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## An Autoethnography of Masculinities: Flexibility and Flexing in Guyland

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### Abstract

This autoethnography traces the author's shifting masculine identities as they have evolved across time and contexts. This piece splices journals and blogs from the author's past with prevailing masculinities theory, spectral data (Nordstrom, 2013), post-structural feminist theory and the author's present gender identity to investigate what can be learned about gender flexibility within one person's lived experience. The paper offers a special glimpse into the masculine narratives the author performed during one phase of his early adulthood and opens possibilities for alternative discourses. By closely analyzing his gender expressions and identity, the autoethnography reveals moments when his masculinities intersect with and diverge from dominant narratives in masculinities, which fractures notions of a monolithic masculine experience. Ultimately, it suggests fractured masculinities that destabilizes gender and suggests masculinity is an always ongoing, incomplete, flexible, process of becoming.

## **Introduction**

The media coverage leading up to the election of Donald Trump as the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States emphasized anti-immigration xenophobic rhetoric, Trump's acts of misogyny, and responses to ongoing shifts in male privilege. The electorate was largely divided along gender and class lines with working class white males comprising a critical constituency in Trump's ascension to the presidency (Agiesta, 2016). Because working class white men have seen their earning power decline in recent decades (Kimmel, 2012), issues regarding male privilege and its alterations became central drivers of not only election coverage but also of Trump's election. Much of this rhetoric scapegoats already marginalized groups and presents a very real threat to civil liberties previously established by our nation's political leaders. Additionally, his election appears to have empowered many people to actualize his aggressive and demoralizing language through acts of bullying (Grecko, 2016; "CBSNews," 2016). These acts of abuse manifest from the confluence of Trump's election and the corresponding empowerment it provides.

Amidst this cultural milieu, events revealing the confluence of male privilege and violence abound. Notably, in June 2016 former Stanford swimmer, Brock Turner, was sentenced to six months in prison for felony sexual assault. A year and a half earlier, he digitally penetrated an intoxicated and unconscious woman behind a dumpster. Two passersby approached Turner during the assault, probably preventing him from perpetrating further violence, and restrained him until police arrived. Though he was sentenced for only six months (serving only three), the crimes he was convicted of carry a potential maximum sentence of six years (Grinberg, 2016). In an attempt to plead for leniency, his father wrote a letter to the court stating that the incident has had a "devastating impact" on his son, and that the verdict "shattered" Brock's dreams, as a "steep price to pay for 20 minutes of action" (Turner, 2016 para. 7). The letter clearly indicates a tone of privilege and reveals no sense of remorse for the irreversible life-long impact Brock's actions have and will continue to have on his victim.

In addition to the letter his father sent to the court, Turner's victim read a 10-page letter just prior to the sentencing. In her letter, she outlines the lasting effect of her assault, Turner's evident apathy and inability to take responsibility. While media reports emphasize Turner's swimming accomplishments and enrollment at Stanford, they largely discount his victim. Though her anonymity is certainly paramount, the victim's letter expresses frustration at being dehumanized in media reports. In the following statement she claims her right to personhood and underscores the permanent effects of her assault:

I am not just a drunk victim at a frat party found behind a dumpster, while you are the All American swimmer at a top university, innocent until proven guilty, with so much at stake. I am a human being who has been irreversibly hurt. (Anonymous, 2016, para. 51)

In spite of the poignancy of her letter, the Judge sentenced Turner to only six months in jail. For the purposes of this paper, most noteworthy about the Turner case is not necessarily the leniency of his sentence (though this is inarguably egregious), but his inability to take responsibility for his actions or show empathy for his victim; he continually blames his behavior on excessive alcohol consumption rather than condemn his own abhorrent decision-making. This fact alone reveals very disturbing implications regarding male privilege and heteropatriarchy.

While this case emphasizes the destructive potential that pervades commonly accepted, and often exalted patterns of masculinity (Connell, 2005), Trump's rise to power is likewise a very real indication of just how many people truly applaud these performances of destructive masculinity. Taken together, this exposes a correlation between male privilege and violence. While this correlation has already been well documented in the scholarly literature (Katz, 2006; Kimmel, 2008 & 2012), this autoethnography hopes to upset some of the existing scholarship by presenting a case for gender fluidity within masculinities discourse. As many of the currently exalted and acceptable masculinities continue to perpetrate damage at great social cost, it remains imperative to open the discourse in gender studies to include flexibility and fluidity within masculinities. The alarming rates of violence resulting from hyper-masculine behaviors coupled with the existing trend indicating that hyper-masculinization is continuing to grow among men and boys (Katz, 2006) reveal the significance and timeliness of interrogating the current discourse taking place in masculinities. Including flexibility and fluidity allows for the recognition and validation of alternative masculine expressions that may be less destructive and more egalitarian. While alternate expressions of masculinity remain central to the possibility of countering the dominant discourse, this paper does not assume that flexible or fluid masculinities will necessarily ameliorate rape culture. However, alternatives may open space for masculinities that are less destructive. I begin with the two examples above to show how the dominant narrative in the field of masculinities aligns with devastating actions of violence currently taking place in our culture.

While the section above situates some of the costs associated with hyper-masculinity, the following sections frame the autoethnography within pertinent post-structural feminist theory and concurrent work in masculinities.

