

Peaceful Societies

Douglas P. Fry

Åbo Akademi University and University of Arizona

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Peaceful Society A society with an extremely low level of physical aggression among its members as well as shared beliefs that devalue aggression and/or positively value harmonious interpersonal relationships. Consequently, conflicts in peaceful societies tend to be dealt with in ways that do not involve aggression.

Violence Severe acts of *physical* aggression generally resulting in some degree of injury or even death.

GLOSSARY

Aggression Acts that inflict physical, psychological, and/or social harm (pain/injury) on an individual or individuals. Aggression can stem from emotional arousal (e.g., anger, frustration, fear) and/or be instrumental (i.e., engaged in for a reward or to avoid punishment).

Becharaa' A dispute-resolving assembly used by the Semai people of Malaysia.

Belief System/Cosmology Conceptions that are held and shared by the members of a society, both implicitly and explicitly, about the nature of humans, the world, supernatural beings, and spirituality.

Conflict A perceived divergence of interests—where interests are broadly conceptualized to include values, needs, goals, and wishes—between two or more parties, often accompanied by feelings of anger and hostility.

Enculturation The processes through which culture is transmitted to new generations.

THE MEMBERS OF A PEACEFUL SOCIETY rarely if ever engage in physical aggression, and correspondingly, they share a system of beliefs that eschews aggression and instead promotes harmonious, nonviolent interpersonal relations. Section I of this chapter provides a brief overview of key comparative and analytical sources on peaceful societies. Section II presents two detailed case studies, one on the Semai of Malaysia and the other on the La Paz Zapotec of Mexico. Perhaps the Semai represent a pinnacle of human social tranquility; they demonstrate the human capacity to construct and live a nonviolent social existence. As part of the case study, a description of the Semai dispute resolution procedure, the *becharaa'*, is presented. The La Paz Zapotec demonstrate the importance of enculturation processes for the maintenance of peace. Psychocultural mechanisms thought to contribute to the peaceful lifestyle in La Paz are considered, with emphasis being given to how individuals internalize values, beliefs, and behavioral patterns that are incompatible with violence.

Section III reviews several theoretical issues, including intracultural variation in peacefulness, within-group versus between-group peacefulness, changes in peacefulness of a society over time, and the multidimensional nature of aggression and conflict. Section IV draws on cross-cultural data to discuss common features observable in at least some peaceful societies. The presence of a belief system that promotes nonviolence and/or social harmony and therefore does not condone physical aggression is perhaps the most critical feature found in peaceful societies. Additionally, typical ways in which peaceful societies keep the peace include avoidance, internalization of self-restraints against expressing anger and aggression, and use of informal social controls such as ridicule, gossip, social pressure from kin, and so on. Humans are capable of creating peaceful societies. This statement is not utopian, because peaceful societies already exist.

I. OVERVIEW: THE EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF PEACEFUL SOCIETIES

Attitudinal research shows that neo-Hobbesian beliefs that human beings are naturally war-like or naturally violent continue to be widespread among Westerners today. For example, 64% of college student respondents viewed “war as an intrinsic part of human nature” and 40% agreed that “wars are inevitable because human beings are naturally aggressive creatures,” findings reported by Douglas and Brooks Fry in 1997. A view of humanity as naturally aggressive is also suggested by the statement, “violence is always present in society” (Balandier, quoted by Sponsel, 1996a, p. 97), an assertion implying that nonviolent societies cannot exist. However, a cross-cultural perspective shows such a view to be incorrect. Nonviolent, peaceful societies do exist.

Peaceful societies—those with extremely low levels of physical aggressiveness—can be found in various parts of the world, although, as noted by Lawrence Keeley, they are not nearly as numerous as more violent societies. Peaceful societies include, for example, the Amish of North America, the Batek of the Malay Peninsula, the Buid of the Philippines, the Chewong of Malaysia, certain Canadian Inuit groups, the Hutterites of Canada and the United States, the Ifaluk of Micronesia, the !Kung of the Kalahari in Africa, the Mbuti of central Africa, the Piaroa of Amazonia, the Semai of Malaysia, the Siriono of Bolivia, the Tahitians of the central Pacific, the Tikopia of the western Pacific, the Toraja of Indonesia, the Veddahs of Sri Lanka, the Yames of Or-

chid Island off the coast of China, and certain Zapotec communities of Mexico, among others. Additionally, warfare is not engaged in by all societies, being absent in cultures such as the Andaman Islanders, Arunta, Arapesh, Birhor, Buid, Hadza, !Kung, Mission Indians, Punan, Semai, Semang, Todas, Yahgan, and so on. Clearly the existence of peaceful, nonviolent societies shows that violence and war are not inevitable features of human social life. As Carl O’Neill expresses “we appear *not* to arrive at birth biologically ‘prepackaged’ for violence” (in Howell & Willis, 1989, p. 117, emphasis added).

Leslie Sponsel, writing in the *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*, proposes some general tendencies of peaceful societies. They are likely to be small communities with egalitarian social structures—including relatively high gender equality—that emphasize cooperation, generalized sharing, and decision-making through group consensus. Additionally, Sponsel suggests that peaceful societies have world views, values, attitudes, enculturation practices, and conflict resolution procedures that emphasize nonviolence.

Marc Ross also lists some typical features of what he terms “low-conflict” societies. In parallel to Sponsel, Ross notes that norms in such societies emphasize nonviolence and cooperative approaches to dispute resolution among community members. After making the caveat that each society is different, Ross (1993, pp. 59–60) suggests that seven characteristics are important in “low-conflict” societies:

Psychocultural practices which build security and trust; a strong linkage between individual and community interests and high identification with the community so that individuals and groups in conflict trust that its interests are their own; a preference for joint problem solving which leaves ultimate control over decisions in the hands of the disputants; available third parties (sometimes in the form of the entire community) to facilitate conflict management; an emphasis on the restoration of social harmony that is often at least as strong as the concern with the substantive issues in a dispute; the possibility of exit as a viable option; and strategies of conflict avoidance.

A number of descriptions and analyses of peaceful cultures are now available in the anthropological literature. In addition to a diverse set of articles and books that provide information on particular nonviolent societies, for example, Robert Dentan’s *The Semai: A Nonviolent People of Malaya* published in 1968 or Douglas

Hollan's 1988 article "Staying 'Cool' in Toraja: Informal Strategies for the Management of Anger and Hostility in a Nonviolent Society," the following sources provide comparative analyses and/or collections of writing on peaceful societies. David Fabbro briefly summarizes information on seven peaceful societies, the Copper Eskimos, Hutterites, !Kung, Mbuti, Semai, Siriono, and Tristan da Cunha Islanders. In a volume edited by Ashley Montagu, *Learning Non-Aggression*, the contributors pay special attention to socialization and enculturation processes occurring in low-violence societies such as certain Canadian Inuit groups, the !Kung, the Mbuti, the Semai, Tahitians, and others. Additional descriptions of peaceful cultures, such as the Buid, Chewong, Piaroa, and La Paz Zapotec, are found in *Societies At Peace*, edited by Signe Howell and Roy Willis. Marc Ross briefly reviews published accounts on five "low-conflict" societies, namely, the Papago, Norwegians, Tikopians, Semai, and !Kung, in Chapter 3 of his book, *The Management of Conflict*. Contributors to Leslie Sponsel and Thomas Gregor's edited book, *The Anthropology of Peace and Nonviolence*, provide further data on the certain peaceful Inuit groups, the Semai, and the La Paz Zapotec, as well as on several other peaceful cultures. Sponsel's 1996b article provides a concise overview of certain issues and sources related to peaceful societies and nonviolence. Finally, Bruce Bonta focuses on conflict resolution and other salient aspects of peacefulness using information from 24 societies with low levels of violence.

