

Perspectives

Spring 2009

Article 3

5-1-2009

Deep in Guyland: College Age Guys with ADHD Speak on Facebook

James D. Blauvelt

University of New Hampshire, Durham

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.unh.edu/perspectives>

Recommended Citation

Blauvelt, James D. (2009) "Deep in Guyland: College Age Guys with ADHD Speak on Facebook," *Perspectives*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://scholars.unh.edu/perspectives/vol1/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Journals and Publications at University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Perspectives by an authorized editor of University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. For more information, please contact nicole.hentz@unh.edu.

Deep in Guyland

College Age Guys with ADHD Speak on Facebook



James D.
Blauvelt

University of New Hampshire
2009

Guyland 1.0

Michael Kimmel's book *Guyland* has been touted as a must read look into the secret lives of guys, the next step to understanding the troubled generation of college age guys. After reading the book I found I had insight into many things in my life that I had never really stopped to analyze. It also left me with unanswered questions, which were spawned mostly from one sentence in the book. "No wonder Guys... are six times more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD than girls."(Kimmel pg.54). As a college age guy with ADHD, I can say with certainty that it has shaped the last several years of my life, and thinking of the amount of other guys I know with ADHD I wonder how a social phenomenon like this could be passed over with such a simple, dismissive statement. I decided that it was imperative to look further into this and enter into a sort of sociological discussion with Kimmel and see what I would find.

It was important for me to think of ADHD phenomenally. A great debate rages over the biological legitimacy of ADHD and ADD. This is simply not what this paper purposes to seek out. The fact that so many people believe avidly that this is a real condition and that so many people who have no been diagnosed are affected by it, make ADHD a social fact. This is not to dispute either sides claims, it is merely to say this is a social phenomenon that needs to be looked at. The fact that Kimmel did not look at it is why this study has been undertaken.

To gain insight within the time constraints I used the social networking site Facebook to unobtrusively observe the conversations of guys with ADHD on a variety of topics. Facebook, boasting more than 157 million users worldwide, is the leading social networking site based on monthly unique visitors. Users can create an account for free and include personal information, as well as pictures and videos. The site also allows users to join interest groups and voice opinions, concerns, and personal accounts in a public forum setting. It is two of these groups specifically that I delved into. One of the groups, *ADD/ADHD isn't a disease, it's a personality quirky*, has 3,650 members. The other, *ADHD is not a disability, it's a gift*, sports 2,756 members. I observed 248 threads with hundreds of entries posted of roughly 2 years. Each group is comprised mainly of persons age 16-25 and are roughly half women and half men, which is surprising considering the masculine stigma put on ADHD. The groups are set up so that there are multiple subject threads, all user created, and when users post their name and photograph (as portrayed on their personal profile) are shown. The open forum format set the stage for a rich outpouring of personal stories and anecdotes, as well as numerous question and answer sessions between users about pertinent issues facing people with ADD/ADHD.

I found this to be a superior style of information gathering than focus groups. Focus groups are touted as being a safe environment where people, in this case guys, can say whatever is on their mind without fear of repercussions socially. This can be very useful, but when considering gender it seems to be very limited. In the environment of Guyland other guys are the ones that guys are hiding a lot of things from. So when in a group of other guys like themselves, most likely from the same area, why would they be apt to share things that might make them seem feminine or against the “guy code”. Such a methodology simply reinforces the guys code, even perpetrates it.

A lot of the same topics that were discussed in Kimmel's book were discussed among guys on the Facebook forums, namely relationships and alcohol use, and some were very pronounced on Facebook that were less so in Kimmel, such as academia. I broke down my observations into these sections and analyzed what these guys had to say about the way ADHD has influenced their ride through Guyland.

1.1 Drinking In Kimmel's *Guyland*

In *Guyland* alcohol is a central theme. Kimmel cites it as being an “epidemic” and not nearly as harmless as the general public believes. College is supposedly the most enjoyable period of our lives, yet it is awash with hazing, vomiting and hangovers. For boys all of this is validated under the “guy code” by other boys, constantly challenging others’ masculinity to further validate their own. Kimmel specifically points out that it is not men who initiate boys into manhood, but other boys. He contends that guys in college try and initiate each other into manhood, however these rituals turn from a rite of passage into a test designed to humiliate and “up the ante” from last year. Kimmel focuses most of his lengthy section on alcohol abuse and hazing on the fraternities in colleges around the country.

Kimmel cites Henry Wechsler of Harvard University in his definition of “Binge Drinking” - “as consuming five or more drinks in one session for males and four or in a row for females, at least once in the past two weeks.” Wechsler, however, makes a note in his article: “A major criticism of the five/four drink binge measure is that it overstates the problem of heavy drinking among college students by adopting a low threshold that includes too many students who do not experience alcohol-related problems. Furthermore the policy in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* is to reserve the use of the term “binge” for drinking or other substance use that extends for a period of 2 days or longer where the individual gives up their usual activities. It must be noted here for clarification that the term “binge drinking” is used in *Guyland* and this thesis with some looseness. In fact, “binge” drinking among high school seniors has declined from 41.2% to 27.9% between 1980 and 2003 if you use the 4 and 5 drink standard. That's a drop of almost one-third (32.3%). The common over-inflation of the binge drinking problem has the immediately dangerous consequence of painting the picture to arriving students that binge drinking is something that they have to do to fit in. Kimmel says himself, “Research consistently finds that college students dramatically overestimate the amount that other students drink - then they drink that to keep up”.(Kimmel 108) I propose that this “dramatic overestimation” is directly due to the over inflation of the current drinking problem in college students given credence by popular research. Despite

these flaws, for the purposes of this research, to uncover an important layer of *Guyland* left untouched by Kimmel, I will use his definition.

