



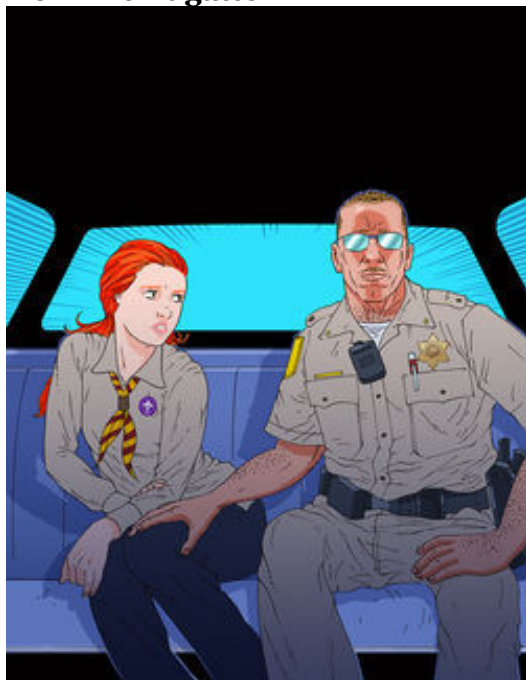
The Boy Scouts' Police Problem

Dozens of teenage Explorers have been sexually abused by cops. Should the Scouts share the blame?

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Brownwood Police Department

Sergeant Vince Ariaz liked what he saw in 15-year-old "Maggie." Eager to please, in awe of police work and seeking a trustworthy authority figure in her life, the shy brunette was an ideal fit for the Brownwood, Texas, Police Department's Explorer program.

With nearly 2,000 law-enforcement Explorer posts and upward of 32,000 14- to 21-year-olds participating in the Boy Scouts-affiliated program each year, Maggie had entered a primary gateway into American law enforcement. The paunchy, gregarious 53-year-old sergeant who'd been running Brownwood's Explorer program since its inception took pains to make her feel special. Rapidly promoting her through the ranks, he promised to get her into the police academy when she was of age. Soon, he was taking her on ride-alongs nearly every night.

One morning in June 2007, six months into Maggie's tenure, another Brownwood cop saw the girl—too young to have a driver's license—at the wheel of Ariaz's squad car. Uneasy, he contacted a Texas Ranger, John Nick Hanna, who was in the midst of a months-long investigation of Ariaz over allegations of sexual abuse.

Ariaz had been suspected of it for years. In 2004, according to court records, a 15-year-old Explorer told Brownwood Police Chief Virgil Cowin that Ariaz had forced himself on her one night when they were alone in the station house, kissing her, fondling her breasts and fingering her vagina. Cowin also knew of text messages Ariaz had sent the girl bragging about the size of his penis and how he intended to use it on her.

"You're just a child," the girl recalls Cowin telling her. "You're just making it up."



Brownsville, Texas, Sergeant Vince Ariaz allegedly forced himself on one underage Explorer and performed oral sex on another

San Bernardino County Sheriff



San Bernardino deputy Nathan Gastineau allegedly had sex with an underage Explorer

Bremerton Police Department

Her complaint went nowhere.

Hanna's investigation, meanwhile, had been similarly stalled. Jolted to action by the new information, however, he soon learned that Ariaz took Maggie out several nights per week, often parking his car for hours at a time at known make-out spots. With a go-ahead from his superiors, Hanna set up a hidden camera. For five nights, he watched as the sergeant kissed and groped Maggie, but he held off until he had his smoking gun. Finally, after watching Ariaz go down on the girl, he swooped in for the arrest.

The eyebrow-raising decision to use an unwitting 15-year-old girl as bait for a serial sexual abuser—over which a multimillion-dollar lawsuit, naming the Texas Rangers, the local prosecutor and the Brown County Sheriff's Office as defendants, was filed earlier this year—is atypical. But police officers having sex with Explorers is not.

In recent decades, more than 100 police officers have had sex with Explorers they were entrusted with mentoring, the vast majority of whom were underage. In just the past year, two sheriff's deputies in San Bernardino were arrested for having sex with underage girls; a New York City cop was charged with child sexual abuse after sending racy text messages to a 15-year-old; an officer in Bremerton, Washington, was reprimanded for sleeping with an 18-year-old; and a former cop in Burlington, North Carolina, pled guilty to taking indecent liberties with a minor after being accused of having sex with a 14-year-old he'd taken on ride-alongs.

