



Bridging The Gap: How Behavior Analysts Can Better Serve Diverse Populations

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ABSTRACT

Culture has a profound impact on individuals' lives, influencing their beliefs, perspectives, qualities, and expectations. Different societies present unique likelihood conditions that shape and affect people's behavior. Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), through its cumulative attention on solving social problems, offers a way to spread behavioral theory in applied settings while allowing direct and continuous measurement of observable behavior. It also helps to understand the relationship between action incidences and environmental factors. Behavior analysts should possess cultural awareness skills and seek to understand others' values. Communication and collaboration with families are integral to understanding the cultural context for effective interventions. This quantitative survey research investigates behavior analysts' understanding of culturally sensitive matters on both national and international levels. This study will provide suggestions and strategies for behavior analysts and behavior technicians to develop cultural awareness skills, especially when providing services to individuals from various cultural backgrounds, while also addressing cultural barriers they may encounter.

Keywords: culture, behavior, analysts, cultural awareness, cultural barriers.

Introduction

Culture plays a significant role in shaping individuals' perspectives, values, expectations, loyalties, and concerns. When people interact effectively, they can establish meaningful relationships and gain insights into one another's cultures. Culture encompasses the behaviors, responses, and communication patterns of individuals and is a source of pride for many. According to Shweder & LeVine (1984), culture fundamentally influences how people develop and function within society, shaping their values, beliefs, and behavior throughout their lives. Specifically, culture affects the perceptions and practices of both behavior analysts and their clients, including their assumptions about appropriate behavior in social situations (Glenn, 2004).

Background

Cultural competence is a critical factor in shaping and modifying individuals' behavior in the behavior analysis field. Different societies present unique circumstances that shape and affect people's behavior (Glenn, 2004). For each individual, culture comprises their distinct characteristics and associations with their families and communities, especially in the behavior analysis setting. Culture varies across different groups of people, depending on their principles, upheld values, and other rules that govern how a particular community lives. Culture may influence how a condition affects a person and manifest as a culture-bound disorder, often affecting how these disorders are treated (Marsella et al., 2000).

Culture and Applied Behavior Analysis

Hayes and Toarmino (1995) questioned the significance of comprehending social contracts if behavioral norms are appropriate. However, modern experts still debate the importance of understanding ABA terminology in the context of cultural and linguistic diversity and its application in educational settings.

It is crucial to identify how people's culture and traditions can affect behavior analysts' methods and plans. Culture can be defined as "how much a social group of individuals engages in observable and verbal behavior

reflecting shared behavioral learning histories, serving to isolate the group from different audiences, and predicting how individuals within the group exhibit specific contextual conditions" (Sugai et al., 2012, p. 200). In addition, Fong, Ficklin, and Lee (2017) suggest that increasing the number of culturally diverse professionals is another way to improve cultural competence in the ABA field. Culturally knowledgeable analysts can introduce ABA to ethnic and racial communities that may not be familiar with the field, as well as share their cultural knowledge with other professionals who may not understand or miss subtle environmental contingencies (Bolling, 2002).

Behavior analysts must also be aware of the Professional and Ethical Compliance Code 1.05 Professional and scientific relationships for Behavior Analysts (BACB, 2015), which highlights the significance of recognizing the differences in people and their cultures. According to Bailey et al. (2016), behavior analysts must receive the necessary training, experience, or supervision to ensure the fitness of their services or make appropriate referrals when specific aspects such as age, sex, race, and culture primarily influence conduct.

Culture is shaped by various factors and affects how individuals think, respond, and relate to others. Demographic differences, such as religion, sexual orientation, age, sex, and financial status, also contribute to different cultural ideas.

In summary, this paper explores how behavior analysts understand different cultures in their services, how diverse cultures affect these services, and the barriers they face. By recognizing these barriers and incorporating diverse perspectives in practice, behavior analysts can ensure the best outcomes for all individuals.

Behavior Analysts and Culture

Acknowledging individual differences is important for behavior analysts and therapists to ensure that any modifications or accommodations to career theories and development are sensitive to diverse needs (Kauffman et al., 2008). The instructor's willingness is combined with social validity rulings to develop appropriate adaptations for individuals.

For example, an educator may need to find alternatives to corporal punishment when it may be a cultural tradition or a choice of parents but is not tolerable for the educator. In a similar way, a tangible reward may not be socially acceptable or effective in a particular situation, and guidance may be needed to apply the most appropriate method of social approval for the desired behavior (Kauffman et al., 2008).