Kimmel allows that although college students are involved in heavy drinking, the reasons why are unclear. He points out several possible factors. He points to Psychologist Mark Fondacaro, who found that “having family members who were heavy drinkers was actually negatively related to student drinking.”(Kimmel 107) Instead, Fondacaro found that drinking was overwhelmingly related to peers and that abuse ran across friendship lines rather than intergenerational. This is a startling and extremely prevalent finding. Kimmel talks about a “risky network”, that is guys connected by the “bonds of friendship” who are far more likely to engage in risky behavior together than when alone. The more drinking friends you have, the more likely you are to drinkⁱ. This peer network of drinking buddies is very real and provides an environment that encourages and nurtures alcohol use and sometimes abuse. A prime example of this can be found among fraternities across the country. These are the epitome of this drinking network. A group of men, in many cases living together, drinking together, in an environment that is stigmatized as being a place of heavy drinking and dangerous behavior. It is in this environment that Kimmel’s study really shines and gives the majority of us who have never been a part of a fraternity activities a glimpse into the dark underbelly. Kimmel also cites the previously mentioned misconception of college students concerning the level of drinking among their peers as a factor behind heavy drinking. The illusion that the party scene on campus is bigger than it actually is inflates the amount of perceived alcohol consumption and encourages guys to drink more to “fit in”.

1.2 ADHD in *Guyland* : Self Medication with Alcohol?

Michael Kimmel's in-depth explanation of "binge" drinking certainly has merit and plumbs the depths of hazing and ritualization of alcohol abuse. However, in my opinion, he underestimates the value of understanding young men with ADHD in college in relation to the "binge" drinking problem. His only comment in the entire book about ADHD leaves us asking for an explanation that never comes. He writes: "No wonder boys... are six times more likely to be diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder than girls." With such a disparity between the sexes in a condition that effects upwards of 10% of college student you would imagine special attention would be given to the subject. One passing comment, especially one that emphasizes how important ADHD is to understanding Guys, seems to be a little lackluster in a book that is supposedly the map to the social world where tomorrow's men are made.

In reviewing many accounts of ADHD college age men using the public forum Facebook, I found evidence of ADHD playing a marked role in many students' drive to drink. Kimmel talks about men living under the watchful eye of their parents, being cultivated by them, and then being launched into the freedom of college with no set lines of right and wrong. This freedom turns into a lack of accountability for these young men and being irresponsible becomes a way of declaring their freedom to all. They are also exposed to more social pressure than they have been in their entire lives. When at home, these boys can go home and be whoever they want under the safety of their own homes, now they live under the watchful eyes of their peers, who judge their masculinity at every turn. Imagine this same pressure along with the added pressure of living with ADHD. These ADHD guys in *Guyland* are not only undergoing this transformation of self, they are also dealing with heightened impulsiveness, anxiety, hyperactivity, and in some cases depression. To help cope with this many turn to some form of medication, doctor prescribed or not. In her article Loe articulates this, "When college students make the transition from parental supervision to the freedom of a college life they undergo a reevaluation of self in which they sometimes find that medication is the answer." Loe found that students turned to medication by necessity but many were not happy with the side effects. Similar feelings were voiced on Facebook by a guy in a small Eastern college,

“I'm a second -semester freshman, and have been on (Brand Name) for a little while, now. It will perhaps be what saves me from dropping out of college. But I still don't know how I feel about meds - regardless of how much different I seem to other people when I'm on it, more important to me is that inwardly, everything's different. It's like I have to re-learn who I am and how to BE in the world, through different eyes.”

This student recognizes the need for the medication, especially in a collegiate academic setting but also finds the side effects concerning. For someone who is learning how to be self sufficient and away from parental support for the first time, the added pressure of relearning how to be in the world can be daunting. The student also seems less worried about the perception of his peers and more worried about his own self. Medication may be the solution for the academic struggles of the ADHD guy in college but a social solution it is not.

Loe saw in most students the desire to choose their own regimen of the drugs, that is to medicate with the pharmaceuticals prescribed to them, but only at the times they thought that they needed it. An example of this would be only taking medication during week days and then ceasing medication over the weekend or cutting pills in half to control dosage. This gave the students a form of control over something they feared would control them. Across the board, student reported not feeling like themselves when they were on medication, something that my research collaborates. Guys need control; control over themselves and control over others.(Connell, *Masculinities* 1995) Guys with ADHD constantly struggle with control because their symptoms often lead to lack of control. Uncontrollable impulsivity, incredibly short attention spans, and organizational woes contribute to a sense of helplessness. Medication can help mitigate these symptoms but brings with it a whole new set of control issues, the control of one's self and personality. As symbolic interactionists maintain, the self is the mainstay of actors in the social world. Students in Loe's study used language of the “self” to explain what it meant to be “real” and then juxtaposed this with the medicated self. This establishes that people are aware of the difference when they are under the effects of medication. The study explores the students continuing struggle to stay true to their “selves” and also utilize the benefits of medication. I found similar sentiments in the discussions of guys

on Facebook.

“Now i take (Brand Name) 18mg, which is a stronger kind of medicin(e), maybe it helps day by day in a year or two, but i feel a kind of "controlled" with all this medicin(e)”

This male user, G.H. stresses the feelings of being “controlled” and not himself while under the effects of his medication.

Another user, F.K. uses more extreme language,

*“i hate my meds...but im pretty sure im goin back on em
Ta make my parents shut up while my grades shoot up.
i dunno though im scared they change my personality.”*

Between 5-7 posters a month posted on this topic and the majority agreed with these two. Although in some cases guys reported having no problem with medication and the side effects, the majority were not happy with the way the medication affected their self image, a finding that is consistent with Loe’s article. This likely results in guys turning to alcohol, Caffeine, Video games, and in some cases drugs, to ease their symptoms when they can. One man out of college, when responding to a thread about self medication replied:

“Yes I definitely self-medicated with Coffee, Smoking, Alcohol, Intense Emotions, Risk, Juggling too much at work, overeating, going without sleep, and a few other things.”

