RESEARCH ARTICLE

Behavioral anthropology – conceptual definition and presentation

Daniela Naidin [1]
Elena Opran [2]

[1,2] PhD, University of Craiova

Abstract

This paper presents a theoretical outline of the concept of behavioral anthropology. What it is and how this approach finds its place and role in the already existing matrix of behavioral sciences. We have tried to briefly describe what composes this concept and what its usefulness is, both theoretical and practical.

Keywords: Anthropology, Education, Behavior, Behavioral anthropology, Anthropology

We are alike and we are equally different. Every culture – both macro and micro – is essentially a dynamic, complex and ever-changing universe. When we talk about a cultural system at a micro level, we can go so far as to integrate into this concept even *the human being.* Each person is a combination of experiences, influences, conjunctions, biological inheritances, and not only that the combination of elements that characterize and behavioral a person has almost infinite results. The most simplistic example in this context is that of children raised in the same environment, but who will also have different traits; and in the mirror is the example of a person who, moved into a different environment, will behave in certain circumstances differently than he did in the previous environment. However, at the same time, if we expand the notion of culture and go toward macro spectrum, we will be able to identify traits common to members belonging to the same cultural pattern and discover elements that cause certain reactions and behaviors similar to the members belonging to them.
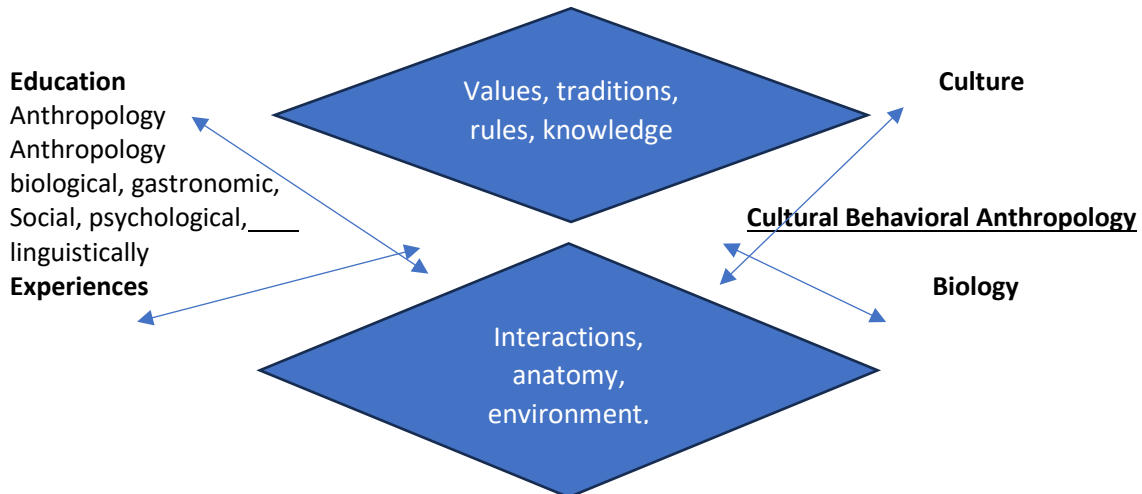
Given the complexity of the cultural matrices with which we interfere throughout our existence, as well as the colossal set of elements that influence and build the individual as a being, the question arises whether we can scientifically encompass, study and understand these nanoparticles of character and behavior?

We strongly believe that the answer can be found in *behavioral anthropology.* What is *behavioral anthropology*? Anthropology itself approaches quite complex both individual characteristics and elements that have built and continue to build the human existential environment. There are also several behavioral sciences that focus on typology, characters, behaviors, attitudes. Well, *behavioral anthropology* aims to correlate all this data in order to obtain some accredited tools that help to better understand the manifestation of human nature. The only research that has been made in this direction, is by Theodore Graves which, after several years of research, he published a book that opens the door for the research in this direction, stating that behavioral anthropology studies what people actually do (Graves, 2002), however since that was published we have no other relevant research within this direction, nor a thoroughness and development of the concept.

Another important question is: Why do we need a more precise structure of how behavior manifests itself? Because, in a time axis determined by speed, diminished communicative interaction, even superficial, we need to learn to know and understand others as correctly and effectively as possible, but we also need to know and understand ourselves.

When we want to analyze a particular situation from the point of view of behavioral anthropology, then we must consider the connections between all the aspects presented in the previous figure. A realistic picture can be obtained only by the coherent and profound integration of all these aspects, focusing most on the determinant obtained from their interaction. Basically, the four corners – education, culture, experiences and biology – are the pillars that should always be taken under consideration when we research something from the behavioral anthropology point of view. The branches of anthropology that we find between the for corners are the ones that should provide the deep meaning of the situation and its main characters (the individuals that are the manifesters of behavior), so they should be used each one to paint an accurate image.