### **Situated Literature**

This inquiry borrows from post-structural work in feminisms to explore what can be learned by applying a post-structural feminist framework to examine one person's lived experience in masculinities. While much of the work in masculinities relies on historical or sociological epistemologies (Katz, 2006; Kimmel, 2008 & 2012; Lesko, 2000; Pascoe, 2012) rather than post-structural theories, this paper uses post-structuralism to interrogate previous assumptions

and unearth new ways of understanding masculinity. Much of the sociological or historical scholarship in masculinities occurs via epistemological underpinnings that conceive gender as relatively stable and knowable. However, this paper contests the notion that masculinities are fixed, and contributes to the burgeoning field of masculinities, deepening our understanding of gender theory by exploring the lived experience of masculinity through post-structural conceptions (Butler, 1990, 1993, 2004). Rather than fixing gender, Butler's framework provides possibilities for gender to be flexible, subjectivist, contextual and fluid. Infusing this theory with masculinities allows this paper to augment the scholarly literature in gender theory in an important capacity; it dialogues with the vital literature that feminist scholars have produced and attempts to include masculinities in the discourse. Specifically, it seeks to uncover what can be learned from putting post-structural theory to work within an autoethnography methodology. While the paper is framed within post-structural feminisms, the following section employs a systematic literature review to outline current trends in masculinities scholarship.

Masculinities scholarship occurs within two major strains; the first uses historical and sociological approaches whose assumptions regarding gender are outlined above. The second contextualizes its scholarship within a theoretical frame. In order to provide a literature review of the theoretical frame, the section below is comprised of a systematic review (Booth, Papaioannau & Sutton, 2012) of theoretical masculinities scholarship. The review indicates Connell's hegemonic masculinities (2005) as the most dominant theory employed in masculinities scholarship. In her well known piece, *Masculinities* (2005), Connell proposes hegemonic masculinity as "the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations" (2005, p. 76), and it is "culturally exalted" (Tarrant, Terry, Ward, Ruxton, Robb & Featherstone, 2015, p. 72). Though Connell states that the hegemonic position is always contestable as it is historically mobile, she and Messerschmidt (2005) also assert that "the concept of hegemonic masculinities presumes the subordination of nonhegemonic masculinities" (p. 846). Additionally, in their work on male suicide Canetto and Cleary (2012) write that hegemonic masculinity is the "natural state of masculinity" (p. 462). This scholarship specifies that hegemonic masculinity holds a clear position of privilege which may serve as a delimiting factor regarding the possibility for multiple authentic masculinities. In fact, Limmer (2014) writes that men aim to achieve a masculinity that adheres to "the hegemonic ideal" (p. 185). In general, scholars who employ hegemonic masculinities as a theoretical framework tend to define other masculinities by their proximity to it (Lingard, 2003; McCormack, 2011; Swain, 2006). Connell's hegemonic masculinity grounds many studies, yet she presumes relatively concrete gender constructions, and hegemonic masculinity exists in a privileged position within masculinities discourse, so it may limit possibilities for fluidity within lived experiences of gender. In contrast to much of the

scholarship in masculinities, the post-structural work of many feminist scholars (Butler 1990, 1993, 2004) recognize gender fluidity across a spectrum.

Though post structural feminisms acknowledge fluidity, Paechter (2006, 2009) asserts that in contrast to femininity, masculinities remain fairly stable and defined. She also argues that a person's lived experience of gender tends to be relatively stable over time. In their work on male role models, Tarrant et al. (2015) show that there must be more discussion about gender fluidity regarding the assumption that boys require male role models. In their discussion of male suicidal behaviors, Canetto and Cleary (2012) argue that gender fluidity should be considered in the discussion regarding suicidal behaviors, and these behaviors are more complicated than Kimmel's (2011) assertion of men's failing of expectations, or men's failures to achieve hegemonic masculinity. Canetto and Cleary remind us that the hegemonic ideal continues to lead to violence, and this paper complicates the discourse by including flexibility and providing alternatives counter to the dominant narrative.

The previous sections provided a brief overview of the risks of hegemonic masculinity maintaining patriarchal privilege, some of the intrinsic theses of post-structural feminisms, and current trends in masculinities scholarship. The following section presents the research questions and outlines the methodological framework of this autoethnography.

### **Purpose**

While much of the scholarship acknowledges some fluidity across male masculinities, little of it recognizes gender fluidity within one person's lived experience. Contrary to the dominant trends, I propose that men's experiences of gender have the possibility for fluidity and this likewise carries with it a means for countering the destructive capacity of hegemonic masculinity. Thus, the research question for this paper is, how can applying post-structural gender theory to the lived experience of masculinity uncover new possibilities for gender diversity within the field of masculinities studies? To answer this question, this paper employs autoethnography and Deleuzoguattarian spectral data (Nordstrom, 2013) to examine gender in one straight, cisman and challenge the assumption that experiences of gender remain stable across one's lifetime.

According to Nordstrom, spectral data emerge from the complex interactions between a living researcher and a deceased person. This autoethnography appropriates Nordstrom's conception to investigate what data develop when my current self interacts with the specter identities that exist in 15-year-old journals and blogs I wrote in my 20s. In doing so, this paper traces interactions I have had with my evolving constructions of gender while intersecting with and diverging from dominant narratives in masculinities theory to investigate possibilities for alternative discourses. The dangers of hegemonic masculinity lie in the subordination of

nonhegemonic masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), and the regulation of potential masculine alternatives, for it prohibits and penalizes boys and men whose masculinities fall outside its confining borders. Hence, it could be argued that reliance on the dominant narratives in masculinities prohibits alternative discourses that many men and boys embody. This autoethnography hopes to rupture these narratives in two important ways. One, as stated above, it hopes to open space for recognizing multiplicities in a single person's gender experience in cis-male masculinities. Two, it employs an autoethnography methodology to propose the benefits of arts-based research in the field of masculinities. Thus, it uses autoethnography to uncover possibilities for alternatives, and reveals that masculinities exist in what I call "Fractured Masculinities." That is, masculinities in a continual process of becoming, an ongoing process of practice that is malleable, flexible, situated, context dependent, declarative, and always incomplete. This ontological approach creates opportunities for endless embodiments of masculinities rather than an essentialized, stable, and permanent Masculinity.

