

In Appreciation: Jerome E. Singer

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Jerome Singer

Neil E. Grunberg

Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences

Jerome E. Singer had a lasting impact on the field of psychology and on everyone who knew him. Jerry founded and chaired the Medical and Clinical Psychology Department at the Uniformed Services University (USU) and was called the “best second author in psychology.”

In the late 1970s, Jerry recruited a small band of young psychologists (Bob Gatchel, Andy Baum, Dave Krantz, Sheryle Gallant, and Neil Grunberg) to help create a new version of medical psychology that integrated social psychology, psychophysiology, and psychobiology to study physical and mental health with a focus on effects of stress. He led us to develop PhD programs, a medical education program, and research programs. Jerry deeply understood how to use principles of social psychology — including functional distance, the sleeper effect, promotive interdependence, social comparison, pressures to uniformity, deindividuation, and attitude formation — to motivate faculty, to allow our department to grow and succeed within the USU School of Medicine, and to become influential in medical and health psychology. As an example of his application of social psychology, Jerry negotiated for departmental office space with only one condition: all faculty offices had to be together, regardless of where they were in the university. As an example of his thoughtful approach and vision to gain exposure within the field, Jerry volunteered to serve as Secretary-Treasurer for several scientific organizations in health psychology and behavioral medicine so that our department’s name and address would become known throughout the country. Within our department, he knew how to encourage competition but to pull back just enough so that it would motivate performance rather than become destructive. In retrospect, we all were in a clever Singer experiment in which we were subjects and, at times, unknowing stooges for his grand play.

Jerry was proud of his professional nickname as the “best second author” in psychology. His work with Stan Schachter on emotions (Schachter & Singer, 1962), Dave Glass on the after-effects of stress (Glass & Singer, 1972), Andy Baum to study environmental stress and many books about health psychology (1980s and 1990s), and Neil Grunberg to develop an animal model of Type A behavior and to edit (with Dick Nisbett and Judy Rodin) a festschrift for Stanley Schachter (1987) are a few examples of his second author work. As Jerry used to say, “I like to sing second voice.” He was an accomplished musician who appreciated that harmony, counter-rhythms, back-up vocals, and instrumental texture make music great.

Jerry also was an outstanding first author, including his animal model of emotions (1963), scholarly chapter on social comparison in Leon Festinger’s *Retrospections on Social Psychology* (1980), thoughtful chapter on mentoring in the Schachter festschrift (1987), and articles on Machiavellianism, effects of noise, and human factors. In addition, he was a patient and dedicated teacher and mentor, especially for graduate students and junior faculty.

Jerry had a unique way of saying so much with few words. Some of my favorite Jerry Singer quotes are: (1) “No position is so absurd that it will not be championed by a faculty member.” (2) “Never accept a job before it’s offered.” (3) “Live by the grant; die by the grant.” His most devastating remark about someone was: “...not even wrong.” The quote which should be a guiding principle for us all is: “Be a mensch.”

Jerry was a dedicated and loving husband, father, and grandfather. He adored his family and always put them first. I hope to live up to Jerry's values and practice.

Andrew Baum

University of Texas at Arlington

Whoever said that you can't be all things for all people didn't know Jerry Singer. For me he was a teacher, mentor, colleague, chairman, fortune teller, and friend.

My earliest memory of him is from a meeting I attended as a young graduate student at Stony Brook. Jerry was on the faculty there and we had a number of meetings of our subarea. The first one that I went to was boring and I remember looking around the room watching the students fighting to stay awake. Jerry, ever looking for opportunities to learn, had solved the problem by completely disassembling an old electric typewriter, with all the pieces were laid out neatly in front of him. While he was happily at work on the typewriter he was still able to engage meaningfully in the meeting at hand. By the meeting's end, the typewriter was reassembled and in excellent working order.