Behavioral anthropology is at the confluence of several domains:

Education
Anthropology
Anthropology
biological, gastronomic,
Social, psychological,
linguistically
Experiences

Values, traditions, rules, knowledge

Culture

Cultural Behavioral Anthropology

Biology

Interactions, anatomy, environment.

Education

The very idea that education can shape behavior rests on five fundamental theoretical localizations of the concept of behavior, the nature of education, and their relations. These localizations are presented by two basic types of theories – the behavioral ones and the cognitive ones. The fundamental characteristic of behavioristic theories is the pointed stance on behavior as a regularity of overt or covert behavior. For the behaviorist, human cognitive activity is still behavior, albeit hidden behind the skull, but behavior that thrives on cumulative victories of a reflex nature. (Lim and Weissmann, 2023) From this perspective, learning is the behaviorist's response to the classical and operant mechanisms of learning. These principles show that behavior entails a motion activity, a display of efficient adaptability doubled by permanency in time and is the final result of a coordinated work of physiological processes. This standpoint opened the gates of the educational system for the insertion of a multitude of methods and procedures that have been taken from the industry-like technologies of production and management, thus underlining three basic components: the object of production, work, and the product.

Cognitive theories attempt to face the bewildering complexity of behavior through the recognition of its determinants – the mental mechanisms that count as cognitive and functional regulatory agents for it. Perception is more than mere awareness of an object, and reasoning is not logical and mathematical only, but is also problem-oriented, purposeful, personal, and contextual. From the cognitive stance, learning means, first and foremost, the assimilation of new forms and patterns of mental activity and then the exteriorization forcibly reduced to shared conversations, actions, and products, involved in the society wanted or not by the individual. (Bandura, 2023) However, the cognitive theories have a marked tendency to juxtapose mental and effective worlds, and under the weight of this placed and non-argued assumption, educational technology has to confront the task of preserving the integrity of the cognitive world while ensuring the congruency of effective manifestations. If behavioral theories draw the marketing of interest of education mainly in the acquisition of performance, cognitive theories accentuate the sole form although the interest of education should rather be in the root. Isn't any performance a mere result of the acquisition of form as well as meaning? Although the concepts are explanatory, the inner being of cognition and behavior, for that matter, is not dichotomous. Cognitive meanings and effective meanings are intimately conversed. The person who does not forget has learned the form and effective meanings of memory possessions. Therefore, either the cognitive or effective theories have the dilemma of being intrinsic, and that being one of many demonstrating that dualism is more a myth than it is an explanation. Nonetheless, if the learner or perceiver leaves beyond the frame of cognitive and/or effective manifestations whose inner workings have to be accommodated, the educational strategy of re-orientation of behavior of aspiration should start from that place. Only education takes place there.

The importance of education begins during early childhood and continues well into adulthood. The effect of education on individual behavior and attitudes is pervasive throughout different stages of development in a person's life cycle. This chapter divides into several subsections, each examining a different stage and type of educational experience.

Early education is crucial because it begins to shape behavior as it is shown in several studies (Mondi et al.2021):

-       Social Skills - Early settings with other kids provide an opportunity to learn to get along with others:

- Structured Settings - Research has shown that even a few hours a week in a highly structured preschool setting can help a child develop their social and emotional skills.
- Family Environment - Caregivers are likely to promote rich environments but cannot help those interactions in the classroom. However, teachers can help caregivers facilitate better behavior and support parents to do the same.
- Emotional Regulation - Caregivers and teachers can help children learn how to effectively express their emotions.
- Low Morale - Without structured interventions, children are highly likely to engage in deviant behavior and illegal activities later in life.
- Cognitive Function - We know little about cognitive interventions on delinquent behaviors and criminal decisions. There is greater consensus that interventions on non-cognitive skills can prevent individuals from engaging in criminal behavior. –
- Structured Learning - Parents and teachers can establish and promote positive social interactions among children in structured environments.
- Play - Play scenarios will promote positive behaviors while also inhibiting negative behaviors.
- Learning Success - Students who exhibit natural inhibitory control in a structured school setting have better long-term learning, academic, and subsequent behavioral outcomes.
- Family Background - Children from high-disadvantage areas are less economically able to participate in high-quality educational programs that benefit them in the short and long term.
- Early Childhood - As a result, early childhood education rooted in best practices from the past brings children together in educational activities and helps them be successful