In order to explore these possibilities, I will begin by discussing the methodological choice to employ this kind of autoethnography and highlight the importance of narrative when examining the lived experience of masculinity. In particular, I will show how this methodology offers Arts-Based Educational Research (ABER) a unique way of doing autoethnography. I will then detail the pertinent literature that uses autoethnography methodology in masculinities, which will be followed by a description of the ways in which the paper weaves archival data from journals and blog stories, with spectral data and relevant theory. I will next present the archival data and put it into conversation with the spectral data and my current gender identity and expression. Finally, I will consider the implications that may arise from this work.

### **Autoethnography**

Although autoethnography is becoming increasingly popular in the field of masculinities, little of it relies on a clear theoretical framework or attempts to tackle the evolution of shifting masculinities in one person's lived experience. In this study, autoethnography and spectral data function as a foundation that offers unique insight into narratives of masculinities as they were performed during one phase of my early adulthood.

Autoethnography positions the self within a context (Reed-Danahay, 1997) where "the researcher is viewed as a viable data source" (Leavy, 2015, p. 43). This work employs my experiences in specific masculine contexts in the hopes that it will shed light on the hazards of fixing masculinity as a stable and concrete identity marker. Ellis and Brochner (2000) posit that autoethnography offers "multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (p. 733). This connection creates a unique opportunity to unpack some of the ways

that one person's lived experience relates to the culture under study. This piece will pull from my experiences in specific masculinities discourses and oppose some of the dominant narratives in the hopes that it will break open a fissure that permits masculinities to shift and undergo processes of continual flexing and evolution.

Autoethnography is situated within the field of ABER because it erodes the dualisms present between public and private that exist within traditional autobiography (Leavy, 2015), and this paper extends possibilities for this erosion. By relying on archival data, this paper builds on ABER scholarship regarding autoethnography in that it further degrades the division between public and private spaces. The journals and blogs together muddy these distinctions and simultaneously allow insight into shifting gender expressions and identities.

As stated previously, in order to frame the autoethnography, I lean on Nordstrom's (2013) scholarship on spectral data to see how my current masculinities intersect with specters that emerge from the archival data. While much of the work in masculinities uses sociological or historical approaches, autoethnography and spectral data together offer a special glimpse into the ways that gender fluidity is performed across one person's lived experience.

Through reading theories and sociological accounts of masculinities, I interacted with the phantom of myself and formed a new, shifting relationship with the masculinities I performed as a younger man. One text that particularly resonated with this phantom was Kimmel's (2008) *Guyland: The perilous world where boys become men: Understanding the critical years between ages 16 and 26*. As I read this text, parts of my former self rose to the surface, yet it also became clear that my present masculine identity deviates significantly from the boys and young men *Guyland* so thoroughly portrays. This paper employs autoethnography to weave my gendered experiences through *Guyland* to emphasize the ways in which my current and past selves adhere to and diverge from the narrative Kimmel presents, as well as reveal how the ensuing years caused my gender identity and expression to shift in some ways but remain stable in others. Throughout this portrayal, the autoethnography will serve to "illuminate the culture under study" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 740) and blend personal with theoretical to investigate shifting gendered identities.

Though this autoethnography relies heavily on *Guyland* and my interactions with it, I conducted a systematic review of the scholarly literature (Booth et al., 2012) across work in masculinities employing autoethnography methodology. A great deal of this scholarship falls outside the scope of this paper, so I excluded essential bodies of literature specifically addressing experiences of minority and queer masculinities. A review of the literature that focuses on straight, white, cis-male masculinities reveals four major strains: (1) An emphasis on the male body is central to masculine experience (Brooks, 2007; Carless, 2012;

Drummond, 2010; Garratt, 2015); (2) Sport plays a profound role in the shaping of many men's masculine identities (Carless, 2012; Drummond, 2010); (3) Men are often forced to negotiate tacit expectations generated from stereotypes associated with being white and male (Buitenbos, 2012; Humphreys, 2005; Ott 2011); (4) Men have both a lack of opportunity and a need to engage in meaningful, emotionally intimate relationships with other men (Brooks, 2007; Buitenbos, 2012; Folan, 2012). These autoethnographies contextualized the theoretical with the personal to support existing theoretical positions within masculinities, but the literature utilizing autoethnography to study white, straight, cis-male masculinities so far neglects masculine gender fluidity within lived experience. While the literature review provides an overview of the pertinent scholarship, the following section consists of an explicit synopsis of *Guyland*, and presents the reasons *Guyland* serves as a foundational text for this piece.

*Guyland* attempts to make sense of the experiences many boys and young men share as they enter adulthood. While researching his piece, Kimmel interviewed over 400 young men to investigate their experiences in the liminal space between adolescence and adulthood. He asserts that these young men do not exist in "a state of arrested development, a case of prolonged adolescence among a cadre of slackers. It has become a stage of life" (p. 6). He dubs this stage of life "Guyland," and the book highlights many destructive practices that young men share as they struggle toward adulthood. The work also threatens to delineate a universal masculine experience that exalts hegemonic masculinity. Though he makes room for outliers and heroes, it could be argued that Kimmel suggests a large majority of privileged, white, straight cismen navigate the world of *Guyland* in very similar ways all of which seem to be aiming toward achieving hegemonic masculinity.

Similarly, I position myself as a privileged cis/straight, white male. Much like the men and boys who comprise the data for *Guyland* (and Brock Turner), I attended good schools, played high school sports, and hail from parents who held white collar jobs. Further, the expectation of a bachelor's degree (or more) was not so much a probability as it was inevitable. As a result of this upbringing, I possessed considerable cultural capital during my time in *Guyland*, but my economic capital proved barely adequate to sustain a relatively meager standard of living. These attributes very much align with the guys portrayed in *Guyland*, yet this autoethnography will reveal that my gender was considerably more complicated, situated and mobile than *Guyland* indicates. With this in mind, *Guyland* functions as a touchstone that will be infused with spectral data and my current understanding of gender to destabilize the master narrative *Guyland* presents. As my older self interacts with the phantoms of my 20s, I realize that I retain some of those gender identities while others shifted substantially.

