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**Op-Ed 2: “Mask You Live In” and Masculinity in Sports**

The image of what a true man represents is often wrongly associated with men who play in professional sports. Professional players are mistakenly seen as role models simply because they are either famous, rich, or good at their sport. While it’s not fair to generalize and say that all professional athletes commit terrible crimes, but some players get second chances for crimes that would never be tolerated by any ordinary man. How can we change the image of male athletes? Starting at the individual level, the focus should be on parents and the coaches. Starting from an early age, the impact at home and from coaches can pay off in the long run. Parents and coaches should not be viewed as authoritarians, rather they should be seen as role models who are always available for conversation. Rather, parents and coaches should themselves initiate conversation with young players to show that they truly care. The message should be clear in eliminating ideas that hiding injuries equals toughness, and that toughness equals manhood. The other level that we can change is at the broader societal level which includes fans, and actual sports organizations. The NFL started programs for youth football called Heads Up Football which certifies coaches in teaching youth how to safely play the game. The motivation for these programs maybe so that the NFL protects itself from lawsuits and doesn’t lose its brand, nevertheless it’s a good start. However, the issue with the NFL is the hypocrisy of its mistreatment of some players who committed domestic violence. Ray Rice was a former player that is now famous for punching his fiancé unconscious and as a result has not gotten a job back with the NFL. On the other hand, Greg Hardy was suspended by the NFL until his case was dropped and later signed a contract with the Dallas Cowboys. Recently in the past few weeks pictures were released of the domestic violence committed at the hands of Hardy, yet he still has his job. The message being sent by the Dallas Cowboys is that on the field talent is preferred over off the field problems. Hardy goes about his life as if he committed no wrong, and has yet to truly apologize for his actions as he lives in denial. Another example is that of Kobe Bryant who was unfaithful to his wife, but he made amends by apologizing publicly and giving her a multi-million dollar fancy ring. On the coaching level, Bobby Petrino was involved in a scandal yet a few years after being out of the picture was re-hired by Louisville after public apologies. The general public seems to forgive and forget these actions since they apologize publicly. The argument is also made for giving second chances which everyone deserves. While this is true, the fact of the matter is that second chances should be given to those who are genuine and trying to change their wrong actions. This should be measured by demanding athletes who have problems to attend counseling sessions, and then becoming the voice against their past to show they are truly changed people. These demands should come from public pressure and the professional institutions. Fans should not buy jerseys for athletes who have a dark history as this indicates their indirect approval of their actions. If athletes want to be exemplary role models, they need to be proactively involved in their communities and pass down what it truly means to be a man to the youth that idolize them. “Strength in manhood is being forces for justice against violence” (Newsom 2015).

Newsom, [Jennifer Siebel](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1308076/?ref_=tt_ov_dr) . 2015. *The Mask You Live In*. DVD. USA: The Representation Project.