For the ADHD student, behavioral problems have stemmed from early childhood with parental supervision and medication often being the only ways of controlling impulsivity and anxiety. According to the Anxiety Disorders Association of America (ADAA) 50% of people with ADHD suffer from an anxiety disorder as wellⁱⁱ. Once separated from this support structure, they amble through college, struggling to find their true self. For many, alcohol can be an answer to many problems. The ADAA also states that people with anxiety disorders are two to three times more likely to have an alcohol or substance abuse problem as opposed to the general population. Further, “an anxiety disorder leads an individual to use alcohol or other substances to ‘self-medicate,’ or attempt to alleviate their anxiety symptoms on their own”. These attempts to self

medicate are exacerbated by the ritualization of alcohol abuse described in Kimmel. These young men are in an environment where heavy drinking isn't just accepted but it is encouraged, and applauded.

People with ADHD use whatever is at their disposal to control their symptoms. Coffee and caffeine have long been a common self-prescribed medication for people with ADHD. Alcohol is obviously going to be the self-medication of choice in college. It is easy to get, no matter what age you are, and it is also socially accepted and even celebrated. For someone who is struggling with self-identity and peer pressures as a college age guy, the added difficulties of fitting in with ADHD and containing your symptoms makes alcohol a difficult solution to pass up. Even if it is momentary, it makes them feel normal because everyone else is drinking and feeling slightly out of control, a feeling that they deal with on a daily basis. Says one student B.P.,

"I think many of us have self medicated with alcohol. It made us feel great at that moment, popular, interesting, more social, and more outgoing."

A majority of the 8-10 posters per month on similar conversation topic had similar things to say.

Here, alcohol is not being ritualized or pressured on this individual, as Kimmel maintains. Instead, it's serving as a coping device with which the person medicates himself in lieu of or along-side prescribed medication. It is being employed as a tool, albeit a tool that carries risk and side effects of its own.

The student continues saying,

"However, at least in my case, there would be a lot of guilt and remorse the next day. Either because I did something, stupid, or got into a fight or blacked out"

Just like the prescription medication, there are side effects that users are aware of. However, in an environment where drinking, sometimes to excess, is rewarded with praise and acceptance, what better way to medicate one's self. The stigma given to drinking by the media as explained in Kimmel's Guyland paints the picture to the students that everyone in college is drinking excessively and incoming freshman feel like there isn't anything else to do. Once again, as guys come into college they succumb to the misconception that drinking runs rampant, something that is not helped by hype that

school administrations give to such things. In the case of the ADHD student, they perceive this and it opens a door to experiment with alcohol not only for the purpose of social pleasure but also to self medicate at times when they don't want to be controlled by medication or deal with side effects that could effect their personal lives.

2.1 Hooking up and Relationships in Guyland

In Guyland, sexuality has been one of the most prevalent and talked about issues. Kimmel looks at the “hook up” mentality that has become more prevalent among young guys. He looks at the movement from promiscuous sex interwoven into legitimate dating to now, where hooking up has “become the alpha and omega of young adult romance.”(Kimmel pg.191) This hookup culture, he found, also had repercussions later in life. Many older guys reported having difficulty getting and maintaining long term, meaningful relationship. Kimmel concludes that as a result of this most guys are drifting aimlessly towards adulthood ill-prepared for mature relationships and with no better sense of their own sexuality than when they were 18.

For Kimmel, another piece of the puzzle is the motivation for such sexual behavior. He looks at college sexual patterns and conducts interviews and found that in this day, campus sexual culture is no longer about finding an appropriate mate and eventually wed. College is known for being conducive to sexual activity and experimentation, ever since the free love mentality of the 60s and 70s. The average number of sexual partners in young people was the highest in the 60s and 70s until the

80s and the advent of Aids, in which it drastically decreased. Then again, it slowly increased, until the early 90s until it peaked and has been going down ever since. However, it's different than it was before. Kimmel actually likens the sexuality of pre-Aids gay men in the 70s to the sexuality of today's college-age heterosexuals in the sense of the decoupling of sex from romance and relationship. This directly relates to things that Kimmel uncovers earlier in his book, the lack of responsibility and freedom that comes with college life currently. Consequentially, the exercise of that freedom as often and in as many ways as possible.

Another point that Kimmel hits on is the observation and realization by college students that indeed, they will “never again be in a place where there are so many sexually active unmarried people.”(Kimmel pg. 194) Before college fewer students are sexually active and after college the number drops off as well. In college there is no planning or anxiety involved, they just float through on the wings of alcohol and meet other college students who are interested in the same thing: non-committed sexual activity. The students know this, and they compensate for the fact that their time in college is finite by jamming as much sexual activity into those 4 (or more) years as possible. The statistics are almost self-perpetuating, the guys know that after college sex will be harder to come by, and women expect a lot more from them, so why not get your kicks in in college where the expectations are low and the women are beautiful, young, and horny.

The term “hooking up” is also the subject of observation by Kimmel. A deliberately vague term, “hooking up” can refer to kissing, petting, oral sex, touching of the genitals, or intercourse. In fact, some of the appeal of “hooking up” is the spontaneity of the encounter and the unknown level of sexuality it will reach. In its noun form, “hooking up” can refer to a one night stand (a one time only sexual encounter), “sex buddies” (two people engaging in sexual activity but who rarely associate with each other out of it), or “friends with benefits”(referring to friends who don't want a romantic relationship but who enjoy having sexual relations with each other). To further clarify, sex buddies is a person rarely associated with outside of parties, but they regularly attend the same parties and sex routinely occurs at that juncture. Friends with benefits refers to two people who may have even had a plutonic relationship in the past, who are around each

other more often outside of a strictly party atmosphere. They may belong to the same circle of friends, and have a friendly relationship that is not necessarily exclusive. A low level of emotional attachment is expected from both parties and most of the time the reasons for these flings ending is the perception of too much emotional attachment on the part of one of the parties.

