

## A Behavior Analytic Perspective on Victimology

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### Abstract

The field of victimology has become an area of serious scientific enquiry only recently and now attracts a wide range of theories from within multiple disciplines. In this paper the contribution that the science of behavior analysis can make to the conceptualization of the field is explored by investigating what makes people vulnerable to becoming victims or indeed perpetrators of violence and by examining why some people who have experienced violent incidents become victims while others grow to be survivors. A behavior analytic perspective sheds new light on these issues.

Keywords: behavior analysis, victimology, Northern Ireland, victim, survivor, perpetrator.

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Victimology is defined as “the study of why certain people are victims of crime and how lifestyles affect the chances that a certain person will fall victim to a crime. The field of victimology can cover a wide number of disciplines, including sociology, psychology, criminal justice, law and advocacy” (Wikipedia, 2007). Victimology is also “the study of people who hurt others, and people who are hurt by others. Its subjects are bullies, rapists, molesters, batterers, gang leaders, terrorists, hate crime perpetrators, armed robbers, and their victims” (Ripple Effects, 2007).

As such victimology includes the study of particularly vulnerable groups of people; it explores prevalence of violent incidents; assesses profiles of victims and perpetrators; looks at the impact of violence on victims; patterns of disclosure; societal norms and values with regard to victims and perpetrators; legal status; and/or working and living conditions of those affected. Victimology also includes the study of victims of accidents, such as traffic accidents or house fires; natural disasters, such as floods, tsunamis, and hurricanes; war crimes, civil unrest, and terrorism; and more generally victims of abuse of power, such as sexual harassment or racial discrimination, as well as similar issues linked to perpetrators of violent acts.

The issues addressed in this paper relate to features that make people vulnerable to becoming victim or perpetrator and to factors that distinguish between people who have experienced violent incidents and view themselves as victims and those who view themselves as survivors. Although this is paper is mainly a conceptual/theoretical extrapolation of behavior principles to victimology quotes from people affected by community violence in Northern Ireland are used to illustrate points made (Dillenburger, Fargas, & Akhonzada, 2007) and applications can be derived from theoretical investigations while empirical data to support this approach are emerging.

### **Becoming victim or perpetrator**

There is evidence that some people are more vulnerable than others to becoming victims of crime, accident, natural disaster, or other violent events. Information regarding variables related to increased vulnerability is important as it may lead to the identification of factors that can protect people from victimization. For example, Loeber, Kalb, and Huizinga (2001) found that family factors including low socioeconomic status, parental crime, single-parent household, and poor parental supervision as well as individual factors, such poor school grades, involvement in gang or group fights, participation in serious assault, drug use, drug sales, being oppositional, hyperactive, or impulsive, and association with delinquent peers were related to increased risk of victimization (Espiritu, 1998; Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1987). Conversely, stable family life, good supervision of children, good high school

achievements, not being involved in unlawful behavior, and certain personality characteristics, such as locus of control orientation, and self-esteem are thought to be protective factors against the likelihood of victimization (Moran & Eckenrode, 1992).

Maybe not surprisingly, vulnerability (or risk) as well as the protective factors that are related to becoming a victim of violence are very similar to those of becoming a perpetrator of violence. Borowsky, Hogan, and Ireland (1997) outlined that factors such as experiencing intra-familial or extra-familial abuse, witnessing family violence, frequent use of illegal drugs, anabolic steroid use, daily alcohol use, gang membership, high levels of suicide risk behavior, and excessive time spent "hanging out" were found to be risk factors, while emotional health, connectedness with friends and adults in the community, and academic achievement were protective factors.

Race, social class, and gender are clearly important factors in the socialization and enculturation process (Gadner, 1997) of victims as well as perpetrators, although Alice Ray (Ripple Effects, 2007) found that these were not common distinguishing factors. Instead, she found that people who hurt others shared a skills deficit in the following seven areas; empathy, impulse control, management of feelings, especially anger and fear, assertiveness, decision making ability, self understanding, and connection to community. One of the most recent examples for the disastrous effects of socio-demographic risk factors and ensuing skills deficits, were the shootings in Virginia Tech, when a 23 year-old loner, whose socialization lacked all protective factors and who consequently had a massive social skills deficit, killed 32 fellow students and teachers, before committing suicide (BBC News, 2007).

