

A GUIDED CONVERSATION

What Kind of Man Are You?

Kinkade spends much of *Out of Blue Comes Green* trying to understand what a boy is supposed to be in terms of appearance, vocal tone, emotional expression, and even personal interests. His questions are intensely personal, but they are not his alone.

What makes someone a man and who gets to decide?

Before returning to Kinkade, think about the messages boys receive about masculinity. Consider messages from family, friends, school, sports, entertainment, social media, and other men.

- What qualities does society commonly describe as masculine?
- What are boys encouraged to do for fun? What are they discouraged from doing?
- What are boys encouraged to value? What things should they not value?
- Which expectations for men and boys can be useful? Which can become limiting or harmful?
- What can happen when a boy does not follow those expectations? Are there consequences?

A REAL-WORLD SNAPSHOT

Recent U.S. research suggests that pressures to be confident, not to care too much about anything, not to be feminine, and not to cry are still real. In a 2025 Common Sense Media survey of more than 1,000 boys ages 11–17, **nearly half** said boys must follow “unwritten rules” to avoid teasing. Pew Research Center found that 43% of boys ages 13–17 felt pressure to be physically strong.

Sources: *Common Sense Media, Boys in the Digital Wild (2025)*; *Pew Research Center, The Gender Gap in Teen Experiences (2025)*.

- When have you received the message that boys must be confident?
- How often have you heard that boys shouldn’t cry?
- How seriously do you think these unwritten rules should be taken?

Kinkade's Unwritten Rulebook

Kinkade, like other boys growing up, collects society's clues about what it means to be masculine. He watches other boys, notices what they respect in men, and begins turning those observations into rules for himself.

The first day of weightlifting class, Kinkade sees Danny lifting only ten pounds. In his mind, he considers him to be “weak” (29).

When Madi asks Kinkade if he's glad they're reading *The Great Gatsby*, instead of answering, he thinks, *Guys don't generally answer questions like this. Too emotional* (38).

During Kinkade's first introduction to Madi, she uses the pronoun “he” to refer to Kinkade. This is one of the first times someone else has used his correct pronouns. In response, he thinks, *She thinks I'm a boy. Honestly thinks I'm a boy. I guess I have that head nod thing down* (39).

While Madi is explaining her father being out of work, she mentions that one night she heard him crying. Instead of showing her sympathy, Kinkade says, “The guys I know don't show their feelings. They've learned to keep them in check” (125).

When it's time to buy tickets for *Twelfth Night*, Kinkade doesn't know what he's supposed to do. *I should pay for her. I don't want to insult her, but guys still do that, right?* (129).

What rules about being a guy has Kinkade absorbed? Are they correct?

- Which rules concern emotion? strength? confidence?
- Where do you think these rules came from?
- Where should Kinkade look for evidence of how to be a man?

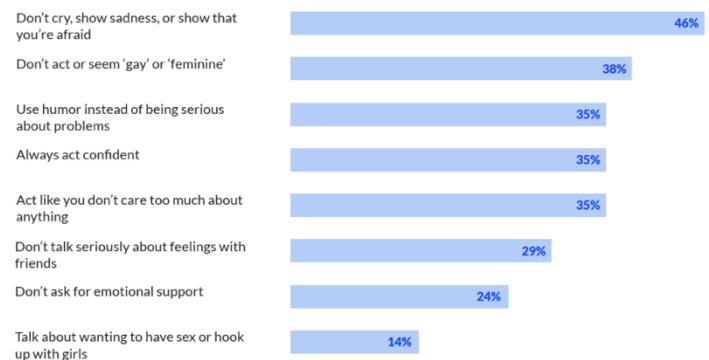


Fig. 1. Common Sense Media, “Boys in the Digital Wild,” 2025. commonsensemedia.org.

REAL MEN

Kinkade tests his rule about emotional control by thinking about men he actually knows. Sam does not fit. His dad does not fit. He doesn't know about Danny, but Danny's pretty calm. The one example he can produce is JT (125). But JT's emotions aren't controlled; he shows anger and aggression.

If JT is the only example, what does this tell us about the rule itself?

More Than Ordinary Pressure

Many boys wonder whether they are masculine enough. Kinkade faces an additional pressure: people repeatedly tell him he is not a boy at all, and he is desperate to prove he is a boy.

For Kinkade, Madi's recognition by using male pronouns to refer to him is exhilarating because she sees him how he wants to be seen (39). But the thrill of Madi seeing him may also encourage a dangerous idea: perhaps there are behaviors he can perform that will make other people believe in his masculinity.

Why might Kinkade feel unusually strong pressure to follow society's rules about masculinity?

- What is the difference between wanting to be recognized as male and wanting to seem "masculine"?
- Identify times Kinkade understands and doesn't understand that difference.
- When a masculine gesture seems to help other people see him correctly, what might Kinkade take away from that experience and why?

THE IRONY

Kinkade wants to stop pretending to be a girl because he isn't one. Why, then, does he begin to pretend to have personality traits he doesn't actually have?

