

SUPER BAD

It seemed that nothing was unattainable for Ali—a Manhattan-based high school sophomore with a near-perfect GPA, a stellar SAT score, and a starting spot on the varsity lacrosse team. Then she met Trevor.*

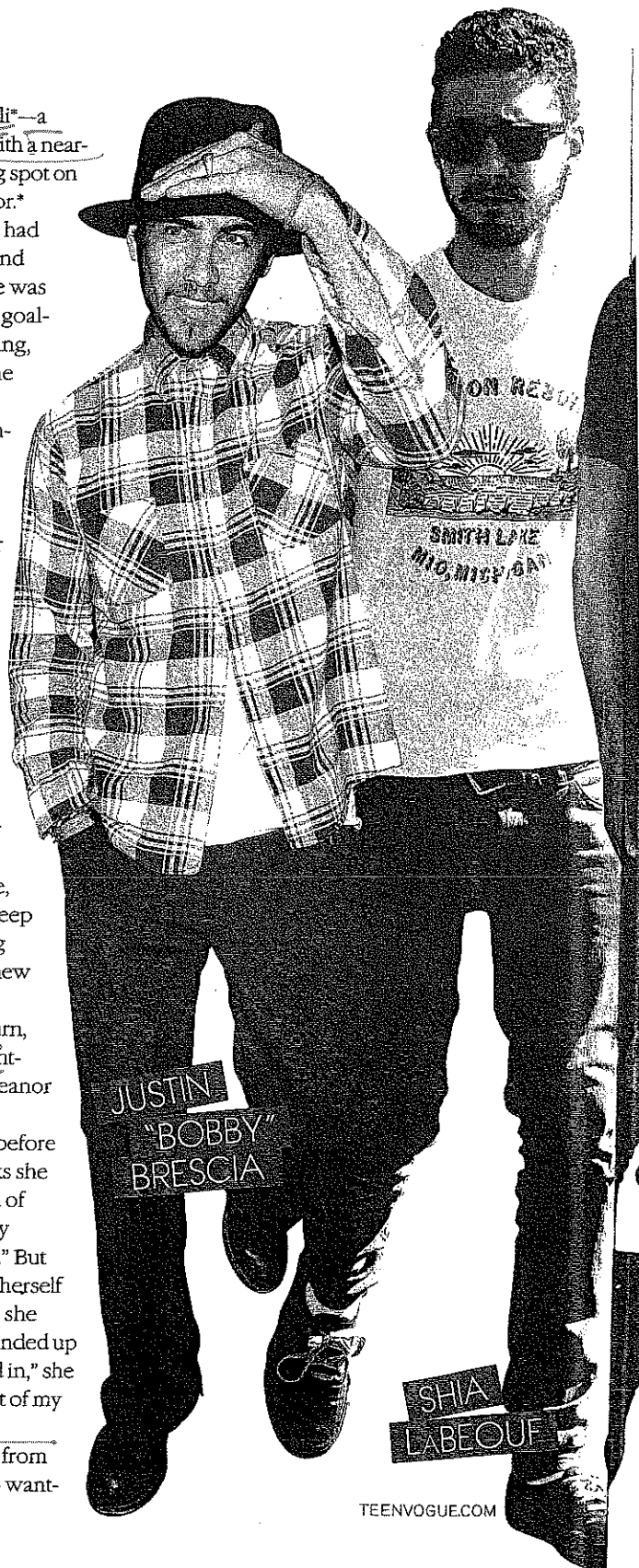
Trevor was prone to cutting class, had quit the soccer team, played bass in a punk band, and hadn't even started thinking about college. Sure, he was attractive, but so were some of the more clean-cut, goal-oriented guys at school. What made Trevor appealing, Ali, sixteen, says, was his emotional elusiveness—he was an ideal distraction from the pressures of her picture-perfect reality. "Dating him felt like an accomplishment," she says. Trevor was the ultimate test: He frequently blew her off, didn't respond right away to her text-messages, and was completely unpredictable. "What can I say? I'm an overachiever and I like a good challenge," Ali admits.