A victim in Northern Ireland expressed this feeling as follows:

*"My initial designation would be victim. I'm a victim not because I wanted to be a victim, I'm a victim because somebody else decided that I should be a victim ... and my family should be a victim. It wasn't my choice at all. To me, the term victim encapsulates accurately what has been done to me and to my family."*

### **Traditional theory**

Theories of victimology first emerged with criminologists Mendelsohn (1963) and Von Hentig (1948). Both were particularly interested in the vulnerability of victims of homicides. Mendelsohn developed the idea of victim precipitation, i.e., the notion that victims had an aptitude, although unconsciously, of being victimized. Consequently, his classification of victimhood emphasised grades of innocence, with only one of the six types of victims *completely innocent*. The other types of victims were all in part to blame for their victimhood, i.e, the *victim with minor guilt* resulted from the victim's ignorance, the *victim as guilty as offender* was for example someone who assisted suicide, the *victim more guilty than offender* was the one who provoked violence, the *most guilty victim* was the one killed while attacking another, and the *simulating victim* was guilty of pretence. This typology still finds resonance in the perception of victimhood today, as one of the victims said:

*"... there's victims and there's victims. To me, there's innocent victims, which my husband was and there's a lot of people that class themselves as victims, which I don't. And I think... the innocent victims should be looked after better by the Government."*

At the same time, Von Hentig proposed a categorization of victims on the basis of their personality types. He thought that the easiest target was the *depressive type* because they were careless and unsuspecting; the *greedy type* was easily deceived because of their insatiability; the *wonton type* was vulnerable because of their neediness, and the *tormentor type* was attacked by the victim of his abuse. In fact, Wolfgang (1958) took this typology further and hypothesised that victims oftentimes had

unconscious desires that fed the crime, e.g., victims of homicide were unconsciously longing to commit suicide. Schafer (1968) took intra-psychic explanations of victimhood even further when called his book *The Victim and His Criminal*. Again, such sentiments are still present today as this statements from a victim illustrates:

*“I must have done something awful bad in my youth because why would God be punishing me like this.”*

One would expect that this kind of *victim blaming* is considered entirely unacceptable nowadays. Yet, some of the main theoretical underpinnings of these kinds of intra-psychic explanations still dominate the field. For example, Luckenbill (1977) proposed the still widely used *Situated Transaction Model* that suggests that it is a contest of character between victim and criminal that leads to the commitment of a crime. While Cohen and Felson (1979) developed the *Routine Activities Theory* that states that violence requires three conditions; suitable targets, motivated offenders, and the absence of guardians. In addition, they recognised that victims oftentimes experience propinquity (e.g., similar socio-demographic characteristics) and relative physical proximity to the perpetrators of the violence. In a similar vein, the *Lifestyle-Exposure Theory* (Hindelang, Gottfredson, & Garofalo, 1978) suggests that the likelihood of becoming a victim is related to lifestyle choices of the victim. Quinn, Holman, and Tobolowsky (1992) describe the *Threefold Model* that outlines three conditions that support crime: precipitating (e.g., time and space), attracting (e.g., choices, options, lifestyles), and predisposing (e.g., sociodemographic characteristics) and these are reflected in the thinking of some victims:

*“I could have accepted it if my husband wasn’t innocent. He wasn’t out murdering in the streets every night. He was out working every day. He was too tired to go on the streets. He did not choose his life, he did not choose to be murdered.”*

In conclusion then, most existing theories in victimology borrow concepts from three categories; *psychopathology*, where the victim is somehow viewed as disturbed and virtually inviting violence; *feminism*, where the victim is viewed as historically socialised into accepting violence, and *traditional learning theory*, where acceptance of violence is thought to be either enabled by a mutual disinhibition cycle between victim and perpetrator or encouraged via learned helplessness (Seligman, 1991).

Meier and Mieth (1993) found that maturation of any of these theories has been hampered by inadequate attention to variations of behavioral variables, “compartmentalized thinking, poor links between theory and data, inadequate measures of key concepts, and failure to specify clearly functional relationships between sets of variables” (p. 459). Behavior analysis offers a knowledge base that has matured past these kinds of limitations and meets the keystones of good theories; generality (or inclusiveness); testability (including empirical and logical support); external validity (or accuracy); fruitfulness (or utility); simplicity (or parsimony) (Schlinger, 1995).

