

Feminist Allies

Men Doing Feminist Work Friday: Don McPherson

Friday, October 12, 2007

Continuing to note feminist men who make a difference to feminist movement, I was pleased to discover that men like Don McPherson exist. From his wikipedia entry:

Donald G. McPherson (born April 2, 1965 in Brooklyn, New York) was an NFL and CFL quarterback drafted by the Philadelphia Eagles in 1988 after a college career at Syracuse University during which he won the Maxwell Award and finished second in the 1987 Heisman Trophy voting. He also played for the Houston Oilers and for the Hamilton Tiger-Cats and Ottawa Rough-Riders.

In some ways I suppose I am a 'typical' touchy-feely, sensitive-guy-type of feminist (hopefully I'm not a Nice Guy, in the negative sense of the term). I'm not a big football-watcher. There is some sport that I like, but I'm more likely to do something locally than watch something globally. I'm more likely to rally around the person playing a pickup game of basketball at the local court than to rally around some national team. And, frankly, part of what turns me off to organized sports is the institutionalized sexism that is often involved in organized sports. Which is why it's such a relief to hear an ex pro football player say things like this:

"Let's look at the semantics of sexism," Don begins, writing on a whiteboard. The Dragons lean forward intently, as if he's a coach outlining strategy for an upcoming game. Then he stands back and reads these words aloud.

Jack beats Jill.
Jill was beaten by Jack.
Jill was beaten.
Jill is a battered woman.

"What's happened here?" Don asks, pointing his marker at the last line. After a few seconds, one of the players speaks up. "Jack's missing?" Don nods. "Jack is out of the picture and Jill is stigmatized. That shows that even our language about sexual violence blames women for the things that men do."

Not only does McPherson do work in places tough spaces (high school, college and pro-sports areas), he does it as a self-proclaimed feminist; not only does he fight violence against women, he does so while acknowledging that the fight is a feminist fight:

"I introduce myself at lectures by saying, 'I'm Don McPherson. I'm a recent nominee for the College Football Hall of Fame and a long-time feminist.' I know it probably shakes some people up when I say I'm a feminist, but I am. You can be both. I think we do men a disservice if we tell them you are less of a man if you care about gender issues." – Don McPherson, former quarterback for the Philadelphia Eagles
Furthermore, he sees men's violence against women as both a women's and a men's issue, and also sees the connection between homophobia and violence against women:

"We, as men, have to be involved in the dialogue." Men commit 90 percent of violent acts against women, he said. "This is our issue," McPherson, who called himself a feminist, told the men. "We don't raise boys to be men," he said. "We raise boys not to be women or gay men."

And to top it all off, he understands that one of the best things male feminists can do is take the talk to other men:

By keeping his emotions and experiences inside, Don realized he was helping to perpetuate an image of manhood that was dehumanizing to both sexes. Now, Don works with athletes, students and young men to change the culture that cultivates abuse. "This movement is about challenging what men say to each other in all male environments, how we raise our boys, and how we talk about women which limits who men are." says Don. "Violence against women is a men's issue and men have to confront other men, otherwise, it won't end."