The Explorer program is administered by Learning for Life, a Boy Scouts of America subsidiary formed in 1991. Its programs, which extend far beyond law enforcement, provide more than 110,000 young people each year the chance to see firsthand workplaces in fields ranging from aviation to architecture to the law. The organization's mission, says Learning for Life executive director Diane Thornton (who for the purposes of this article responded only to questions submitted in writing), is to "enable young people to become responsible individuals by teaching positive character traits, career development, leadership and life skills so they can make moral choices and achieve their full potential."

The exact number of exploited Explorers is not known. ([For a list of known cases, see the interactive feature accompanying](#)



Brandon Greenhill admitted to having sex with Explorer "Natalie," making him one of up to seven Bremerton, Washington, police officers accused of having an inappropriate relationship with that girl



Former Los Angeles Police Department Chief Daryl Gates investigated the first Explorer case in 1976. Said Gates of the alleged "orgies" between cops and

[this article HERE](#).) And Thornton won't say whether Learning for Life tracks sexual-abuse cases against Explorers, nor would she comment on why the vast majority of those cases involves police officers. "We do not release that type of information," she wrote.

Learning for Life, Thornton says, has sought to reduce instances of Explorer sexual abuse—which she characterizes as "very rare"—limiting one-on-one contact between mentors and Explorers, banning non-work relationships, and requiring those who work with Explorers to watch a 20-minute training video.

"The protection of all youth in Learning for Life programs is of paramount importance, and Learning for Life views any abuse of youth as unacceptable," says Thornton.

But a review of Explorer sexual abuses dating back to the 1970s shows that the Boy Scouts and Learning for Life waited years to enact rules barring inappropriate contact between police and Explorers. And despite these rules being in place, the Boy Scouts and Learning for Life have not enforced them, mostly leaving police departments to police themselves.

"Learning for Life should expect police chiefs to follow commonsense rules protecting Explorers," says police-accountability expert Jeffrey Noble, a believer in the Explorer program's benefits. "If they become aware their rules aren't being followed, should they refuse to allow that department to have an Explorer program? Absolutely. Shame on them if they don't."

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The luster was long gone from Hollywood's star when, in the mid-1970s, the first Law Enforcement Explorer Girls (or LEEGs, as they were more commonly known at the time) appeared in the Los Angeles Police Department's rundown Tinseltown outpost. A couple of dozen strong, they were among the first girls allowed into Explorers, a Boy Scouts career-preparation program dating to the 1940s. The LEEGs trailed cops as they patrolled the neon-lit expanses of porn shops, massage parlors and peep shows on their beats. They occasionally helped control event crowds and assisted with station-house desk work.

As a token of appreciation, the Hollywood cops began taking

underage girls: "There was no rape, no seduction. There was a lot of agreement"

Courtesy of Sam Walker



University of Nebraska professor Samuel Walker was the first to publicize the cops having-sex-with-Explorers phenomenon in a paper he co-authored in 2003

the Explorer girls, most of them 15 and 16 years old, on overnight, weekend camping trips. The tradition endured for more than two years, until the autumn of 1976, when one of the girls, uncomfortable with the campsite activities, complained to department higher-ups. The camping trips, she reported, were little more than orgies.

When the news broke, the task of handling the ensuing media onslaught fell to an up-and-coming deputy chief named Daryl Gates, who later gained notoriety as the unsympathetic public face of the LAPD during the Rodney King affair. He was quick to dismiss the severity of what had occurred among his Hollywood cops and the girls they were tasked with mentoring. First of all, he told a scrum of reporters, this was not a sex scandal. "There was no rape, no seduction," he said. "There was a lot of agreement."

Ultimately, it was found that at least six cops had had sex with at least 16 teenaged Explorers. While some officers involved were fired, others remained in their jobs. The first publicly known case of its kind, it remains among the largest in terms of the number of cops and Explorers involved. But it wouldn't be the last.