### ***Behavior analysis***

Behavior analysis is the science of behavior and its subject matter is “behavior in its own right” (Skinner, 1989); in other words, behavior analysts study interactions between organisms and environment (Baer, 1973). The main focus is the study of public as well as private behaviors of organisms, how these are controlled by environmental contingencies, and therefore how changes in behavior can be predicted, if enough is known about environmental events (Moore, in press). This inductive, natural science approach differs from the deductive social science approach of other fields in psychology or sociology, where generally theories are proposed and hypotheses are tested. Behavior analysis thus deals with behavioral phenomena and aims to discover laws of nature. It is important to remember that in this context behavioral phenomena include publicly observable (e.g., walk, talk, cry,

laugh) as well as private events (e.g., emotions and cognitions) that are only observable by the person who experiences them.

Behavior analysts generally consider at least three interconnected levels of analysis; the *personal learning history* of the organism, the *prevailing contingencies* to which the organism is exposed, and the prevailing *cultural or meta-contingencies* (Glenn, 1988; Moynahan, 2001). These three levels of analysis apply to any behavior and therefore offer a coherent system of analysis for the behavior of victims and perpetrators.

### ***Personal learning history***

Personal learning history refers to how private and public behavioral repertoires are shaped across the life span of an individual, from the cradle to the grave. As this shaping process is ongoing at all times, it is ever evolving and changing. Thus, a person's behavioral repertoire is constantly changing. People acquire new repertoires and old repertoires 'drop out' across the life span. For example, many baby behaviors change once the child starts going to school or behaviors acquired for competent performance in a work setting are no longer required in retirement and as a result disappear.

Social and demographic variables play a large part in personal learning histories, so do family composition, sibling order, and parental employment situations. In addition, gender and time (i.e., age) make a difference, for example, in Northern Ireland the vast majority of those killed in the Troubles were young men (Dillenburg, 1992). Gender specific learning also seems to make a difference in coping, as boys usually are shaped to become men who are brave and respond to violence with deeds or stoicism while girls generally are shaped to become women who are more likely to become carers of the injured and respond passively. As Morrissey and Smyth (2002) put it, women learn to suffer in silence.

At the same time there are, of course, other individual differences. Some people have a personal learning history (Roediger, 2004) that makes them more vulnerable to falling victim of crime or becoming a perpetrator of violent acts than others. For example, on a macro scale, a history of child abuse and neglect usually leaves the individual more vulnerable, deprivation or poverty experienced over a lengthy time period increases vulnerability. On a micro level, patterns of behaviors are established that make people more vulnerable, e.g., certain ways of walking, talking, conducting oneself can invite or fend off potential attackers. Take, for example, someone who takes self-defence classes. This person will conduct himself differently than someone who feels weak and vulnerable, because they lead a sedentary life style, are physically unfit, or unwell. An older person will be more vulnerable to certain crime than a younger person, while teenagers who have been brought up in violent circumstances may be more vulnerable to shootings or knife crime than teenagers who are brought up in stimulating environments that promote healthy habits or hobbies. In addition, social learning variables, such as imitation and peer pressure have been found to account for significant variations in vulnerability (Schwartz, Garmling, & Mancini, 1994). As such, individual learning histories differentiate between victims and non-victims as well as perpetrators and non-perpetrators.

### ***Prevailing contingencies***

Prevailing contingencies are situational factors, contingencies of reinforcement that are present at the time of the violent event. The kind of event that can be considered violent differs vastly and ranges from violent homicide, terrorist attacks, grievous bodily harm (GBH), street fighting, domestic violence, sex abuse, theft, natural disasters, to verbal abuse and viewing violence on television.

Prevailing contingencies are obviously highly important when it comes to vulnerability for victims or perpetrators of violence. Contingencies that prevail at the time of the event include *antecedents*, such as time of day, e.g., most crime is committed at night time, after dark; place, e.g., most personal theft is

committed in crowded places, most house burglaries are committed in built-up areas and suburbs; and company, e.g., most crimes are committed by a very small number of people who move in certain circles.

