MICHAEL KIMMEL'S *GUYLAND: THE PERILOUS WORLD WHERE BOYS BECOME MEN*

ANNA BALDASARRE
THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
JULY 2016

WHAT IS GUYLAND?

A sociological interpretation of the experiences of "guys," primarily white, middle class, college educated, heterosexual men ages 16-26

http://www.vdatingtips.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/college_guy.jpg

"Guyland" is Michael Kimmel's interpretation of the behaviors and attitudes of the experiences of "guys," whom he defines as primarily white, middle class, college educated, heterosexual men ages 16-26. Although he states that he "talked with plenty of Latino, African-American, and Asian-American guys," "high-school grads who never went to college but instead worked in auto body shops, served in the military, and opened small businesses," and "quite a few gay and bisexual guys as well," keep in mind that the behaviors and attitudes described in the book are mostly those of young men with privilege in race, socioeconomic status, sexuality, and education and should not necessarily be used to describe men outside of this demographic (Kimmel, 2008, 3).

GUYS AND...

- Transitioning to adulthood

- The Guy Code

- High school

- Hazing

- Sports

- Technology & media

- Pornography

- Sex

- Girls & women

Friends with Benefits, 2011 film
http://www.readunwritten.com/2015/03/05/college-guys-point-talking-get-attached/

The book covers a range of experiences that guys encounter, including transitioning from boyhood to adulthood, interacting with girls and women, and how they use hazing, sports, technology, and pornography to relate to other guys and attempt to prove their masculinity. Kimmel (2008) uses these categories to show broad experiences that guys share and some of the central ways that they try to uphold their masculinity. These topics, each assigned to their own chapters, include general observations, examples from Kimmel's interviews and personal experiences, and Kimmel's interpretation of the underlying meaning and causes of the ways that guys speak and act about each of these subjects.

GUYLAND THEMES

- Homosocial bonding

- Privilege

- Power

These three noteworthy themes appeared repeatedly throughout the book.

Homosocial bonding: Many of the actions that guys partake in are intended to shore up their relationships with other guys. They must follow "The Guy Code," which Kimmel (2008) describes as the feeling that "[t]hese 'almost men' struggle to live up to a definition of masculinity they feel they had no part in creating, and yet from which they feel powerless to escape. Individually, a guy often feels that if there is a playbook everyone else has read—except him. That playbook is called 'The Guy Code'" (p. 43). One of the most important tenets of The Guy Code is that men cannot and should not show emotion; therefore, they must find other ways to develop friendships. Some of these ways include watching sports and/or pornography together, playing video games, and bragging about their sexual exploits (yet these exploits should always be heterosexual, or guys risk losing their masculinity) (Kimmel, 2008).

Privilege & power: The guys of Guyland are primarily guys with privilege—racial, heterosexual, gender, socioeconomic, and educational. Guys may feel less masculine if they do not have these privileges. Their version of masculinity—which involves putting down men who are non-white, non-heterosexual, etc.—is not the masculinity to which all men adhere. Yet men with this type of privilege have historically held power in the United States and used that power to subjugate others without privilege, and according to Kimmel (2008), today's guys are feeling that this entitlement is slipping away. Feeling that they are no longer always on top of the status quo or are losing their power to women, racial minorities, and others can lead guys to find methods of escaping reality to places where they do have power and privilege. These escapes may include expressing violence, racism, sexism, and other prejudices through sports talk, violent pornography and video games, hazing other guys, and bragging about having sex with women (Kimmel, 2008). They use these methods of escape to try to regain the power to which they feel entitled.

For example, Kimmel (2008) sums up the meaning of sports to America's guys: "Once, of course, the entire public sphere was a man's world. Today, everywhere you look, the corporate boardroom, the classroom, the military squad, the athletic field—there are women. Is it so surprising that guys today rely more on talking about sports, playing fantasy sports, and living and breathing sports 24/7? Sports talk has become the reconstituted clubhouse, the last 'pure' all-male space in America" (p. 127).

These themes were concerning for me. From my own experiences I think they do have validity, but I also believe that these attitudes can be damaging both to men and women. I think that The Guy Code and its form of masculinity is outdated and does not prepare guys well to enter the world today—a world that is increasingly diverse and changing.

AUDIENCE

- "[G]uys—and those who know them, care about them, love them" (Kimmel, 2008, p. 8)

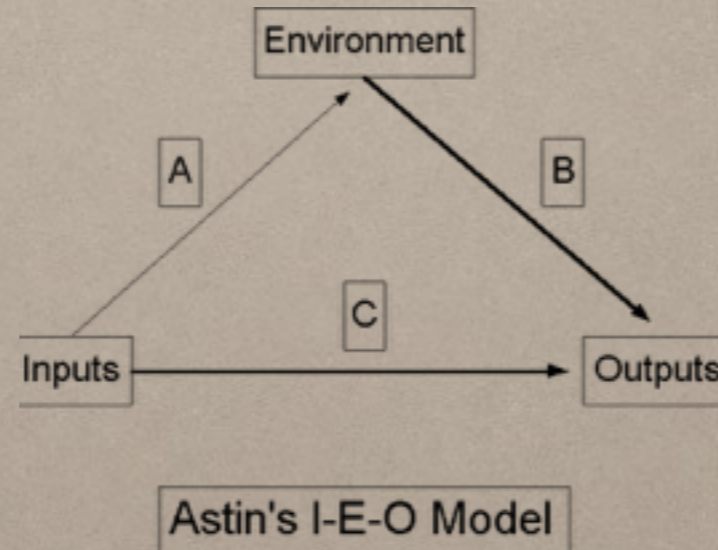http://www.studyskillsireland.com/Parents-and-son-at-gradua-001.jpg