Over the next decade, a handful of new cases would come to light, all in California. But though an underage Signal Hill Police Department Explorer told of having sex with four officers who'd mentored her over three years ending in 1982, and six sheriff's deputies were fired for sleeping with the same 17-year-old girl in Victorville two years later, the Boy Scouts remained untouched by the fallout.

That would grow more difficult in 1987. That February, Lieutenant Robert Padilla of the Long Beach Police Department met a 16-year-old Explorer while she was on desk duty. The middle-aged lieutenant and the teenager hit it off, and he invited her to his house. Twice that month, they had sex. In March, after their tryst had been exposed, Padilla was fired from his job, arrested and eventually placed on probation.

Chastened, the department put in place rules governing the Explorer program. They forbade fraternization between police officers and Explorers, barred female Explorers from riding along with male officers, placed limits on the frequency with which Explorers were allowed to ride along, and put a higher-up in charge of overseeing ride-along pairings. As the department got its house in order, the Boy Scouts emphasized the anomalous nature of what had happened.

"This is an isolated incident," Kurt Weaver, scout executive of the Long Beach Area Council of the Boy Scouts, told a reporter at the time—though, in fact, it was one of three such incidents that had come to light in a three-month period, all in Southern California.

In January 1987, Sergeant Robert Kredel, in charge of the Irvine PD's Explorer program, resigned after being accused of molesting a 15-year-old boy during an Explorer camping trip the previous fall, reportedly leaving the boy suicidal. Two months later, Officer Timothy Campbell of the Simi Valley PD was charged with sexually assaulting a 16-year-old female Explorer. Amid assertions that two

other Simi Valley officers had also had sex with the girl—including a detective specializing in sex crimes and child-abuse cases who was soon fired—that city's police department considered enacting rules similar to those in Long Beach.

Meanwhile, Hollis Spindle, a Boy Scouts executive in Ventura County, provided insight into his organization's approach to such incidents. "This rarely happens, so we have no guidelines," he told the *Los Angeles Times*. "We can't have a policy that people will not meet and talk with each other when they are not in an Explorer activity. We can't stop people from being people."

* * *

In 2003, Samuel Walker, a professor at the University of Nebraska and a leading scholar on police misconduct, was researching a follow-up to a report he'd published a year earlier. In "Driving While Female," Walker had shed light on the phenomenon of police officers sexually harassing and assaulting women they'd pulled over for traffic infractions. He reported discovering an average of nearly 20 cases per year of police officers doing everything from forcing women to walk home in their underwear to raping them in their cars after pulling them over. His findings, he said, were "clearly the tip of the iceberg."

As Walker scoured the Internet to prepare an update, he stumbled upon a different trend: police officers sexually assaulting Explorers. "Just by changing around the search terms, we were able to find a large number of these cases," he says.

The report that grew out of his online meanderings, "Police Sexual Abuse of Teenage Girls," co-authored by graduate student Dawn Irlbeck, uncovered a "disturbing pattern" of cops sexually exploiting female (and, to a lesser degree, male) Explorers.

Among the cases Walker highlighted was one from 1998 in Largo, Florida, in which an officer accused of having sex with a 16-year-old girl killed himself. "I'm not the only person who's having sex with a minor at the Police Department," the officer wrote in his suicide note. "They really need to tighten up the rules with those Explorers."

Largo's police chief initially dismissed claims of a wider scandal as groundless. But an outside investigator subsequently found that at least 11 Largo cops had had sex with Explorers, dating back to the late 1980s.

The following year, in Eureka, Missouri, Walker reported, an internal investigation was launched into two officers accused of having sex with a 16-year-old female Explorer whom they'd taken on ride-alongs. The investigating officer, evidently intent on re-enacting the crime, then took the girl on a ride-along of his own, during which he also had sex with her.

And in a case that came to light the year of Walker's report, David Kalish, who had risen to the rank of deputy chief of the LAPD, was accused of molesting at least six boys he'd supervised when they were LAPD Explorers in the 1970s. One accuser said Kalish had forced him to perform oral sex in his squad car while the two were in uniform.

In all, Walker listed 32 cases of police officers sexually exploiting Explorers, many involving multiple

officers, multiple Explorers, or both. Many more cases had surely eluded his radar, he said, either because they were never reported, were hushed up, or simply didn't appear in his online searches.