II. CASE STUDIES: THE SEMAI AND THE LA PAZ ZAPOTEC

A. The Semai of Malaysia

1. Peaceful Lifestyles

Clayton Robarchek (1997, p. 51) characterizes the Semai as "one of the least violent societies known to anthropology," and Robert Dentan writes of this culture that "although their technology is so simple that there is no metalwork, weaving, tanning, or pottery, nevertheless they seem to have worked out ways of handling human violence which technologically more 'advanced' people might envy" (1968, p. 6).

The Semai live in small bands, seldom consisting of more than 100 persons, and sustain themselves through a combination of swidden gardening, hunting, fishing, and gathering. Semai social organization is extremely egalitarian. A headman (occasionally a headwoman)

has some moral authority over the members of the band, but this leader lacks any institutionalized power.

Based on independent field studies, Robarchek and Dentan reach similar conclusions about the peaceful nature of Semai society. Dentan explains that the Semai people perceive themselves as a nonviolent culture and that Semai individuals hold conceptions of themselves as nonviolent persons. Furthermore, Dentan notes that violence seems to terrify the Semai. Adults do not strike each other and children are not physically punished, aside from the mildest pinching or patting on the hand.

Robarchek concurs with such assessments of Semai nonviolence, noting, for instance in a 1980 article, that aggression simply is not perceived as a behavioral possibility among the Semai. In another article, Clayton and Carole Robarchek (1996, p. 64) specify that "Husbands and wives do not assault one another, parents do not physically punish their children, neighbors do not fight with one another, and homicide is so rare as to be virtually nonexistent." It is necessary to point out that a calculation of the Semai homicide rate published by Bruce Knauft in 1987 is extremely inaccurate. As Robarchek and Robarchek (1998, p. 124, note 2) explain, this unfortunate error resulted in part from Knauft's use of a population figure for the Semai of 300 "rather than on the population of 15,000," thus producing a homicide rate that is at the minimum 50 times too high. Regrettably, this inflated homicide calculation continues to create confusion as it is perpetuated in the literature, as illustrated, for instance, when Keeley concludes on the basis of this erroneous calculation that the Semai "homicide rate was numerically significant" (1996, p. 31).

2. The Enculturation of Nonviolence

Both Dentan (in Montagu, 1978) and Robarchek have discussed the enculturation processes through which Semai children learn and adopt nonviolent attitudes and patterns of behavior in the natural course of growing up. Robarchek emphasizes the importance of the Semai social learning environment as one where children see very few instances of aggression. Children also learn the values, attitudes, and beliefs of their elders. For instance, Semai children, who themselves are not punished corporally, acquire the Semai belief that hitting a child may cause the youth to become ill and die. Robarchek (1980, p. 114) concludes that, "for developing children, the learning of aggressive behavior by observation and imitation is almost entirely precluded. . . . The image of the world, of human goals, and of the means of attaining them that is

presented to Semai children simply does not include violence as a behavioral alternative.”

3. Belief System

Robarchek explains that the Semai view the world as filled with dangers, most of which are beyond any human control. The Semai conceptualize human aspects of the world as split dichotomously between members of the band and all outsiders. The Semai also believe in both good and bad spirits. Security and nurturance are found within the band, while danger and death are found outside it. The good, protective spirits are called *gunik* and help to protect people from the malevolent spirits, called *mara'*, which attack band members causing injuries, illnesses, and deaths. However, Dentan notes that “*Gunik* and *mara'* are not merely opposites; *mara'* become *gunik* without ceasing to be *mara'*” (personal communication, May 5, 1998). Robarchek emphasizes that the community and its *gunik* are the only defense against the *mara'*. In a hostile world filled with malevolence and danger, a person’s security and nurturance can be derived only from others in the community. Thus nurturance (expressed through both emotional and material support) and affiliation (maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships within the band) are two primary values among the Semai. Robarchek (1997, p. 53) explains that “good and bad are defined primarily in terms of behaviors associated with these values, with goodness defined positively in terms of nurturance (helping, giving, sharing, feeding, and so on) and badness in terms of behaviors disruptive of affiliation (getting angry, quarreling, and fighting).” Thus in this culturally constructed Semai belief system, aggression runs directly counter to community values and the images persons hold of themselves as cooperative and nonviolent. (See Box.)

4. Perceptions of Conflict

Robarchek notes that not only do the Semai fear aggression and violence, but they also feel intensely threatened by any type of interpersonal conflict. Robarchek reports that when he orally administered a sentence-completion test to a sample of Semai, the finding clearly indicated the critical importance of maintaining harmony in interpersonal relations. In completing the sentence “more than anything else, he/she is afraid of . . .” the most commonly expressed fear was “a conflict,” outnumbering the responses for “malevolent spirits,” (*mara'*), “tigers,” and “death” combined.

The fact that the Semai are nonviolent does not mean that conflicts never arise within the band. It does mean, however, that violence is not used as an approach to

conflict. In daily life a certain number of conflicts inevitably occur, such as when spouses are unfaithful, goats invade another person’s garden causing crop damage, someone becomes offended by the words of another, and so on. Such disputes are called *hal*, which is roughly equivalent to the term “affair” in English, except that *hal* carries an extremely negative connotation in Semai usage. The Semai “go to great lengths to avoid conflict and will usually tolerate annoyances and sacrifice personal interests rather than precipitate an open confrontation” (Robarchek 1997, p. 54). Much of the time persons manage to deny or suppress angry feelings as a way to avoid *hal*. This point is illustrated by Dentan’s (1968, p. 55) observation that “the Semai do not say, ‘Anger is bad.’ They say, ‘We do not get angry,’ and an obviously angry man will flatly deny his anger.”

Robarchek provides an illustration of how Semai attempt to avoid *hal*. When an owner of some fruit trees discovered that someone was coming in the night and taking his fruit, he went to build a temporary shelter in the forest so he could spend the night to protect his fruit from theft. As he was in the process of building the shelter, he talked a great deal about his plan to guard the trees so that everybody in the band became aware of his plan to camp-out near his fruit trees. He did not want to run any danger of actually surprising the thief. Robarchek (1979, p. 106) explains the strategy as one which avoided open confrontation while simultaneously protecting the resource: “He wished only to stop the theft, not to discover or catch the thief; for if he were to confront the thief, their relations would be disrupted, and *hal* would result.”