Religious heritage may also affect behavioral interventions, especially in the selection of reinforcement for children. Families may differ based on religious beliefs concerning what they can offer their children as rewards (Kauffman et al., 2008).

This paper investigates how behavior analysts understand different cultures when providing services to people from diverse backgrounds, how different cultures affect their services, and the barriers they face. By recognizing these barriers and incorporating diverse perspectives in practice, behavior analysts can ensure positive outcomes for all individuals.

Method

Research Design:

A pilot study was conducted using a survey method to assess the development of cultural competency, awareness, and sensitivity among behavior analysts.

Sample

The sample for this study consisted of behavior analysts certified under the Behavior Analyst Certification Board® (BCBA®), with over 70 participants taking the survey. However, only 31 participants completed all the questions.

Setting

The survey was conducted online and consisted of demographic, multiple-choice, and short-answer questions.

Data Collection

The data were collected from participants by accessing the study survey link on Survey Monkey. In conclusion, this pilot study aimed to assess the cultural competency, awareness, and sensitivity of behavior analysts through an online survey. The sample consisted of certified behavior analysts, with data collected through Survey Monkey. The results of this study may provide insights into areas where behavior analysts need to improve their cultural competencies.

Instrumentation:

The 32 survey questions utilized in this pilot study were derived from three instruments: the CCS-A (Cruz, Colet, Bashtawi, Mesde, & Cruz, 2017), ISS-15 (Wang et al., 2016), and MUDAS (Mosley-Howard et al., 2011). The CCS-A measured cultural capacity utilizing a 5-point Likert scale with scores ranging from 20 to 100. Results showed higher scores representing higher cultural competence. The ISS-15 measured intercultural sensitivity regarding Interaction Engagement, Confidence, Interaction Enjoyment, and Interaction Attentiveness. Responses were obtained on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly

agree. The MUDAS measured cultural awareness with 37 items asking for participants' agreement or disagreement. Ten questions were adapted from each instrument for a total of 32 questions in this study, with minor modifications made to include more behavior-analytic terms.

Results:

The objective of this survey was to identify which characteristics of behavior analysts influence their cultural knowledge and competency. The results were mixed but indicated some direction as further strategies can be developed for behavior analysts and technicians in creating cultural awareness skills. Thirty-three participants submitted their responses, with only 60.61% qualifying as Behavior Analysts as per the eligibility criteria of the Behavior Analyst Certification Board® (BCBA®). The majority of participants were from the United States, and only one participant was from Lebanon.

Half of the participants recognized the privilege they might have due to their race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and lack of disability, while only one participant disagreed. The majority of participants (78.57%) agreed that they are aware of their culture's impact on those from different cultural backgrounds, except for one participant who believed that their culture had no effect on others.

Figure 1: 9 participants (64.29 %) agreed that they checked themselves to see if an assumption they were making about a person(s) was based on facts, not based on stereotypes about a group. However, two of the participants (14.29%) did not agree with this statement.

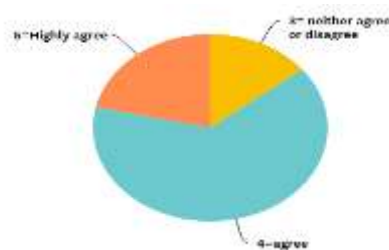


Figure 1

Figure 2: Half of the participants (n=7; 50 %) agreed that they could compare the health or behavior beliefs among clients with diverse cultural backgrounds; however, 5 participants (35.71%) neither agreed nor disagreed, but only one participant (7.14%) disagreed.

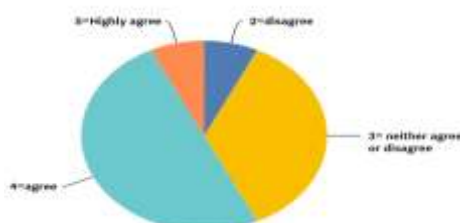


Figure 2

Six participants (42.86%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the point that they could quickly identify the care needs of clients with diverse cultural backgrounds. In comparison, 6 participants (42.86%) agreed, and another 2 participants (14.29%) highly agreed with this statement.

Regarding establishing behavior intervention goals according to each client's cultural background and understanding the beliefs of different cultural groups, 9 participants (64.29%) agreed that they can establish culturally sensitive goals. However, 2 participants (14.29%) stated that they could not develop behavior goals according to each client's cultural background, and only one participant (7.14%) disagreed with striving to understand cultural differences.

