

# Guyland: A tough place to be

By CHARLES EBERLY, PH.D., Bowling Green State '63



Michael Kimmel is a sociologist and gender scholar who focuses his research on men and masculinity. He is a sociology professor at SUNY-Stony Brook in Long Island, New York.

Michael Kimmel's eighth book, *Guyland*, released in September, is a window on young men's struggles to make the leap from boyhood into manhood. Kimmel explains that young men today do not have a transition to manhood like mine: marriage at 22, a new job, one child at 24, a Ph.D. at 28, and three children by 30. They do not have a well-defined "road map" into mature adulthood. Educational expectations have been expanded, the average age to marry is the late 20s, the first job is "a" job and not "the" job. Living with two or three college buddies after college is more common, an extension of the college years rather than growth beyond them.

Kimmel's interviews with nearly 400 young men between 18 and 30 have resulted in *Guyland*, which describes their journey through the travails of transition, that time when young men are seeking a sense of who they are as men. They are trying to acquire their personal masculinity, an identity that takes them beyond the hyper-masculinity found in popular culture. As I read Kimmel's work, I clearly heard the voices of the nearly 600 young men who have joined Eastern Illinois since 1990 when I began to advise the chapter. Kimmel's description of "Guyland as a new stage of development" paralleled the topic discussed on our chapter's alumni bulletin board among recent graduates. We discussed doubts about first jobs, the excesses of weekends around "the friendly confines," the challenges of establishing relationships and the struggles with identifying a healthy personal masculinity. Nearly all had followed "The Guy Code" as they went through college, and now many were without a clear sense of personal goals or next steps.

# GUYLAND

THE PERILOUS WORLD WHERE BOYS BECOME MEN  
UNDERSTANDING THE CRITICAL YEARS BETWEEN 16 AND 26



MICHAEL KIMMEL  
AUTHOR OF MANHOOD IN AMERICA

## Today's way to connect leaves gaps

Kimmel examines the apparent lack of young men's engagement with faculty members in the formal curriculum and college leadership activities, much of which he ascribes to the Guy Code belief that college is the last chance in life to enjoy camaraderie without responsibility. Kimmel calls the guy passion for computer gaming a safe way for men to connect. I see that lived out in the fantasy football leagues formed among our alumni and undergraduate members. They connect less frequently in person than they do through online channels like gaming, social networking and instant messaging.

Sports, in high school and beyond, was their common denominator for communication, as they jostled for position, and acted out their perception of manly behavior. Unfortunately, many of the messages, as Kimmel relates, conveyed a hyper-masculinity detrimental to forming healthy relationships with other men and particularly with women. From high school "Boot Camp" to binge drinking and physical tests of manhood (hazing) in college, Kimmel's respondents voiced their ambiguities with the cultural messages they receive and the image of manhood they hope to achieve. Kimmel argues that the only way to break the Guy Code "is to break the culture of silence" that supports it. The majority of brothers, who are bystanders, must hold perpetrators publicly accountable for their behavior when it becomes destructive.

Wherever young men congregate, as if it were limited only to young men, the topic turns to women, sexual prowess, sexual experience, and the pressure to perform as testimony to one's maleness. Kimmel negotiates the conflicting messages young men tell him they receive, first through surreptitious lurking on pornography

## Sociologist examines the perils of approaching manhood

sites, then through a perceived college culture of hooking up to demonstrate one's maleness. He explores the role of women in Guyland, and the manner in which a great deal of sexual activity is as much to demonstrate one's maleness to other men as it is to be intimate with women. And even among women, the real competition seems to be focused on who among the other men are watching.

### "Charismatic adult" can fill the gap

Kimmel's examination of *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* offers the reader an in-depth view of the drivers of a boy's transition to manhood. In his final chapter, "Just Guys," Kimmel's respondents agree that "most of what happens in Guyland is stupid and gross." Mostly, these young men do not participate in the exaggerated forms of hyper-masculinity that many perceive as a standard they somehow were trying to reach but could not attain. Kimmel argues that mentors of young men

need "to encourage emotional resilience in guys—in our sons, our friends, our brothers." He states that, "To a man, they all spoke of at least one adult who made a difference" in their lives. Whether a parent, a coach, teacher, or other responsible adult, young men want someone to listen to them, to hear them, to support and affirm them. In the final pages, Kimmel concludes that "having a charismatic adult... is crucial" to young men as they journey to their end goal of becoming a "healthy, responsible adult." Here, Kimmel gives voice not so much to young men, but to the people like me who have dedicated their professional and volunteer lives to working with our younger brothers in SigEp.

Chapter advisors and local alumni boards can work to operate good physical facilities, but until we as volunteers understand the hearts of our young men who live inside those buildings, we do little more than provide a leaky roof over their heads.

Charles Eberly is a professor of counseling and student development at Eastern Illinois University.



Jimmy Friesema, Eastern Illinois '08, (left) and Mike Nowak, Eastern Illinois '08, endorsed Guyland and Michael Kimmel for "getting it," to the point that they wanted their parents to read the book.

## Guyland is where hazing happens

By MATTHEW B. ONTELL, UCLA '05, Director of Member Development

Michael Kimmel's book has a very clear and profound implication for SigEp. It takes men like us to change young men's lives. *Guyland* is a must-read for volunteers and parents who want a glimpse behind the curtain at the issues and pressures facing our undergraduate brothers today. I've watched hundreds of my brothers try to navigate the amorphous stage

"between the dependency and lack of autonomy of boyhood, and the sacrifice and responsibility of manhood" even as I went through it myself.

The relevance of this perilous leap from boy to man runs headlong into the reality of hazing seen on campus today (and not just in social fraternities as many infer). Some rites of passage and

traditions have devolved into mental and physical abuse ostensibly to prove commitment, unity, brotherhood and manhood. This is a far cry from the traditions and values of our founders. Kimmel firmly declares that "the very mechanisms of initiation into Guyland are so distorted that they can never produce a real man—sensible, sober, responsible, a

decent father, partner, husband. Initiations in Guyland have nothing to do with integrity, morality, doing the right thing, swimming against the tide, or standing up for what is right despite the odds. In fact, initiations in Guyland are about drifting with the tide [and] going along with peer pressure."

So what are we to do? The men of the community, alumni of

the Fraternity, and volunteers must model what real manhood is about. We have to change "the culture of entitlement" to "a culture of integrity." Kimmel, not a fraternity man, specifically cites SigEp in *Guyland* on pages 288-289, and he highlights our efforts to live up to our values and be an

organization where "guys can be valued for their integrity and encouraged to be good, whole human beings," to be balanced men. Stay focused on building men who not only believe in, but also live Virtue, Diligence and Brotherly Love, because that's what being a real man is all about.

"We have to change 'the culture of entitlement' to 'a culture of integrity.'" ~ MATTHEW B. ONTELL, UCLA '05