- What does he seem to think he gains by pretending to be tough?
- What does he actually risk losing instead?

What Does It Mean To Be Kinkade?

As Kinkade tries to behave the way he thinks a guy should behave, he edits his behavior.

- He holds back enthusiasm.
- He worries about smiling and laughing.
- He questions whether apologizing is something a guy should do.
- He worries about liking theater and books.
- He acts confident and tough even when he does not feel that way.

Do any of these behaviors make Kinkade more “manly”?

- To what extent do these behaviors make him more like himself or less?
- How do they change the perception others may have of him?

Does becoming more “manly” make Kinkade more like himself or less?

Madi is especially important here. She never needs Kinkade to prove to her that he is a boy. She already sees him that way. However, she dislikes the personality he presents when he is trying to be manly.

- What does Madi like about Kinkade when he is not editing himself?
- What does Madi likely think is lost when Kinkade follows his masculine rulebook?
- Is “Manly Kinkade” fake in the same way “Kayla” is fake in Kinkade’s perspective? What is different? What is similar?

Can Eyeliner and Nail Polish Be Manly?

Danny O'Sullivan is a walking contradiction of many of Kinkadee's unwritten rules about masculinity. Danny embraces the things he likes and his personality instead of questioning whether he should.

- Danny has long bangs (30).
- He wears black nail polish (84, 308).
- He isn't athletic (85).
- He listens carefully when Kinkadee talks about his emotions (151–152).
- He discourages violence by rerouting Kinkadee from a conflict (151–152).
- He wears eyeliner (160, 308).
- He works as a makeup artist with the school's theater club (160–161).

Do these traits fit Kinkadee's idea of a young man?

- Does Danny question his gender at any part of the story? Why do you think that is?
- Since Kinkadee questions whether attending a play is something that men do, how much would his judgment increase about a boy who not only works with the theater, but does the makeup?
- How does Kinkadee cope with the “non-masculine” traits that Danny has?

Why does Kinkadee become increasingly comfortable around Danny who doesn't fit the traits in Kinkadee's masculine rulebook?

- Why is Kinkadee comfortable with Danny being himself when he can't allow himself the same courtesy?
- By the end of the story, how would Kinkadee describe Danny as a friend?
- Would Kinkadee need to mention Danny's gender in order to define who Danny is?

I Want to Be That Guy

After Kinkade helps Madi's dog Cooper, Madi comes to a conclusion about Kinkade. She says that if he was so willing to help her with Cooper, then "the real you isn't the stoic jerk you pretend to be at school" (220).

She says he must be the guy who talks about books and movies and laughs at her impressions. Kinkade insists, "I am that guy," but he thinks, *At least, I want to be that guy* (220).

Why is "At least, I want to be that guy" such an important thought for Kinkade at this point in the story?

- Madi does not tell Kinkade to become less masculine. What does she help him notice instead?
- Why might her description of the Kinkade she likes matter more to Kinkade than a lecture about gender stereotypes?
- Does Kinkade have to reject strength, confidence, sports, or other traditionally masculine qualities to become his authentic self?

Kinkade has changed his main question:

What does a man do?

to something much more important:

What kind of man do I want to be?

Boys Can Love Their Brothers

Near the end of the novel, Sam and Kinkade make an agreement that Kinkade can call or text whenever he needs a big brother. Kinkade says he'll need help with girls and lifting weights, traditionally masculine things.

Then Kinkade realizes that Sam could have been the person he told when he felt so devastated and exposed at the mall in front of Christine. He could even have told Sam how desperate he had become. Kinkade seems to wish he would have leaned on his brother when things were so bad. He then texts Sam “a heart emoji. Because boys can love their brothers” (316–317).

What has changed for Kinkade by the end of the novel?

- Which parts of Kinkade's earlier ideas about masculinity has he kept?
- Which has he begun to question?
- Which might he still be figuring out?
- Why is it significant that Kinkade still chooses to lift weights after he embraces his authentic self?
What does that tell us about his concept of masculinity?
- What does the heart emoji allow Kinkade to express that his earlier rulebook might have discouraged?

Has Kinkade figured out what kind of man he should be?

Has he figured out who should decide?

Being a Man. Being Kinkade.

Throughout the novel, Kinkade looks around him for evidence of what men are supposed to be.

Some men are strong. Some cry. Some love sports. Some love art. Some talk easily about their feelings. Some don't. Some are loud. Some are quiet. Some give help. Some need it.

No single one of those qualities determines a person's gender.

Kinkade begins by mentally sorting traits into categories: manly or not manly. By the end, though, he is learning a different way to question which traits belong to him as a person, not only as a male person.

That question does not require him to reject masculinity. It allows him to decide which parts of himself are authentic rather than accepting society's expectations as instructions.

*If there are a thousand ways to be a man, what happens
when a person stops asking whether he is being a man
and starts asking whether he is being himself?*