



SCOPE VISITING SCHOLAR PRACTICING PREVENTION TIP FEBRUARY 2013

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Our Bodies, Ourselves, and Each Other...

Well, just as we were starting to remember that a new year has started, it's already February! Personally, for the last several years I have been specifically resolving not to have any New Year's resolutions, deciding instead to allow myself to be mindful and curious and looking into or trying things that appeal to me. This is perhaps not the way we are taught that men are supposed to behave. On the contrary, if I were consulting the invisible male playbook, I would be concerned with being driven and focused on my work to the exclusion of most other things. Truthfully, that has been a habit of mine for much of my adult life, and I confess it is a tough habit to end. I am trying to think of this as a part of me with which I am developing a different relationship than in the past. When we do the personal work, trying to grow, trying to do better, we sometimes (maybe often) metaphorically kick ourselves for forgetting to do things in the new way to which we aspire. I am sure that fellow SCOPE members will appreciate that complicated tension, and we have a lot of stories to tell. And, we sure do encourage our students to be kind, forgiving and patient with themselves, but it can be hard to do that for ourselves.

You may know that much of my work relates to men and masculinities, and thinking about male-identified people in terms of our gender identity development. Lately, I have been thinking a lot about the things we all (meaning across all gender and sexual identities) might have in common rather than just about our differences. For example, we might have difficult relationships with our bodies. Certainly these difficulties might manifest in different ways, but in any case our connection with our physical selves can be really complicated. Societal norms push males to drive their bodies into the ground, avoiding self-care and physicals, insisting that we "walk it off," "don't cry," and most importantly to avoid carrying or treating ourselves in ways that may be deemed to be "feminine" by others. Female-identified people are severely pressed by norms suggesting or overtly stating that their worth is tied to bodies fitting into a narrowly defined beauty image that even so-called models don't look like in person. They are made to feel shame and worse in regards to how their bodies look or function in whole or part; or their agency with it. It should be added that males have more of this kind of thing happening that we might share, or that is really heard or understood.

So, for this month's SCOPE Practicing Prevention Tip, I would like to offer an invitation for you to consider your relationship with your body, and to offer colleagues and students this invitation as well. How have you been thinking about your body, explicitly or implicitly? Given the question, how do you describe your body privately in your mind or when speaking of it? Where did you learn or develop these thoughts and ideas? What have been their benefits and costs? In what ways are these ideas and thoughts related to your gender and/or sexual identity (how might these change if you were of a different gender or sexual identity)? In conversations I have had with students, I have often (very often, actually) found that they have thought about these issues, but have believed or at least felt alone in their experience of them, at least in some aspects. Take some time to identify the support resources you and your students can access to journey further into these questions, so that trauma or other painful struggles—past or present—or simply the benefits of facilitation can be incorporated into a path toward a kinder relationship with our body.

I would be very interested to hear from you about this. If you would like to share your experience with these questions, you can send me a note at jason@wearescope.org. Also, this month I will be conducting a SCOPE Webinar entitled, "Men and Wellness: Toward a Solution to the HuMANity Conundrum" (Monday, February 18th, 12:00-1:30ET. See: <http://wearescope.org/events/webinars/>).