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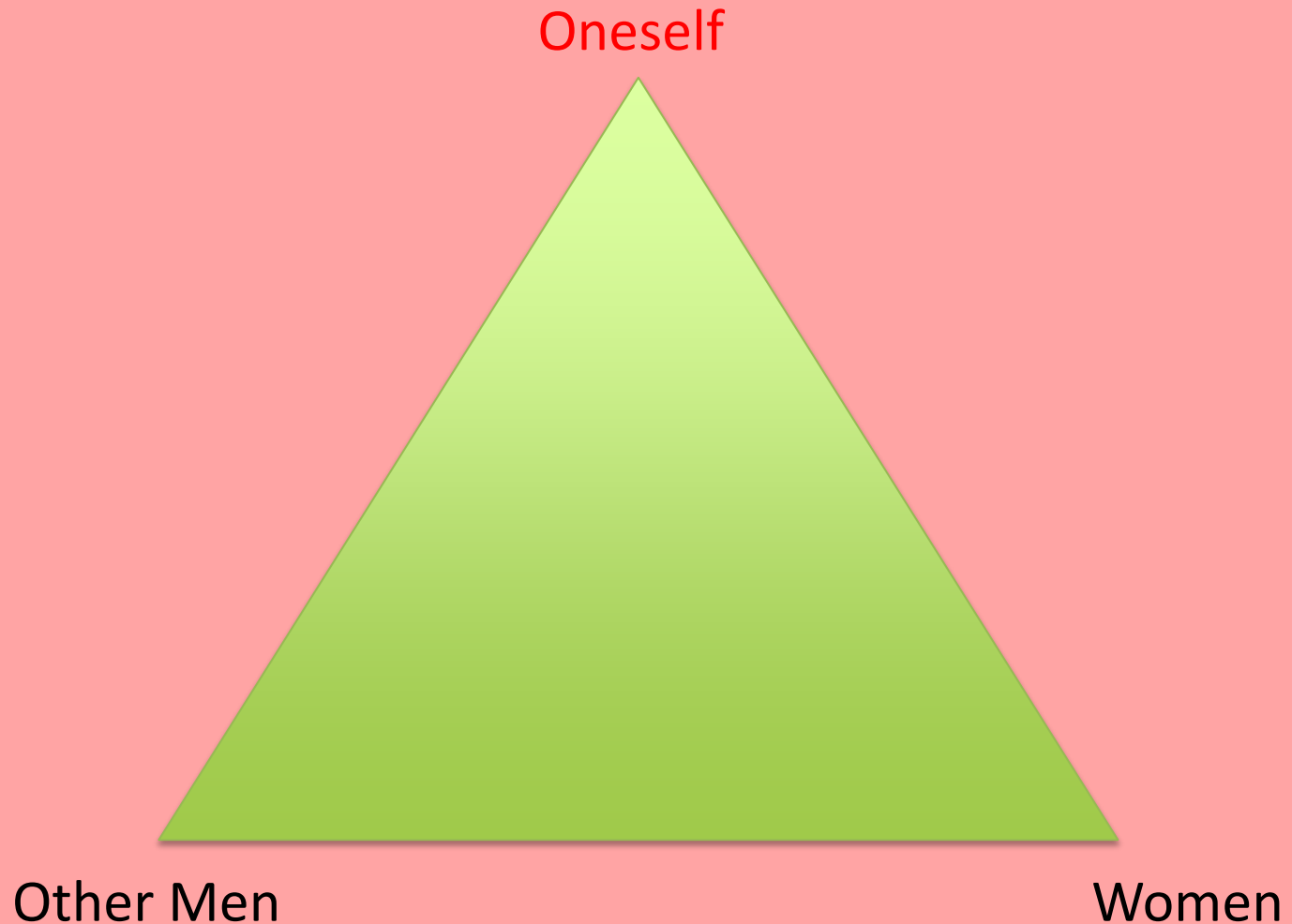
It's Just a Game: The Detriments Sport Has Forced Upon Masculinity