Though Kimmel may be in danger of claiming Guyland as a monolithic typography of gender pursuant to hegemonic masculinity, he emphasizes that some men rebel against it and the vast majority of young men who live in Guyland eventually outgrow it. The fact that men move through Guyland and often transform to other masculine identities indicates that a person's gendered experience has the potential to evolve. However, *Guyland* explicitly emphasizes a shared masculine experience rather than a multiplicity of masculinities; Kimmel argues that simple maturation allows men to escape Guyland rather than conceding multiplicity within and across experiences of gender. On the contrary, he generates a gendered map and track through which an extremely large number of boys and young men pass. On the surface, my privilege and some gender expressions of my 20s closely adhere to Guyland decorum, yet a deeper unpacking of my gender diversity reveals an exceedingly complex gender history that continues to evolve.

### **Method**

My time in Guyland began in adolescence and proceeded through college, two master's degrees and only ended when I began my career as a high school teacher at age 31. Though I spent nearly two decades in Guyland, I extracted the data for this piece from a brief period in my 20s when I lived in New York City; the data are comprised of archival materials that include blog stories and my concurrent journals, and the spectral data that emerges when I interact with and reflect upon these artifacts. While living in New York, my friends and I kept a blog of our experiences in the city night life. We based the stories largely in true events, but they are intentionally embellished renditions of our urban adventures. This paper selects excerpts of stories I wrote for our blog, and contextualizes them with both concurrent (seemingly more honest) journals and the ways I understand my current gender identity and expression.

The data underwent a thematic analysis (Flick, 2014) that revealed three major themes. First, the masculinities that we publically performed exaggerated the behaviors of Guyland; the events that comprise the blog stories suggest that my friends' and my public presentations of self often highlight rather than reduce Guyland decorum, which indicates that our public gender expressions signify our attempt to attain hegemonic masculinity even when more honest reflections reveal a very different gendered self. Second, moments of the stories and journals indicate a very different understanding of our masculine identities; these moments deviate significantly from the masculinity *Guyland* articulates. Finally, the identity presented in the journals reveals profound moments of insecurity and a deep sense of failure that contrast drastically from the gender expression portrayed in the blog. It was, in fact, quite difficult for me to read the journals as they often depict an unhappy person, much different in tone and voice than the person the blog portrays.

While my interactions with the journals and blogs proved difficult at times, their analysis conjures spectral data as my current self interacts with these phantoms. Again, Nordstrom (2013) defines spectral data as data that are produced between a living researcher and a deceased person. Though the person that I was in my 20s is not deceased, the data reveal a phantom self and my interactions with him now produce their own unique ways of knowing. Spectral data arise during my interaction with the data, and the piece weaves the spectral data through the blogs and journals.

As articulated above, this autoethnography intends to construct knowledge by producing data from archival autobiographical narratives that more closely represent an analysis of narrative. While traditional methods of autoethnography generally involve a researcher analyzing and researching a previous experience and then writing narratives grounded in the scholarly literature to offer insights into the experience, I argue that this piece is a non-traditional autoethnography that adheres to many of autoethnography's conventions (e.g., the author's use of narrative to position himself at the center of the research), and also diverges from these conventions (e.g., the narratives employed in this paper consist of archival data). This non-traditional autoethnography provides a special opportunity to research the gender expressions of a man in his twenties and analyze their shifts across ensuing decades. While traditional autoethnography relies on memory and possibly some archival data to create narratives, this autoethnography relies on archival narratives at the center of the methods. This qualitatively different approach permits the researcher to interact with a less filtered, ostensibly more authentic perception of his previous gender identity in a way that traditional autoethnography would not.

In the following section themes from the analysis will be intertwined with blogs, journals, and spectral data which will also dialogue with *Guyland*, hegemonic masculinity and post-structuralist feminist theory. This analysis exposes a fractured masculinity where gender identity and expression is understood as a flexible ongoing an always incomplete process of becoming.

### **Guyland in New York City**

I wrote the stories below for a blog two close friends and I shared for roughly two years. They depict snippets of our lives, interactions with women, ourselves and each other. Writing for it provided us a hobby, and we contributed to it regularly, but our contributions became less frequent when two of us enrolled in graduate school, and eventually the stories stopped entirely. Though we all contributed to it, the excerpts included here consist of stories I authored and published online. While I wrote for the blog, I also kept a journal regularly that reflects a different gendered self than the one presented in the blog. In order to help with clarity, I will refer to the person in the blog stories as *Bushwick Joe* (which I assumed as a

nom de plume), and the person in the journals as Joe. Except for the author, all names are pseudonyms.

Because of the data spreads across parts of two decades, contextual biographical information may aid in understanding the analysis below. Immediately preceding moving to New York I completed an MA in Dramatic Arts. While I contributed to the blog I initially worked as a temp worker and later an administrative assistant making just enough money to live without accruing further debt. Over these two years, I also matriculated into graduate school again intending to become a secondary English teacher. A year into this graduate program, I began my career as a high school teacher, and my contributions to the blog ceased completely. A year later, I finished the master's degree in English education and continued to teach in both middle and high school for nine years. I left secondary school teaching two years ago to pursue a PhD in educational research. I am now in my early 40s, and I understand my current masculinities as always contextual, fluid and evolving. At the same time, I remain deeply dedicated to issues of social justice, and equity, aspirations inconsistent with current iterations of hegemonic masculinity or Guyland decorum.

While I recognize that inserting this brief personal history risks solipsism on my part, I feel its inclusion is necessary for reading the intersections among the data presented in this section. In addition to my personal history, table one below clarifies some of the slang my friends and I employed; some of our vocabulary was specific to our immediate social circle.

Table 1.

