

EDITORIAL: THE GLOBALIZATION OF VIOLENT BEHAVIOR

The term “globalization” has sometimes been used in oversimplified ways that do not provide useful guidance for addressing critical human problems (Rischard, 2002). Nevertheless, complex webs of interlocking global processes in the contemporary world often have profound effects at all levels from the individual to the collective. Buvinic and Morrison (2000) report data that indicate that humankind is living in an increasingly violent world, and that the processes of globalization may, in effect, “breed violence.” They calculate that the world homicide rate increased by more than 50% between 1984 and 1994, from 5.82 to 8.86 homicides per 100,000. A similar increase in the US has often been attributed to the crack epidemic, but clearly that did not have a global reach. (Note that violence toward self—suicide—has also dramatically increased worldwide in recent decades, often in the countries in which violence directed toward others has not.) Buvinic and Morrison’s analyses of these phenomena provide at least a set of intriguing hypotheses for behavior analysts who may be interested in contributing to attempts to respond to these crucial social issues. There is also a growing suspicion among scholars studying violence, violence prevention and nonviolence (e.g., Buvinic and Morrison, 2000; Nagler, 2001) that “violence is violence”—that there may be non-trivial relationships among personal violence, economic and structural violence, terrorism, war, and other forms of collective violence. Behavior analysts also recognize that “violence is behavior” and therefore that the natural science of behavior can help us to understand and prevent it.

Buvinic and Morrison argue that while a set of demographic factors (e.g., relative proportion of young people, urbanization, transience, rates of single parenting) “pack the bomb of violence,” in effect “heightened global integration lit the fuse” (p. 63). They suggest that this has occurred through at least three mechanisms, including (a) aggravating income inequalities, (b) spreading a culture of violence through the media, and (c) “expanding trade in ‘death industries’ such as firearms and drugs” (p. 63).

In each of these areas, the analysis presented suggests behavioral implications that might be explored. With regard to income inequalities, it appears that poverty, while related, is not as strong a predictor of violence as the gap between rich and poor. A one point increase in a country’s Gini coefficient (a standard measure of income inequality) is associated with nearly a one-point increase in homicide rate, according to Buvinic and Morrison’s analysis. Observing others with much more appears to increase experiences of deprivation, increasing the value of reinforcers that cannot be attained given structural conditions, regardless of behavior. Note that the relevant reference groups may become global in scope with the expansion of mass media. Deteriorating economies, in which reinforcers once available no longer are, are also associated with increasing violence. The issues here technically involve establishing operations. If this is true, at least two potential responses emerging from behavior analytic science. One policy-level implication is that

action to reduce relative income inequities may reduce violence; this at least appears to be advice that the scientist-advocate should consider offering, not because it is charitable, but because it is practical. Secondly, educational projects that help children, youth, and adults to recognize the extent to which perceived levels of deprivation are manipulated by corporate interests for marketing purposes might at least to some extent function as abolishing operations, particularly in conjunction with values education. Such values education (involving teaching alternative equivalence relations) also could meaningfully shift experiences of relative deprivation. Behavior analysts have not yet done substantial work in these areas, but certainly could.

With regard to exposure to violence and threat *in vivo* and in the media, the data are clear: increased exposure to such violence contributes to aggressive and violent action, although not surprisingly the effects among individuals and cultures show considerable variation. Buvinic and Morrison offer cultural level explanations for why such effects have not been found among children from cultures that strongly discourage violence, like that of Japan, or Israeli kibbutzim. (Recall an early experiment by Davitz, 1952, that showed that children taught cooperative repertoires became relative more cooperative when under stress, while children taught to act aggressively acted more so under stress.) In developing countries, the rate of exposure to violent media has dramatically increased in recent years, an increase that at least correlates highly with increases in many forms of violence (Buvinic & Morrison). Exposure to actual violence, however, is even more powerful, as “violence begets violence as entire societies learn to solve conflicts by recourse to aggression” (Buvinic & Morrison, p. 61). Note the consistency with Sidman’s (2001) analysis of the behavioral dynamics of coercion. Approaches that may serve as “behavioral vaccines” (the term is Dennis Embry’s) that might moderate such effects (e.g., the Good Behavior Game, Embry, 2002) certainly deserve exploration, as do approaches for constructing cultures of nonviolent action (Mattaini & McGuire, *in press*).

Approaches to reducing “death trades” may seem beyond the scope of behavior analysis, but even here there may be contributions to be made. One of the observations made by Buvinic and Morrison in their review of the global situation is that “some of the most cost-effective outcomes may result from the implementation of programs tailored to local conditions” (p. 70). For behavior analysts, this statement, and the examples provided, should remind us of the work of Fawcett and his colleagues (Fawcett, 1991; Fawcett, Mathews, & Fletcher, 1980), who have provided substantial guidance for developing just such programs. The examples cited by Buvinic and Morrison include a program in Bogotá, Colombia (a nation in which the homicide rate grew by 391% over the course of two decades) that produced dramatic declines in homicides, and the oft-cited collaboration between police, churches, and social agencies in Boston that was associated with a 77 percent decline in homicides.

Some of these issues may at first glance appear too large for behavior analysts to tackle. But on a closer look, potential small projects and studies that could contribute emerge in each area. Values education drawing on what is known about

THE GLOBALIZATION OF VIOLENT BEHAVIOR

constructing equivalence relations; “behavioral vaccines” for the effects of media exposure; and community organizing around limiting the impact of “death trades” all offer such opportunities, for example. There is much to be done.

Mark A. Mattaini

Jane Addams College of Social Work-UIC

REFERENCES

- Buvinic, M., & Morrison, A. R. (2000). Living in a more violent world. *Foreign Policy*, 118, 58-72.
- Davitz, J. R. (1952). The effects of previous training on postfrustration behavior. *Journal of Abnormal Social Psychology*, 47, 309-315.
- Embry, D.D. (2002). The Good Behavior Game: A best practice candidate as a universal behavioral vaccine. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 5, 273-297.
- Fawcett, S. B. (1991). Some values guiding community research and action. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 24, 621-636.
- Fawcett, S. B., Mathews, R. M., & Fletcher, R. K. (1980). Some promising dimensions for behavioral community technology. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 13, 505-518.
- Mattaini, M. A., & McGuire, M. S. (in press). Behavioral strategies for constructing nonviolent cultures with youth: A review. *Behavior Modification*.
- Nagler, M. N. (2001). *Is there no other way?: The search for a nonviolent future*. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Hills Books.
- Rischard, J. F. (2002). *High noon: 20 global problems, 20 years to solve them*. New York: Basic Books.
- Sidman, M. (2001). *Coercion and its fallout* (2nd ed.). Boston: Authors Cooperative.