

CULTURE, *et cetera*

Teacher-teen relationships a national, age-old problem

States begin to crack down

By Beth Frerking
NEWHOUSE NEWS SERVICE

The recent tabloid tale of Glenn Harris, a 33-year-old New York City gym teacher who ran off with a female student less than half his age, may have been extreme, what with their two-month trip through seven states and a string of cheap motels.

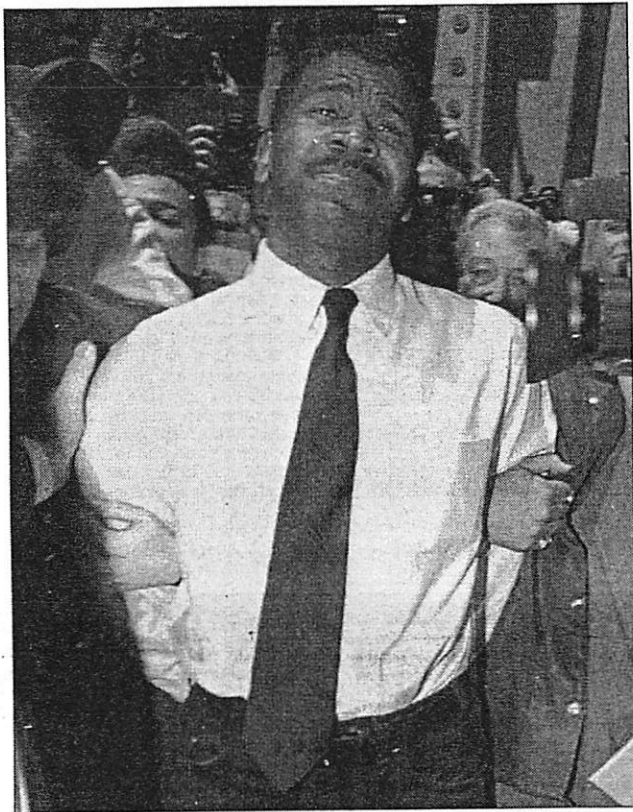
But for schools everywhere, that forbidden relationship is an old and disturbing story. Of 5,233 teachers nationwide who had their teaching licenses revoked from 1987 to 1994, nearly half lost them because of sexual misconduct with students, according to a report by the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification.

No one knows exactly how often teachers become sexually involved with students, although estimates from a few studies suggest that the numbers are small.

Nonetheless, no other factor causes as many teaching licenses to be revoked, says Douglas Bates, a Utah lawyer and legal adviser to the Seattle-based association.

Many teachers who lose their licenses are classic pedophiles who prey on young children. Those like James Gilman Udell, a former Michigan teacher convicted last year of molesting dozens of children during his 33-year career, work in schools precisely because they provide a never-ending supply of young victims.

But many others become involved with teen-agers and view themselves as sympathetic Romeos — more romantic, in their own minds, than abusive. Years after he was fired for having a sexual relationship with a 15-year-old student, former Texas high school football coach Jesse Lynn Stroud told a reporter: "I'm not the kind of person who went out and molested little kids or that kind of thing. I just had an affair with a



Glenn Harris, a teacher who ran off for two months with a girl in junior high school, is led through a media horde after surrendering in May.

high school girl."

The public sometimes seems confused when the victims are older, and especially when they appear more sophisticated and worldly than they are. That double standard was reflected in New York tabloid headlines when news broke of Glenn Harris' sojourn with Christina, a pretty junior high student: "It's Over, Clansanova," and "Romeo and Lolita Coming Home."

That Mr. Harris was a gym teacher, and Mr. Stroud a coach, is not a coincidence. A dispropor-

tionate number of teachers who have complaints filed against them for sexual misconduct are those who spend many off-hours with students — coaches, drama teachers, music and band directors, says Carol Shakeshaft, a Hofstra University professor who co-authored a recent four-year, federally funded study on sexual abuse in schools.

Yet for every teacher who gets caught, there are many more who go unpunished, Mr. Bates says. "By far, the majority of these cases never get reported."

Area reflects national trend in sexual abuse cases

Along with the rest of the nation, the Washington area has seen a growing number of teachers and others in position of authority over children being charged with sexual abuse of students. Here is a rundown of recent cases.

June 16: Police charge Prince George's County teacher Rebecca Simon, 24, of the 4500 block of Willard Avenue in Chevy Chase with one count each of sexual child abuse and fourth-degree sex offense. A 16-year-old told authorities he had engaged in sexual acts with the teacher.

April 18: Reginald Wiggins, 52, a teacher at Malcolm X Elementary School at 13th Street and Alabama Avenue SE, is arrested at his Southwest home and charged with three counts of indecent acts on a minor. Law-enforcement sources say more than six girls accused him of a wide range of offenses, including snapping girls' bra straps and having sexual relations.

Feb. 16: A Montgomery County grand jury indicts a Kennedy High School teacher on charges

of sexual relations with a teenage female student from September 1978 through June 1981. Michael Allen Sims, now 42, of the 200 block of Rollins Avenue in Rockville was a teacher then at Poolesville Junior-Senior High School.

