

'I Want to Hear Those Charges': Noted Sociologist Defers Award Until He Can 'Make Amends'

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A sociologist at Stony Brook University who was slated to receive a national award this month for his career-long contributions to gender equality will delay accepting the award for six months, in light of rumors he said were circulating about his professional behavior.

Michael Kimmel, a professor of sociology and gender studies at Stony Brook, said in a statement released on Wednesday that he wanted to give those who feel they have been mistreated by him time to file complaints with the American Sociological Association.

Kimmel, who founded Stony Brook's Center for the Study of Men and Masculinities in 2013, had been announced as the 2018 recipient of the Jessie Bernard Award, which was to be given this month at the association's annual meeting in Philadelphia.

The award recognizes scholarly work over a person's career "that has enlarged the horizons of sociology to encompass fully the role of women in society."

"I have been informed that there are rumors circulating about my professional conduct that suggest I have behaved unethically." Kimmel, who has been anonymously accused of sexual harassment by former students, has written several books including *Guyland: the Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* and *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era*. On his website, he describes himself as "an activist for gender equality for more than 30 years." He has lectured at hundreds of colleges and corporations worldwide on gender equality and related issues.

Nancy Kidd, executive director of the ASA, said she cannot comment on whether any formal or informal complaints have been made against Kimmel. The association did not ask him to delay accepting the award, she said.

In an email on Wednesday, Kidd said Kimmel will not attend the award ceremony at the annual meeting and has asked that a statement be read on his behalf. In it, he said he was honored to be selected for the award.

"However, I have been informed that there are rumors circulating about my professional conduct that suggest I have behaved unethically," the statement reads. "While nothing has been formally alleged to the best of my knowledge, I take such concerns seriously, and want to validate the voices of those who are making such claims. I want to hear those charges, hear those voices, and make amends to those who believe I have injured them."

The ASA has a professional-ethics committee that could facilitate the process, but it can't act on rumors, he wrote. He encouraged those making accusations to file complaints with the committee "so these accusations can be formally addressed." To help the process, he said he will defer the acceptance of the award for six months.

'Professional and Respectful'

In an email to The Chronicle on Wednesday in response to questions about his statement and anonymous accusations of sexual harassment, Kimmel wrote that he appreciated the association's willingness to "extend the timeline for the vetting process."

"I've spent my entire career advocating for gender equality, and believe I have been professional and respectful in my relationships with women," he wrote.

A spokeswoman for Stony Brook said the university doesn't comment on personnel matters.

Kidd said a committee of peer reviewers selected Kimmel for the award based on an extensive review of his academic contributions. "ASA takes very seriously any accusations of misconduct against sociologists which violate our Code of Ethics, and we have a process for receiving and addressing complaints," she wrote earlier this summer. "Should a complaint be filed and investigated, through us or other investigative bodies, that leads to a finding of misconduct, ASA will take appropriate action."

Margaret L. Andersen, a professor emeritus of sociology at the University of Delaware, chaired the committee that selected Kimmel for the award. Asked whether the committee had been aware of any harassment complaints against him, Andersen said that Kimmel had been selected "based on a long and outstanding record of scholarship." The association, she said, has a formal process for dealing with complaints about professional ethics. "As on university campuses," Andersen added, "due process must be followed in any such matter." She declined further comment.

A former graduate student who asked not to be identified, fearing retaliation, told The Chronicle that Kimmel suggested about six weeks into her graduate study, and then later in her career, that they sleep together. She said he complimented her on her appearance and told her that because of her looks, she'd have to work hard to prove to people that she wasn't sleeping with someone to get where she was. "I think he thought he was being helpful," she said.

Feeling her main worth was as a "pretty object," who titillated other scholars, her confidence in her work plummeted and she "sabotaged" opportunities to publish, she said. She called it a "travesty" that he was receiving the Jessie Bernard award. Kimmel declined to comment on the specific allegations.

One female sociologist who has been a leader in the association but who asked to remain anonymous told The Chronicle that she had heard similar accusations from other female scholars about Kimmel "through the whisper network." She said that "no one is comfortable coming forward and there's not a lot our professional organization can do without a person willing to make a first-hand claim."

Adia Harvey Wingfield, an ASA member and president of Sociologists for Women in Society, wrote in an email that she welcomed Kimmel's decision to defer his acceptance of the award.

Wingfield, a professor of sociology at Washington University in St. Louis, said she hoped it would "serve as a sign to victims and institutions" that allegations of sexual harassment will be treated more seriously than they have been up to now.

Sexual harassment and gender equity are major themes at the annual meeting, with several sections devoted to the topic. The discipline has been rocked by allegations of sexual misconduct against other scholars, including Robert L. Reece an assistant professor at the University of Texas at Austin. He was accused by a former graduate-school classmate of sexual assault. Reece, who came under fire for an essay in which he described how men are coming to terms with behavior that would now be considered coercive, says he doesn't consider the incident she referred to as assault.

A former graduate-school classmate also accused Matthew W. Hughey, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Connecticut, of sexual abuse. He was not immediately available for comment. Like Kimmel, Reece and Hughey have focused much of their scholarship on equity issues.

A male sociologist who says his experience being harassed prompted him to serve on the ASA's working group on sexual harassment wrote in a recent blog post that “despite the rhetoric of inclusion and diversity, professional organizations often create cultural environments that make disrupting the status quo risky” — especially for young scholars trying to establish themselves.