Call it Blair Waldorf Syndrome: The case of the über-perfectionist who's head-over-heels in love with a classic cad like Chuck Bass. Since the beginning of time, poets, philosophers, and psychologists have been puzzled as to why smart, savvy girls often end up swooning over the wrong guy.

Like Ali, fifteen-year-old Eleanor* from Philadelphia—a straight-A student and competitive horseback rider—didn't seem like a girl who'd fall for one of the loner guys at school. That is until James,* a good-looking senior who was somewhat of a rogue, asked her out. "I was so overwhelmed by having to keep everything together all the time," Eleanor says. "Being with James was sort of my own form of rebellion. I knew I'd never let him get me into trouble or anything."

Maddie—an eighteen-year-old from Auburn, California, who describes herself as "the quiet, straight-edge type"—didn't have the same self-control that Eleanor had. As class valedictorian, Maddie worked nonstop throughout high school and then spent the summer before college dating a guy who encouraged her to take risks she never would have taken on her own. "I liked the idea of being with someone who was fearless and didn't play by the rules," Maddie says. "Brett* was really exciting." But fun had a price—and it wasn't long before she found herself in jeopardizing situations. That summer, Maddie says she frequently lied to her family, snuck out at night, and ended up getting a citation for underage drinking. "I got sucked in," she admits. "By the end of the summer, I'd lost the respect of my parents and a few of my closest friends."

Motives behind dating bad boys can range from wanting to be more like them, as in Maddie's case, to want-