This ambiguity again adds to the excitement of the unknown and adds to the appeal. The sense of spontaneity seems to be real, at the beginning of the night all a guy knows is that he does want to hook up but doesn't know who with. However, this is a very planned spontaneity. There are pre nightlife rituals like pre-gaming (drinking before going out to the bar to save money and get a "buzz" going) and having a "wing man". A wing man refers to a guy friend who assists in the conversation and flirtation with a target girl. Guys often travel in packs, as do girls. When approaching a girl a guy may feel more comfortable if his guy friend is there with him, hitting on a girl adjacent to his target. The duties of said wingman can be as follows, talking the guy up, distracting the girls' friends so they don't distract their friend, keeping the conversation going, being generally likeable so that the group of girls feels comfortable, perhaps comfortable enough to meet up again later.

Not surprisingly, this desire for the seemingly spontaneous, is very male gendered. Kimmel reveals this saying, "guys lounge in comfort of the illusion of alcohol-induced spontaneity; the women are several steps ahead of them." They plan and think carefully about how much they want to flirt, if they should bring a change of clothes and how much they can drink. Said one student interviewed by Kimmel, "Girls, like, before they go out at night, they know whether or not they're going to hook up with somebody. It's not spontaneous at all." (Kimmel pg. 199) The illusion of spontaneity remains, however, a singularly important aspect of "hooking up" for guys. It gives them a sense of invulnerability and coolness which comes with the appearance of not being interested and not really caring if something goes your way, that way if it doesn't and failure occurs, other wont know their level of disappointment.

The role of alcohol in "hooking up" cannot be overstated. It is the lubrication of the hook up world. Alcohol clouds your judgment and people who drink it do so with this knowledge. To a guy, it removes any responsibility from what may occur that night.

He can chalk it up to drunkenness. This way, failure to “hook up” with a girl can be met with, “Oh I was just really drunk, I wasn’t “on my game“. Poor sexual performance can also be lumped in here, being blamed on “too much to drink”. On the female end of things alcohol can be the difference between being a drunk and a slut. If a girl “hooks up” while really drunk they can just say, “Oh man I can’t believe I did that, I was so drunk”, and the behavior immediately is seen as something they don’t usually do, its just the alcohol. For both sexes the lack of responsibility in “hooking up” brought on by alcohol is necessary for it to occur. (Kimmel pgs 190-199)

Kimmel makes an observation about the presence of low expectations common to both genders. Both guys and girls reported being generally wary of long term and committed relationships. Kimmel observes this might be attributable to over 50% of them coming from divorced households. The students said that dating was to emotionally draining and time consuming. The general consensus was, if you can just hook up, why bother with a relationship? Said one woman, “Serial monogamy is exhausting. You put all your emotions into a relationship and then you have to do it all over again.”(Kimmel 201)

2.2 Impulsivity and Lack of Focus: Hooking up for ADHDers in Guyland

Kimmel hits many problems leading to the hook up phenomenon occurring in today’s collegiate social atmosphere right on the head. His book covers the topic well

and spares no one in its critique of the state of relationships in college(or lack there of). However, although he makes many fascinating points, another social phenomenon frames his work so perfectly it should not be left out. Indeed many of the issues that men especially are having with long term relationships, the pressures to hookup, the desire to remain emotionally invulnerable, and the fear of failure could be directly related to ADHD. My observations of discussions between ADHD guys, shed more light on the hookup phenomenon.

One of the themes found consistently throughout Kimmel's piece on "hooking up" is the perception of college as a place between high school and real "adult" life where freedom reigns. The way to really enjoy it and take advantage of your time in this "last hurrah" is to exercise your freedom in every sense of the word. This is the scene that is set as the ADHD guy arrives at college, a place where impulsivity and reckless behavior, things he has been trained relentlessly by medication, therapy, and parents, to control, is the normative behavior. Not only is it normative, it's a celebrated part of the social culture, especially among guys. The characterization of sex in college as "no string attached" and "anxiety free"(helped along of course by alcohol) is extremely appealing to ADHD guys, who are prone to concurrent diagnoses of various anxiety disorders. For ADHD guys Guyland is somewhere that they fit right in, impulsivity and being obnoxious are normative behaviors, recklessness and physical expressiveness are celebrated as being manly. Any anxiety concerning failure, in terms of academia, social situations and especially sexuality, is quelled by alcohol and any short coming can be chalked up to, "I was really drunk" or "I was really hung over".

ADHD has been dubbed an "invisible condition", meaning that unless the symptoms are extreme, it is often undetected by peers and the general public. This has a considerable normalizing effect on the behavior of ADHD guys. In my observation ADHD guys consistently talked about their lack of long term relationships. They did not, however, blame it on alcohol or the "hook up" society. They actually compared themselves to "normal" people and lamented the fact that for them, relationships and dating were increasingly difficult because of how invisible their ADHD was until a

specific extreme symptom came out and then was mistaken for something else. A female user, B.K. laments this:

“The most “normal” of the guys I’ve dated are fairly certain that I’m devious, not clever; thoughtless, not distracted; immature, not hyper-active...”

In my observations girls talked about similar issues to men, but in general, did not suffer as many relationship problems. In fact most were positive about their dating experiences, J.R writes,

“I think we really are more fun to date actually! I have never had any complaint from my dates. I have the feeling that after an evening of bar hopping, or something like that, together with some delightful conversational stuff, the right body language and ambiguousness, they are completely fascinated and want to know more and more. I really LOVE the flirting game and intrigues, it gives me kicks. But as soon as I have got the guy my interest is mostly away to never come back”

Although ADHD and its diagnosis has been shown to be male gendered, some of its symptoms could be said to be feminizing. Bubbly, easily excitable behavior, as well as emotional instability and anxiety are all feminine aspects of ADHD. Guys are supposed to be steadfast, a rock in emotional situations. Kimmel looks at this in his section on the “guy code”; number one on the guy code list is “Boys don’t Cry”. For women, many of the symptoms are masked and just attributed to a fun loving, energetic girl, while the same behavior may be perceived differently in men.