July 20, 1994: The Fairfax County School Board fires Craig Russell Gordon, 47, after 60 hours of public hearings spanning several weeks. Mr. Gordon was never convicted of criminal charges, but the School Board found he had fondled female students in the upper elementary grades and kissed them on the lips. He last taught at Virginia Run Elementary in Centreville.

May 19, 1994: A Montgomery County grand jury indicts a 36-year-old New Carrollton man on charges of fondling and sexually abusing 12 children he coached in soccer, swimming and gymnastics. Brian Edward was arrested April 28, two weeks after a 7-year-old boy said his coach "had squeezed his genitals" frequently during soccer games and practices.

April 26 1994: Fairfax County

teacher Paul E. Luetkemeyer, then 31, pleads guilty to misdemeanor sex-abuse charges involving a 12-year-old student who testified that the man fondled him last year in a classroom. He also pleads guilty to a misdemeanor sex charge involving a 1985 incident with a 14-year-old who was not his student.

Dec. 10, 1993: An Anne Arundel County jury acquits Laurie Cook, then 33 and a North East High School teacher, of charges she sexually abused a former student. However, the Anne Arundel school board has refused to give her job back.

Oct. 14, 1993: A former Anne Arundel County high school teacher who had sexual relations with some of his students in school is sentenced to 26 years in prison.

Female students testified they had sexual relations with Ronald Price, who was 48 when sentenced, in classrooms, offices, dressing rooms, the football stadium press box and on a catwalk above the school auditorium.

— Maria Koklanaris and John Haydon

In some instances, especially when the victims are teen-agers, school officials look the other way, hopeful that a relationship will burn out, Mr. Bates says. In others, administrators quietly ask a teacher to resign but never inform subsequent employers of the sexual misconduct. Michigan prosecutors were furious to find that some of Udell's previous employers had known about his predatory sexual behavior but didn't report him to state education officials.

Sometimes teachers escape criminal conviction because the student is above the age of consent or because families hesitate to go public with charges, particularly when the teen-age victim proclaims love for the teacher. "They are very hostile witnesses," Mr. Bates says.

As a result, many states have

started instituting tougher penalties against sexual offenders who, like teachers, hold "positions of trust" with children. In at least half the states, penalties are tougher for sexual penetration if the offender is a relative or has authority over a child, such as a teacher or baby sitter, according to a 1993 survey of criminal child sexual offense laws by the American Bar Association.

Mr. Bates' home state is a good example.

In Utah, the age of consent for heterosexual relations is 16. But in order to discourage sexual abuse by parents, guardians, teachers and others, legislators amended

the law so that a person under the age of 18 cannot legally consent to have sex with an adult who is in a position of trust with him or her.

"The difference that makes in the case of sodomy is, under the old statute, it's a \$1,000 maximum fine and six months in jail, which is the same as stealing a can of root beer from 7-Eleven," Mr. Bates says. Under the new law, "it's a first-degree felony, and you're looking at five to life with a fine of \$10,000. It is quite a jump."

Mr. Bates is delighted that prosecutors are taking the new law seriously.

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WORLD

Experts: Risky sex among young gays on rise

LOS ANGELES TIMES

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — An alarming increase in high-risk sexual behavior among young gay men, once thought to be restricted largely to San Francisco, is spreading rapidly throughout North America and Europe, researchers said yesterday at the 11th International Conference on AIDS.

Gay men are the group most at risk of HIV infection in industrialized countries and account for just under half of all new HIV infections in the United States, and the increases threaten to reverse hard-won gains made by AIDS prevention efforts, experts said. And the risk is especially high among

young black and Hispanic men, who have recently shown the greatest increase in infection rates.

"Young gay males have not seen their friends and lovers die of AIDS, which is a powerful stimulus to behavioral change, and are not taking precautions," said Dr. Michael Rekart of the University of British Columbia.

Canadian researchers found that gay men who had been abused as children were twice as likely to engage in high-risk activity as those who had not been abused. "These results suggest that sexual-abuse counseling should be integrated into HIV prevention efforts," said Dr. Steffanie Strathdee of the University of British Columbia.

Studies in San Francisco have shown that young gay men are two to three times more likely to be HIV-positive than those older than 30. Typically, about a quarter of them had engaged in unprotected anal sex in the year before the surveys. Now, however, similar results are being found elsewhere.

Epidemiologist Linda Valleroy of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was expected to report today on a new study from six urban areas, including Dade County in Florida, Dallas County in Texas and Los Angeles. She found that 7 percent of gay men between the ages of 15 and 22 were HIV-positive and that 39 percent had unprotected anal sex in

the previous six months.

Similar results were found independently in studies in Pittsburgh, Boston, Vancouver and Amsterdam, Netherlands, said psychologist John de Wit of the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands.

Strathdee's results were based on a study of 287 young men in the Vanguard Project in Vancouver.