Prevailing contingencies also include *consequences*, such as instant gratification of a theft, or potentially punitive effect of personal injury. From a behavior analytic view, victim as well as perpetrator behavior is elicited by prevailing contingencies of reinforcement and punishment, however, this is not necessarily a linear process, as the behavioral interaction between victim and perpetrator will influence the sequence of behaviors; the behavior of one will provide antecedent as well as consequent stimuli for the behavior of the other. As such, during the violent event, victim as well as perpetrator behavior is determined by contingent and functional relationships between a complex net of proximal antecedent and consequent stimuli.

### ***Cultural or metacontingencies***

Cultural or meta contingencies exist over prolonged time periods and shape behaviors that are passed from one generation to the next. "Culture is learned; ... it is not encoded in the human genome. It's socially created" (Avruch, 2003). The culture in which we live will determine the level and likelihood of violence experienced. This is due to the cultural differences (Mattaini, 2001; 2004) and the fact that perpetrators as well as victims experience a lifelong process of enculturation. "Enculturation is the process whereby an established culture teaches an individual by repetition its accepted norms and values, so that the individual can become an accepted member of the society and find their suitable role. The six things of culture that are learned are: technological, economic, political, interactive, ideological, and world view" (Wikipedia, 2007).

*"Ok, I am a victim, you made me a victim, but I'm not going let you beat me, I'm going to go on. And I'd prefer seeing them in the gutter, they would love to see me in the gutter. So, that's the way I would look at it. And that would make me rising above them, would make me a survivor."*

In this context, the term cultural difference does not refer only to distinctive inter-cultural differences, such as for example those between Asian and European cultures or between different religious cultures, it also addresses intra-cultural differences. Intra-cultural differences exist between different social economic classes (e.g., working class/middle class culture) or demographic areas (e.g., urban/rural). There also are gender- and age related cultural difference, like pop culture, or the culture and atmosphere in a residential facility for older adults.

Clearly, cultural contexts determine whether an individual or group is more likely to encounter violent events. Violent cultures, such as those often experienced in inner city ghetto areas, will lead to more violent incidents, in other words, more violent behavior from perpetrators and consequently produce more victims. Certain intra-group cultures, for examples those promoted in some youth gangs, may idealise violence and encourage their members to engage in violence. Other cultures encourage the feelings of victimhood, for example, the Scottish (Kay, 2007) as well as the Irish (Ní Aoláin, 2000) have been accused of promoting a victims culture, where the behaviors involved in being a victim are reinforced.

In sum then, the three levels of analysis described above allow for a coherent as well as comprehensive analysis of contingencies of which victim as well as perpetrator behaviors are a function, before and during the violent event. After the event, these contingencies will obviously continue to have a strong influence on subsequent behaviors, however, social contingencies will need to be added to the analysis of long-term effects. Consequently, Dillenburger and Keenan's (2005) D.I.S.C analysis considers the **D**eath (prevailing contingencies), **I**ndividual (learning history), **S**ocial (subsequent shaping,

generalization, and maintenance), and Cultural (meta contingencies) contexts in a thorough behavior analysis of victim and survivor behaviors.

### Victim or survivor

The first step of a behavior analysis of what happens after the violent event, i.e., why some people become victims and some become survivors, is to identify and define what kind of behaviors victims and survivors engage in. The most common problems faced by over 75% of victims of violent events are emotional distress, including fear, anxiety, nervousness, self-blame, anger, shame and difficulty sleeping. If these kinds of behaviors persist for more than a month, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) may be diagnosed. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV; American Psychiatric Association, 1994, pp 247-251) outlines in detail the behaviors that are the basis of the diagnosis:

A- The person has been exposed to a traumatic event ... that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others [and] ... the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror.

B. The traumatic event is persistently re-experienced in ... recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the events ... [or] dreams of the event. ... acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were recurring. ... intense psychological distress ... [and/or] physiological reactivity on exposure to internal or external cues that symbolise or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event.

C. Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness, [3 or more; e.g.,] ... avoid thoughts, feelings, conversations; ... avoid activities, places, people; ... inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma; ... diminished interest or participation in significant activities; ... feeling of detachment or estrangement from others; ... restricted range of affect; ... sense of foreshortened future.