In general, guys saw the disadvantages that came from having ADHD when dating or interacting with women. Says one guy, P.P.,

“It definitely is harder sometimes for people to really understand the huge difference in personality that someone with adhd has... i myself love the fact that i have it but dating has definitely been hard to do.. but then again like it was said before... either people get you or they don’t”

For ADHDers with anxiety this search for someone who “gets you” can be harrowing. College is a place where there are no expectations and where being adverse to dating is normal.

On this specific topic, relationships and sex, people on the forums posted upwards of 15 times in a month, The majority of which complained about the difficulty of maintaining relationships. About half were women, and although there were those who complained as well, the majority of the female users who posted reported dating with ADHD as a positive experience.

An example of this was Z.G.

I think we really are more fun to date actually! I have never had any complaint from my dates. I have the feeling that after an evening of bar hopping, or something like that, together with some delightful conversational stuff, the right body language and ambiguousness, they are completely fascinated and want to know more and moore. I really LOVE the flirting game and intrigues, it gives me kicks. I also left the concept of monogamy. It's just a stupid power instrument of society to control us. My next boyfriend will have to life with it.”

She seems enthusiastic about the behaviors that she believes are linked to her ADHD. She embraces the hook up culture entirely, and verbally asserts a level of control over her male counterparts.

There was also a small segment who had ADHD but were also dating someone else with ADHD. Among these was a poster we will identify as Julie.

Julie was shared her story of dating a guy with ADHD and the turmoil in her life. She does not appear to be in college but in her late 20s. She writes,

“I find it difficult to manage his negative behaviours...He is unpredictable, messy and disorganised with his possessions, doesn't treat his friends with respect, chats up women a lot, spends money erratically, has different hobbies which change, changes mobile phones(Has had over 10 this year alone) eats badly(Just Junk food) No breakfast or proper dinner. Has debts to pay off and bills to pay. I am at my wits end after more arguments and stress. He was diagnosed as ADHD in his teens and medicated with Ritalin 20mg. Unfortunately took off it abruptly and subsequently went off the rails. Took cannabis, got into fights and got arrested for rape, jailed on remand for over a year and a half, but cleared by a jury last December. He gets still into trouble. Cut his wrists twice in a fortnight, was hospitalised with stomach pains last month; told first that it was

Appendicitis, but discharged two days later as having nothing wrong. Probably, his bad diet, condition and stress. He is so impulsive, impatient and irritating. Do you treat women with respect even if you aren't really into them. My ADD fella treats me badly, he gets other women phoning me up, he don't take me out anywhere; only his mum's house. He won't give me much affection, only when he wants. He phones me reverse charge(Has no cell-phone credit) and he begs me to help him. To phone people for him.”

Julie posted a few times over the course of a couple months about her volatile relationship. Her posts described behavior that could be attributed to ADHD but also described an abusive relationship in which she often blamed abusive behavior on the ADHD itself.

A guy with ADHD, T.J. immediately responds,

“Those are common traits in men who treat women generally and have nothing to do with his ADD which sounds like an excuse. i can be impulsive, impatient, and if im stressed or overwhelmed i can be harder to deal with i need to settle out and manage step by step when that happens.. but never do i do things like that. Stop blaming the add, and just leave your man... or, start putting crushed ritalin in his morning coffee.”

The guy in Julie’s story has ADHD but also exhibits behaviors that are not necessarily caused by his ADHD. He just simply treats women badly. She sees his symptoms and assumes that his behavior is derived from these. But as this guy with ADHD and 4 more attest, this is not necessarily the case. The question then arises, are guys acting out because of their ADHD or are they just jerks?

An area where ADHD guys provide a further look into the possible reasons for the new shift in masculinity to the Guyland mentality is seen in emotional maturity. A possible symptom of ADHD is a the stagnation of emotional growth into maturity. A user comments on this,

“It is hard to relate to them how different you perceive the world and how to communicate your feelings. I also have a childlike perception of emotions - you either love someone or you dont - sex does not mean love - sex is playful, childish and silly.”

The trivialization and decoupling of sex from love in this new generation could be partly attributed to the Generation Rx influence. With the normalization of their behavior, things they can help but do can be adopted as choices by people without ADHD with no social recourse. “Sex does not mean love, sex is playful, childish, and silly.” While before sex was the gateway to love, now it is something done in your free time, for no purpose other than.

The shift in male sexuality and “hooking up” in college is in part due to the elements explained by Kimmel. But, when looked at through the eyes of a guy with ADHD it is obvious that this is more than an alcohol induced exercise in shedding responsibility and impressing your peers. For these guys, a place where relationships are not the norm is a haven from their anxiety and from failure. In Guyland, the things that come easily to many of them, being outgoing and impulsive and having short attention spans is normative behavior.

Chapter 3 - Academia- a Priority for Guys?

3.1 Economic Pressures

One thing that Kimmel hints at but does not go into detail about is the pressures on the male college student from academia. These pressure become very important when considering the economic changes in the last 20 years and how this frames Kimmel’s work. The current economic situation aside, men have always been thought of and are still considered on some level the breadwinners in the family. This is a historical constant that, is still present at the subconscious level in a man’s mind. Twenty or thirty years ago it was possible, and expected, to find a job right out of college, to make enough money at this job to support a family, and to have security in the fact that if you did your

job well you could have this job for life. Even jobs not requiring a college degree, factory jobs especially, have lost the sense of stability that came with them. The GM layoffs in the 1980s in Flint and Lansing marked the decline in the supposed stable jobs in one of the countries largest auto companies. This problem is largely gendered; the majority of factory workers are male and these jobs have long been a source of pride for men as good manly jobs where hard physical work is rewarded with loyalty from the company. The loss of this and the slow disappearance of middle class jobs has put previously unknown pressures on the males of this generation. No longer can they necessarily get a job out of college or rely on a blue collar job to support a family.