Michael A. Krug

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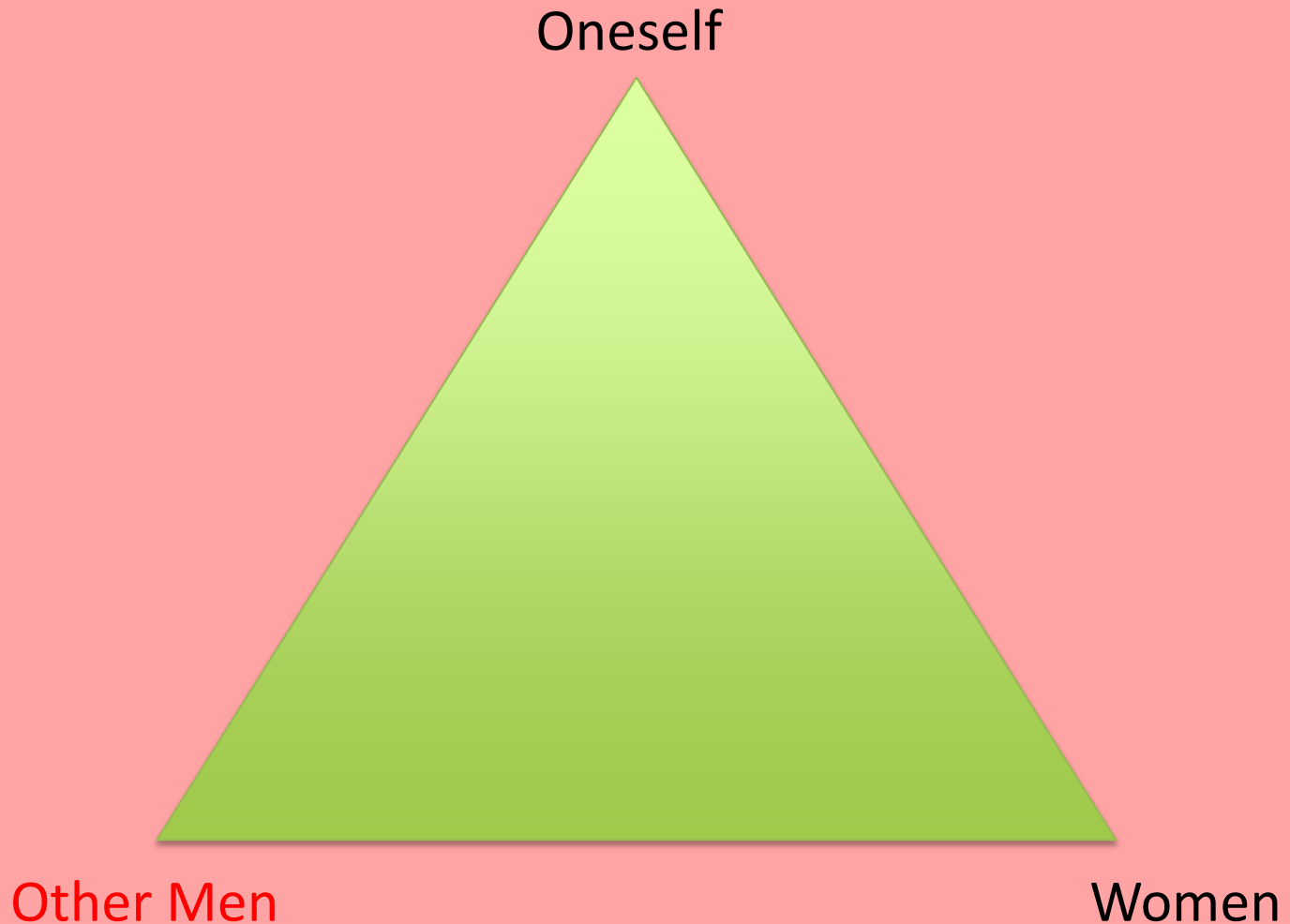
My goal is to show the different ways that sports and patriarchal culture are intertwined, and how this has adverse impact on everyone from the athletes themselves to other men and women they associate themselves with

Triad of Men's Violence



- “On the game’s seventh play, I trailed my receiver down the left sideline and looked back to see Andy Dalton toss it underneath to Chris Pressley, their 260-pound fullback. As he turned up the sideline I came down hard, squared up, and dove at his legs. His right knee connected with my temple, flipping him over my head. **I got up quickly and shook my head back and forth to let them know nobody is running me over.** The problem was that I couldn’t see. The concussion blurred my vision and I played the next two quarters half-blind, but there was no way I was coming off the field with so much at stake. It paid off: Just as my head was clearing, Andy Dalton lobbed one up to rookie A.J. Green and I came down with my first career interception.” –Richard Sherman

Triad of Men's Violence



Cary Williams: Chip Kelly overworking Eagles players - NFL.com

www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000398812/article/cary-williams-chip-kelly-overworking-eagles-players?campaign=Twitter_atn_wesseling



The **Philadelphia Eagles** have outscored opponents 74-24 in the second half of their three games this season.