After the Associated Press reported his findings, Walker used the ensuing attention to take police departments to task. Appearing on CNN in June 2003, he told a righteously outraged Bill Hemmer, "There appears to be a real pattern of abuse across the country. What I think it indicates is a failure of police departments to supervise these programs . . . and really investigate allegations of misconduct."

That evening, Anderson Cooper interviewed a 16-year-old former Explorer from San Diego who had been seduced by an officer she'd gone with on frequent ride-alongs. "I don't want to hear this ever happening again," "Jane" told Cooper, her face blurred to conceal her identity. "This wouldn't have happened if they would have done their jobs."

Spared from the public shaming was the organization charged with overseeing the program. In 1991, under fire for its long-standing policy of not allowing atheists, homosexuals, or girls among its ranks, the Boy Scouts spun off the Explorer program into a more-inclusive subsidiary it named Learning for Life. Scouting officials described the move as the natural evolution of a fast-growing segment of its organization that had aims separate from the core mission of instilling traditional values in American boys. Critics smelled a different plot: at once inoculating a popular program from the legal challenges besetting the Boy Scouts while providing political cover for the organization as a whole.

Whatever the motivations, it would take Learning for Life years to begin imposing Explorer safety standards on police departments. The organization's "Safety First" policy, with a blanket ban on fraternization between cops and Explorers and limits placed on ride-alongs, first appeared on Learning for Life's website in 2002. (Thornton says Learning for Life barred underage Explorers from going on overnight ride-alongs starting in the mid-1990s, declining to specify further. She refused to say whether its no-fraternization rule went into effect before 2002.) Learning for Life had all but ripped the weathered page from the Long Beach PD's manual—the same rules that, years earlier, Boy Scouts official Spindle had dismissed as unrealistic.

Summoning the courage to enforce the new rules would prove to be another matter.

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As Walker broadcast his warning to the public, a 27-year-old cop two months into his career at the Bremerton, Oregon, Police Department was getting to know a shy, immature 19-year-old volunteering there as an Explorer. Over the following months, in the hours spent on ride-alongs in his squad car, Officer Kelly Meade and "Bethany" progressed in stages from flirty conversation to a stolen kiss to heavy petting. Eventually, they started having sex.

In February 2004, their passionate emails intercepted, they came clean to department investigators about their liaison. Bremerton's then-police chief, Robert Forbes, reprimanded Meade in writing that though Bethany was of age, the officer had brought shame upon himself, the department and the Explorer program by sleeping with her. "You were in a position of power and apparent, if not actual, authority," Forbes wrote, sparks all but flying from his keyboard. Bethany, he added, "continued to refer to you by your title as an officer, not by your first name."

Forbes then handed down a 10-day suspension without pay. Meade, claiming ignorance of the no-fraternization policy, filed an appeal. Bremerton's rule prohibiting outside relationships between cops and Explorers had been created just as Meade and Bethany were getting acquainted—*after* the supervisor in charge of the Explorers, having heard about Walker's report, decided to update the Explorer manual. But the same language never made it into the department's official rule book.

Citing that oversight, an arbitrator found that Meade hadn't been properly informed and reduced his punishment to a written reprimand. Bethany wasn't so lucky. Expelled from the Explorers, her career in law enforcement was over before it began.

Six years later, when an outgoing 18-year-old brunette with chipmunk cheeks and a fondness for police officers signed up as an Explorer, the integrity of Bremerton's police department would again be put to the test. "Natalie" quickly made an immediate impression on both the departmental rank-and-file and the top brass, friending officers on Facebook, chatting with them online and going on ride-alongs as often as she could.

Having built up her online network, Natalie sought to hang out with her new police friends away from work. One officer took her to dinner and a movie, invited her over, and allowed her to spend the night in his bed, but denied having sex with her. Another, Captain Tom Wolfe, took Natalie to a pizza joint, where he was seen caressing her inner thigh in public (an assertion he denies), and gave her special assignments that allowed her to bring home confidential paperwork. A third officer, Brandon Greenhill, admitted to inviting Natalie to his house while his wife was out of town and, as a movie played on TV, having sex with her.