Data reported that 84% (12) participants agreed or highly agreed to learn about different cultures, but only one participant (7 %) disagreed.

Seven participants (50%) agreed, and 6 participants (42%) highly agreed to seek opportunities to interact with people from different cultures. Only one participant (7.14%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

All participants either agreed or highly agreed with the statement that they appreciate and welcome the challenges and opportunities which diversity brings. A conscious effort should be made to teach cultural expectations in schools/classrooms/home-based and centers. Similarly, participants agreed/highly agreed that Behavior Analysts should develop conflict management skills to solve cultural clashes. Only one participant (7.15%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

Eleven participants (78.5%) disagreed or highly disagreed that people from different nationalities should NOT be encouraged to retain their various customs, traditions, and language. However, 14.29% (2) participants

agreed that people from different nationalities should NOT be encouraged to retain their various customs, traditions, and language.

Twelve participants (87%) reported that they knew how to learn about people and cultures unfamiliar to them without being offensive, and only one participant (7.14%) reported that they did not know how to learn about people and cultures unfamiliar to them without being offensive.

Thirteen participants (92.86%) agreed that all individuals could learn highly, no matter their background or Culture, except one participant (7.14%).

A total of 11 participants (78.5%) highly agreed/agreed with the statement that promoting diversity wherever they can is an essential part of the behavior analyst's role; however, one participant (7.14 %) disagreed.

Regarding the range of cultural experiences people bring to relationships or situations, 13 participants (92.86%) either agreed or highly agreed that they appreciate it, but one participant neither agreed nor disagreed.

A total of 12 participants (85.7%) highly agreed/agreed that they are very observant while interacting with people from different cultures. However, 2 participants (14.29 %) neither agreed nor disagreed.

Most participants (n=11, 78.5%) reported being sensitive to their culturally distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during their interaction, but only one participant (7.14%) disagreed with this statement.

Figure 3: All the participants strongly believed that behavior analysts should receive training in cultural diversity to help them interact with people from different cultures (questions 19 and 22).



Figure 3

Surprisingly, 4 participants (28.57%) were familiar with health or behavior-related cultural knowledge or theory, while four others were not; moreover, 4 participants neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. Half of the participants (50%) agreed they could list the methods or ways of collecting health, behavior, and cultural-related information, but 2 (14.29%) disagreed.

Six participants (42.86%) agreed they could teach and guide other colleagues about planning behavioral interventions for clients from diverse cultural backgrounds, but 2 participants (14.29%) disagreed.

Most of the participants (n=10; 71.43%) highly agreed/agreed with the statement that they could use examples to illustrate communication skills with clients of diverse cultural backgrounds and teach or guide other colleagues about communication skills. On this point, nobody disagreed.

A total of 9 participants (64.29%) agreed that they could explain the influences of cultural factors on one's beliefs/behavior towards intervention efficacy of clients from diverse ethnic groups. The same percentage of participants agreed they could use communication skills with clients of different cultural backgrounds; no participants disagreed.

Most participants (n=10; 71.43%) agreed or highly agreed with the statement that they usually discuss with each client about differences between their client's health beliefs/behavior and their knowledge, but 21.34 % (3) participants disagreed.

More than half of the participants (n=9; 64.28%) agreed or highly agreed that they could explain the influence of Culture on a client's beliefs/behavior about health/behavior; 0% of participants disagreed.

Half of the participants (n=7; 50%) agreed or highly agreed that they could teach and guide other colleagues about the differences and similarities of diverse cultures; however, one participant disagreed.

Discussion

Most of participants demonstrated an awareness of their clients' cultures and were attentive to the differences in cultural backgrounds. They emphasized the importance of embracing and appreciating cultural diversity without being insensitive. All participants agreed that training in cultural diversity is crucial for behavior analysts when interacting with clients from diverse backgrounds. This training may be achieved through observing other people's interactions or sit-downs.

Most participants expressed appreciation for the broad range of cultural experiences they encounter in their work, with none reporting complaints. They believed that Behavior Analysts should possess conflict management skills to resolve cultural clashes that may arise from insensitivity to other cultures. Participants acknowledged the need to enhance their familiarity with cultural knowledge related to health or behavior.

Most participants acknowledged the importance of preserving customs, traditions, and languages for

individuals from different cultures to promote self-esteem. Additionally, participants agreed that facts should inform their assumptions about others rather than stereotypes to avoid cultural clashes and devaluing other cultures.