One of the theories bandied about for that advantage is that coach **Chip Kelly's** rigorous, fast-paced practices have his troops hitting their stride later in the game while the other team is sucking wind.

Jabbering cornerback **Cary Williams** takes the opposite viewpoint, complaining after Sunday's 37-34 victory that Kelly's up-tempo practices are to blame for the **Eagles'** slow starts this season.

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Philadelphia Eagles postgame press conference





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"Le'Veon Bell, downhill attacking all night!" –
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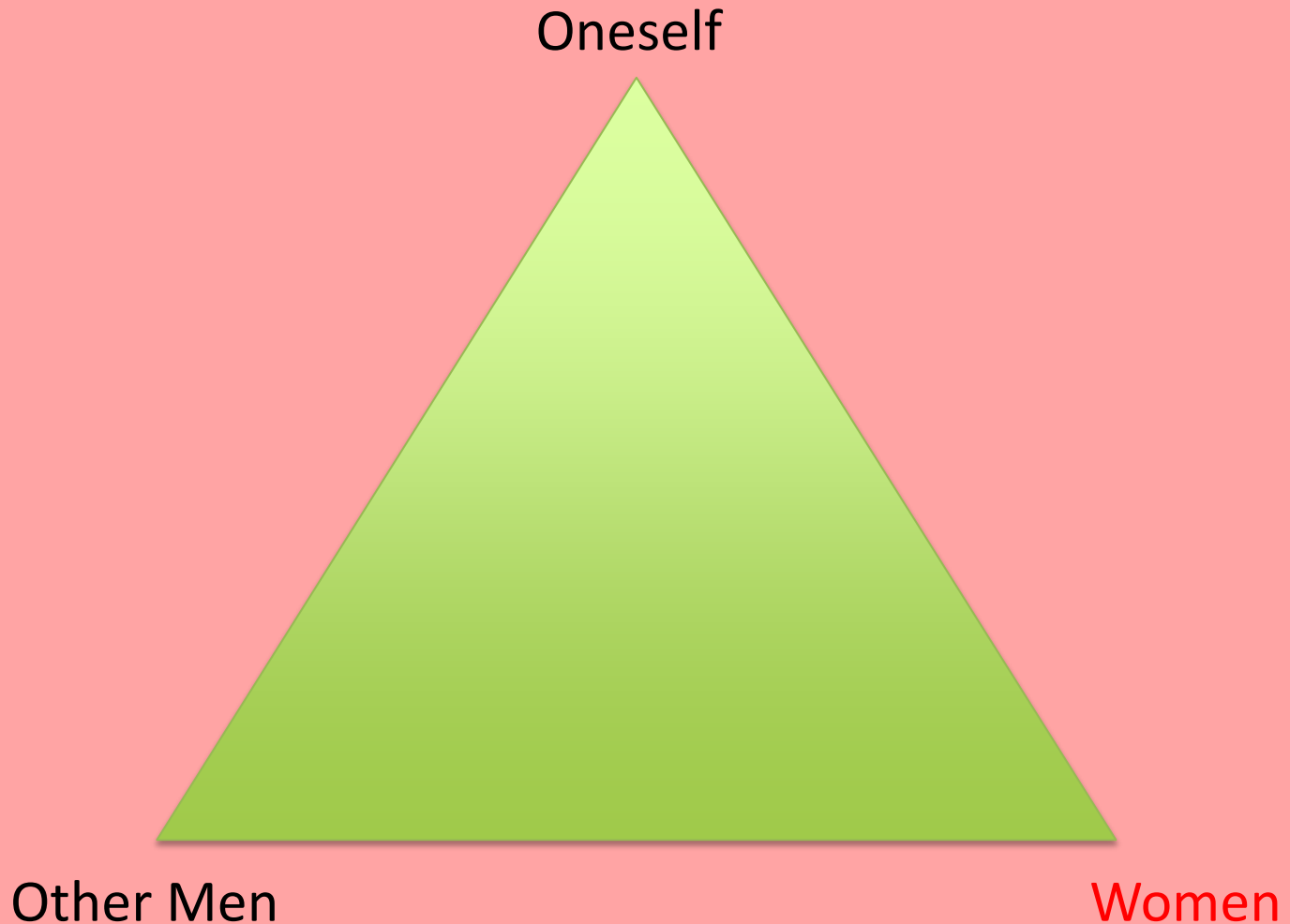


Discover



Me

Triad of Men's Violence



What Can Be Done?