Cultural and sociological factors contribute to shaping education, which in turn influences behavior. Cultural values shape how fair or effective teacher-student rapport is built in the classroom. It is important that educators understand how values might affect societal roles, as well as roles within the classroom. There is diversity among children's cultural values and norms. For instance, children exhibit varying levels of respect for authority and hard work. Cultural practices also affect parenting strategies. Different cultural practices and expectations might partially explain why some students are more likely to demonstrate behavioral issues than others. (Lansford, 2022)

Experiences

There are a variety of theoretical perspectives that are useful for thinking about how experiences might be translated into behavior. Theories from the economics literature stress rational decision-making processes, suggesting, for example, that exposure to job loss can have important income effects that are associated with behavioral changes. In contrast, criminological perspectives like social learning theory focus on the role of interactions among individuals in the formation of aberrant behavior. Such interactions, this literature suggests, mediate between experiences and behavior. (Thomson et al.2022) The existence of a variety of perspectives is, in fact, quite reasonable in light of the fact that the behavior in which we are interested is multi-determined.

A life is one's pattern of behaviors and choices, and the ways in which we act are influenced by a variety of different experiences. Emotional experiences help to determine the things and activities we enjoy. From an early age, social experiences with parents and peers dictate what we do and do not do. Similarly, socioeconomic, physical, and other environmental forces conspire to instruct our behaviors. However, it is not the case that earlier experiences exert immutable influences upon our future selves. Life is full of changed situations and altered circumstances, and we exhibit rather different behaviors as children than as adolescents, young adults, and the elderly. As a result, previous experiences can only partially predict the pattern of behaviors and choices in adults, particularly when one lacks knowledge of the immediate environment. Intervening events can help to change the traits and situation-behaviors we demonstrate. This pattern of life results from the interplay between relatively formative influences and the dynamic action of recently active events. Attempting to understand the relationship between experiences and behaviors demands, in the first instance, an ecumenical view of psychology, neuroscience, and sociology.

It is clear that in order to understand our behavior, we must look at our history and current collection of life experiences. From the early days when we focused on how behavior can be changed through environmental interventions up to the present day, where we look for new ways to help children attend and learn in school, it has been clear that new experiences shape behavior to a large extent. Our theoretical positions have changed over the years, from behaviorist conditioning models to social learning models, to the perspective that children develop knowledge and behaviors from their environment in a developmental manner. A great deal of research has accumulated regarding the role experiences play in shaping behavior, indicating that the more intense the experience (positive or negative), the more likely that experience is to change behavior. Furthermore, it is now

understood that experiences in childhood shape behavior later in life and that experiences have a different effect on behavior at different life stages, including adolescence and adulthood. Clearly, understanding one's history is the key to understanding behavior. Personal experiences are important in shaping behavior. If those experiences were traumatic, rewarding, or outside the norm, it is more likely that the individual's behavior would diverge. As such, research around the importance of particular experiences on the individual may help psychologists better understand differences in client behavior, and ultimately how these differences have arisen. (Saracho, 2023)

This has significant application within behavioral anthropology practice, in understanding not only why people present with different behaviors but also, at a holistic level, why this might be.

Culture

Culture informs and guides a significant part of the behaviors of individuals. Our collective and individual behaviors cannot be understood without reference to the cultures in which they are situated. The role of cultural patterns by themselves in shaping behavior cannot be understood without examining the individual's immediate social and psychological context. Culture can be defined in different ways because it is made up of different elements - culture as knowledge, culture as norms and practices, and culture as objectives telling us what is true.

The actions and conduct of individuals are profoundly influenced by culture. Cultural explanations consider identity to be personal but shaped by external circumstances; formed and enacted by cultural frames of reference, this identity determines people's thoughts and emotions and thus their actions. Cultural influences on behavior come through the role of language and symbolic meaning. (Thompson et al., 2020) The language we speak and the way we talk, or our communication style, convey something about who we are culturally. Communication styles include verbal cues such as voice tone, loudness, intonation, silence, timing, and laughter, as well as non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, body motions, and stance. Showing our communication style can be a way of expressing our cultural identity to others, and so can be used to help us understand who we are "in relation to them." Research shows that our perception of who another person is morally dependent on the way they communicate. (Allen, 2023)

