



# Trend Alert!

# NEKNOMINATE: ONLINE ALCOHOL ONE-UPS-MANSHIP

*By Walt Mueller*

## Trend Alert: NekNominate - Online Alcohol One-Ups-Manship

**Earlier this year, Rhiannon Scully had too much to drink.** Two of her friends encouraged her to guzzle a mixture of vodka and whiskey. They issued their dare to Rhiannon after seeing someone do the same on a viral Facebook video. When her mother found Rhiannon with her eyes rolling back in her head, she called an ambulance. Rhiannon was fortunate. After spending the night in the hospital and having her stomach pumped, she returned home. Rhiannon is nine-years-old.

Rhiannon Scully had indulged in a competitive social-media-fueled drinking game that’s sweeping through Australia, the United Kingdom, and now the United States. Known as NekNominate, this new and dangerous competition is especially popular among the under-30 crowd, including young adults, college students, teenagers, and even pre-teens.

Originated in Australia, NekNominate combines “Necking” (the Australian slang term for guzzling or chugging alcohol) with nominating others to do the same. How does it work?

First, an individual creates a pint-sized or larger drink that combines two or more types of alcohol (beer, whiskey, vodka, etc.). In addition to the alcohol, other substances are mixed into the drink. As the popularity of the game has spread, these other substances have become increasingly outlandish and dangerous, including things like dead mice, goldfish, urine, insects, motor oil, dog food, raw eggs, hot sauce, and hair. . . to name just a few. The more extreme, the better.

Second, the individual will choose an activity to engage in while chugging or “necking” the alcoholic concoction. The more extreme, dangerous, public, and outlandish the setting. . . the better. For example, NekNominators have chugged while surfing, riding a motorcycle, standing on a moving car, skateboarding, and jumping off a bridge. Others have gone to the front of the classroom and interrupted college lectures, stood naked in grocery store aisles, or set their clothing on fire. One of the most popular NekNominate videos shows a young man being lowered headfirst into a dirty toilet filled with beer. Still another shows a man biting off and eating the head of a live chicken after guzzling his brew. Seemingly, there are no limits and the envelope is continually stretched.



***NekNominate combines “Necking” (Australian slang for chugging alcohol) - while performing an outlandish stunt - with nominating others to do the same. The results are videoed and uploaded online.***

Finally, the entire episode is recorded on video and then posted online on social media sites like Facebook and YouTube, where the videos quickly go viral. To be sure that the NekNominate fad continues, the person looks into the camera and nominates at least two other people by name who have to do the same - or something more extreme - all within the next twenty-four hours. For those who don't accept the nomination and take the dare, they can be sure to face online ridicule, harassment, and being socially ostracized. Not surprisingly, YouTube and Facebook are currently home to thousands of NekNominate videos and pages, with that number growing leaps and bounds as the NekNominate trend continues to spread.

As expected, government and health care officials are sounding an alarm regarding the NekNominate fad, as it encourages dangerous binge-drinking and other types of alcohol-fueled high-risk behaviors that can lead to serious injury and even death. In fact, officials in the U.K. have already attributed five recent deaths to NekNominate, including incidents of fatal alcohol poisoning and one where an Irish teenager chugged his drink before jumping off a bridge and drowning.

We believe that there are several factors contributing to the popularity of NekNominate.

**First, our culture glorifies excessive consumption of alcohol.**

In fact, marketing has effectively created an environment where alcohol consumption is seen as a necessary prerequisite to having a "good time."

**Second, drinking is seen as a "fun" activity and rite of passage.**

One student says this about NekNominate: "I genuinely think it's just a bit of fun. All the people I know who've done it have done it because they found it funny and didn't feel pressurized at all. If they did, they wouldn't have to do it. It's just a bit of entertainment on boring nights in." In addition, drinking has become an expected "marker" on the passage from childhood to adulthood.

**Third, our culture's loss of a collective moral compass leads to a climate where anyone can do anything.** . . . because, after all. . . it's just a matter of personal preference and choice. There is no right or wrong.

**Fourth, our kids are at a developmental stage where peer pressure reaches its apex.** Even those who have been taught and know right from wrong will sometimes compromise their morals as that is a far-less-risky proposition than going against

the will of the peer group. Because the risk of harassment is high for those who don't take the dare, NekNominate is a game fed by adolescent insecurity.

**Fifth, teenagers tend to be risk-takers.**

Even in the presence of warnings and hard evidence of clear and present danger, there is always the sense that "I can totally get away with this" and "nothing bad will happen to me."

**Finally, the popularity of NekNominating is testimony to the viral power of social media.**

A game that originated in a college dorm in Australia went global almost overnight. And in a world where young

people embrace social media as a perceived passport to developing an audience that will feed their celebrity and fame, kids will gravitate to filming and posting outlandish behaviors as an investment that they hope will yield huge dividends of social capital in the form of likes, views, and followers.

We expect that the NekNominate fad will continue to catch on and spread. We believe that because of age-compression (typically older pressures and behaviors embraced at younger and younger ages) and age-aspiration (kids want to be seen, treated, and feel like they are much older than they really are), we will be hearing more and more stories like those of young Rihannon Scully. This trend will grow in popularity among pre-teens who want to look and feel older than they are. We can also expect to see fall-out in terms of consequences including illness, injury, and even death. In addition, other knock-off games will develop and spread through the

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youth culture. Already we are hearing about variations of NekNominate known as “The 1-Pint Challenge” and “Icing.” And finally, it is reasonable to expect NekNominate videos to depict unimaginable extremes in terms of what people choose to ingest, and the risk-taking behaviors they engage in while doing their drinking.

CPYU offers the following suggestions to parents, educators, youth workers, and others who love and care for children and teens.

- Warn kids about the moral, physical, and legal dangers of NekNominate. Because the trend is reaching kids at younger and younger ages, it is essential to speak even to pre-teens about this dangerous and deadly trend.
- Clearly lay out behavioral expectations and parameters for your kids. Let them know what is and is not expected of them, along with the consequences for violating those parameters. Be sure to follow-up if they disobey your boundaries.
- View, deconstruct, and talk about alcohol marketing wherever and whenever you encounter it with your kids. Point out and discuss the messages equating alcohol consumption with maturity, relational connections, and fun.



- Come to a decision about how you will model responsible alcohol consumption, whether that be by choosing abstinence or moderation. Your children are watching and learning.
- Limit and monitor your child’s exposure to social media. Do not put Internet-capable, unlimited-access, camera-equipped smartphones in the hands of elementary-aged and middle-school-aged children.

Supervise and monitor the use of devices by older teenagers.

- Warn your children of the dangers (moral, legal, and physical) of daring someone else to engage in behaviors that could result in injury or death.

No one knows how long the NekNominate fad will last. In the meantime be aware and equip your kids to beware of this dangerous trend.

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For more information on today’s youth culture, visit the website of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding at [www.cpyu.org](http://www.cpyu.org).

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