Job security is vanishing as well, leaving these men, the supposed breadwinners, in a state of job anxiety. This is the underpinning of Laree's' study as well, concerted cultivation as a means to an end; preparing children for the extraordinarily competitive academic and occupational environment they are about to enter. Parents cultivate their children, filling their time with activities meant to enhance their resume or give them cultural capital to make sure they have every edge possible. If they don't, then there is no guarantee that a job awaits them after college. This pressure is felt by the students as well.

3.2 Cultivation: A Means to an End

People often ask, why is ADHD a relatively new condition, and why is there sudden an influx in people diagnosed? It has been proposed that this economic restructuring and the disappearance of the secure middle class job is in part responsible for this. Previously, guys with attention problems or impulsivity that lead to bad grades in school simply went off to make a good living out of high school, at a plant or a factory. These jobs were a source of pride for the guys and their parents. So guys with ADHD had outlets in which they could thrive, there was no reason to look deeper in to the reasons for this behavior because it was simply a different path, one that enable people with ADHD to make a good living with good job security. The path has now narrowed to the point where people who exhibit these symptoms are at a decided disadvantage. Now, with parents sculpting their sons to be the best they can be, there isn't any room for short attention spans, impulsivity, and other symptoms of ADHD. The parents cannot be blamed either, for thus is reality in this era. With workplace competition extremely high,

to succeed at a job and make enough money to support a family you have to be on top of your game. At some level, these guys are aware of this because, even when sent off on their own to college, they struggle to maintain grades despite their symptoms. For this reason they take medication that makes them question their own self-identity, makes them feel like a different person. Even guys without ADHD are seeking out ADHD medication with the hopes that it will improve their performance and give them that edge. The most talked about subject on the Facebook forums was coping skills and medication as related to daily life, school in particular.

3.3 High school

The pressures from all angles to perform start well before the designated “Guyland” begins. Kimmel refers to high school as the “boot camp” of Guyland. This is applicable when looking at guys with ADHD as well. One student sums up the sentiments of many others,

“I would stop taking the damned meds if only I could, but my grades go down the drain if I don't, and I need to get into college, so I'm stuck with 'em. Such a shame.”

Such a shame, the student says, referring to the side effects that limit social interactions as well as muffle creativity. By the time they get to college, and into Guyland, many guys know what's at stake and are willing to sacrifice other things as long as they can maintain that all important G.P.A. Although its not necessarily “cool” to worry about grades, especially in a high school and especially not vocally, many guys with ADHD worry constantly about getting into college. Again, it has been made apparent to them, through their parents and teachers, that a college degree and a diverse

skill set will be what nets them a job. This sets an extremely high standard of expectation for those with ADHD. Another high school guy alludes at this sacrifice,

“i have a case of both add and adhd. im in the 10th grade and i took myself off of the pills way back at the begginin of the 7th grade. and right now im havin trouble with grades and school and all that stuff like really bad cuz my add and adhd totally get in the way and im scared ta go back on it cuz it completely changes my personality. i become alienated. i dont participate. i dont talk. and i dont eat but my grades are high.”

This young man uses the word “alienated” to describe himself when he’s on medication, something that seems to be at the crux of the personal crisis ADHD guys go through when weighing the importance of all the factors in their lives. If they take medication, they risk being alienated from their friends and, risk self alienation as well. If, on the other hand, they stay off medication, they become alienated from their parents, and from the academic institution they attend. So in a sense the ADHD male is constantly alienated, no matter what course of action he takes.

Although those around them are often aware of their diagnosis, the level of understanding and patience needed is staggering. Sociologist Linda Blum talks about mother-blame in cases of invisible disabilities such as ADHD. The stigmatization of the child with ADHD affects parents, especially mothers, as well. They are expected to spare no expense and no effort to cultivate their children, and if their son does poorly in school or is socially disruptive in the classroom because of his ADHD symptoms, there is a level of blame aimed directly at the mother. This in turn encourages mothers to go to previously unknown levels of concerted cultivation. This is all framed, again, by the economic pressures that are increasing in this time and the disappearance of good middle class jobs with a livable salary.

A topic of discussion that showed up numerous times was the role of the mother in determining the direction that was taken when dealing with ADHD in their sons.

Many guys voiced the role of the parent, stressing the mother. K.G wrote -

“For a longtime i took them just so my mom could have a hope that i would change even though i thought i didn’t need them but now i kind of like them”

Three other people responded to this specific thread within a month of the original post, all of them sharing similar sentiments, two of them guys. T.D writes

“i totally know what your saying! it's like you don't mind if you take them or not, but your mom is so adamant about taking them that you take them for that sake but if it's working, it's all good”

From an early age guys take medication for their ADHD because their mothers tell them to. Some don't even know what the pills are until later. Like Blum alludes to, mothers are pressured to act to reign in their sons, by their peers and by school administrations. There were many threads by mothers, over 40 posts in the course of a year, and a common topic of discussion was the struggle to decide whether to medicate their sons and if they were doing the right thing. Many felt a guilt of failure and being a bad mother. This is exemplified by this post in which S.D shares.

“MY son hasnt been disgnosed cos I cant get anyone to take this seriuosly - I thought it was just me being such a bad mum !!! There is no way he is a naughty kid , everyone will tell you how polite and well mannered he is, but when he kicks off , or gets distracted , or talks continuously and wont shut up and you ahve to struggle to hold him and calm him down so he doesn't hurt him self and others it a different story !! Just thanks for sharing , i need to hear from someone else that's its not just me and my son”

The fact that this woman's son hasn't been diagnosed is unusual, especially considering the amount of over diagnosis documented in the United States. However, her sentiments about how his behavior plays out and the way it makes her perceive her self was a typical feeling among posters who were mothers. This feeling of blame by mothers plays right into Blum's article and thoroughly supports her work.

