


## Behavior Analysis Ambassador: In Honor of João Claudio Todorov

*Embaixador da Análise do Comportamento: em homenagem a João Claudio Todorov*

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DOI: [HTTP://DX.DOI.ORG/10.18542/REBAC.V18I1.12698](http://dx.doi.org/10.18542/REBAC.V18I1.12698)

João Claudio Todorov (1941–2021) was without question a prominent leader of behavior analysis in Brazil and abroad. The breadth and depth of his commitment to the analysis, research, and application of behavior science was inspiring. He believed that behavior science can inform policy makers and can help leaders to design contingencies that strengthen the well-being of society. He left a tremendous legacy that will continue to impact many individuals, organizations, and the field of behavior analysis for years to come. Figure 1 is a photograph of João Claudio Todorov in 2009.

Figure 1

*João Claudio Todorov (2009)*



## Trajectory

After obtaining an undergraduate degree in psychology in 1963 from the University of São Paulo, his native state, Todorov spent most of his career at the University of Brasília, Brazil. He arrived at an exciting time. Brasília was founded in 1960, when it became Brazil's capital. Only two years later, in 1962, the University began its operations (Universidade de Brasília, 2021). In 1963, a new and innovative Department of Psychology was created, with Carolina Bori (1924–2004), a pioneer in experimental psychology in Brazil, as its chair and Fred Keller (1899–1996) on faculty. Along with an outstanding group of faculty members, they developed the Personalized System of Instruction, sometimes referred to as the “Keller’s Plan” (Todorov, 2006), which Todorov later studied and implemented. Following Bori’s advice, Todorov enrolled in the University of Brasília’s Psychology Master’s Program and concurrently served as teaching assistant, from 1964 to 1965. Keller advised him to continue his psychology studies in the doctoral program at Arizona State University, and he did, graduating with a doctoral degree in 1969. Afterward, he returned to Brazil and worked as assistant professor of psychology at the Medical School of the University of São Paulo.

In 1972, Todorov returned to the University of Brasília, where he remained until 2006. Throughout his lengthy career at the University, he taught, directed research, and assumed several important administrative positions, including department chair, dean of graduate studies and research, vice-president, and president (Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico, 2021). He also taught at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Goiás from 2000 to 2009. He continued to be a prolific researcher and scholar until his passing.

Todorov published over 170 articles and chapters and authored or coordinated the publication of eight books. He was editor of the Brazilian Journal of Behavior Analysis and participated in the editorial board on a number of other scientific journals.

An active member of the Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI) since 1983, Todorov participated in many ABAI annual convention programs. He also presented in ABAI’s international conferences and single-topic conferences, including meetings on autism, organizational behavior management, and culturo-behavioral science.

Todorov had a strong basic and applied experimental background in learning, memory, choice, and motivation. For years he focused on conceptual, experimental, and applied issues involved in cultural practices. His position was consistent with B. F. Skinner’s writing (1904–1990), specially, “Science and Human Behavior” (Skinner, 1953). He was interested in how cultural practices are shaped, maintained, or altered. He saw them as products of social contingencies predominant in societies or groups. He advocated for translational research of basic and applied work when studying cultural practices. He analyzed public policy, laws, and the role of controlling agencies, like government, religion, and family, in the establishment of conditional relations in society.

In his research and conceptual work, Todorov embraced the study of metacontingencies (Glenn, 1988, 1991, 2003, 2004). He analyzed prevailing behaviors in Brazilian society in terms of contingencies and metacontingencies, in diverse areas such as reforestation, incarceration, traffic, and public health. In 2003, he invited Sigrid Glenn to Brazil to speak at several universities about metacontingencies (Glenn, 2017). This collaboration led to further research and study of metacontingencies in several universities in the country. It is in this work that I began a longstanding relationship with Todorov, with the organization of a think tank of cultural studies.

## Think Tank of Cultural Studies

The second ABAI international conference was held in Campinas, State of São Paulo, Brazil, in August 2004. The conference was organized in collaboration with The Brazilian Association of Psychology and Behavioral Medicine (ABPMC)—the largest psychological association in Brazil, founded in 1991 (Malott, 2004). At the conference, Todorov presented on the topic of contingencies and metacontingencies on the legal statute in Brazil (Todorov, 2004). Following his presentation, we started an informal conversation that resulted in a proposal from Todorov to the ABAI Executive Council for cosponsoring what ended up being the first Think Tank on Cultural Studies (TTCS1). Todorov would obtain funding from Brazilian institutions, and participants would cover their own travel. The Council approved the proposal in December 2004. That is how Todorov and I, along with other colleagues, engaged from then on—always focused on the understanding of culturo-behavior science. Todorov and I worked intensively to coordinate TTCS1, which was held in Campinas, eight months later, in August 2005. Todorov gained support from the Universidade Católica de Goiás, ABPMC, and the Instituto Brasiliense de Análise do Comportamento (Todorov & Malott, 2005). Figure 2 shows the main participants of TTCS1.