5. *Becharaa'*: A Dispute Resolution Assembly

With an egalitarian band type of social organization, the Semai lack superordinate mechanisms for resolving disputes. On occasions when *hal* cannot be avoided, the headman convenes a dispute resolution assembly called the *becharaa'*. The persons who are engaged in a dispute, their relatives, and any other members of the community who choose to attend, meet at the house of the headman, usually in the late afternoon. At first, the persons present discuss any number of topics, *except* the dispute that is the reason for the gathering. After some while, several elder members of the band each present lengthy monologues referring to the mutual interdependence of all members of the community. Everyone is reminded of their dependence on the other members of the band and that maintaining harmony and unity is of primary importance. Following these reiterations of community values and cosmology, one of the disputants eventually begins to discuss the *hal*.

Box 1

Anthropological Quotations on Peaceful Societies

“Anger is ignored as much as possible, as with angry children, but when it becomes too manifest, people physically remove themselves, just as they flee from outsiders. . . . Their mythology has no instances of human physical violence. I asked about murder. They insisted it never happened.”—Signe Howell on the Chewong of Malaysia (in Howell & Willis, 1989, p. 55).

“Available statistics on crime and suicide, impressions of administrators, and my own observations during a period of more than two years in a rural village and a small enclave in urban Papeete indicate in comparison with Western experience and in comparison with reports of many other non-Western societies an extreme lack of angry, hostile, destructive behavior.”—Robert Levy on the Tahitians (in Montagu, 1978, p. 224).

“They had no policemen, no jails, no external controls of any kind for outbreaks of aggression. Nevertheless, aggression did not break out [p. 71]. . . . Perhaps the most important cultural factor in the valued peacekeeping practices of the Ju/wasi was the phenomenal self-control that was practiced by everyone but the smallest children [p. 75].”—Elizabeth Marshall Thomas on the Ju/wasi of Namibia (Thomas, 1994).

“In my view, the Buid may be fairly described as a society ‘at peace’ because of the extremely low *value* they attach to ‘aggression’ and the extremely high *value* they attach to ‘tranquility.’”—Thomas Gibson on the Buid of the Philippines (in Howell & Willis, 1989, p. 60).

“The concept of good is tied to peacefulness. A villager’s reputation and moral worth depend on being circumspect in behavior, avoiding confrontations, and rarely showing anger. These behaviors are regarded as ‘harmonious’ and aesthetically pleasing.”—Thomas Gregor on the Mehinaku of Brazil (in Sponsel & Gregor, 1994, p. 246).

“I have been describing ways of avoiding conflictful confrontations by respecting the autonomy and privacy of others: being indirect, discreet, not putting oneself forward, not making claims on others, or attempting to influence them. Another way of avoiding confrontations was to deny that one was unhappy, angry, dissatisfied, resentful. . . . A very frequently used technique was to turn the situation into a joke; to laugh at it.”—Jean Briggs on the Utku-hikhalingmiut and Qipisamiut Inuit of Canada (in Sponsel & Gregor, 1994, p. 165).

“Piaroland is almost free of all forms of physical violence, a place where children, teenagers, and adults alike never express anger through physical means. . . . Since the Piaroa totally disallow physical violence, and children are never physically punished, the children have no model of such action.”—Joanna Overing on the Piaroa of Venezuela (in Howell & Willis, 1989, pp. 79, 92).

[The Toraja devalue] “. . . anger and hostility and successfully control overtly aggressive behavior through a number of cultural practices [p. 54]. . . . Anger (*sengke*) is one of the ‘hot’ emotional states most feared and avoided by the Toraja . . . the conscious awareness of angry, ‘hot’ feelings is upsetting to people, even if such feelings are not openly expressed [p. 59].”—Douglas Hollan on the Toraja of Indonesia (Hollan, 1988).

Next the other disputant offers a portrayal of the dispute. Others join in, offering opinions and observations, or perhaps asking clarifying questions. The disputants do not confront each other or argue, but rather they calmly address the gathered assembly. The *becharaa'* continues without ceasing for hours or typically for several days and nights. The headman’s household provides food, and people may nap from time to time on the floor as the discussion continues. Throughout the *becharaa'* meeting, anger and other emotions generally are not displayed.

Robarchek explains that during the *becharaa'*, all events related to the dispute are explored from “every conceivable perspective in a kind of marathon encounter group. Every possible explanation is offered, every imaginable motive introduced, every conceivable mitigating circumstance examined . . . until finally a point is reached where there is simply nothing left to say” (1997, p. 55). The headman then lectures one or both of the parties, noting their guilt in the *hal*, instructing them in how they should have acted differently, and directing them not to repeat such behavior. The head-

man and other elders again offer monologues reaffirming the paramount necessity of maintaining the unity and harmony of the band. In his 1979 article, Robarchek emphasizes how, through the *becharaa'*, the Semai are able to deal nonviolently with serious conflicts—involving property ownership, infidelity, divorce, land claims, and so on—in such a way as to (1) dissipate angry emotions, (2) deal with the substantive issues of the dispute, (3) promote the reconciliation of the antagonists, and (4) reconfirm and reinforce the interdependence of all members of the band and the need for social harmony.

6. Summary

In summary, the following points can be highlighted about the belief system and behavior of the Semai. Nonviolence is a central aspect of the Semai belief system, making physical aggression unacceptable. Behaviors of individuals closely correspond with the nonviolent beliefs: physical aggression of any type is practically nonexistent.

Another aspect of the Semai belief system is that conflict (*hal*) is to be feared and avoided. Behaviorally, Semai relocate to avoid external threats to the band and respond to conflict within the band by denying and suppressing anger, tolerating others, and, when necessary, employing the *becharaa'* to resolve disputes.

Within the Semai belief system, the band and protective, good spirits provide nurturance and security, while the world beyond the band is the realm of malevolent spirits and potentially harmful foreigners and therefore extremely dangerous. Aggression and conflict endanger the core of Semai existence by threatening the nurturance and security obtainable only through life in the community. Behaviorally, the overriding tendency is for people to cooperate, share, avoid conflicts, and act nonviolently.

Through enculturation, children internalize the Semai perceptions of the world, the core values, and other aspects of the belief system. Children also learn to behave nonviolently, to avoid conflicts whenever possible, and to suppress any feelings of anger.