D. Persistent symptoms of increased arousal [2 or more, e.g.,] ... difficulty falling or staying asleep; irritability or outbursts of anger; difficulty concentrating; hypervigilance; exaggerated startle responses”.

According to the DSM- IV, a diagnosis should be made only if these behaviors persist for more than 1 month and if they cause “clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important functioning”. PTSD is considered *acute*, if these behaviors persist for less than 3 months; *chronic*, if they continue for 3 months or more; and *delayed*, if they emerge or remain at least 6 months after the traumatic event. The concept of PTSD is not without its critiques (Gilligan, 2006; Kutchins & Kirk, 1999; Jones, 2006; Spates, 2003; Summerfield, 1999), which is mainly due to over-diagnosis in minor cases of traumatization, e.g., diagnosis of PTSD after watching a violent TV dramatization; abuse of the term for unmerited personal gain; and inherent mentalism, e.g., having flashbacks is considered caused by PTSD. Stevens (2006) illustrates these points in Northern Ireland, “we all now have to present ourselves as victims. We can see the rise of competitive victimhood between the two main communities in Northern Ireland. So a culture of rights has the danger that it feeds into a culture of victimhood” (p.4).

*“I wasn’t attacked personally, but I was in situations where I was very close to attacks that have happened. I wasn’t attacked physically but I feel that I was attacked psychologically, mentally, emotionally.”*

From a behavior analytic point of view, the terms *victim* and *survivor* obviously are more correctly considered as descriptive *summary labels* (Grant & Evens, 1994) rather than explanations of behavior

(i.e., she is behaving like this because she is a victim). This distinction leads to an understanding of victims' and survivors' behavior as contextually determined patterns or repertoires of behavior that are shaped by reinforcement contingencies.

*“I would be more a survivor now and I would have been more a victim years ago, but I suppose time would have helped.”*

One of the main problems in distinguishing between victims or survivors (Cairns & Mallet, 2003) is that there may not be much in the line of obvious and publicly observable behavior. Much of the difference between victims and survivors lies in private behavior, i.e., emotional or cognitive. Private events or ‘Inners’ are notoriously hard to measure (Calkin, 1981). To assess private behavior, we generally have to rely on how the individual describes their feelings or thoughts, i.e., verbal behavior, and Lloyd (1994) alerts us to the general lack of correspondence between what people do and what they say they do. If what we do and what we say we do is not corresponding, then one can safely assume that, what we feel or think and what we say we feel or think may not be corresponding either. This problem is further augmented by the difficulty of expressing precisely what we feel or think, a difficulty that lies in how we learn to label feelings and thoughts within the limitations of language (Keenan, 1997).

#### **Establishing/abolishing operations**

The violent event usually changes things for victims and survivors dramatically and forever. In the non-behavioral literature the ‘social meaning’ of violent events has been discussed in relation to violent death by Michalowski (1976) who found for example that despite the fact that violent death in motor accidents happens far more often than homicides, the latter are far more feared. In relation to Northern Ireland McLoone (1988) thought that the images that are used to portray violence also play an important part in the development of meaning of violence. As one victim put it:

*“Well, if you look at it clinically, I’m a victim, because I have been attacked. And I’m a survivor, because I wasn’t killed.”*

The individual who experienced a violent incident feels differently, behaves differently, and relates differently to their environment and at the same time those around them behave differently towards them after the event. In behavior analysis, events that change things in this way are considered establishing and/or abolishing operations, in other words, motivational operations (Michael, 2000). Motivational operations are events that alter the reinforcing effectiveness of a stimulus and modify the current frequency of all responses that have been reinforced by that stimulus. For example, Sulzer-Azaroff (1999) found that “the experience of losing my husband must have functioned as an establishing operation, changing the value of some of those presumed reinforcing activities. While some persisted, gardening and music dropped out entirely” (p. 59).