I saw Jerry a few times after I got my degree, including a brief passing in which he told me about a new department he was going to organize. A year later I found myself on my way to Bethesda to help! When I arrived Jerry had just moved from Walter Reed to the present USU and because there was no office for me, I shared one with Jerry for a month. Talk about massive exposure...I suddenly found myself in the midst of intense intellectual stimulation 7 or 8 hours a day! A maelstrom of ideas, theories, and facts! Whatever happened, this caused me to imprint on Jerry. Had I physically followed him around that might have made the situation clearer, but that experience began one of the richest, most gratifying and satisfying adventures in my life that lasted more than 15 years.

During these years, we did research together, wrote and edited books together, and edited a journal together. During all this Jerry remained always a mentor, gently advising me and warning me about incredibly stupid things that I was about to do. Always with humor and sensitivity, Jerry taught me about academia, science, and life. Once, at a professional meeting in Canada, Jerry joined a group of us having breakfast in the hotel coffee shop. He arrived late and the rest of us were already eating. Jerry sat down and waited for service. After much time had passed and Jerry had not yet been able to even order his meal, the hostess came through saying that there was a phone call for a Mr. Frazier. Jerry made eye contact with her to get her attention and she asked, "Would you be Mr. Frazier?" Without a moment's hesitation, Jerry answered, "I will be if it will get me breakfast."

Shortly before I left USU for Pittsburgh, Jerry pulled me aside and told me, "Always do the right thing even though it is often more difficult and unpleasant." I always remembered that advice and it has served me very well.

Jerry taught me so much about so many things it is hard to recall or list them here (including about publishing and "slack time"). I think about him every week and consistently hear his words coming from me when I interact with young colleagues and mentor graduate students. I hope they will continue to pass on this knowledge; if more people knew what he knew, the world would be a better place. I am very grateful for Jerry and the opportunity that I had to work with and learn from him. It is a debt that I

will never be able to repay.

Lawrence Erlbaum

Publisher (retired)

Jerry Singer always seemed to me to be slightly larger than life. He was a big man, in every sense of that word, but mostly a man big enough and secure enough to see the humor in matters that were not always easy to laugh at. He often spoke of his “kids,” the people he had hired to build the department at USU, and how their sometimes conflicting desires and needs made him rue at least temporarily his task of running the department. They were his kids, in the sense that he looked after them with a fatherly concern that went well beyond his job as chairman of the department. He cared about them, mentored them, listened to them, and did what he thought best for them. Everyone who knew Jerry knew he was unfailingly fair and direct in trying to give and get the best from his colleagues. If it is not an oxymoron to suggest that politics can be fair and disinterested, particularly academic politics, then one can only say that Jerry never played anything, including the necessary politics, in any way other than open, fair, and honest.

Jerry was also able to poke fun at himself and the situations in which he found himself. I remember my secretary asking me what a “Chew-chum” was, as she handed me a letter from Jerry. The letter was on what looked like stationery from the State University of New York at Stony Brook, the same typeface, the same color, the same quality of paper as usual. Except when one looked more carefully, it was letterhead that bore the words State University of New York at Chelm, the mythical Jewish village inhabited by fools, who used spurious reasoning to wreak unintended havoc on hearth and home. Jerry, who had agreed to do administrative dean work, changed the title from office of the dean to Office of the Chuchem (wise man), a jab at the very position in which he found himself.

Jerry’s famous wit found expression in other ways too. I remember telling him that I intended first to teach the Amazon parrot I had just bought for my wife the word fiduciary. Quick as a flash, Jerry suggested that I teach the bird the word psittacosis first. He was so full of that quick wit, good humor, and honest empathy for which he was so loved. I could tell Jerry Singer stories for a long time, but one really saw the best of him when he delivered his lines himself. His bluff good humor and decency just shined from within him.

Jerry had a passion for crosswords, and he often made them more challenging by omitting the vowels as he filled in the blanks. He was up for challenges of that sort, as he was for the challenge of research and administration. He was most up for the challenges of life. No one who knew Jerry ever doubted his devotion to family, his concern for his sister and mother, and his efforts and planning for their well-being. He met those challenges with grace and guts and good thinking.