B. The La Paz Zapotec of Mexico

1. Respect

Benito Juárez was a Zapotec Indian from the Mexican state of Oaxaca who became the President of Mexico in the mid-1800s. Juárez wrote, "Respect for the rights of others is peace," a sentiment which is in accordance with the emphasis that at least some Zapotec communities place on *respect*. La Paz and San Andrés are pseu-

donyms for two adjacent Zapotec communities, with populations of about 2000 and 3000 respectively. Members of the communities are peasant farmers, subsisting on maize, beans, and squash. While the people in both communities regularly espouse the virtues of acting respectfully, the citizens of La Paz take their own words more seriously than do the people of San Andrés. Persons from San Andrés are more likely to abandon this ideal in daily life by arguing, insulting, lying, coming to blows, and damaging another's property than are the Zapotec of La Paz, who live in much closer correspondence with the ethic of respect. In terms of fistfights, wife beatings, jealous feuds, assaults, and murders, San Andrés has a substantially higher level of violence than La Paz.

The citizens of La Paz maintain a self-image of themselves as nonjealous, respectful, and nonviolent (*pacíficos*), while in San Andrés, by contrast, the community self-image includes aggression, as voiced in such sentiments that avenging a relative's murder may be honorable, that jealously killing a rival is understandable, and that fighting, especially among intoxicated persons, is simply to be expected. In other words, the people of San Andrés internalize an ambivalent belief system regarding aggression and do not hold a nonviolent image of their community analogous to the one held in La Paz.

2. Socialization for Peace

Data gathered by Douglas Fry in San Andrés and La Paz illustrate how socialization and enculturation patterns perpetuate peaceful social life. In the first part of this case study, methods of child discipline and children's behavior are compared between peaceful La Paz and more aggressive San Andrés. In the second part of the case study, the focus shifts to peaceful La Paz, and certain social mechanisms that appear to contribute to the social tranquility of the La Paz Zapotec are reviewed.

Observing that physical punishment of children is absent or very rare in some cultures with low levels of aggression, in a 1993 article Fry predicted that parents in La Paz would employ less physical punishment than parents from San Andrés and furthermore that La Paz parents would favor verbal means of disciplining their children. Both attitudinal and behavioral data were gathered.

The assessment of attitudes toward disciplining and raising children was addressed during tape-recorded structured interviews with samples of fathers from La Paz and San Andrés. One interview question asked what a father should do if his son let the farm animals under his care eat alfalfa belonging to another farmer. In San

Andrés, 65% of the fathers included punishment in their responses, while only 20% of the sample from La Paz suggested punishment, statistically a very significant difference.

Answers to other interview questions also showed that parents from San Andrés advocate the use of physical punishment very significantly more often than do respondents from La Paz. Typical San Andrés responses were: “hit him then so that he grows up with some discipline” and “hit her so she will have a little respect.” By contrast, the most favored reaction to children’s misbehavior among the La Paz parents is to talk, tell, show, correct, and educate the children—in other words, positive verbal responses. For instance, one La Paz father told how he would talk to a disobedient son, and in his speech, the core value of *respect* and adherence to proper father and son roles are emphasized: “Listen son, if you do not obey . . . I am not able to assist you. . . . You, as my son, ought to [have] respect. . . . I am your father. . . . You ought to respect my words, because you know that your father and your mother are the ones that raise you.” Other La Paz respondents also regularly mentioned respect, for example: “Teach them . . . so that they have respect. Educate them.” And La Pazian nonviolent thinking regarding child training is expressed by a father who explained that, “One must explain to the child with love, with patience . . . so that he is educated more.” Some La Paz respondents also mentioned the importance of setting a good example for their children through their own behavior.

Figure 1 graphically portrays the major differences in approaches to child discipline between parents in San Andrés and La Paz: in neither community do respondents advocate much use of negative verbal approaches, such as scolding or threatening children, but

San Andrés respondents clearly favor physical punishment, while La Paz respondents lean strongly toward positive verbal responses.

Ethnographic observations correspond with the attitudes and beliefs voiced by the fathers. Fry recounts how during fieldwork in the 1980s he saw 11 child beatings in San Andrés as well as other types of aggression directed at children, but never observed in La Paz a child receiving a beating nor any other type of physical aggression from an adult. On two occasions, La Paz parents were observed to threaten children with a beating, but they did not actually punish the children. Correspondingly, Carl O’Neill, who conducted fieldwork in La Paz during the 1960s, writes “the physical disciplining of a child might be undertaken with a *vara* (cane), reported to be so by fathers *but never observed*” (emphasis added, O’Neill, 1969, quoted in Fry’s 1993 article). Thus, corporal punishment in La Paz is very rare.

The parents in San Andrés and La Paz also hold markedly different opinions as to the “nature of children,” and this relates to their expectations about children’s behavior. In San Andrés, a fair amount of disobedience is tolerated as *natural* among children. The people of San Andrés view children as mischievous and somewhat uncontrollable, and the children live up to these expectations. In comparison, the Zapotec of La Paz perceive children as basically well behaved. La Paz adults believe that children naturally will learn how to behave correctly, and La Paz children typically do obey adults.

3. Internalization of Peaceful Behavior

It would seem that the positive verbal approaches as well as the positive expectations that La Paz parents hold may help children develop their own *internal* controls against acting aggressively. La Paz parents explain the consequences of misdeeds to children and convey both in words and actions the ideals of respect and nonviolence. For example, one father said, “If my boy sees that I . . . do not have respect for other persons, well . . . he thus acquires the same sentiment. But if I have respect for others, well, he imitates me. . . . Above all, the father must make himself an example, by showing how to respect.” On the other hand, the heavy reliance on physical punishment in San Andrés may not be conducive to the internalization of self-restraints against aggression. Physical punishment reflects an *external* locus of control, and thus San Andrés children may come to expect a controlling response from others rather than develop their own self-restraints. Additionally, as San Andrés adults model physical aggression during punishment episodes and at other times, the

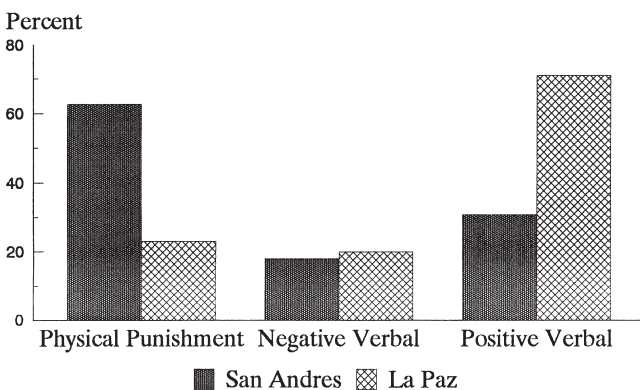


FIGURE 1 Disciplinary styles: San Andrés and La Paz.

children are presented with messages that sometimes aggression is acceptable.

One line of evidence in support of this interpretation involves the behavior of young children in San Andrés and La Paz. As reported in a 1992 article, Fry conducted systematic behavior observations on samples of 3- to 8-year-old children from both communities in order to record data on fighting and play fighting behavior (such as beats, slaps, kicks, and so on). The samples of children were similar regarding sex composition, mean age, the age of their parents, number of siblings, and economic standing of their family within the community. Whenever the child who was being observed engaged in aggression or play aggression, the details of the interaction were recorded, including the identities of the interactants and any facial expressions or gestures.