As such the question of whether someone becomes a victim or survivor may depend on whether the event had an establishing or abolishing function. An event that leads to new reinforcers becoming available can be considered an establishing operation and lead to a greater variety of ‘survivor behaviors’. For example, after the death of a husband who was afraid of flying, a widow may start to use airplanes to visit relatives that she has not seen for years (Dillenburger & Keenan, 2001). A victim in Northern Ireland described how she was availing of new reinforcers after the trauma:

*“Am I a victim? Am I a survivor? Yes, I would be a survivor. I would go to hell and high water to survive. Life is good. There’s people who obviously don’t have the opportunity and the choices that I have, and I’m going to avail of anything that is there for me to improve my life.”*

If however, the event leads to the abolishment of reinforcers, the widow may not engage in behaviours that were previously reinforced and may experience restricted variability in behaviors in line with 'victim behaviors'. For example, music what was previously enjoyed with the husband now longer holds any attraction and the widow may listen to less music or no longer go to concerts that she previously enjoyed. Sulzer-Azaroff (1999) realized that "recognizing and availing myself of alternative reinforcing choices would hasten the recovery process" (p. 57-58).

### **Trans-generational transmission of trauma**

Clearly people who actually experience violence are not the only ones to suffer. In fact, there are instances where trauma is verbally transmitted or transmitted across generations. For example, in South Africa the issue of second-generation traumatization has come to the fore and Hamber and Lewis (1997) found that "[a]t times those vicariously traumatised can act-out victim-aggressor patterns or over-identify with victims". In Germany, the trans-generational transmission of the trauma of the Holocaust has attracted large-scale attention in post-war psychological research (Rowland-Klein & Dunlop, 1998). In cases where trauma is transmitted over many generations, this can grow into a culture of victimhood as shown in a number of contexts and cultures, for example, Dowty (2006) argues that a mentality of victimhood developed as a result of Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while Shanafelt (2004) outlines the potential for the development of such a mentality in African-American culture.

*"And then even, children grow up with this fear that's not their fear, it's the person's fear who wants to be a victim. They carry it, and what does it do? It just goes round in a circle."*

However, the general concept of transmission of trauma has been criticized, for example, by Kohout and Brainin (2004) who considered that a "vague and almost mystic notion of transmission of trauma ... has appeared in psychoanalytic literature" (p1261) that does not fit with the DSM-IV diagnosis which requires direct exposure to a traumatic event involving actual or threatened death or serious injury or a threat to the physical integrity.

For behavior analysts the concept of transmission of trauma is neither vague nor mystic and obviously concentrates on transgenerational transmission of victim behavior (private as well as public). Across generations this kind of behavior is largely transmitted by stories (Leonard, 2006) and thus determined by verbal behavior. Skinner (1969) pointed clearly to the difference between behavior that is shaped by contingencies and behavior that is verbally determined, when he said that rule governed behavior "is in any case never exactly like the behavior shaped by contingencies ... [Even] when topographies of responses are very similar, different controlling variables are necessarily involved, and the behavior will have different properties. When operant experiments with human subjects are simplified by instructing the subjects in the operation of the equipment..., the resulting behavior may resemble that which follows exposure to the contingencies and may be studied in its stead for certain purposes, but the controlling variables are different, and their behaviors will not necessarily change in the same way in response to other variables" (p. 150-151).

As such the analysis of transgenerational transmission of trauma as rule-governed behavior is entirely feasible, as long as it is understood that the behavioral repertoire of the second generation is different from that of the first, who experienced violence first hand. This is recognised even by non-behavior analytic writers such as Halbwachs (1992), who argued that *historical memory* (i.e., transmitted) is not as rich and personally meaningful as *autobiographical memory* (e.g., experienced). In addition, behavior analysts working in the areas of modelling, imitation, schedules, and stimulus equivalence make valuable contributions to an even better understanding of transgenerational transmission of behavior (private and public), that explore and clarify functional relations, and take the concept truly out of a vague, mystic, and mentalistic world (cf. Dillenburger & Keenan, 2001).



### Access to reinforcers

Consequently, traumatised individuals find themselves functioning in changed environmental contingencies, and these contingencies determine whether someone is a victim or a survivor. In a *Theory of Conservation of Resources*, Hobfoll and colleagues (Freedy & Hobfoll, 1995; Hobfoll, 1989) identify the role that access to resources plays in the differentiation between victims and survivors. They thought that there are at least five necessary key resource areas; *object resources* (e.g., "housing that suits my needs"); *condition resources* (e.g., "status/seniority at work"); *personal resources* (e.g., "sense of optimism"); *energy resources* (e.g., "financial resources"); and *feelings about self*.