Translation of Vernacular

<i>Our Vernacular</i>	<i>Translation</i>
<i>Talls</i>	Beers
<i>Trifecta</i>	Group of three women
<i>Goose Gossage</i>	Posterior
<i>Parcells Up</i>	Assumed confidence, almost to the point of hubris
<i>Vertical Gin Line</i>	Possessing a tall stature
<i>Six Pack</i>	A group of six people
<i>Ambient</i>	Relating to favorable surroundings or state of mind.

### ***The Day the Music Died***

*T's bladder was empty and he hit a trifecta on the other side of The Gowanus Yacht Club. Before long he convinced his compadres in talls, Bushwick Joe and The Snake, to join him. This wasn't a difficult proposition – the girls they were hunting didn't know who The Man in Black was – OUT!*

*Bushwick Joe and The Snake march over to the lovely young ladies upon whom Tad, a few minutes before, had descended solo, Large And In Charge. After introductions, and general small talk the ringleader of our remarkably edgy ladies began talking with her girlfriends.*

*“Betty Shabbaz would have been an important cultural and political leader regardless of who [sic] she decided to marry.”*

*“What did you just say?” Bushwick Joe asks, wondering from what this ludicrous statement stems. No one says something so silly without at least having some specific reasons for it, right? One would think . . . ?*

*“Betty Shabbaz was destined for political greatness before she decided to get married.”*

*“That's ridiculous.”*

*Molly finds her witty retort in attacking BJ's fashion sense. “Just because you're wearing a velour sweater doesn't give you the right to disregard other people's opinions.”*

*“Alright,” he responds with a surreptitious, under-the-table-hand-wave. Universal translation: “These chiquitas are OUT!” T shakes his head at BJ as in “Not yet,” and reconfigures the campaign. The prey was escaping and T was tall pickled, but not so pickled that he couldn't adjust his battle tactics for the sake of his pickle. He wanted peace and a pickling. A piece for the pickle.*

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Jenny [my high school girlfriend] came by Dad's while I was there on Christmas eve. She's getting married. Talk about a surreal experience. She's still beautiful, a little heavier, deeper laugh lines, but still a looker, and she considers herself an adult, complaining about having to pay bills and crap. “Responsibility” she said about four times in a five-minute conversation. How could you possibly feel a sense of responsibility at 24, and what does “responsibility” have to do with getting married? I don't know. I feel responsibility to myself to do what I want, but I certainly don't feel a societal

responsibility. Too young for that shit, but I am an adult, support myself, etc. I just can't believe that she's getting married. I'm sad about it. It's kinda fucking me up. A right of passage, I guess. My first exgf to get married. The first of many, I suppose, but it still depresses the hell out of me. Maybe because I'm single, and I got no chicks going. So it goes.

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“The Day the Music Died” is laced with misogyny: Bushwick Joe disregards Molly’s understanding of Betty Shabbaz and he and his friends objectify women in all of their interactions. The story also adheres to tenets of hyper-masculinization exemplified in Guyland that equate manhood with having sex. Additionally, Bushwick Joe and his friends take a tone that is concerned with exerting power over the women, clearly aligning with correlating notions of hegemony and privilege. Correspondingly, the journal entry reveals Joe’s immaturity, for he is unable to comprehend the responsibility of adulthood. He also objectifies Jenny, thereby exposing his misogyny when he describes her. While Joe simultaneously feels a genuine sense of loss as he attempts to understand his feelings regarding his high school girlfriend’s impending wedding, he is clearly incapable of expressing any kind of response that does not concern his immediate wellbeing. More than anything this journal entry reveals an inescapable sense of egocentrism. Together these entries show different ways through which masculinities become manifest in the lived experiences of one individual.

Spectral data surfaces as I attempt to reconcile the person represented in the blog with the person in the journal and the older person who writes this now. When I read these now, my current gendered selves are embarrassed for both Bushwick Joe and Joe. At the same time, I am compelled to forgive them. However, while my current masculinities arise from a privileged perspective, as I am now a highly educated, securely middle-class, cis-straight white guy, and I insist on egalitarian ideals. The discrepancy among my current masculinities and the specters of Joe and Bushwick Joe reveal a complicated gender history that emphasizes its flexibility. Though this suggests a flexibility in the lived experience that resonates with Kimmel’s assertion that men tend to outgrow Guyland, I posit that the data reveal a constantly shifting gender identity that extends far deeper than simply growing up. The data expose major transformations continually taking place as I continually revise multiple masculine identities.

*Guyland* conveys a relatively fixed gender expression during which Kimmel generates a typography of gender based on his sociological research within a specific population. The data from the blog, journal and subsequent spectral data, however, suggest that gender identity and expression is a dynamic experience where multiple genders exist simultaneously in one

subject. Also, these genders are consistently adjusted in an ongoing process of change that evokes a fractured masculinity.

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### ***The JMZ***

*Waiting for the train at Canal Street, Bushwick Joe targeted her from down the platform and adjusted his battle vector: a cute white girl waiting for the JMZ at 01:00. What? Yes, it's true. "Was she lost?" you may ask. Perhaps. She was looking the wrong way for the approaching train. Armed with Dutch courage and nothing better to do, he put Sweet's Money Ballz on the line and walked the thirty yards down the platform to address her.*

*"Excuse me, you look kinda lost. Where, exactly, do you wanna go?" he asks as unpredatorily as one can ask such a thing at 01:00 . . . on an empty platform . . . while waiting for the JMZ.*

*"Does this stop at Delancy?" she asks.*

*"Yes. Two Stops. You could probably walk in 15 minutes."*

*"Yeah, but I'm here," she responds with a coquettish smile.*

*Recognizing an implication, BJ extends a hand and says, "I'm Joe."*

*After small talk led to both learning their nights were disappointing, BJ suggested they go get a drink "somewheres in your neighborhood. Mine's too far away."*