Children from San Andrés participated in significantly more play aggression than the La Paz children (6.9 versus 3.7 episodes/hr). Likewise, the rate of aggression was significantly higher in San Andrés than in La Paz (.78 versus .39 episodes/hr).

Some aggression consisted of physical contacts (e.g., punches and kicks), while other instances blended *non-contact* threatening (e.g., a raised arm with the intention to beat) with contact aggression. Of course, noncontact threatening is less severe than actually striking blows. In San Andrés, only about 10% of aggression simultaneously included threatening. In La Paz, however, 63% of aggression simultaneously included threatening. The mixing of noncontact threatening with physical aggression over half the time in La Paz is another indication—along with the significantly lower rate of aggression among the La Paz sample to begin with—of the La Paz children's *internal* restraint against actually engaging in physical aggression.

These findings suggest an overall reluctance on the part of La Paz children to participate in play fighting and real fighting relative to the San Andrés children, an intercommunity difference that also appears to strengthen with age. These differences in children's behavior correspond with the interpretation suggested by Fry in a chapter in Sponsel and Gregor's edited book that different beliefs and values regarding the expression of aggression are internalized in these two communities. Prevalent attitudes regarding what constitutes acceptable behavior, shared expectations about the nature of the citizenry, and overall images of the community's aggressiveness and peacefulness are all elements of a child's learning environment. It seems that through socialization, even by the 3- to 8-year-old age range, La Paz children have begun to develop internal controls against engaging in both play fighting and real fighting.

4. Psychocultural Mechanisms That Promote Peace

To shift the focus of discussion exclusively to peaceful La Paz, a variety of psychocultural features appear to contribute to a relatively nonviolent social life. O'Neill (Howell & Willis, 1989, p. 119), states that "residents of La Paz emphasize values and ideals which in their enactment stand as antithetical to a violent way of life." The social ideals that O'Neill sees as antithetical to the expression of aggression are respect, responsibility, and cooperation. Additionally, Fry recounts how members of the La Paz community hold a nonviolent image of their community, reflected, for example, in statements to the effect that we are *pacíficos* (peaceful or pacifists), we don't fight, we are like one family, and so on. Fry concludes that "the citizens of La Paz maintain a self-image of themselves as respectful, peaceful, nonjealous, and cooperative" (Sponsel & Gregor, 1994, p. 140).

O'Neill discusses several psychocultural mechanisms that he sees as contributing to La Pazian peacefulness. First, he explains that persons are suspicious of witchcraft, and one check on behaving aggressively may stem from a concern that the victim might retaliate through witchcraft. Second, O'Neill points out that community life makes each person interdependent and that the necessity of reciprocity and cooperation serve to inhibit aggression. Third, O'Neill discusses how fear of gossip may check a person's aggression and/or prevent the escalation of aggression. Fourth, avoidance is noted by O'Neill as a critical mechanism for preventing aggression. He specifies that the act of removing oneself from a threatening situation is not considered cowardly by La Pazians. Additionally, the *machismo* value system with its emphasis on male fighting is not manifested in La Paz, in contrast to many other segments of Mexican society. Fifth, denial of anger or hostility is another mechanism which O'Neill emphasizes as important in maintaining the peace: "A person who feels hostile toward another will often go to great lengths to deny such feelings" (Howell & Willis, 1989, p. 126).

Fry provides an example (Sponsel and Gregor, 1994) that illustrates both avoidance and denial. When an inebriated and angry man came looking for a fellow La Pazian late one night, the fellow he was looking for simply avoided a confrontation by pretending not to be at home, letting his unmarried sister deal with the angry drunk while he remained locked in his house. The following day, the man who had verbally expressed his drunken rage the night before denied that he had ever been angry at his neighbor. Both men simply went about their business and that was the end of the matter.

5. Summary

To summarize the main points of this case study, in the first part, disciplinary practices and children's behavior were compared between San Andrés and La Paz. La Paz parents prefer positive verbal alternatives to corporal punishment. They discuss, explain, and teach their children how to behave, making frequent reference to the key value of respect. As a result of such enculturation, La Paz children tend to be more obedient, respectful, and less aggressive than San Andrés children, the latter difference being quantitatively documented through systematic observations of 3- to 8-year old children's behavior. La Paz parents, through actions and words, provide their children with methods of dealing with conflict within the family and community that do not involve physical confrontation. The La Paz case provides an example wherein parents deemphasize aggression and employ nonforceful child training techniques, and children, for their part, are generally well behaved and not very aggressive.

By adulthood, people who have grown up in La Paz have internalized certain beliefs and values that act as a first level of aggression control, contributing greatly to the overall peacefulness in the community. Thus it seems that the first level of restraint against acting aggressively comes from *within* the individuals who are the products of La Pazian enculturation. In the second part of this case study, it was suggested that certain psychocultural mechanisms operate to prevent and minimize aggression in the community. For instance, the people of La Paz regularly deny their feelings of anger and hostility, avoid conflict situations and direct confrontations, perceive their mutual interdependence with other community members, and perhaps reassure themselves, when necessary, that all the people in their community are basically good and peaceful persons. They reaffirm in daily conversations and behavior the primary social ideals of respect, responsibility, and cooperation, and, when disputes do arise, people from La Paz—again at an internal level of control—employ self-restraint to prevent the escalation or lengthy duration of the conflict.

III. SOME THEORETICAL ISSUES RELATED TO PEACEFUL SOCIETIES

A. Intracultural Variation

A consideration of peaceful societies raises several theoretical and conceptual issues. The first issue involves *intracultural* variation. There has long been a tendency

within anthropology to generalize about the characteristics of a culture based on fieldwork in only one or several villages, communities, bands, and so on. When considerable variation exists among intracultural entities, generalizations may lead to misrepresentations about the level of aggressiveness, peacefulness, or other features of a culture. For example, it would be incorrect to generalize that Zapotec culture overall has a low level of aggression based solely on data from the peaceful La Paz community, or conversely, to generalize on the basis of fieldwork in a different Zapotec community than La Paz that all Zapotec communities are violent. Jean Briggs voices a similar caution that not all Inuit bands are as peaceful as the groups she describes (Sponsel & Gregor, 1994).

B. In-Group versus Out-Group Aggression

A second issue to consider in assessing peacefulness involves whether to focus on the degree of tranquility within the group, between neighboring groups, or both. Some cultures have very low levels of both in-group and out-group aggression, such as the Buid and the Semai. The Buid response to conflict both within the group or from the outside is to attempt to escape from the situation. Thomas Gibson explains that "... simple withdrawal is the preferred solution to conflict. The socially approved response to aggression is avoidance or even flight. The Buid language is rich in words for fear, fleeing, and escape from danger, none of which carries negative moral overtones" (Howell & Willis, 1989, p. 66). On the other hand, some societies with very low levels of physical aggression within the group may be willing to engage in externally directed aggression. As noted by Ross, the internally peaceful Papago of southern Arizona and northern Mexico defended themselves against raiding Apaches, although they do not themselves glorify warfare.