“But one thing we know for sure: we need to engage men as allies in this cause. Most men are not perpetrators—and when we empower men to step in when someone’s in trouble, they become an important part of the solution”

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- Bunch, C. (1983). *“Not by Degrees: Feminist Theory and Education.”*
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- Not Alone (2014)

It's Just a Game: The Detriments Sports have forced on Masculinity

Michael Krug

Winona State University

Sports have become some of the most profitable industries in the United States. As a male feminist and former football player, I wanted to use a feminist lens to explore the impact sports have on masculinity and the ways that violence installed in sports has navigated its way into many institutions.

Though baseball is considered America's national past time, football has become the true love of sports fans in this country. A game of strategy, power, and violence, football has become more similar to war than it is a game. At a net worth of around 12 billion dollars, the National Football League certainly has an extreme impact on our economy and society as a whole. From a personal standpoint, football has given me some of the greatest joys I have ever felt, but it has also left me in the most pain I have ever experienced. My experiences with the game of football are just a microcosm of those experienced by all men who have played and continue to play the games they love, and it is these experiences that have left many men with a distorted view of what masculinity truly is. My goal is to show the different ways that sports and patriarchal culture are intertwined, and how this has adverse impact on everyone from the athletes themselves to other men and women they associate themselves with.

For this essay I have utilized the theoretical framework of Michael Kaufman's "The Construction of Masculinity and the Triad of Men's Violence," to show how masculine sports culture reproduces gender hierarchies and violence. This coincides with feminist scholar bell hook's notion that while many men are the oppressors of women in a patriarchal society and often experience extreme privilege, men are also plagued by the rigid sex roles installed in society, which are unhealthy in institutions like sports culture (Bell, 1984, p.74). Kaufman's triad of men's violence is essentially a cycle of violence perpetrated by men against themselves, other men, and women.

The first point on the triad of men's violence pertains to men's violence against themselves. In the sport of football this is such a normalized phenomenon that it often goes unnoticed, yet it is beginning to be noticed by the public eye in the form of concussions and Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy. Kaufman states, "Masculinity is power. But masculinity is terrifyingly fragile because it does not really exist in the sense we are led to think it exists; that is, as a biological reality—something real that we have inside ourselves" (Kaufman, 1987, p. 587). What Kaufman is arguing here is that the idea of masculinity in a patriarchal culture is that of power, strength and violence, but at the same time masculinity is just that, an idea that is alluring to many young men seeking their own definitions of masculinity. One of the most famous NFL players in the league today, Seattle Seahawks cornerback Richard Sherman, wrote a column titled, "We Chose This Profession," and goes in depth about the dangers of football and his experience with getting a concussion in his first ever NFL game. Sherman writes, "On the game's seventh play, I trailed my receiver down the left sideline and looked back to see Andy Dalton toss it underneath to Chris Pressley, their 260-pound fullback. As he turned up the

sideline I came down hard, squared up, and dove at his legs. His right knee connected with my temple, flipping him over my head. I got up quickly and shook my head back and forth to let them know nobody is running me over. The problem was that I couldn't see. The concussion blurred my vision and I played the next two quarters half-blind, but there was no way I was coming off the field with so much at stake. It paid off: Just as my head was clearing, Andy Dalton lobbed one up to rookie A.J. Green and I came down with my first career interception." When reading this I was struck by what Sherman said about the tackle. "I got up quickly and shook my head back and forth to let them know nobody is running me over." This reminded me of my football days and how being "run over," as Sherman says, is one of the most embarrassing things that can happen to a football player, because it shows the other player was more powerful, more dominating, and thus more masculine. Sherman goes on to explain how the NFL's new rules are aimed at lessening the amount of big hits in the game, the one's that make fans say "oooh" and "ahhhh," when those hits are only a small fraction of the game and cause just as much damage as seemingly normal, safe hits. Sherman ends his passage writing about how every player in the NFL is aware of the dangers of football, but that they don't think about the future because they live in the present, similar to the way people don't think about the food they eat that could cause cancer down the road. Sherman's assertion that 'We Chose This Profession' removes any criticism from the institution of football and the NFL, and rather places the blame of internalizing dangerous masculinity to the individual player. This creates a situation in which men's violence against themselves is a private matter, rather than a situation in need of public critique.