The first officer, along with four others suspected of improper relations with Natalie, was cleared of wrongdoing by a subsequent department investigation. Wolfe and Greenhill were found to have broken department rules. But because the no-fraternization policy still hadn't made it into the department's official rule book, both officers, just as Meade before them, received nothing more than written reprimands. As happened to Bethany, Natalie was kicked out of the program.

The investigation did yield one positive result: The department's rule book has since been updated. It is now officially forbidden for Bremerton cops to sleep with Explorers.

"To have an incident like that and not have policies in place is inexcusable," says Jeffrey Noble, the police-accountability expert. "But then it happens again? That is outrageous. Someone is asleep at the wheel."

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In the years since Walker's report brought police-on-Explorer sex into the open, Bremerton has not been the only department faced with an embarrassing lack of leadership.

In Tualatin, Oregon, the extent of an Explorer sex case—the second such case in the small department in recent years—that included a female Explorer, three officers and a state patrolman was not revealed until *The Oregonian* undertook a months-long investigation. It found that at least a third of Tualatin's 36-member police force had known of the abuse for years before any action was taken.

Two years ago in Madison, Connecticut, police chief Paul Jakubson resigned after an outside investigation found he had "deliberately and repeatedly ignored, condoned and thereby facilitated sexual misconduct" for more than a decade. In addition to turning a blind eye to his officers' having sex with prostitutes, Jakubson allegedly reversed a lieutenant's decision barring an officer from repeatedly taking an underage Explorer on ride-alongs, thereby allowing that officer to continue to have sex with the girl unimpeded.

And earlier this year in San Bernardino, it took months for a complaint from an administrator at a 15-year-old Explorer's school that a sheriff's deputy had an unusually close relationship with her to result in an investigation that quickly found they'd been sleeping together all along. The inquiry found that another deputy was also having sex with a different Explorer. Both men were fired and face criminal charges. A third deputy suspected of similar behavior was allowed to remain in his job.

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In a locked, fireproof cabinet at their national headquarters in Irving, Texas, sits a carefully maintained record of the Boy Scouts' most shameful secrets. "The perversion files," as they're known within the organization, hold the names of more than 5,000 suspected child molesters dating back to the 1940s. The documents gained public notice last year, when a former scout from Oregon, suing the Boy Scouts for hushing up his troop leader's serial molestations in the 1980s, successfully fought to get six boxes of the files—containing the names of some 1,200 suspected pedophiles—entered into evidence. A coalition of news organizations has since sued to make those files public. Citing privacy concerns, the Boy Scouts have resisted. The case is now before Oregon's Supreme Court.

Whether the Boy Scouts keep similar records for the Explorer program is not a question the organization is willing to answer. The same culture of secrecy and scandal-aversion that has earned unflattering comparisons to the Catholic Church appears to be at work at Learning for Life. Beyond the organization's opacity is the matter of how it deals with police departments that have proven themselves incapable of keeping their officers' hands off their Explorers. When asked if Learning for Life has expelled, suspended, or reprimanded any police department with an Explorer program for failing to uphold its rules, Thornton declined to answer directly. "[Police] departments investigate and take appropriate action to help insure the quality of the Exploring program and the safety of the youth in those programs," she responded. "If needed, city and county officials would also get involved."

Ceding oversight to the police departments and whatever local authorities they answer to may be a sound legal strategy, says Patrick Boyle, author of *Scout's Honor*, a book detailing cases of sexual abuse within the Boy Scouts. But it is disappointingly hands-off. "In a program that pushes kids to go above and beyond," he says, "the kids would be better served if their leaders went above and beyond, too."

Judith Cohen, a Temple University psychology professor specializing in youth sexual abuse, is more blunt. "Before [Learning for Life] has any more kids enroll [as Explorers], they should take a very systematic look at the problems and why they're arising," she says. "You can't just trust the police departments and hope for the best."

Maggie, the Explorer abused by former Sergeant Vince Ariaz in Texas in 2007, is a prime example of who suffers when Learning for Life cedes oversight of its program to locals, says her lawyer, Jeffrey

Edwards. "Every person that was supposed to look out for her not only failed, but also really turned their back on her," he says. "In this case, the authorities were notified. They just didn't do their job."

This article appeared in print as "Hands-On Experience: Dozens of teenage Explorers have been sexually abused by police officers. Critics say the Boy Scouts, who oversee the program, should share the blame."