C. Cultural Changes in Aggressiveness/ Peacefulness Over Time

A third issue to consider in assessing the peacefulness of a culture is that the degree of internal and external aggression can change over time. Keeley writes, "With bewildering rapidity, hated enemies can become respected allies, devout pacifists can become tigers on the battlefield, peaceable societies can become belligerent, and vice versa" (1996, p. 147). For instance, Dentan (Silverberg & Gray, 1992) notes apparent shifts in levels of aggressivity among the !Kung over several decades, wherein they seem to have experienced a 2-decade pe-

riod of relative peacefulness, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, which was interspersed between more aggressive periods. Similarly, Thomas reports a marked shift toward violence among the previously peaceful Ju/wasi people once they gave up nomadism for a sedentary lifestyle. Sponsel (1996a, p. 106) notes that change also can occur in the opposite direction, asserting that “the transformation of warlike societies into peaceful ones has occurred repeatedly in human history.” As discussed by Fry in more detail in this volume in the article entitled “Aggression and Altruism,” Sponsel’s point is contemporaneously illustrated with the previously warlike Waorani of Ecuador and the Chatino villagers of southern Mexico, who dramatically reduced aggression in their communities. The Waorani, for instance, while not completely transforming themselves into a nonviolent society, remarkably managed to decrease their homicide rate by *more than 90%* over several years. Thus the degree of peacefulness in a society clearly can change over time. Implications of this observation are that cultural comparisons regarding peacefulness should include a specification of the time frames involved. Also, awareness of the potential for culture change may at times account for discrepancies in descriptions of aggression and peacefulness given by different fieldworkers for the same culture but at different time periods, as seems to have occurred related to the !Kung, a point noted both by Dentan and Draper (Montagu, 1978). A final implication, relevant for reducing violence in society, is that cultural transitions toward lower levels of aggression can be both dramatic and rapid as shown by the Chatino and Waorani transformations toward more peaceful lifestyles.

D. Aggression as a Multidimensional Construct

A fourth conceptual issue related both to assessing the peacefulness of a particular society and to determining where a particular society might fall along a cross-cultural peaceful-to-violent continuum is that aggression, and more generally conflict, are multidimensional concepts. For example, possibly relevant dimensions of physical aggression might include spousal aggression, physical punishment of children, infanticide, homicide, capital punishment, interpersonal fighting with fists, clubs, sticks, or spears, and group raids, ambushes, and battles. By some such indicators a society could appear to be extremely tranquil while by other indicators the same society could appear to be more violent. This observation about multidimensionality

is relevant, of course, to any attempts to scale societies along a peaceful-to-violent continuum, an approach advocated by researchers such as James Silverberg and Patrick Gray.

Some of the challenges posed by the multidimensionality of aggression are reflected in Fabbro’s comparison of seven societies. While his characterization of all seven societies as “peaceful” based on a set of criteria (e.g., no wars, no collective internal violence, little or no structural violence, little or no interpersonal physical violence) makes sense in comparison to other societies that do not meet these criteria, nonetheless the complications posed by the multidimensionality issue come into play as Fabbro notes, for instance, (1) infanticide in two cultures, but not in the other five, (2) physical punishment of children in three cultures, but not in the other four, and (3) spousal aggression in three societies, but not in one, and no explicit information on its occurrence for the remaining three societies. Furthermore, in a summary table, Fabbro classifies four societies as having “*little* physical violence” and for two of those four he notes the presence of “lethal physical violence.” Fabbro classifies the remaining three societies as having “*some* physical violence” and one of these three is noted to have “lethal physical violence.” Finally, Fabbro at times mentions particular cultural beliefs that may directly or indirectly relate to aggression and peacefulness—for example, noting fear of violence in one society and that violence is abhorred in another society.

Thus while all these societies are relatively more peaceful than many other cultures in the sense that they do not practice warfare, lack internal collective violence, have minimal structural violence and low levels of interpersonal violence, and so on, it is nonetheless clear that some aggressive acts—of various types, occurring at various rates, and on occasion even involving lethal violence—may happen in societies that are at or near this tranquil end of a cross-cultural peaceful-to-violent continuum. Furthermore, and related to the multidimensionality of aggression issue, arranging societies along a cross-cultural peaceful-to-violent continuum would seem to present certain challenges. For example, is fistfighting more or less violent than wife-beating? Is infanticide more or less violent than homicide intended as the capital punishment of a murderer? What importance should be given to nonviolent beliefs, attitudes, and ideals? Can different beliefs related to peacefulness and violence be meaningfully compared, for example, a fear of violence versus an abhorrence of violence? It is clear that the precise criteria used to scale societies on a peaceful-to-violent continuum should be

carefully considered and clearly specified in the event that such an undertaking is attempted.

IV. KEEPING THE PEACE

A. Introductory Comments

How do the members of peaceful societies manage to keep the peace? At the onset, several points should be made explicit. Recall that a peaceful society is defined as having an extremely low level of physical aggression among its members as well as having shared beliefs that devalue aggression and/or positively value harmonious interpersonal relationships. It is apparent from both the information in the literature on peaceful societies and the above discussion of aggression as a multidimensional construct that peaceful societies differ among themselves regarding exactly what constitutes “an extremely low level of physical aggression.” In other words, variation exists within peaceful societies: all have extremely low levels of physical aggression, but some have lower levels than others. For instance, some societies such as the Semai and Chewong are virtually violence free, while others such as the Tahitians, !Kung, and Mbuti have rare but periodic instances of physical aggression. However, the relevant points here are that (1) acts of physical aggression are very rare and markedly less frequent than in other societies and (2) members of peaceful societies have belief systems that explicitly place a negative value on aggression and/or place a positive value on behaviors which are viewed as antithetical to aggression.

Another point to keep in mind is that although it is possible to discuss certain features often found in peaceful societies, it is critical to remember that each culture is unique. Thus there are as many different “cultural formulas” through which peaceful societies keep the peace as there are unique peaceful societies, since no two societies have identical belief systems, psychocultural mechanisms, social institutions, and so on through which the peace is maintained. The Semai “formula” for peace is different from the La Paz Zapotec “formula,” for example, and both of these differ in turn from the cultural manifestations of peacekeeping in other peaceful societies.

