexual objects, that his role is to trick or pressure girls into having sex—or even a father who demonstrates by belittling his wife that he has little respect for women—may help set the stage for later sexual assaults. At the very least, he perpetuates ignorant and unfair attitudes about the opposite sex.

Psychologist Peter Scales believes that part of the solution to the problem at hand lies in sex education that teaches not only about sexually transmitted diseases, abstinence, and condoms, but about how boys and girls get along. "Gender roles are still controversial," he says, "but where in society are we helping young people talk about how men and women are supposed to relate to each other?"

At a time when sex is discussed more openly among teenagers than ever before, there is still a wide gulf between

guys' and girls' thinking on the subject. And the old double standard—that it's perfectly natural for a guy to have sex and, if he wants, to have a lot of partners, but not permissible for a girl—is alive and well. "Girls today feel very much that they can make their own sexual choices," Dr. O'Sullivan says. "But [for a lot of] guys, the girl who makes the choice to be sexual is a slut. What they see is that if she's going to be sexual, she has to be sexual with them; she's lost the right to choose. Girls and boys are operating on two different standards."

Most experts agree that the majority of the boys who take part in a group assault are not seriously disturbed kids. "In a one-on-one attack, I think the boy's got a problem," says Dr. O'Sullivan. "But in group attacks, maybe just the leader does." That idea is, in itself, kind of scary. Does this mean every boy is a potential rapist, ready to be carried away by hormones and peer pressure? Not at all. "A well-adjusted guy has a number of things going on in his life that will make him resistant to this behavior," says Dr. Resnick. "Most boys are raised with a sense of accountability and connectedness to others. It just seems that there's a growing number who aren't."

Paula Thomas* was attacked by a group of guys when she was sixteen. She met them at a bar one night and went with some of her girlfriends to the house the guys shared. After drinking

too much, she went upstairs and had sex with the guy she had been flirting with all evening. She passed out and awoke to find herself surrounded by four or five guys. They had sex with her as she passed in and out of consciousness, unable to stop the attack. "Afterward, I didn't tell many people, because they would judge you by that," she says. "Not girlfriends; they understood. But men always said, 'You shouldn't have been in that situation.' In the real world, we all feel we should be able to do what we want, as women. If we want to go out and tie one on, we should be able to. But you're not safe if you do."

"I didn't blame myself, but I felt gross and used," Paula continues. "And I decided to keep myself in better company, to be more careful about who my friends were."

While there's no foolproof way to identify guys who might engage in a group attack, there are some indicators. Dr. O'Sullivan says, "They're usually the most verbal boys, they're popular, they're good-looking, and they tend toward antisocial behavior—drinking, talking back to teachers, vandalism, and worse."

If you should become the victim of a group assault, "be really clear about what is happening," Dr. O'Sullivan says. "If the boys hear the label 'rape,' it scares them. So say, 'Stop, you're raping me!' rather than, 'Stop, I don't want this.' They don't like to think of themselves as rapists, and it's more likely to (continued on page 139)

4 Men Convicted in Sexual Abuse of a Retarded Girl

Continued From Page A1

Residents Quiet After Verdict

The New York Times
RIDGE, N.J., March 14—Residents of Ridge today, resigned to the jury's decision, want to dis-