From back row to front row, left to right: João Claudio Todorov (Universidade Católica de Goiás, Universidade de Brasília and IESB); M. Jackson Marr (Georgia Institute of Technology); Marc N. Branch (University of Florida); Mark P. Alavosius (University of Nevada, Reno); Ramona Hومانfar (University of Nevada, Reno); Jorge Mendes de Oliveira Castro (Universidade de Brasília); Mark A. Mattaini (University of Illinois); Alexander (Sandy) Hobbs (University of Paisley, Scotland); Jerome D. Ulman (Ball State University); Deisy das Graças de Souza (Universidade Federal de São Carlos); Maria E. Malott (ABAI); Sigrid S. Glenn (University of North Texas); Maria Amália Andery (Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo). Missing from the photograph is Ingunn Sandaker (Akershus University College, Norway).

Figure 2

*Participants of TTCS1, 2005*



After this first gathering, think tanks on metacontingencies and cultural studies took a life of their own. They continued to be organized by different people and supported by various institutions. Ingunn Sandaker organized TTCS2 in Oslo, Norway, in 2007; Todorov and Marcelo Benvenuti organized TTCS3 in São Paulo, Brazil, in 2016; Sigrid Glenn organized TTCS4 and TTCS5, both in Denton, Texas, in 2016 and 2018, respectively; Todorov and Laércia Vasconcelos organized TTCS6 in Brasília in 2019; Maria Malott and Sigrid Glenn organized TTCS7 virtually in 2021 (Malott, 2021; Vasconcelos et. al., 2021). These think tanks have produced a number of presentations and publications and have inspired further research and study. Todorov was at the center of all these efforts, inspiring the rigorous analysis of culture based on a culturo-behavior science foundation.

### **Recognitions**

Todorov was highly respected, and his contributions were recognized by a number of organizations. For instance, he was awarded by the Conselho Regional de Psicologia - 6a. Região with the Medalha Centenário da Psicologia Científica (1979), by the Ministério das Relações Exteriores of the Brazilian Government with the Ordem do Rio Branco (1994), by the Sociedade Brasileira de Psicologia with an Homenagem (2000), and by the Ibero-American Federation of Psychological Associations for his international contributions (2012; Vasconcelos et al., 2022). However,

in this section, I focus on his recognitions by ABAI and its partner organization, the Society for the Advancement of Behavior Analysis (SABA).

Todorov received the status of **ABAI Fellow** in 2015 (Association for Behavior Analysis International, 2021). This designation is intended to recognize outstanding contributions of ABAI's most distinguished members in at least one of the primary areas of research/scholarship, professional practice, and teaching/administration/service. He received this distinction for contributions in all these areas.

He obtained the 2009 SABA **Award for International Dissemination of Behavior Analysis** (Society for the Advancement of Behavior Analysis, 2021a) for being a powerful force in advancing the internationalization of behavior analysis. He arranged international exchanges between South American, North American, and European graduate students involved in translational research.

He mentored generations of students in Brazil who moved on to various universities and continued his lineage of research and training. He encouraged his doctoral students to go to the United States, Mexico, Wales, and Belgium. He urged them to engage in different areas of research, to broaden their perspectives, and to disseminate their knowledge through publications. In Mexico, invited by Emílio Ribes, he taught students from various Latin-American countries. He was influential in the Brazilian Association of Psychology and in the formation of ABAI Brazil.

In 2018, the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciências do Comportamento, Instituto de Psicologia, of the University of Brasília received the SABA **Award for Programmatic Contributions to Behavior Analysis** (Society for the Advancement of Behavior Analysis, 2021b). The award recognized the strong history started with the leadership and contributions of Keller and Bori, and the collaboration from other outstanding and renowned Brazilian behavioral scientists. It was also an acknowledgment, in part, of Todorov, who spent over 30 years in the University. For over 50 years, the University of Brasília master's and doctoral programs conferred over 150 master's degrees and 46 doctoral degrees. Their graduates furthered the development of the experimental analysis of behavior, applied behavior analysis, and philosophical foundations in Brazil and abroad.

In 2020, Todorov received the highest recognition of SABA, the **Award for Distinguished Service to Behavior Analysis** (Society for the Advancement of Behavior Analysis, 2021c). He was honored for his lifelong contributions, illustrious career at the University of Brasília, and decades of dedication to behavior analysis, which included a remarkable range of achievements in research, education, and service.

In closing, a few weeks before his passing, at the conclusion of TTCS7, in reference to the future of think tanks, Todorov called for the rigorous study of culture, based on our scientific foundations in the analysis of contingencies and the further conceptual and research development of metacontingencies. He was a rigorous culturo-behavior scientist all his life.

João Claudio Todorov was a remarkable and irreplaceable human being. He was an ambassador of behavior analysis, a change driver, and an inspirational mentor. He established partnerships between individuals and organizations. He promoted his students and colleagues and helped them to grow. His protégés moved on to other institutions and began new lineages of conceptual and experimental rigor, continued collaboration, and exchange all around Brazil and abroad. He will be remembered with gratitude and respect. His legacy will continue for generations to come.

### Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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Invited Paper  
Submitted on: 15/11/2021