All participants reported being comfortable using communication skills with clients from different backgrounds, utilizing non-verbal cues such as gestures or facial expressions. They recognized their role in promoting cultural diversity and its importance given their engagement with people from varying backgrounds.

The participants consisted of eligible recipients and behavior analysts who responded to the survey, ensuring accurate and reliable data. Most participants believed that Culture affects day-to-day life and its benefits, with half agreeing, and only one disagreeing. Furthermore, the majority agreed on the importance of understanding how their culture affects those whose culture differs from theirs. Participants acknowledged various cultural factors that affect beliefs toward intervention efficacy and behavior.

The participants agreed on the potential to teach and train individuals on appreciating cultural differences through examples of communication skills. Behavioral interventions can constructively interact with and understand clients from different cultures and backgrounds, increasing sensitivity to their cultures and beliefs. Most participants reported being highly observant of other cultures during interactions while avoiding insensitivity. Everyone can learn to appreciate other cultures and backgrounds without being dismissive or insensitive. Some participants demonstrated knowledge about health or behavior-related cultural theory and methodologies in gathering information. Cultural sensitivity should inform the formulation of behavior goals rather than personal beliefs.

It is crucial to recognize and understand culturally distinct meanings during interactions and identify the needs of individuals irrespective of their cultural backgrounds. Engaging with people from different backgrounds helps foster integration, leading to effective communication and problem-solving.

Recommendations

The findings of this research study regarding analysts' sensitivity, behavior awareness, and cultural disparities have encouraging implications, but there is always room for improvement. Many participants expressed a desire to learn more about the cultural understanding of behavior or health, emphasizing the importance of professional development, particularly cultural competence in the field of behavior analysis.

However, some respondents disagreed with some remarks about identifying and treating cultural disparities, indicating a potential need for more expertise or capability in working with individuals from various cultural backgrounds. This highlights the importance of providing additional education and training to behavior analysts to ensure they can serve clients effectively from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Moreover, with only thirty-one participants completing all the survey questions, the sample size is relatively small. Although the results offer vital information, further extensive studies must be conducted to produce outcomes applicable broadly. We recommend developing an instrument for parents to assess the needs of families from different cultures in addition to the Behavior Analysts instrument.

Overall, the research suggests that behavior analysts have some knowledge and sensitivity to cultural disparities, but there is always room for growth and improvement in their cultural competence. Behavior analysts should pursue opportunities for professional development that bolster their cultural competence and communicate effectively with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. In doing so, they can offer clients high-quality services that are sensitive and effective to cultural differences.

Limitations

This research study also had several limitations that impacted its direction and findings. One limitation was the small sample size, with only thirty-one participants completing all questions. Therefore, the limited sample size may restrict the generalization of the results to a vast population of behavior analysts. Additionally, the non-random sampling method used may be subject to bias due to the participants being predominantly members of the Behavior Analyst Certification Board, leading to selection bias (Cooper et al., 2020). Thus, the results may not represent behavior analysts who do not belong to the certification board or with different experiences and backgrounds.

Another area for improvement is the need for more diverse respondents. Most of the survey respondents were residents of the United States, with only one respondent from Lebanon. Therefore, the limited diversity in respondents' cultural backgrounds may impact the generalization of behavior analysts' findings from different cultural backgrounds. The survey only focused on sensitivity, awareness, and cultural competency among behavior analysts, thus failing to include all relevant aspects or elements of cultural competence in behavior analysts, such as skills or specific cultural knowledge required in providing diverse populations with quality services.

The study mainly relied on quantitative data collected via an online survey, which may have resulted in bias or socially accepted responses, possibly leading to errors in the findings. Collecting qualitative data such as observations and interviews could offer more in-depth insights into behavior analysts' experiences and perspectives concerning challenges faced in terms of cultural competency (Cooper et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the study primarily focused on cultural disparities and their effects on behavior analysts' services, neglecting other crucial cultural aspects such as religion, language, or socioeconomic status. Exploring a broader range of cultural elements could provide a more comprehensive understanding of behavior analysts' challenges.

In conclusion, while the research study offers critical insights into behavior analysts' cultural competency, the limitations discussed above should be considered when interpreting the results. Further analysis, with a larger and more diverse sample and mixed-method approaches, is warranted to enhance our understanding of cultural competency in behavior analysis.

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