*"Okay," she answers. What? You're gonna go out for a drink with some guy who just picked you up on the JMZ at 01:00. What would your dad think?*

*"Oscar de la Hoya," Bushwick Joe thinks to himself as he follows her goose gossage up the escalator at Delancy.*

*Fellas, it was one of those nights. We've all had them. Sometimes, you can do no wrong. You are The Golden Boy.*

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There was an article in *The Times* about my generation, and our resistance to permanency. How we don't grow up, but we do - just later. The article said this was a result of a number of factors. I have already thought about all but one; people between the ages of 22-35 make 17% less money than their peers in 1970. All of our parents are divorced, we're going to live longer, our parents' generation instilled in us a desire to better the world in some way - to find our purposes, and we have our parents for financial support. We know we will not

make as much money as they do, so we need to figure out what it is we're going to do with our lives, so we try out a number of different careers until we settle on one. The "so what?" question of the article asks what parents can do in order to prevent it. I'm not sure it needs to be prevented.

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I found out I was accepted into Hunter's teaching program. I start classes in just a few weeks and have a meeting with the advisor tomorrow. I'm very excited about this though I'm already ~20k in the hole on student loans. I'm pretty sure this is what I want to do and I'm looking forward to the challenge, if not the debt.

---

"The JMZ" offers insight into how Bushwick Joe expresses his gender. The tone of the story, which is undoubtedly misogynistic, coupled with its publication indicate that he was proud of the masculinities he performs. This aligns with some of the scholarship in masculinities. Namely, men prove their masculinity in the eyes of other men (Kimmel, 2008; Messner, 1992). Correspondingly, some men assert their manhood through the conquest of women in a tacit competition among them to sleep with the most and prettiest girls (Kimmel, 2008). Clearly, Bushwick Joe uses "The JMZ" to participate in this competition and in this way it attempts to establish his manhood in the eyes of his friends. The piece also adheres with some of the principles of hegemonic masculinity in that Bushwick Joe wields the power often associated with white male privilege in an attempt to claim hegemonic masculinity. Its publication affirms that his gender expression corresponds with Guyland decorum, and reveals the exalted position the blog affords hegemonic masculinity. On the other hand, spectral data emerge from this story to show a disturbing relationship between my current self and the person the blog represents. Now, I identify as a feminist, queer ally who dedicates his life to social justice. Thus, I recognize Bushwick Joe's egregious behaviors as destructive, and currently work to upend the destructive behaviors ascribed to hegemonic masculinity and Guyland. The actions Bushwick Joe enacts I simply cannot do, and I maintain that this is largely owing to major transformations in my gender identity and expression.

While Bushwick Joe performs gender in specific ways, the journal entries reveal a more complex understanding of Joe's gender identity. Contrary to "The JMZ," the private gendered self, Joe presents in his journal wonders about his lack of direction and celebrates his discovering and working toward a purposeful existence. In keeping with some notions of traditional masculinities defining a profession remains an important feature of some contemporary masculinities (Connell, 2005), yet scholars rarely (perhaps never) associate the

chosen profession (secondary school English teacher) with traditional or hegemonic masculinity. Additionally, the journal expresses an explicit desire to discover a life's work to "better the world in some way." It is clear that the gender expression on the blog, which adheres to hegemonic masculinity differs drastically from the simultaneous gender expression in the journal which conflicts with hegemonic masculinity. Taken together, the journal and blog reveal two contrasting masculine expressions being performed simultaneously which underscores post-structuralist tenets regarding recursive, ongoing and multiple ways of doing gender.

Moreover, as I interact with the journal and story, spectral data interject and rupture any concrete or fixed notion of gender identity. The spectral data that emerge from these entries make clear that one person's gender is highly contextual and unsettled. These entries show Joe's masculinities existing as a both-and, rather than an either-or. There is a fracturing of sorts where the specters of Joe and Bushwick Joe continue to leave residue in my gender identity and expression, but these specters are fragments that surface occasionally among the fractured masculinities I currently perform. For instance, like Bushwick Joe, I still talk to women I meet in public spaces. I am, in fact, much more likely to start a conversation with a woman than a man, yet, unlike Bushwick Joe, I currently do not objectify women in the ways he does, nor do I publish stories further marginalizing the people I meet. At the same time, the residue from Joe is very much part and not part of my current gender identity. I still have a deep-seated desire to better the world in some way, though I am no longer drifting through life. In fact, part of my masculine expression now manifests as extremely driven professionally and academically, very much different than either Joe or Bushwick Joe.

The next story, "Office Crush Girl," continues to unveil iterations of Guyland masculinity, yet the corresponding journal entry exposes a person struggling with understanding his gender identity.

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### ***Office Crush Girl***

*I said "goodbye" to all my colleagues, packed up my bag, put my jacket on and made for the cube. If I had to make my ignominious exit after a conclusive (and what I feared inevitable) rejection, I was prepared to do it as furtively as possible. There would be no returning, tail between the legs, ego brought to Earth, ashamed banishment, coat check crackhouse style back to my cube.*

*As I rounded the corner I saw her looking at her computer screen, not on the phone, no one talking to her. "Parcells up and hit it," I thought to myself as I focused in on the crosshairs aimed at the prey.*

*Before something became anything, I was at the point of no return. "There's nothing to lose now, but a little pride," I say to myself. This mantra has helped me through a few situations and my pride has suffered accordingly. Game on:*

*"Excuse me," I say louder than is necessary. I didn't think about volume during my mental masturbation rehearsals of what I would **actually** say to her. I stumble forward. Still too loud: "This is my last day of work here, and I find you very attractive. I was wondering if you were seeing anyone?"*

*"No," she answers quietly, shaking her head, beginning to blush.*

*I manage to articulate a standard 'now I'm gonna ask you out line:' "Well, would it be alright if we went out for a cup of coffee or a beer or something sometime?"*

*"Yeah," she answers. Unbelievable.*

*She grabs a pen and begins to write down her number. "What's your name?" she asks very quietly, tacitly trying to reduce my decibels.*

*"Joe," I horse whisper.*

*"I'm Kelly," she says as she hands me the digits.*

*Millsy's a wise man. Large And In Charge, dude, LARGE AND IN CHARGE.*

---

Sometimes the world opens up and I'm given a chance, a last chance saloon. I'm left with loads of potential and little to show for it. Aside from my personal experience, I have nothing tangible from my life. I have done nothing, left no mark. I think about how my life could have gone and still may go, and what I've done. I really need to stop blaming others and take responsibility for my life. These are the cards I was given, and my cards are pretty good. I was given a lot, more than most people. But, then why is my life so pathetic? That's the big

fuckin' question. Perhaps too much was expected of me and I've always been chasing it. This led me to be in a transitory place for ten years.

