In Memoriam

We Lost a Leader: Maria Amelia Matos (1939–2005)

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Maria Amelia Matos in the poster session at the 1996 meeting of the Association for Behavior Analysis held in San Francisco.

Maria Amelia Matos was born in Birigüi, an inland city in the state of São Paulo, Brazil, on April 14, 1939. On May 17, 2005, with deep sorrow, we learned about her death, after a long fight against cancer, during which she had been permanently armed with serenity, lucidity, and hope.

Maria Amelia left Birigüi and moved to São Paulo in December

1957. In the following year, she was admitted to the first class of the first psychology course in Brazil at the University of São Paulo (USP). In her last year as an undergraduate student, in 1961, she met Fred Keller when he came to Brazil to teach at USP as a visiting professor (Matos, 1996b). Inspired by him, she traveled to the U.S. in 1962, where she attended the graduate program in Experimental Analysis of Behavior/Experimental Psychology at Columbia University, where she stayed until 1969.

As a graduate student, Maria Amelia was proud of having been

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supervised by Keller (Matos, 1964) and by William "Nat" Schoenfeld (Matos, 1969). Such pride was fully justified, because quite likely this closeness shaped her special ability to scrutinize an experimental work, by reasoning its logic and methodology. With Keller, Maria Amelia acquired abilities regarding personalized instruction. In 1969, she returned to Brazil and started her teaching activities at USP.

Maria Amelia was a distinguished and generous professor (Matos, 1993). She always devoted a great deal of effort to her students, carefully planning her classes. As a programmer of contingencies, she provided her students with the concrete experience of going through a very intense and quick learning process, something that she handed down to us from her own experience (Morais, 1999, transcribed interview):

The sole manner I can describe what happened to me [at the time she studied at Columbia University] is that, sometimes, in this manner, I used to stop to observe myself and felt I was improving, I clearly remember that sensation, that the volume and amount, the quickness of my learning was so significant that I was able to notice that I was changing, I was expanding all that I knew to speak, to say, to do. (p. 36)

Maria Amelia was a molder of critical thinking. She was a shaper of scientific attitudes (Machado & Matos, 1990). Very likely, it was from her experience with programmed instruction that she derived her ability to believe in the capacity of her students, attempting to treat all of them individually and equally in regard to their learning capacity (Morais, 1999, transcribed interview): "I have a great need, almost a compulsion, for the equanimity, that is, for really treating everybody equally, in terms of possibility, although not in terms of evaluation" (p. 77).

Maria Amelia was one of the pioneers in Brazilian psychology, and she helped to build it up to the level at which it exists today (Matos, 1996a,

2001). She was a student when she strove for national regulation of the psychology profession along with her teacher at that time, Carolina Martuscelli Bori (1924–2004), with whom she wove strong bonds of friendship and companionship throughout her life (Matos, 1998).

In her academic history, her leadership was outstanding. She took active part in scientific societies, especially the Brazilian Society of Psychology. She contributed to the creation and maintenance of the graduate program in experimental psychology at USP, a model for the country. At USP, she also organized the first Brazilian research laboratory in the experimental analysis of behavior, which likewise became a reference for the whole country. She imprinted strong marks on several teaching and research centers at which she had short stays as a visiting professor (e.g., Federal University of Bahia and Catholic University of São Paulo). Through her participation in editorial and advisory work for national and international scientific journals, Maria Amelia taught many Brazilian researchers how to publish.

In behavior analysis, in particular, Maria Amelia displayed leadership throughout a career in which she became definitively known as an unquestionable reference and a researcher who left an expressive volume of relevant works. She made important contributions in regard to philosophical aspects of behaviorism (Matos, 1981c, 1985, 1999a, 1999c) as well as to theoretical and methodological aspects of behavior analysis (Matos, 1990, 2000). In the experimental field, she dealt with behavioral and learning processes in research areas including aversive control (Matos, 1969, 1981a), stimulus control (Matos, 1981b; Matos & Malerbi, 2001), verbal behavior (Matos, Paracampo, Souza, & Albuquerque, 2001), rule-governed behavior (Matos, 2002), conditional discrimination and equivalence relations (Matos,

1999b; Matos & Lopes Júnior, 1999), among others. She conducted basic research with animals and, during the last decade, she started to investigate, in humans, the behavioral processes that underlie the recombinative reading from minimal units (Matos, 1999d; Matos & Hübner, 1992; Matos, Hübner, Serra, Basaglia, & Avanzi, 2003).

Maria Amelia's dedication to teaching was permanent. And, in this regard, she contributed to the development of methods for teaching behavioral observation (Danna & Matos, 1999). More recently, she published a didactic teaching book on the experimental analysis of behavior (Matos & Tomanari, 2002), which reflects her accrued experience in teaching laboratory activities. She supervised over 30 master's graduates and almost 40 doctoral graduates, and many of those currently work at several teaching and research centers spread out across Brazil.

Personally, as a friend and work colleague, Maria Amelia's erudition was impressive, usually unveiled by her notable interest in the historical and social aspects of other cultures. She had an accurate, meticulous, and strict ability of observing the world, wherein people's behavior was included. She was able to describe and analyze behavior with great accuracy, deducing implications and anticipating facts. Her ability to analyze her own behavior was equally impressive: She was clearly aware of her impulsivity, impatience, and strength, elements to which she could add sense of humor when self-criticizing. Maria Amelia's hallmark probably was her dedication to hard work, high-quality work, both in herself and in others. She used to say, "I demand a lot and demand as much as I can ... I do not leave anything at random" (Moraes, 1999, p. 79).

Maria Amelia's absence leaves a huge void in psychology and behavior analysis, especially in Brazil. Nonetheless, we are left with

important legacies to comfort us. Maria Amelia passed on to us scientific contributions of utmost importance, and, above all, she imprinted permanent marks on those who had the opportunity of being exposed to the contingencies that were established over those close to her.

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