B. The Importance of Belief Systems

Howell and Willis suggest that peacefulness “is cosmologically constructed and morally embedded in a cosmological universe of meaning” (1989, p. 25). In other

words, in peaceful societies, the aspects of belief systems that devalue physical aggression and/or promote harmonious relations are integral parts of the larger cultural cosmologies, and such world views are critical to the maintenance of peace. This point is emphasized by Bonta, who concludes that a nonviolent belief system is the single most important variable for keeping the peace: “As the examination of conflict resolution in these small-scale societies proceeds, one fundamental fact emerges: the peacefulness of their conflict resolution is based, primarily, on their world-views of peacefulness—a complete rejection of violence” (1996, p. 404). The Semai and La Paz Zapotec case studies clearly show the importance, uniqueness, and multifaceted aspects of such peace-promoting belief systems or cosmologies. The Semai belief system simultaneously devalues physical aggression (e.g., the belief that hitting a child can cause its illness or death, that violence provokes feelings of terror and results in flight, the sentiment, “we don’t get angry,” and so on) and values interpersonal harmony (e.g., beliefs that sharing and cooperation are normal and necessary, that the unity of the band is paramount, and so on). The La Paz Zapotec also directly devalue physical aggression (e.g., the beliefs that violence might provoke retaliatory witchcraft, that one’s anger should be denied, that threatening situations should simply be avoided, and so on) and, as emphasized by O’Neill, simultaneously promote harmonious values, images, and ideals that are incompatible with violence (e.g., the emphasis on respect, cooperation, reciprocity, responsibility, and interdependence; sentiments like “we are like one family,” “we are *pacíficos*,” and so on).

C. Egalitarianism

Although there are exceptions, many peaceful societies have an egalitarian form of social organization, including a high degree of gender equality. For example, the Buid, Canadian Inuit, Chewong, Copper Eskimo, Ju/wasi, !Kung, Mbuti, Piaroa, Semai, and Siriono, among others, are foraging societies, which tend to be highly egalitarian (nonhierarchical) and lack both centralized authority and mechanisms of superordinate social control. Peacefulness also can be found among sedentary cultivators and agriculturalists (such as the Amish, Fipa, Hutterites, Toraja, Tristan da Cunha Islanders, and La Paz Zapotec), but the foraging lifestyle, with its corresponding emphasis on egalitarianism, cooperation, and sharing, may be particularly conducive to peacefulness, a point discussed further by Sponsel in his 1996a article.

D. Avoidance, Internalization, and Social Controls

Since foragers lack centralized, superordinate social controls, peacekeeping is largely dependent upon (1) avoidance and separation of disputants, (2) the internalization of nonaggressive values and behaviors resulting in a high degree of self-restraint against expressing anger and aggression, and (3) informal social controls (such as gossip, ridicule, a high degree of interdependence within the group, and so on) as opposed to formal social controls (such as laws). Additionally, as Black proposes in his book, *The Social Structure of Right and Wrong*, the third-party dispute-resolution roles of *friendly peacemaker* and *mediator* reflect relatively egalitarian relationships between the third-party and the disputants and, especially in the case of friendly peacemakers, might be expected to be important in egalitarian, foraging societies.

Keeping in mind that each peaceful society has a unique constellation of beliefs, values, practices, mechanisms, and institutions that result in its low level of physical aggression, it is nonetheless possible to observe some frequently occurring features that seem relevant to keeping the peace. The discussion as to how peace is maintained can be organized around three basic themes: (1) avoidance, (2) internalization of self-restraint, and (3) social controls.

1. Avoidance

Black defines avoidance as “the handling of a grievance by the curtailment of interaction” (1993, p. 79). The members of many peaceful societies utilize avoidance to prevent the escalation of conflict. Relating to the Mbuti, Turnbull poetically expresses that “In later life the child will find that mobility is one of his primary techniques for avoiding a dispute or for resolving one, for once he moves elsewhere, his sphere moves with him and the dispute is discarded” (in Montagu, 1978, pp. 184–185).

Avoidance can be temporary or long-term. In the short-term, an individual can simply avoid a disputant or in some cases an angry person can remove himself or herself from the proximity of the entire group, as has been noted by Draper for the !Kung (Montagu, 1978). An example of a householder avoiding an angry, inebriated man by simply staying inside his house was given in the La Paz Zapotec case study. Hollan’s descriptions of how Toraja remain emotionally “cool,” or under control, also portray a series of short-term avoidance techniques. Finally, Gibson emphasizes that for the Buid, “the socially approved response to aggression is

avoidance or even flight” (Howell & Willis, 1989, p. 66). Thus short-term avoidance appears to be widely utilized and in some cases it is the culturally prescribed response to conflict.

Regarding longer-term avoidance, among the !Kung and the Ju/wasi, for instance, individuals transfer into other bands when social tensions require such a solution. Correspondingly, Bonta reports that among the peaceful Malapandaram, Birhor, and Paliyan peoples, communities can split apart in response to a conflict.

A final type of avoidance involves movement of the entire group to avoid another group, an approach practiced by the Semai and Chewong, for instance. Bonta observes that the peaceful Amish, Hutterites, and Mennonites also have moved away from conflicts with other societies on numerous historical occasions.

2. Internalization of Self-Restraint

Some peaceful societies not only devalue aggression but also inhibit the expression of anger. Supposedly, the suppression of anger also helps to inhibit aggression. Cultural values favoring the denial or nonexpression of anger can be found among the Chewong, certain Canadian Inuit groups, Ju/wasi, !Kung, La Paz Zapotec, Semai, Toraja, and other cultures. Hollan provides a thorough discussion of the individual and cultural mechanisms of anger and aggression control among the Toraja. He writes, “Standards of etiquette; fears of ridicule, supernatural retribution, and magical retaliation; and the use of culturally constituted defense mechanisms seem remarkably effective in curtailing overt displays of anger and hostility in Toraja” (1988, p. 56).

The denial of anger also has been noted in both the Semai and the La Paz Zapotec case studies. For instance, it was suggested that among the La Paz Zapotec, by adulthood, persons have internalized attitudes, values, and beliefs that serve as a self-restraining check on physical aggression. O’Neill writes that “one of the most effective and extensively used devices to prevent negative dispositions from erupting into interpersonal violence in La Paz is denial” (Howell & Willis, 1989, p. 126). Correspondingly, Briggs emphasizes that in the Inuit camps she studied, “fear of aggression was also inculcated in various ways during the process of socialization” (Sponsel & Gregor, 1994, p. 161), and that by adulthood emotional self-control was well developed, “especially denial and nonexpression of hostile and resentful feelings” (1994, p. 161).

Draper’s discussion of the !Kung and Thomas’ discussion of self-control among the Ju/wasi suggest that norms which run counter to the expression of anger and aggression are being internalized by persons in

these societies. Thomas (1994, p. 75) explains that “self-discipline pervaded everyday life, so that people virtually never showed hunger, pain, let alone anger.” Finally, self-restraint in conflict situations is noted by Bonta to occur in peaceful cultures such as the Ifaluk, Paliyan, and Tahitians.