JUSTIN
"BOBBY"
BRESCIA

SHIA
LA BEOUF

EXAMPLES OF
GIRLS W/
BAD BOYS

perfect

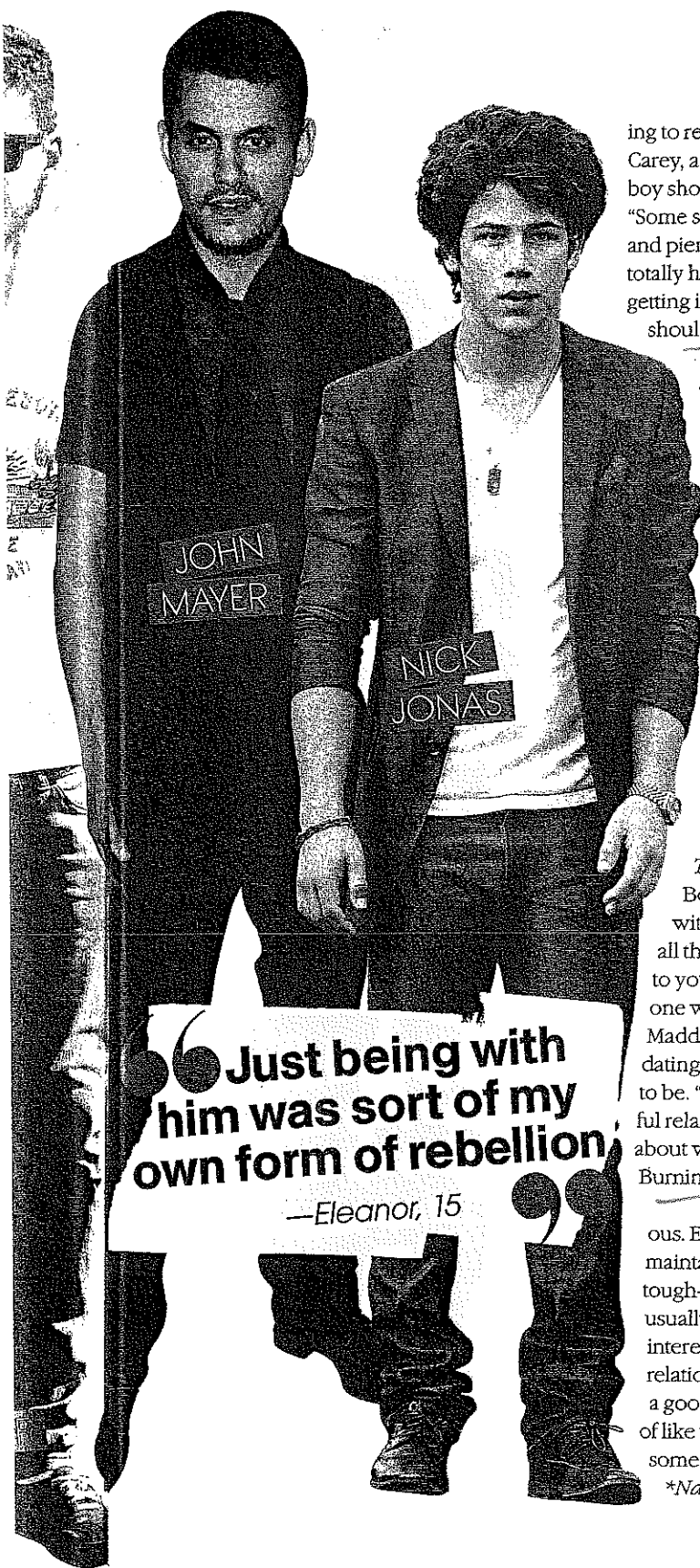
bad
boy

wrong
guy

rebellious

effects

Reasons



“Just being with him was sort of my own form of rebellion.”

—Eleanor, 15

ing to reform or tame them, as in Ali's. But, according to Susan Carey, a Boston-based psychiatrist, what any girl dating a bad boy should consider is just how dangerous they really are. "Some socially deviant traits and characteristics—like tattoos and piercings or a seemingly rebellious attitude—can be totally harmless and all for show," she explains. "But if he's getting into serious trouble, that's when an intelligent girl should know to draw the line."

"It doesn't help," Carey points out, "that pop culture keeps us constantly infatuated with the notorious, not-so-nice guy." It's true: With his trademark leather jacket and rebel-without-a-cause attitude, the bad boy has become a staple in the script of nearly every high school rom-com and TV series. And the list of smart girl/bad boy duos has roots deeper than modern-day reference points like *Gossip Girl* and *Twilight*: Just think of Danny and Sandy in *Grease*, Johnny and Baby in *Dirty Dancing*, or Elizabeth Bennett's initial fascination with Mr. Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*. The allegory has been pervasive in music, too, from rapper P. Diddy's "bad boy for life" mantra to the underlying message behind Rihanna's latest record, *Good Girl Gone Bad*.

But it's not just pop culture that's to blame. "Our society puts so much pressure on teenagers today," says Sarah Burningham, author of *Boyology: A Teen Girl's Crash Course In All Things Boy* (Chronicle Books). "So I can see the need for a girl to want to be with someone who doesn't require her to be perfect all the time." But the most important thing is to stay true to yourself, she explains, because ultimately you're the one who suffers the consequences of breaking the rules. Maddie, for example, was eventually able to see that by dating Brett, she was turning into someone she didn't want to be. "That shows she's capable of having healthy, successful relationships in the future because she now knows more about what she wants and what's going to be good for her," Burningham says.

Often, dating the bad boy can be pretty innocuous. Even while going out with James, Eleanor was able to maintain her smart-girl mentality and avoid trouble. And the tough-guy appeal can also be fleeting: For girls like Ali, it's usually about the thrill of the chase—she wound up losing interest in Trevor once he wanted to get into a serious relationship. "I know I eventually want to settle down with a good guy who's ambitious," Ali says. "But for now, I kind of like the idea of someone who's a little more captivating—someone like Edward Cullen." —LINDSAY TALBOT

**Names have been changed.*

event
reasons

line

pop
REASONS

pop
culture
influence

sub-teen
pressure

+ advice

stay true
healthy power

something
not
harmful

final
note