As I mentioned earlier, concussions and Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy are the primary reasons player safety has been put to the forefront for the NFL and it's fans. Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy, also known as CTE, is a progressive brain disease found in many former athletes that is believed to be caused by repeated force trauma to the cranium, otherwise known as concussions. Dementia, Alzheimer's disease, and depression often accompany CTE. One of the biggest troubles with CTE is that it can only be detected post-mortem, as the inside of the brain must be examined. Two former players, Dave Duerson and Junior Seau, took their own lives via gun shot wounds to the chest just 15 months apart, Duerson in February of 2011 and Seau in May of 2012. Both men wanted their brains to be examined by doctors to determine why they were feeling the way they were. Not surprisingly, both men were diagnosed with CTE after their brains were examined.

The violent construction of the masculinity of football, along with the value players put on upholding this idea of masculinity, can ultimately lead to their lives being cut short. Though analyzing the violence in football on individual levels is important, looking at football as a social institution that pits men as parts of teams against other men as parts of other teams is just as important, as it shows how dehumanization and militarization have become integral parts of the success and

popularity of football.

The second point on Kaufman's Triad of men's violence is violence against other men. Kaufman hits the nail on the head when he claims, "All of us had experiences of being beaten up or picked on when we were young. We learned to fight, or we learned to run; we learned to pick on others, or we learned how to talk or joke our way out of confrontation. But either way these early experiences of violence caused an incredible amount of anxiety and required a huge expenditure of energy to resolve. That anxiety is crystallized in an unspoken fear (particularly among heterosexual men): all other men are my potential humiliators, my enemies, my competitors" (p. 591). This quote is, as far as my personal experience, accurate to every detail. Violence coincides with masculinity, and since it is installed at a young age it is hard to think of masculinity without relating it to violence. The easily seen violence of men against other men in football is on the field, as players constantly hit each other throughout every contest. Taking a look behind the scenes shows different types of violence that men are pinning against other men when it comes to football, and it has just as much a negative effect on players as the violence on the field causes. Language used by players, coaches, and media have instilled the idea that violence and power are two of the most important keys to success for football teams. After week three this year I was reading some post game articles when I came across the Eagles-Redskins post game analysis. In the article the author exclaimed how head coach Chip Kelly of the Philadelphia Eagles "had his troops running at full speed" in the second half of the game. Later on twitter I saw the NFL tweeted a quote from former Saint Louis Rams running back Marshall Faulk, a hall of famer, and how he described Pittsburgh Steelers running back Le'veon Bell's running style as "downhill attacking." These are just two examples of countless ways militarized language has been and is being used to describe football players and teams from one week of NFL games. Using this kind of language not only glamorizes the violence of football, but it also relates the game to war. Both militarism and football share the same goal of militarism, which Gwyn Kirk and Margo Okizawa-Rey argue is "a system based on the objectification of 'others' as enemies. This in turn distances men even further from each other by dehumanizing their opponents.

Though men are the primary perpetrators and receivers of violence on the football field, there is no question this violence has had an effect on the amount of and ways that men perpetrate violence against women. Kaufman writes, "Men's violence against women is the most common form of direct, personalized violence in the lives of most adults. From sexual harassment to rape, from incest to wife battering to the sight of violent pornographic images, few women escape some form of men's aggression" (p. 589). He continues, "My purpose here is not to list and evaluate the various forms of violence against women, not to try and assess what can be classed as violence per se. It is to understand this violence as an expression of the fragility of masculinity combined with men's power" (p. 589). This passage only further exemplifies how violence and masculinity are intertwined, while bringing up