The stigmatization of ADHD also has a negative effect on the children themselves, particularly guys. For guys in high school it is much more difficult to hide their symptoms than girls¹, making them the target of labels such as “disruptive”, “lazy”,

¹ Girls are more likely to be diagnosed with ADD, as opposed to ADHD, which is more common in boys. The symptoms of ADD are more consistent with withdrawal, inability

or a “punk”. The pressure to conform to what Kimmel calls the “boy code”, a precursor to the “Guy code”, is ever looming, ever present. Kimmel makes some keen insight into the academic troubles of boys in high school, while side stepping ADHD. He writes about the feminization of academic success, especially in areas like English which have been further feminized. He also talks further about the pressure of masculinity and “boy code” standing in the way of academic success in guys. He writes, in a passage that dives deep down into the heart of the problem academically within Guyland,

“Might that constant pressure actually be what lies behind the problems boys are having in school? And the fear of failure - of being seen as a geek or a sissy, of becoming a target, or of the shame that attends being a passive bystander - is not only what lies behind guys’ poor performance academically, but also what lies behind so much of the behavior that baffles the adults in their lives, and leaves so many young guys with knots in their stomachs every time they eat in the cafeteria, go to the bathroom, stand by their locker, or even walk from one class to the next. For so many boys, only by shutting down completely, becoming stoic, expressionless robots, can they navigate those public spaces. Is it any wonder boys are having trouble in school? Could it be that the very aggression and rambunctiousness- that is, the norms of Guy Code - are what get in boys’ way in school?” (Kimmel pg 75)

I cant help but partially agree with Kimmel’s argument. The feminization of academic success is part of reality for boys, especially in high school, and on a more subconscious level in college. Conversation between guys is rarely about how good their grades are, in fact anything but. Guys are left to worry alone about school and college, not having the support system that girls tend to develop. That ADHD is a huge contributor to the aggressive and often impulsive behavior in the classroom and out of it that Kimmel refers to, I find undeniable. Suppose one boy acts out in class because he can’t help it, because it’s a symptom of his ADHD and he simply cant sit still. This sets up a normative behavior for boys around him. It becomes ok for them to act the same

to concentrate and execute goals, whereas boys with ADHD exhibit disruptive behaviors such as impulsiveness and loud, obnoxious behavior, and this is less tolerated, especially in a classroom setting.

way, because if they don't, if they aren't aggressive and don't get in trouble with the teacher, they may be labeled sissy, or wimp, or as Kimmel puts it, a "passive bystander".

3.4 College and Beyond

The entrance into college and "Guyland" only serves to intensify the pressures faced by guys in high school. The "boy code" is replaced with the "Guy code" and expectations in following this code are increased. With the closeness and integration of school work into their daily lives guys talk about school more but the same stigmas remain, even if they seem to disappear. Academic success is still feminized to a degree, if somebody stays in studying on a Friday night or other drinking night, he's labeled a fag², or a loser.

Guys are still worried about school though, although they try their hardest to hide it. They are still locked into that expected stoicism that Kimmel describes so vividly. For the ADHD guy this becomes increasingly difficult as the pressure builds. And again the dilemma remains, to medicate or not? Eight guys posted in a topic thread concerning this dilemma over the course of a month.

One student puts it bluntly,

"If you have ADHD and you aren't taking medication at all, you are putting

² This reinforces what Connell talks about in *Masculinities*, the unavoidable politics of masculinity surrounding men's homosexuality. In this case hegemonic masculinity defines homosexual guys as a subordinate form of masculinity. The term "fag" being used to describe someone not necessarily gay but inferior plays into this. This is interesting because of the diversity of positions within the regular hegemonic masculine community that gays occupy. Openly gay people are in positions of power in many areas. The gay community does not necessarily automatically generate oppositional masculinity politics. But the presence of an alternative to hegemonic masculinity reconfigures the politics of masculinity as a whole, making gender dissidence a permanent possibility. (Connell , pg. 219)

yourself at a huge disadvantage.”

Another guy adds,

“In junior high and high school i tried my best to avoid my RITALIN because of the side effects (user) mentioned, but when i came to University...it became impossible for me NOT to take it..and it sucks that it makes me feel like an empty shell on speed, but it has helped my grades...But if i seriously had the choice, i would not take it...but unfortunately i must weigh my options: Grades? or feeling social?”

This guy designates college as the turning point where medication ceases to be a hassle and a path to college, and a decision is made, grades or social success. For those who choose social success, alcohol or drugs may become their self medication. For those who choose to use prescription medication success is all but guaranteed. The fact that medication gives people with ADHD a leg up is undisputed, at least among the ADHD community.

3.5 Kimmel on Academia in Guyland

Kimmel’s research leads him around the country talking to many guys about their lives in “Guyland”, specifically focusing on Fraternity life as the basis of his understanding of guys. The problem in this, when understanding academia in Guyland, is the very fact that Kimmel points out earlier. Success in school is feminized. If you walk into a room of fraternity brother and ask them about their upcoming tests of course they are going to be dismissive and aloof. But this reality or is it a constructed reality that they are projecting for the benefit of their peers? I suspect, from the sharing of many guys on public forums, away from their own peer group, that academic success is on guys’ minds more than they will readily admit when among their own “risky network” of drinking buddies. Not taking into consideration the fact that a lot of ADHD guys risk their social lives to medicate with prescription drugs and aspire to academic success, the very fact that this decision is something that is important to them and is a subject of much discussion lead to the conclusion that academics is an important part of their Guyland.