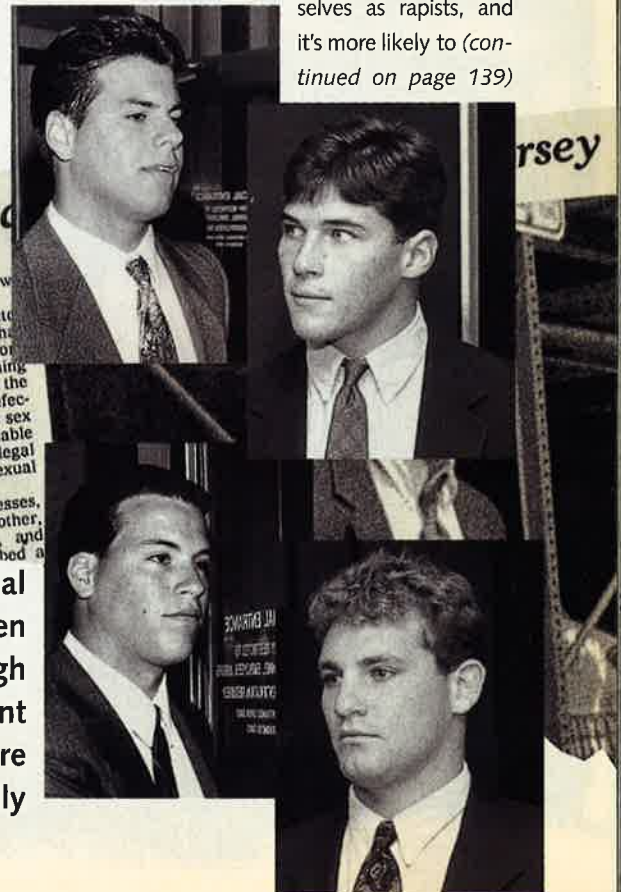
handle and a stick? Prosecutors said no. Defense lawyers said yes.

At the start of the trial last October, Judge Cohen made it clear that prosecutors would have to show more than gullibility, slowness or learning problems to prove the charge that the young woman was mentally defective, as defined by New Jersey's sex crime law, and, as such, was unable to understand or exercise her legal right to refuse to engage in sexual activities.

Most of the state's 24 witnesses, including the young woman's mother, two friends, and a

the Glen Ridge boys

In a case that drew national media attention, former Glen Ridge (New Jersey) High School students Kevin Scherzer, Christopher Archer, Bryant Grober, and Kyle Scherzer (clockwise from top) were convicted last spring in the group sexual assault of a mentally retarded girl they'd known most of their lives



*Not her real name.

sleep. She couldn't figure out why she felt so bad when she was beginning to look so good.

The morning she stepped on the scale and weighed ninety-six pounds, she was filled with a vague disappointment. She couldn't say why.

Labor Day weekend the family went up to Lost Lake for what Emily's mother called the "last hurrah." Emily's father planned the menu for three days, and when he showed it to her, printed in his tiny, pinched handwriting on the long legal paper, Emily felt tired, as if she had to start figuring out how to avoid all this food on the spot.

Her father looked into her face and said, "We'll have corn on the cob, we'll have chicken, and, if you help pick the berries, we'll have your favorite huckleberry pie."

"Looks fattening, Dad," she said. She wanted him to stop pleading with her like a big dog. Her parents had begun to have whispered conversations that stopped as soon as she walked into the room, the tide of murmurs rising again as soon as she left. She knew they were talking about her, about what to do with her.

"You used to love huckleberry pie. You used to eat three pieces at a time, Em," he said softly. "Can't you let up?"

She walked upstairs. When she got to the landing, she turned and looked back at the kitchen, and she started to whisper, "I hate huckleberry pie," but her throat lumped up and the words wouldn't come.

Later, at the cabin, Emily and her mother and father were sitting out on the deck watching the blue jays eat the last of the morning pancakes, when they heard a shout from the lake. Emily's dad started up from his chair. They looked out and saw Billy in the rowboat, holding up a large fish.

Her mother and father clapped and shouted congratulations that echoed across the lake. Billy beached the boat and walked up the path carrying the fish by its gills.

"I think it's the biggest fish I've ever seen out of Lost Lake," Emily's mother said when he reached the deck. She lined him up in front of the camera and snapped a picture.

"Nice catch." Her father looked into Billy's face to be sure he had his attention. "This is a cutthroat trout, *Salmo clarki*."

Billy looked at them all, set down his fish, and clasped his hands over his head like a champion. Then he said, looking levelly at all of them, "I'll go gut my fish now."

