



JUNE SCOPE PRACTICING PREVENTION TIP

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It is now June and I imagine we are all relieved to have the school year completed. Affection for our students, perilously close to being snuffed out by end of year incident reports, is limping but alive. We lived to tell, though our sentimentality is eclipsed by a desire for rest, reflection and enjoyment of summer activities before getting ready for next year. With a bit more quiet, we also have a chance to ask our annual questions about what happened, what we learned and what we might want to do better or differently when it all starts up again in August.

For my part, I couldn't help but notice that this was a very gendered year. By this, I mean a lot of the issues with which colleagues and I contended, as well as items covered in Education news, featured issues related to gender. For example, several universities experienced high profile coverage for problems and failures in responding to gendered violence and campus climate issues. The disproportionate attendance and graduation rates between male and female students (e.g. more women on campus and graduating) continued to be a topic. There were also more incidents of rampage violence committed by males in schools and public spaces (Brian Van Brunt, Michelle Issadore and I are presenting a [post-conference](#) on this at the upcoming [SCOPE conference in Orlando](#)).

The popular media writ large has had a lot to say about gender as well, especially this past year. Not known for nuance or subtlety, news anchors, columnists and pundits on the Right and Left alike have been gleefully declaring a male "crisis" for a while now. And many have suggested or outright stated that girls and women, especially Feminists, have caused or exacerbated these so-called problems. There was, for instance, a lively conversation (rather than a debate, which assumes the presence of differing views) on Lou Dobbs' show on Fox (<http://tinyurl.com/lu5vgpx>) in which he and four other men were connecting an increase in households with female "breadwinners" to a dire breakdown of US society that will have calamitous results. Despite Fox's Right-leaning politics, even one of their female colleagues confronted Lou and one of the other panelists for their sexist reductions.

Across the Atlantic, Britain's *The Guardian* has been covering remarks in a speech given by Minister of Parliament (MP) Diane Abbott, who also serves as her political party's "Shadow Public Health Minister" (a role associated with the minority party). MP Abbott sounded an alarm, indicating that Britain is facing a "crisis of masculinity" fueled by the troubled economy, and that it is "warping male identity" and encouraging machismo, homophobia and misogyny. In her view, men are also failing to talk about these issues and problems, and she likens it to the movie "Fight Club," with its fundamental rule that it not be discussed.

Not surprisingly, the speech provoked a lot of debate and punditry. Thankfully, some of it was thoughtful and appreciated the complexity of the issues. For example, in an Opinion piece in *The Guardian* a week later (<http://tinyurl.com/k38ovfr>), columnist Jack O'Sullivan unpacks the speech and associated issues, noting:

"A debate about men defined by women inevitably dwells on what's wrong with men – on a continuing 'crisis'. That's understandable. There are many worrying issues that a male discussion of masculinity would and should confront. We are, after all, fathers, husbands, brothers, sons, lovers, colleagues and friends of women. But which man wants to join a debate loaded with negativity, littered with slogans like 'all men are rapists'? A debate with genuine male participation and leadership would include the above issues, but within a broader, aspirational and authentically male agenda."

Personally, I have been very interested in studying, writing and speaking about men and masculinities for over 20 years, especially as it affects campus life and student issues. "Men and Masculinities Studies" is a subfield of gender studies concerned with masculine role socialization, how masculinities are constructed and performed, by whom and with what consequences. Use of the plural "masculinities" assumes a diversity of masculine identities and performances, including those performed by people who do not identify as male.

So, when a colleague shared *The Guardian* article with me, I was struck by a persistent ambivalence. On the one hand, it gave voice to important, though politically uncomfortable, constraints associated with dialogue about gender. I also have a salient and longstanding urge to make sure men's sexism and gender violence against women is adequately

covered. I have observed this tension in Student Affairs and other educational circles for a long time. In the over 20 years I have been working, our field hasn't become much more comfortable or better at grappling with the ironies and paradoxes associated with identity. I would argue that our students are generally far more ready to do this than we are.

On a related note, bullying and related suicides were also prominently covered in the news. Many of these tragic situations involved female bullies and victims, which initially surprised me. My colleague, Dr. Erica Boas, and I have just completed the first phase of our study about the so-called "Hookup Culture" on college campuses, gendered dynamics of students' social and sexual lives and ways to reduce coerced and non-consensual sexual encounters (we will also be presenting a pre-conference about this together at the SCOPE conference). I mention these two things together because of the frequency in our study (and in other settings, including my classes) in which female students shared about being subjected to social isolation, bullying and "slut-shaming" by other women; in some cases, much more often than encountering these acts from male peers.

The ambivalence I described earlier, possibly along with some Liberal self-consciousness, caused me to be surprised to hear that women can be so mean to other women. As I reflect on why, I realize I have been accustomed to conversations about sexism and the ways men impose upon or otherwise hurt women: how women have been affected by feeling unsafe, dismissed, marginalized, physically and sexually dominated, or violated by males. I have been in very few conversations about women's participation in lateral sexism and misogyny, or about instances and patterns of male pro-feminist allies and lateral affirmations. Relatedly, Queer and Trans people experience homophobia from Cisgendered women and men, as well as from fellow Queer and Trans people.

How are all of these things related? They are the dirty laundry of our gender politics, further complicated by intersections with race and ethnicity, social class, body ability and size, among other things. My tip for June is really more than can happen within a month, but it can certainly start right now. There are complications, alternative stories, tragic secrets and hopeful possibilities hiding inside some very (initially) uncomfortable topics we need to broach. Our field has many virtues, but not nearly enough courage.

I am reminded of a 2004 Op-Ed in The Los Angeles Times, written by Feminist author, Barbara Ehrenreich, reacting to the discovery that three of seven soldiers involved in the notorious case of prisoner abuse at the Abu Ghraib prison during the Iraq War were women (<http://tinyurl.com/lq9bve>). In her piece, she expressed her shock at this, and sadly reported that "A certain kind of feminism, or perhaps I should say a certain kind of feminist naiveté, died in Abu Ghraib. It was a feminism that saw men as the perpetual perpetrators, women as the perpetual victims and male sexual violence against women as the root of all injustice." She urged readers to question the assumption that women are morally superior to men, noting, "A uterus is no substitute for a conscience." She called for challenging all of the structures that may have been male-centered and created initially, but which women have been aspiring to enter equally with some success. In this context, the fact that many women are cruel to each other and to men, or that many men are kind to women and other men is not the point. Ehrenreich concludes her essay thus: "To cite an old, and far from naive, feminist saying: 'If you think equality is the goal, your standards are too low.' It is not enough to be equal to men, when the men are acting like beasts. It is not enough to assimilate. We need to create a world worth assimilating into."

My own conclusion is similar, but it assumes that Cisgendered men and women, Queer and Trans students, faculty, staff and community partners can all work together to create that campus and that world worthy of our assimilation. But, we will never get there if we are so concerned with political fashion and avoiding offense or discomfort that we conveniently avoid the hard topics. As Educators, we have a professional, ethical and moral obligation to speak the truth of what we have seen and heard, what we wonder or believe, what we want to change and the commitments we will fulfill. So, my June tip is to get some good rest and thinking done, with the purpose of building your capacity to perform courageously come August.

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