The author, Michael Kimmel (2008), states that he hopes this book will be useful to "guys—and those who know them, care about them, [and] love them" (p. 8). This is partly a call to action for young men—to make them aware of some of the problematic experiences that guys face and empower them to strive for a different type of masculinity—and partly a type of parenting book to help parents and others understand what their young men ages 16-26 typically experience in the world.

There is also meaning for others, including college administrators, who are interested in some of the behaviors and attitudes that guide the privileged young men of America—the type of men that, traditionally, are poised to enter into positions of social, cultural, political, and economic power (sometimes at the expense of those who are women, racial minorities, of low socioeconomic status, not heterosexual, or otherwise have less privilege). I chose this book because I work with and advise fraternity men, and at my institution, most of these men fit Kimmel's definition of "guys." From Kimmel's (2008) book, and the three themes previously identified, I think it is clear that the masculinity that these guys seek to perpetuate will be problematic in today's world, and as educators it is our responsibility to help guide them in reshaping what it means to be a man and to be successful.

CONNECTION TO THEORY

Environment

A   B

C

Inputs → Outputs

Astin's I-E-O Model

http://uwm.edu/saassessment/wp-content/uploads/sites/157/2014/09/astin70.gif

Astin's model of input-environment-outcome says that a student's pre-college characteristics (input) as well as college experiences (environment) have both individual and combined effects on what the student learns during college (outcome). Regarding *Guyland*, I have identified a component of each facet of the model which can help us further explore the challenges that guys face and discover ways to help them from boyhood toward manhood.

Let's begin with the output. Kimmel (2008) has identified several of the challenges that guys face as they transition from boys into men, and I believe that some of the major themes which emerged from his research, including the inability of guys to understand and express their emotions and their inclination to cling to feelings of entitlement, will cause problems for guys and men in today's world—and even for the girls and women with whom they share the world. So as college educators and parents (the audience for which the book is intended) who guide and support guys, I would suggest that the desired output would be an updated version of masculinity that will better serve today's guys. This form of masculinity should emphasize respect for others, acceptance of differences, and a willingness to embrace traditionally "feminine" traits such as compassion to help develop a well-rounded man.

If the output is the goal, then what aspects of guys' "inputs" and "environments" can help achieve that goal? College educators cannot do much about the inputs that students bring with them to college. Affecting the input would be the responsibility of primarily parents and other role models that boys see while growing up—men and women who set expectations and display what it means to be "a man." Gender roles and expectations are set before children are even born (consider "gender reveals" during a pregnancy and the subsequent buying of blue or pink clothes, "boy" or "girl" toys) and continue throughout childhood (Witt, 1997). So how can parents help achieve the new output? By encouraging their children—both boys and girls—to explore various aspects of their personality, modeling well-rounded interests and traits themselves, and having open discussions and answering questions about how to be masculine and/or feminine.

Environment is where we as college educators enter the picture of guys' lives. We should build programs and provide educational opportunities that encourage participants to examine their gender biases, develop respect for people who are different than them, and make them feel empowered to explore various definitions of masculinity and femininity. New (2016) states that "[c]olleges are increasingly creating masculinity programs, aimed at boosting retention while encouraging students to rethink what it means to 'be a man.'" These programs have the potential to improve men's retention rates, social relationships, and academic performances by engaging them in conversations about sex, gun culture, pornography, alcohol and high risk drinking, and sports. As these programs continue to develop, it will be important to include assessment in order to determine if they truly are having a positive effect. My functional area, fraternity/sorority life, has the potential to have a huge impact on guys. Fraternities were initially created to bolster college men's academic skills and social networks but now are often better known by the public for incidents of racism, sexism, violence, and high-risk behaviors. Considering that, the most pertinent question for me is how can we help create fraternities that once again strive to improve men's lives rather than have the potential to hurt them?

REFERENCES

Astin, A.W. (1991). Assessment for excellence: the philosophy and practice of assessment and evaluation in

higher education. Washington, DC: American Council on Education/Oryx Press Series on Higher Education.

Retrieved from http://uwm.edu/saassessment/assessment-cycle-reports/ieo-model

Kimmel, M. (2008). *Guyland: the perilous world where boys become men*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

New, J. (2016). 'Be a man.' *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/news/

2016/06/29/masculinity-programming-university-redlands-hopes-help-men-be-authentic-selves

Witt, S.D. (1997). Parental influence on children's socialization to gender roles. *Adolescence* (Summer 1997).

Retrieved from http://gozips.uakron.edu/~susan8/parinf.htm