*"There should be more help for victims. It's not fair the way they are left. We didn't choose it, to be left on our own with no help, it wasn't there."*

*"There is plenty of money but no husband."*

While Hobfoll and colleagues make important points, a behavior- or functional analytic approach can take their observations one step further. Clearly, those who have access to these key resources (i.e., reinforcers) are more likely to view themselves as survivors than those who do not have access to them. Consequently, even where resources were destroyed through violence (e.g., Tsunami or earthquake), those who can regain access to these key resources quickly are more likely to become survivors. As such Hobfoll's list of key resources could be viewed as a list of potential key reinforcers responsible for the behavioral differential between victims and survivors (Sturmey, 1996). To a large extent, the establishment of these reinforcers depends on the establishing or abolishing effect of the violent event mentioned earlier.

*"That's one very, very, particular thing I'd love to see fun out there, for children, to do something with them, because not alone that, they deserve it, you know. It's only right that there should be something out there for them."*

However there is more to the story. It is a well-known fact that reinforcers are functionally defined as consequences of behavior that increase the future probability of the behavior in question. Yet, much of victim behavior is shaped by avoidance contingencies, i.e., is negatively reinforced. Blackledge (2005) explains, "The term experiential avoidance refers to any behavior, private or public, that functions to eliminate or attenuate aversive stimulation arising from emotions, cognitions, physical sensations, or other experiences. Such avoidance strategies can take a broad variety of forms. Behaviors as apparently diverse as physical avoidance, thought suppression, dissociation, rumination, mental undoing, drinking, drug use, distraction, numbing, inability (or unwillingness) to articulate details of the trauma, can be thought of as examples of experiential avoidance because they function to attenuate, eliminate, or stave off aversive emotions, cognitions, and sensations" (p. 454).

*"My mum was saying at the time of C's death, how she thought of herself as a victim, ... I was saying, 'Ach, for God sake wise up to yourself', hoping I wouldn't have to listen to that again."*

### Behavioral economies

Whether resources (i.e., reinforcers) are established, abolished, avoided, or conserved determines the kind of behavioral economy experienced. Behavioral economics is the study of relationships between behavioral dimensions (e.g., intensity or frequency) and reinforcer dimensions (e.g., quality and amount, or unit price). In the experimental study of behavioral economics a difference is made between open and closed economies. *Open economies* are those where the reinforcers are available at all times, during the experimental situation as well as outside the experiment, while in *closed economies* the reinforcer is only available during the experimental situation. "The closed-economy methodology

extends the generality of behavioral principles to situations in which response rate and obtained rate of reinforcement are interdependent.” (Hursh, 1984, p.435). Experimental results of this differentiation show that behavior in open economies is weaker, more flexible, and less resistant to change than behavior in closed economies, that is usually strong, relatively inflexible, and resistant to change (unless there are changes in the economies).

These findings have important implications in the understanding of victimology. Becoming a victim of crime, natural or man-made disaster means that previously open economies have become largely closed economies, since due to a range of factors (including avoidance behaviors), many reinforcers become only available in certain situations. These situations are usually coherent with the victim role and behavior. For example, compensation is only available if suffering can be evidenced, in other words, compensation functions as reinforcer for victim behaviors in a closed economy of victimology.

At the same time, a person who has suffered a violent event and does not get involved with victims' support is much less likely to benefit from social support. Within this closed economy there are high demand functions for reinforcers, in other words, there is a requirement of a large number or high intensity victims' behaviors in order to access reinforcers, such as compensation, social support, or sympathetic responses from others.

*“... if you can keep people in a state of victimhood, then they're no bother, you can do whatever you want and proceed with politics.”*

The amount of effort needed to achieve a reinforcer is known as *demand function* and in the experimental chamber “[d]emand functions generated by operant conditioning techniques are used to measure animals' motivation to obtain a certain reinforcer” (Ladewig, Sørensen, Nielsen, & Matthews, 2002, p. 325). When these findings are applied to humans we find also that if the demand function is too high, performance will be adversely affected, while lower demand function will increase behaviors. For those who experienced violence, the demand function to receive reinforcers is lower for victim behaviors than for survivor behaviors, at least in the short term, thus there is higher motivation for victim behaviors than for survivor behaviors.

