

# Guest Viewpoint: Send message that all violence wrong

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(Photo: AP)

I've been thinking a lot about all of the violence that's been in the news from our supposed role models — professional athletes.

For months, I have watched the NFL wrestle with how to discipline former Baltimore Ravens running back Ray Rice for abusing his wife. Only now, after the public has had the opportunity to witness the video recording of the actual event, did the NFL decide his punishment needed to be more severe. In the meantime, people from all over the country are discussing domestic violence towards women and bringing awareness to this public health concern.

Then we learned of another "star," Minnesota Vikings running back Adrian Peterson, resorting to violence — only this time it was against his 4-year-old son. Now we get to witness the same public process where the NFL considers how to discipline one of their star players for abusing his child. I am sure that, over the next several weeks, the public will debate this example of domestic violence and bring awareness to another public health concern — child abuse.

On the one hand, I am encouraged that the public's outcry was so strong that it dictated to the NFL how to discipline these offenders. The NFL now has the opportunity through its disciplinary process to send a message back to the public that hitting women and hitting children is unacceptable.

However, if we limit our public outcry to end acts of violence against women and children only, then we are also limiting our capacity for peaceful resolutions.

The truth for me is that violence is wrong in any way that you label it. For men, we grow up in a world where there is always the real possibility that another man will want to engage us in a fight. This type of violence seems to be publicly acceptable — in fact, the winner is often celebrated. This is even more apparent when looking at the growing viewership for Ultimate Fighting Championships or the growing propensity of men training to fight as part of their exercise regimen. I would wager to say that fighting amongst men is actually becoming more acceptable.

We as a society accept that men can be violent, but then are horrified when men are violent towards women and children. The point I want to make is that the message we send after a violent act is committed can have an effect on future violence.

I can only hope that the public reaction around these two events leads to fewer and fewer instances where women and children experience violence at the hands of men. That alone would have a huge impact in our society.

Still, I can't help but wonder what other effect we could realize if our society joined together with a message that we will no longer tolerate fighting or hitting another human being, and it doesn't matter if the victim is a woman, a child or a man. Let's all just agree to stop the violence.

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