the idea that this violence can come about against women as acts of Gender based violence to show dominance and power. For those who may not be aware, gender-based violence is violence against an individual based on their sex and the perceived differences and imbalance of power between sexes. The intersection of sports and rape culture can also be examined here. Rape culture is essentially the way that rape and gender based violence is normalized in our society because of our perceptions of gender, sex, and sexuality. In the past 7 months the NFL has seen an influx of negative media attention for player conduct off the field. We are assumingly all familiar with the Ray Rice and Adrian Peterson cases of violence against women and children. While these stories finally brought gender based violence and domestic assault to the nations forefront, the fact that it took multimillion-dollar athletes committing these crimes, followed by horrible handling of the cases by the NFL, may have only made matters worse. The now 'common image' of men who commit crimes of gender based violence is of black men of athletic stature. This is very troubling in many ways. First, men of all races, sexual orientation, social status, and backgrounds commit these crimes. That being said, white men who have and do perpetrate these crimes are not made a spectacle of because men of color are central to the eye of media. For example, Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger had a sexual assault suit filed against him in 2008. The case was blatantly mishandled, and Roethlisberger was eventually let off the case. In a NY Times article by Thayer Evans posted in July of 2010, Roethlisberger's career is examined and, though the sexual assault case is mentioned and how it has changed the public's view of Roethlisberger, he is still praised in the article as being "a down to earth and good guy." The designation of being a 'good guy' is reserved for white masculinity, which thereby holds his privilege intact. This type of treatment for players who commit crimes of gender-based violence is all too common, and the NFL is to blame for much of the prevalence of rape culture being perpetrated by athletes.

As the triad of men's violence is certainly rampant in football culture, one may ask, what can be done to change the culture? Three weeks ago I was able to attend a discussion with author Steve Almond at Winona State University. Almond is a New York Times bestselling author and recently published a book titled, Against Football: One Fan's Reluctant Manifesto. I was fortunate enough to share some of my research interests with Almond and ask if he had any input as to ideas of how to change the masculinity of football culture, which is primarily derived out of violence, power, and aggression. He suggested things like having players play at smaller sizes, educating them more on how to safely hit and tackle other players, and reiterating to players the importance of reporting injuries, especially head injuries. Though these are good ideas, and some that have already been acted on, Almond ultimately concluded that the problem lies beneath the game itself. He stated that the culture of the fans, that being the desire to see and hear big hits and to see men bring force upon other men, is the true ignition and fuel of the violence in football. He personally, as stated in his book, has made a stand against football by refusing to watch any kind of football at any venue, and suggested that the only way

to truly diminish the violence of football is for all fans to stop supporting it. Richard Sherman's article that I mentioned earlier is concluded by Sherman saying, "And the next time I get hit in the head and I can't see straight, if I can, I'll get back up and pretend like nothing happened. Maybe I'll even get another pick in the process. If you don't like it, stop watching." The fans and consumers play a role in the context of this sporting institution's violence.

I personally do not see the popularity of football decreasing any time soon. This is evident, as the NFL has gone from a 9 billion dollar industry to 12 billion in only two years. There is hope though, as the scare of the long term effects of concussions and CTE are becoming more and more scoped by the public, specifically by kids and parents of kids who play football. At the end of the day we must remember, it's just a game.

These topics are very important to me for many reasons. Feminist scholar Charlotte Bunch argues that social justice takes a description of the problem, analysis of its roots, a vision for change, and strategy (Bunch, 1983). The violence institutionalized in masculinity that is rooted into boys' minds at young ages needs to be addressed and eliminated in order to create a more just environment for all. One way I am advocating for this change is by working for the WSU RE initiative, which was established to bring attention to gender based violence through peer-to-peer education and advocacy. RE stands for recognizing equality, as most gender-based violence occurs because of the perceived inequalities between genders. On Thursday, October 16 my colleague Victoria Von De Linde was able to give a presentation to the student athletes of Winona State, approximately 300 of them, about becoming active bystanders in hopes of reducing acts of GBV on campus as well as in the community. The white house task force published a document in April titled "Not Alone," as a report to protect students from sexual assault. The second notion of the executive summary, titled "Preventing Sexual Assault—and Engaging Men," states, "But one thing we know for sure: we need to engage men as allies in this cause. Most men are not perpetrators—and when we empower men to step in when someone's in trouble, they become an important part of the solution" (Not Alone, p. 2) As a male feminist it is my duty to not only bring forth and act on these issues, but also to try to get other men involved by joining me in this movement.

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