Culture provides a system of norms, rules, laws, values, beliefs, and attitudes that shape and guide behavior. Norms are the cornerstones of societal organization, providing social predictability and routines. Personal identity is formed by experience, including human experience of other people. Experience forges personal identity, developing the so-called "self" from psychological determinants shaped by societal norms, to be something more than simply cultural. In this sense, an individual's cultural background is expected to influence their behavior, especially if the moral actions are expressive of communicative behavior influenced by cultural considerations. Differences in decision-making processes, and thus behavior, can be seen at a cross-cultural level in fields as diverse as healthcare, sport, business, and tourism. Within societies, relevant cultural differences can be linked by behavior to membership of different working sectors or by class or occupation, for example, what football team one supports. In addition to these broader cultural determinants of behavior, collective behavior may be collectively determined by societal factors. Society provides a system of norms, rules, and values that may guide behavior in different situations, and societal norms will thus impact individual physiology and psychology. (Jensen and Cross, 2021)

People from different cultures might pose distinct patterns of responses, thus necessitating an understanding of cultural differences to manage human resources in culturally diverse or multicultural societies, or to plan appropriate strategies in the fields of human resource management, marketing, consumer behavior, health, or social policy for businesses looking to act in globalized marketplaces. Culture has a significant effect on the behavior of individuals as well as groups. In conclusion, culture is critical in shaping and transmitting attitudes and behaviors, and despite globalization, culture remains deeply influential. Since cultures will continue to change and evolve, we call for more interdisciplinary research that considers culture as a dynamical system, emphasizing cultural dynamics as a delicate balance between factors that maintain and change cultural patterns. It is also important to consider the influence of technology on culture: how does modern information technology and an interconnected global world influence personal identity, cultural patterns, cultural behavior, and cultural exchange in the globalized world?

Biology

Our bodies are composed of complex systems that work harmoniously with one another in order to execute various functions. One of the most important yet least understood of these systems is the way that our biological systems impact our psychology. This happens at the level of our biology and chemistry, with neurotransmitters allowing for communication between neurons and impacting our mood, perception, and cognition. There are several key neurotransmitters that have been identified as being critical in the regulation of certain aspects of

behavior. For example, dopamine is a neurotransmitter that is associated with the reward system, meaning that it is critical in influencing our desirability for various actions. Low levels of serotonin are implicated in suicidal thinking and aggressive behavior, while low levels of norepinephrine influence our ability to feel awake and aware. (Lewis et al., 2021)

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Like neurotransmitters, hormones are chemical messengers, but rather than having an immediate impact on the activations of brain cells in that moment, they instead have an impact over time, often with more global changes in response to them. Cortisol is a hormone that becomes heightened in response to stress, with consistently high levels of cortisol often associated with symptoms of anxiety and inhibition. On the other hand, oxytocin is a hormone that can create feelings of calm and trust, with levels rising when we breastfeed, hug, and make eye contact. (Dziurkowska and Wesolowski, 2021) Neurotransmitters as well as hormones work together—and in opposition—in critical ways that are essential for everyday behavior. For example, repeated use of drugs that increase dopamine levels can lead to the loss of the ability to produce dopamine unsupported by drugs. This can lead to a state of withdrawal and depression if drug use ceases. (Yılmazer, 2024) Understanding the dynamic and extensive relationship between neurotransmitters, hormones, and behavior is also critical in clinical settings, shedding light on the causes of certain affective and behavioral disorders, including depression, anxiety, bipolar disorders, and others.

Nature versus nurture is a classic debate in explaining behavior. According to behavioral genetics, almost all behavior is a result of genetic predispositions and environmental interactions. Most psychologists today understand that individual differences arise from the interaction of genes, life events, and experience. (Benton et al.2021)Biological processes and behaviors operate at different levels of explanation, and each approach to the study of physiological processes may reveal something useful about a given behavior. Methods that are commonly used in behavioral genetics attempt to estimate the magnitude of genetic and environmental influences through twin and adoption studies. (Goldman, 2023)

Research on simple, mostly physiological, characteristics provides examples of what might be called genetic effects. For instance, fear of snakes, heights, or closed spaces, which has been found to be characteristic of monkeys and apes reared in isolation, was recently discovered to have a human genetic component. Similarly, researchers have tentatively established that the delicate orchestration of mood, personality, and sleep-wake cycle, known as biological or circadian timekeeping, is under genetic control. (Niepoth and Bendesky, 2020)

Perhaps the closest science to the approach of behavioral anthropology is forensics. This brings together almost in the same way all the main aspects on which behavioral anthropology would be based. The difference, important in fact, is that, unlike forensic science, *behavioral anthropology* comes to provide answers not only in extreme situations, but in managing, understanding and perfecting the interactional and communicative dynamics at the level of society in the daily context.

The concept of *behavioral anthropology* is an integrated research *tool* that could and should be used by specialists in different domains, but the results should find an unitary convergence.

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