Within the belief systems of some peaceful societies, anger and physical aggression have acquired particular cultural meanings as disgusting, frightening, or even illness provoking. It seems likely that such beliefs have an aggression-inhibiting effect once they are internalized by the individuals of a culture. Gregor explains that among most Xingu tribes, “violence is ugly, dangerous, and inhuman, while peace defines what is human and morally valued” (Sponsel & Gregor, 1994, p. 247). Fabbro notes that Mbuti abhor any violence which produces blood, because in the Mbuti belief system, an entity called *pepo* can then escape from the body through the bleeding opening, causing the death of the victim. Among the Semai and the Toraja, anger can lead to unpleasant feelings and can cause illness. Recall also that the Semai are terrified by violence. Similarly, the Chewong fear violence. Hollan quotes a Toraja mother, who in explaining how she calms herself if she begins to feel anger, alludes to both the connection between anger and illness in the Toraja belief system and the importance of exercising self-restraint: “If, for example, we are about to get angry, in order to calm/soothe/control, we must remember, ‘If I get angry, what’s the use?’ Our bodies will be bothered. It is better, even if the children are very bad, to just reprimand them well, in order to avoid illness” (1988, p. 63). Such cultural beliefs and reactions, once they are internalized by the members of society, can be seen as having a major inhibiting influence on the expression of both anger and aggression.

3. Social Controls

In peaceful societies, acts of physical aggression—and other behaviors that violate social norms—can be met with a variety of sociocultural responses, for instance, criticism, ridicule, gossip, witchcraft, withdrawal of support, and ostracism—that is, mechanisms that can be labeled *informal* social controls, in contrast to *formal* social control mechanisms such as law. Both informal and formal types of social control operate in some peaceful societies such as the La Paz Zapotec, where both the formal legal system of courts and a host of informal mechanisms, such as concern about negative gossip or fear of witchcraft, can be seen as inhibiting physical aggression. Similarly, informal controls among the Toraja are exemplified by Hollan’s descriptions of

how people are motivated to avoid expressing anger and aggression in part out of fear of social ridicule and also in part because the recipient of one’s anger or aggression might retaliate through magical means. Additionally, formal aspects of social control can be seen in the posting of government civil servants in Torajan villages.

Many peaceful societies rely almost exclusively on informal social control mechanisms—a typical feature of forager social organization. One reflection of this reliance on informal social control involves the nature of third-party interventions, as practiced regularly by community members. Interventions can take many forms, most of which fall under the category of *friendly peacemaker*. The responsibility of group members to intervene is stressed by Bonta (1996, p. 407) when he summarizes for the Yanadi, Ifaluk, Malapandaram, Nubians, Paliyan and other peaceful cultures that “it is incumbent on bystanders to become involved in virtually any circumstance where controversies threaten to become serious or where a conflict situation seems to be developing.” Black (1993, p. 18) provides an example of friendly peacemaking: “the only settlement agent found among the Mbuti Pygmies is the so-called camp clown, who handles conflicts primarily by making a fool of himself, thereby distracting the principals from their dispute and possibly making them join together in laughter as well.” Similarly, as noted by Bonta, among the Tristan da Cunha Islanders a clever bystander might defuse a quarrel with jokes. Briggs specifies that there were no formal leaders in the peaceful Inuit camps she studied and that “every individual was equally responsible for keeping the peace” (Sponsel & Gregor, 1994, p. 156). Robarchek also emphasizes how every member of the Semai band has the responsibility to immediately bring any conflict to the attention of the headman “so that it can be brought out in the open and settled” (1979, p. 107). From Briggs’ descriptions of the Inuit camps, it is clear that friendly peacemakers utilized strategies for distracting, calming, and reminding a disputant of proper behavior: “... others laughed and turned the matter into a joke; tried to reassure the angry person that ‘it’s nothing to get angry at, have some tea’; [or] commented disapprovingly: ‘You get angry easily’” (Sponsel & Gregor, 1994, p. 167). Instances that amount to friendly peacemaking by others are also described for the Ju/wasi by Thomas, the Toraja by Hollan, and the !Kung by Draper, who writes, for example, “Other people will intervene before a person can act in a hot rage with possible serious injury to his enemy” (Montagu, 1978, p. 43).

Third-parties who adopt the role of *mediator* go be-

yond the activities of friendly peacemakers by delving into the substance of a dispute in an attempt to help the disputants find an agreeable solution. Mediators attempt to be impartial, and they lack the authority or power to enforce the terms of an agreement. A statement of a Torajan villager, quoted by Hollan (1988, p. 66), suggests that persons in the community adopt mediator roles: "If we know that A has been angry with B, right away we will visit them and publicly repair [reconcile] them, so that there is peace. Because we feel that if there is a rift in the village, everything is ruined!" In the Semai *becharaa'* (examined in the above case study), the headman, assisted by the other community members who are present, adopts a mediator role, although elements of arbitration on the part of the headman also may be present. But the headman's authority is limited, as reflected in Robarchek's (1997, p. 52) characterization of the Semai headman as the "first among equals." Perhaps his role is best characterized as *mediator-arbitrator*. In a process that has some similarities to the *becharaa'*, members of Buid society may submit a dispute to *tultulan*, or collective discussion within the band, in which the group decides what compensation might be paid by one party to the other. In this case, the band members gathered at the *tultulan* function as mediators in helping to settle the dispute. Gibson explains that divorce is the most common type of dispute that is submitted to a *tultulan*, since the favored Buid approach to conflict, avoidance, cannot long be employed by spouses. Gibson writes, "No one has the authority to enforce a settlement, but through extended discussion and diffuse moral pressure, divorces are normally settled without undue disruption. The emphasis is on preserving communal harmony (*uway*) through the separation or reconciliation of the disputants" (Howell & Willis, 1989, p. 66).

V. CONCLUSIONS

While the majority of cultures tolerate, or in some cases augment, physical aggression and violence, the existence of at least several dozen peaceful societies demonstrates that a nonviolent social life also is within the realm of possibility. Bonta (1996, p. 404) suggests that "the Western world-view boils down to an acceptance of the inevitability of conflict and violence," but this is not the case within the belief systems of peaceful societies. While conflicts certainly exist in peaceful societies, the members of these societies deal with their disputes in ways other than by acting aggressively.

The first lesson to learn from the peaceful societies is that the moderate-to-high levels of violence that occur in many cultures are not inevitable features of human social life or human nature; it is possible to live in human societies with extremely low levels of physical aggression. The second set of lessons comes from a careful examination of how peaceful societies maintain their social tranquility. A key observation is that the belief systems of peaceful cultures do not accept the inevitability of violence, but to the contrary, devalue physical aggression and violence. Additionally, egalitarianism seems especially conducive to keeping the peace. Other general peacekeeping approaches seem to include (1) avoidance of antagonists, (2) enculturation processes that facilitate the development of each person's self-restraint and internalization of nonviolent values, beliefs, and behavioral patterns, and (3) a variety of psychocultural social controls, many of which are informal.

Also See the Following Articles

AGGRESSION AND ALTRUISM • AGGRESSION, PSYCHOLOGY OF • ANTHROPOLOGY OF VIOLENCE AND CONFLICT • CLAN AND TRIBAL CONFLICT • CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION • COOPERATION, COMPETITION, AND CONFLICT • NONVIOLENCE THEORY AND PRACTICE • NONVIOLENT ACTION

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