*“But it's the people who want to stay negative and in a hole, the way to do it is 'I'm a victim and I lived through 30 years of the Troubles', I hate that. It was an awful time but now it's a good time, if people would just move on.”*

At the same time, experimental research found that “[s]ince specific reinforcers allow the animals to perform specific behaviors, the method can be used to compare and rank different behaviors according to their importance to the animals” (Ladewig, Sørensen, Nielsen, & Matthews, 2002, p.325). As such, if we could rank different behaviors according to the importance for victims or survivors, we would find that at least initially victims behaviors would rank higher than survivor behaviors.

In most situations of violence, eventually there will be an insertion of resources. This could be in the form of individual compensation, charitable giving, or Governmental funding, e.g., in Northern Ireland 44 Million Pound Stirling were spent on victims support since the Good Friday agreement (McDougall, 2006). Moynahan (2001) suggested that it is entirely possible that victim behavior rather than survivor behavior is reinforced in these circumstances (Dillenburg, Fargas, & Akhonzada, 2005). As such victims' behaviors are reinforced by what has been termed a “victims industry” (Best, 1999).

Does this mean that maybe we should not offer compensation, support, or empathy to victims? Of course not! Given that victims are likely to go through an extinction burst during the early part of victimization, it is important not to prematurely punish or reinforce these behaviors. Extinction bursts

are a natural part of the process that victims go through after the event and therefore need to be managed carefully (Dillenburg & Keenan, 2001; 2005). If managed successfully, contingencies change and consequently victims will grow to become survivors (Joseph & Linley, 2004).

*“I would have called myself a victim but I think now, going through all what I’ve gone through with the group and the program... I would like to think I am a survivor.”*

*“I felt a victim when the feud was going on. When the feud is over, I gather myself together and feel like I’m a survivor. But then, if something happens tomorrow, I would feel like a victim again, you know. So, you are moving from one to the other.”*

On the other hand, if the extinction burst is not handled well, or repeated violent events are experienced, victims may get stuck in victimhood.

*“I would like to think I’m both [victim and survivor]. One, I had a number of incidents where my wife and I had our own house blown up and wrecked through a bomb that was dumped down, along with quite a number of other houses ... But due to my illness, which obviously made me a victim, I would categorise myself as a victim of the Troubles, but also a survivor because, because I mean I’m able to talk about it. Sadly, quite a number of victims haven’t been able to reach that stage.”*

## Conclusion

In this paper we have outlined a behavior analytic view of victimology. We have done this by considering two main areas. First, we looked at protective and vulnerability factors for victims and perpetrators and then we looked at reasons why some people who experience violence become victims while others grow to be survivors. We outlined behavior analytic principles that underpin the understanding in each of these areas. We found that the range of factors that determine whether someone becomes a victim or a perpetrator include the personal learning history, prevailing contingencies, and cultural context. While obviously these factors also influence whether someone who has experienced violence becomes a victim or survivor, there are a number of other factors that are important here. These include the nature of the event, the effect the event had on motivational operations, and the nature of the behavioral economy after the event. Closed economies lead to less flexible behavior that is more resistant to change and may typify victim behaviors while open economies produce more flexible and variable behavior that is more likely to be described as survivor behaviors.

In a nutshell, a behavior analysis of victimology is based on event related, individual, societal, and cultural contexts that determine actual behavioral repertoires (public as well as private) (Dillenburg & Keenan, 2005). As Skinner (1980) said some time ago: “One can picture a good life by analysing one’s feelings, but one can achieve it only by arranging environmental contingencies” (p.127). A behavior analysis of victimology acknowledges that violent behaviors are a function certain personal learning histories that evolved within cultural contexts and culminate in specific prevailing contingencies. Violent events in turn constitute establishing or abolishing operations for behavioral economies of which ultimately victim, survivor, and perpetrator behaviors are a function and subsequently become integrated into behavioral repertoires and personal learning histories.

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