---

Much of the recent scholarly literature in the field of masculinities articulates a struggle men perceive as a result of the loss (or shift) in white male privilege (Connell, 2005; Kimmel 2008 & 2012). The historical and sociological literature in masculinities indicate that many men perceive a loss of privilege they once received in the form of wages, access and opportunity. Because of a consortium of factors including assumed competition from increased immigration, women's equity movements and affirmative action, many men feel as though their prospects to attain wealth and status that once existed are no longer accessible. Though the literature reveals these trends regarding beliefs about male privilege, the spectral data that emerges from my interactions with "Office Crush Girl" and the journal interrupt the dominant narrative regarding privilege. While "Office Crush Girl" clearly exploits privilege and asserts power in an attempt to claim hegemonic masculinity, the journal entries appear to lament both the loss of privilege and the inability to capitalize on it. In contrast to the dominant narratives, Joe speculates more on his inability to take advantage of the privilege his parents, gender, and ethnicity afforded him than on assigning his disappointments to the loss of privilege itself, for he writes specifically that he must stop blaming others in order to capitalize on the advantages that he was fortunate to receive.

These contradictions regarding privilege indicate that context plays a considerable role in the ways through which one performs gender as it intersects with privilege. On the one hand, Bushwick Joe performs a largely hegemonic masculinity situated within a public persona intended to grow his status among his peers. On the other hand, Joe's masculinity exists in a private space and contains thoughtful introspection far removed from hegemonic masculinity. Because gender expressions are performed in specific contexts, these examples suggest that people are very much capable of performing multiple genders simultaneously. While the possibilities for multiple, simultaneous gender expressions appear to exist in a recursive, contextual process of becoming, the spectral data produced from the blog and journal entry reveal many shifts and many enduring features in my gender identity. For one, my life's work still strives to justify the privilege my fortune awarded. However, my interactions with hegemonic masculinity are qualitatively and quantitatively different. The specter of Bushwick Joe's hegemonic masculinity still informs my masculine expressions in specific contexts such as jokingly asserting silly ideas in intellectual discussion and occasionally seizing authority. In contrast, I have also grown more content with expressions of masculinity that fall outside hegemonic tropes. For instance, I no longer engage in the questionable behaviors of Guyland

such as extreme overdrinking, blatant acts of misogyny, and sexual conquest. Instead, I am more likely to perform acts that work for the public good such as volunteering and engaging in acts of public service. The flexing of my genders over the last 15 years draw from the phantoms of Bushwick Joe and Joe, and also include an ever-shifting interplay among various gender expressions within specific contexts. Whereas context persists as an important factor for doing gender, the two excerpts from the next story, "A Tall Tail Tale: All Nights Must End," further complicate the ways in which Joe and Bushwick Joe engage their masculinities.

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### ***A Tall Tail Tale: All Nights Must End***

*The quarry was in the crosshairs so-to-speak, primed and pumped to be primally pumped full of inebriated and sweet wantonness. It was difficult not to be in the crosshairs, one should know, given the breadth of Mary's width and the length of Beatrice's (no, I can't remember her name either) vertical gin line.*

*The six met on the sidewalk and Bullfrog invited the boys over to the Travelin' Nursing Home. The six split into two cabs of three each plus one foreign chauffeur. "69th and Broadway," The Snake ordered the cabby, "And don't spare the horses."*

*Upon arrival, a young man greeted the six-pack with three six-packs of hops and barley transported in a big, brown, bag. "I ordered ahead," Mary said with a coy smile, tipping the delivery man and walking toward the front door of the apartment building she calls home.*

---

*Bushwick Joe enjoyed the view this Sunday morning. It was chilly, not cold, and the sky was clear but beautifully grey. Very Zen after nearly 24 hours of consciousness.*

*Ambient? Yes.*

*BJ's nirvana moment of reflection upon his pathetic, inconsequential little life was startled when he turned around to address his comrades-in-talls and sees Beatrice in all her glory directly in front of him. Taken aback, he says, "Wow, you're a big girl."*

*"What?" she asks.*

*"Um . . . I mean you're very tall. I didn't notice that before . . . very . . . tall."*

---

Generally, girls have been my stability. They have been an anchor. Every girlfriend I've ever had has helped give me a sense of purpose, grounded me in some way. I feel that part of me needs this. I would really like a grownup relationship with a girl, but they are not so easy to come by.

At the same time, I'm glad that I think I know what I'm doing with my life. This gives me a sense of purpose. I think I'm moving in the right direction. I know I am. Here I am, almost thirty. Maybe I'm entering adulthood a little late, even late when compared to my contemporaries, but at least I'm entering it.

---

In some ways Joe feels very directed during this phase of his experience: he is studying to be a secondary English teacher, a profession he believes will both satisfy him intellectually, and provide him the purpose so many of his journals covet. Bushwick Joe, however, reveals severe immaturity and lack of perspective when he writes of his "nirvana moment of reflection upon his pathetic, inconsequential little life." This reflection indicates an immaturity often fostered by Guyland masculinities, for Kimmel writes young men feel pressure "to live up to unattainable ideals of masculinity" (p. 42), and Bushwick Joe's utterance reflects a conflicting notion throughout Guyland: he at once feels entitled to the opportunity to make a significant impact on culture, but he also has yet to do any actual work toward creating an impactful life.