Emily's father looked after Billy as the

screen door banged shut behind him.

Emily went into the front room and listened to a distant song crackle over the short-wave radio, then to the kitchen, where Billy was reciting the names of the organs as he gutted the fish.

"Mr. Trout had a fly for lunch. Wanna see?" he said, walking toward her.

"No," she said. "That's disgusting."

"Wanna see?" he said. "Pretty, lovely fish guts." He started to chase her, holding up a long string of pale, slimy guts.

"Billy! Get those gross things away from me," she said.

He held them close to her face. "Wanna?"

"Stop!" she said. She slammed the door and walked down the path, carpeted with tamarack needles, to the lake. She was breathing fast, and she felt like she was going to cry. Because Billy had held fish guts to her face? She dragged the rowboat into the water, the oars banging against the side, and she stepped in and pushed away from the shore.

The lake was quiet. She could hear her mother say, "Where's Emily?" and her father answer, "In the outhouse, I think."

Then her mother called, "Em—ily, where are you?" and her voice bounced from shore to shore, rippling out over the water and into the cattails, "you, you."

Emily watched them get up out of their chairs and walk down the path to the lake, where they stood on the dock and looked out, her father shading his eyes with his hand. They looked toylike and fragile, and they were looking in the wrong direction. A rush of loneliness came over her like that night her mother had sat on her bed and Emily had wanted to tell her about the waves of fear and the rooms of giant furniture, but she hadn't been able to find the words.

She stood up. The boat was unsteady, shifting from side to side as water slapped wood. "Over here!" she called. She waved. She saw her father tap her mother's arm, and point to her. "In the boat—alone," she called, and she listened to her voice skip across the lake to the dock where her parents stood, "own, own."

A breeze ruffled the water. She sat down, picked up the oars, and began to row slowly toward shore.

Caroline Patterson, a recent Wallace Stegner Fellow in Fiction at Stanford University, has published stories in "Epoch" and "Alaska Quarterly Review." She's working on her first novel.

bad boys

continued from page 127

bring them back to their senses."

But even in the midst of giving advice, Dr. O'Sullivan hesitates. To outline a set of rules for girls' behavior—never get into an unsupervised or party situation where you're the only girl among several guys, be extra alert, and avoid getting "out of control"—is to suggest a return to a traditional ethic where the boy's job was to try to get sex, and the girl's job was to keep him from getting it, where the girls were the moral and sexual gatekeepers, and the boys the irresponsible, hormone-driven animals. It is, perhaps, to lose sight of the fact that "it's really the boys' problem," as Dr. O'Sullivan says. "A girl may be able to avoid a particular situation, but the boys are the ones who can stop it."

Unfortunately, the proliferation of these kinds of sexual assaults suggests a basic distrust, a wary opponents' relationship between boys and girls. These are, after all, guys you grew up with, boys who, for the most part, come from similar backgrounds to yours and who might be your brother's friends. But now we know that similarity and familiarity are no guarantee. For a wide constellation of reasons, a few boys out there are all too capable of this behavior—which leaves everyone else with an inescapable and perhaps necessary residue of doubt. "I mean, I trust the guys I know," Sarah Hammond says. "But then, I'm sure these other girls did, too." ■

girls who rule

continued from page 119

Northampton, Massachusetts, Julie became the semiofficial defender of her father's Vietnam policy, while Tricia, who'd already graduated from Finch College, in New York City, lived in the White House and greeted visitors, answered letters, and made official appearances.

When President Nixon faced impeachment at the end of his first term for the Watergate scandal (some dirty dealings involving stolen papers and incriminating tapes), Julie drew national attention for coming to his defense.

A model Ford

After Nixon resigned, Vice President Gerald Ford moved into the White House with his wife, Betty, and seventeen-year-old daughter, Susan, who hung out in the White House in bare feet and blue jeans.

Susan was already used to Secret Service escorts—they'd started (*continued on page 145*)