3.6 Drug Testing - A New Form of Discrimination?

One phenomenon that was discussed within the forums was a new form of discrimination in the work place targeting candidates with ADD, ADHD, or other “invisible disabilities”. In many states many prospective job candidates in a broad spectrum of occupations, both white collar and blue collar, are being subjected to pre-employment drug tests as well as compulsory drug tests at random intervals during employment. The object of these tests is to provide a drug-free work environment, something that is required by law of companies which receive federal grants of any kind. The United States Supreme Court has upheld that both blood and urine collection are minimally intrusive procedures which are not harmful to job applicants or employees, when they are conducted in the employment environment (such as where applicants or employees are required to go to a doctor's office to provide a sample) without direct observation by the tester. The problem with this is that drugs that are used to treat

ADHD and ADD will show up on these urine and blood tests and the candidates are often disqualified with no opportunity to present information regarding prescription. A user comments on this,

“The last place I applied to made me take a psychology test and a medical check-up (I'm not sure if that includes a drug test, but if it does I'm out because I took Ritalin for a while until I couldn't stand the side effects). Anyway, before they made me take these tests I passed an interview and a skill test... Now all of the sudden I haven't heard from them again. I'm so annoyed. I'm SO ANGRY and frustrated. I'm being judged based on something I can't even change!”

The duality of the stigma that comes with the medication of ADHD becomes apparent in this example. Someone with ADHD who is not on medication is often seen as not living up their full potential. In the same way, the parent who does not medicate their child is seen as not pushing them, or not doing all they can to ensure their child's success. Their symptoms are not excused and evaluation and prescription is

recommended by school administrators and followed up on by doctors. The diagnosis, prescription, and consumption of medication that quells the symptoms of ADHD and other invisible disabilities has become normalized into our society. The other side to this manifests itself here- after academia and in the workplace. ADHD students have undergone a crisis of identity regarding their own medicalization options. Now that some have come to terms with medication that they have chosen to take, risking the alienation of their friends and dealing with sometimes difficult side effects, the very medication that made it possible for them to complete their education is now a roadblock to getting a job afterwards. So the coping mechanism that has been legitimized by society as the correct way to deal with ADD/ADHD, pharmaceutical medication, is now a source of discrimination, as soon as ADHDers hit the workplace. By using a lawful practice such as drug testing it is possible for companies to effectively screen for people with ADHD. This is not to say that all companies that use drug testing as a prerequisite are engaged in this kind of discrimination but the information is available to them. These drugs are prescribed by a doctor and in fact enhance the performance, focus and efficiency of the individuals under their effects. Yet when they show up on a drug test, they all but disqualify a person from a job, especially in an environment where jobs are scarce and competition for those jobs is taken to the extreme. The person quoted above took Ritalin, a stimulant, that shows up on a drug test under the same category as Cocaine. In his case, the company in question passed him through the interview process and skill test and apparently turned him down after the medical check, no questions asked. In other cases, people have gotten wise to this and bring medical scripts and notes from their doctors about their prescription to the drug test.

“When i take a drug test i take all of my scripts with me PLUS a note from my shrink verifying that yes i am crazy and that i do need this stuff. i wonder how many people are passed over for a job because they are bipolar or add.”

In these cases, however, in defending their medication, they in fact reveal themselves to be ADHD or ADD. This in itself holds the stigma of laziness and unreliability. This can also mean increased use of medical benefits and increased cost to employers. Regardless of any truth behind this stereotype, it can mean the difference between employment and unemployment. This type of discrimination is illegal,

employers cannot discriminate against individuals with a record of ADHD, for example, by refusing to hire an individual with school records noting this diagnosis. The ADA also protects individuals who are perceived to have a substantially limiting impairment, even if they do not. For example, an employer may not refuse to promote an employee who is using medications to control his/her ADHD based on fears that the employee will be inattentive and impulsive when in fact that person's symptoms are successfully controlled. Despite this protection on paper, cases of such discrimination are rarely actionable. Businesses can claim other reasons for not hiring someone, with the amount of applicants and the heightened competition for jobs, this is not difficult to do. In discrimination claims, the burden of proof lies with this victim.

So to conclude, ADHD as a social phenomenon in college age guys is of great significance when looking at the RX generation. Medication, Alcohol as self medication, relationship troubles, Academia, self identity - these are all issues that guys on Facebook revealed to be of extreme important. The significance of this is that not only are these all issues but they are issues that the guys are aware of, and see some dysfunction in. Kimmel makes some compelling arguments and his book is illuminating and well researched, however, the piece of the puzzle of Guyland that he glazed over may be one of the most important pieces. The important of this phenomenon is enhance when looking at it economically and politically. Guys with ADHD are at the forefront of the behavior associated with Guyland. There needs to be more sociological discussion about the collision course of the RX generation with the capitalist erosion of good breadwinning jobs.

Works Cited

1. Kimmel, Michael, 2008. *Guyland*, New York: HarperCollins.
2. Connell, R.W, 1995. *Masculinities*, Los Angeles: University of California Press
3. <http://employment.findlaw.com/employment/employment-employee-hiring/employment-employee-privacy-drug-test.html>
4. http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/edi/hr_tips/article_1.cfm?b_id=23&view_all=true
5. Techtree News Staff (2008-08-13) "Facebook : Largest, Fastest Growing Social Network." Techtree.com ITNation. Retrieved on 2008-08-14
6. Johnston, L. D., O'Malley, P. M., Bachman, J. G. and Schulenberg, J. E. Monitoring the Future national Survey Results on Drug Use, 1975-2006. Volume I, Secondary School Students. Bethesda, MD: National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2007. 669 pages. (NIH Publication No. 07-6205) Table 5.1.
7. [http://www.adaa.org/gettinghelp/MFarchives/MonthlyFeatures\(sep07\).asp](http://www.adaa.org/gettinghelp/MFarchives/MonthlyFeatures(sep07).asp)
8. Blum, Linda, 2007. Mother-Blame in the Prozac Nation: Raising Kids with Invisible Disabilities, *Gender & Society* 2007; 21; 202
9. Meika, Loe, 2008. Grappling with the Medicated Self: The Case of ADHD College Students, *Symbolic Interaction*, Vol. 31, Issue 3, pp. 303-323

i

ii