Unlike the men in Guyland who express anger about their loss of privilege, or the men who perform Connell's recuperative masculinity, which seeks to regain perceived loss of privilege, or those whose hegemonic masculinity capitalizes on power through traditional masculine expressions, Joe and Bushwick Joe both acknowledge their privilege and express anxiety over their own shortcomings rather than blame some external entity. The dominant narratives in masculinities assert that men often assign responsibility for their failures to a force beyond their control (Connell, 2005; Kimmel, 2008), yet Bushwick Joe implicitly and Joe explicitly hold themselves responsible for their deficiencies. In this instance it appears that Kimmel's sociological approach and Connell's theoretical approach may not adequately account for simultaneous multiplicities in gender expressions.

Moreover, spectral data make clear that Bushwick Joe is incapable of participating in the "grownup relationship" that Joe seeks, for Bushwick Joe and his contemporaries clearly objectify women, which is in keeping with Guyland masculinity. In all of the stories, women

are reduced to objects of conquest who become commodities that Bushwick Joe and his cohorts use to establish masculinity and secure their grasp on hegemony. For instance, the two women portrayed in “The JMZ,” and “Office Crush Girl” are all similarly objectified as unthinking bodies that are rendered objects of desire whose value to Bushwick Joe and his friends hinges only on the attainment of their bodies. Moreover, the women in the first story, “The Day the Music Died” are similarly objectified, yet these women reject Bushwick Joe and his friends. In order to reestablish his manhood Bushwick Joe questions one of the women’s intellectual capabilities, feigns disinterest, and insults her to the reader. In all cases, the women exist as objects of exchange whom Bushwick Joe and his peers dehumanize and objectify in order to grow their status within the group. It is no wonder then that Bushwick Joe is wholly incapable of maintaining any kind of a meaningful intimate relationship.

While the gender expressions and misogyny that Bushwick Joe and his friends exhibit in Guyland make romantic and emotional intimacy impossible, an important shift occurs once I abandoned Bushwick Joe and began to view my relationships with both men and women in different lights. Escaping Guyland developed through a series of nearly simultaneous events. One of my friends began a committed intimate relationship and matriculated into law school, another moved to New Jersey, and most importantly I began a career as a secondary school English teacher. It was only after this series of events that I was capable of maintaining a caring, meaningful and committed romantic relationship. I recognized unequivocally that I abandoned Guyland and Bushwick Joe when moments of contemplation regarding my actions as a younger person would uncover feelings of sincere horror and disgust. In these instances, the specters of Bushwick Joe influence my current gender expressions and identities as I self-consciously work against destructive masculinities and toward masculinities based in egalitarianism and inclusion. The spectral data engender profound contrition that continues to inform my work as an educator and scholar.

The behaviors associated with Guyland are at once destructive and pervasive, and the reverence often granted to hegemonic masculinity certainly affirms this contention. As Guyland continues to entrench itself in our culture, its behaviors remain deeply troubling and there is little indication they will diminish any time soon. Like the majority of young men who spend time in Guyland, I eventually inched my way into adulthood, but my varied gender expressions within Guyland were always situated in specific contexts indicating that gender is both contextual and multiple. Moreover, the shifts in my gender since Guyland suggest that masculinities are fractured as an always incomplete, ongoing processes that allows for alternate masculinities to counter dominant narratives concerned with hegemony and recuperating male privilege. Opening alternatives for young men to express their masculinities in a myriad of ways, and decentering hegemony from masculinities discourse may help temper some of the harmful behaviors being enacted by those currently navigating Guyland.

### Conclusions

This autoethnography serves a dual purpose; it provides a unique opportunity to destabilize dominant narratives of masculinities that privilege one way of being male in a way that opens insights to flexibilities, pluralities, and fluidities of one person's masculinities across decades. It also employs an arts-based approach using narrative as research that erodes the distinction between public and private, and hopes to enrich the discourse in gender studies currently engaging questions regarding gender fluidity and stability. Exploring masculinities through a post-structural feminist lens creates a counter-narrative to much of the scholarship currently produced through sociological and historical approaches. Allowing fractured masculinities into the gender discourse can have far reaching effects including helping to destabilize the preeminent position that hegemonic masculinity holds for millions of guys, and simultaneously recognizing the huge number of people who express nontraditional masculinities. To build on the important sociological work Kimmel conducts, I suggest it may be possible that there are multiple guylands instead of a monolithic Guyland. A multiplicity of guylands may open alternatives for different iterations of gender far removed from the destruction implicit in privileging hegemonic masculinity. The narratives of aggression exemplified by the rise of Donald Trump, and the behavior of Brock Turner demonstrate the necessity for fractured masculinities and the need for valuing and exalting forms of masculinities that oppose hegemony and male privilege.

It is through accepting fluidity and multiplicity that we can fracture monolithic conceptions of masculinity and unseat hegemonic masculinity as the privileged incarnation of maleness. As we inch toward the unrestricted welcome of gender diversity, hegemonic masculinity will continue to maintain its elevated position, so researchers must work toward deepening our understandings of multiplicities and fracturing among masculinities. Brock Turner's victim articulates the very real impact rupturing the hegemonic discourse in masculinities can have: "Most importantly, thank you to the two men who saved me, who [*sic*] I have yet to meet. I sleep with two bicycles that I drew taped above my bed to remind myself there are heroes in this story" (Anonymous, 2016, para. 71). These two men serve as a reminder that masculinities can open space for alternatives; fractured masculinities will help to undermine some of the culture of violence hegemony embraces and also legitimate a diversity of more egalitarian masculine expressions.

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