His love for his wife and children was evident in almost every conversation we had. I listened and learned when he spoke of his daughter’s college education, her musical work, and what he thought of it all; I learned more when he spoke of his sons, how he dealt with certain situations all parents face; and I learned how much he loved his wife and children whenever we spoke of personal matters. He was a great guy: larger than life, larger than the pettiness of lesser minds and hearts, and finally larger than the stroke that killed him. He survives and will survive in the hearts and minds of everyone who really knew

him. And for those of us who loved the man, he will always be a shining example of what it means to be a real man — a mensch.

Daniel Druckman

George Mason University

Simply put, there was no one quite like Jerry Singer.

I worked with Jerry for a decade as part of a National Research Council (NRC) committee on human performance. He was one of 14 committee members when we met in 1985. Yet, he stood out as a larger-than-life figure in a three-piece suit. My first impression was that of a rather stuffy know-it-all academic who took pride in a well-earned reputation for superlative scholarship. This impression was only half correct: Jerry was anything but stuffy and, though he “knew it all,” never bragged or asserted himself as an authority. His blend of analytical reasoning and empathic understanding set him apart from many academic colleagues. Like an inquisitive student, Jerry got to the heart of issues. Like a probing scientist, he sought solutions to the questions raised by those issues.

Our first committee was assigned the task of evaluating a range of new-age techniques with strong claims for effectively enhancing human performance. Jerry embraced the challenge and demonstrated a knack for distinguishing between fraudulent and genuine claims. The result was a very important chapter on his assigned topic. His contributions to the second phase of the committee’s work were equally impressive. Once again, he embraced his assignment with enthusiasm, even though it meant coming up to speed on a topic outside his own areas of expertise.

When confronted with the need to decide on a chair for our committee’s fourth phase, I spent very little time agonizing over the choice. Jerry was perfect: He participated as a member of our committee during its first two phases, understood U.S. military culture and politics, knew the NRC from the inside (having served earlier on its staff), worked well with diverse ideas and with people, and had virtually no experience with the topics of this phase and, thus, no vested interest in promoting a pet theory or practice. This turned out to be one of my best professional decisions.

We worked closely together to produce the 1997 *Enhancing Organizational Performance* book. One surprise was to learn that the research in this field lagged behind its practice. Jerry was determined to understand why the research base was weak and realized that the field needed both a guiding framework and more sophisticated measures of organizational effectiveness. Thanks to Jerry, both are provided by the book – which has come to be regarded by some colleagues as a seminal contribution.

As in many collaborations, we got to know each other as people. Jerry displayed a refreshing openness about his life and a willingness to share stories and anxieties without dwelling on them. All of this helped me to appreciate the experiences that produced this empathic person without a trace of what might be considered by some as deserved arrogance.

We have lost a valuable colleague and prized friend. We all treasure our experiences with Jerry and are

thankful for the opportunity to have known this wonderful person.

David C. Glass

Stony Brook University

Jerry Singer and I met over 45 years ago. I was Social Psychologist at Russell Sage Foundation (RSF) and had been appointed to the Committee on Biological Bases of Social Behavior of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC). Jerry was Consultant to SSRC for a variety of its activities, including the Biological Bases Committee. Both RSF and SSRC were located in the same Manhattan building. We met several times to discuss Committee business, but also to chat about the interface of biological processes and social behavior.

In 1966, I was appointed to Rockefeller University in furtherance of a new research and training program at RSF. Jerry contacted me and we had lunch at the University. He had decided to accept a tenured appointment at Stony Brook and asked if I would serve as a reference. I readily agreed. It was soon after this luncheon that we met again for the first in a series of conversations about social psychological approaches to stressors characteristic of large urban centers, including crowding and noise. These discussions culminated in a plan of experimental research on behavioral effects *and* aftereffects of noise. Jerry argued for beginning our studies with noise as an analogue of urban stress. His reasons were frankly pragmatic and, as usual, persuasive. We proceeded to conduct our first experiments in preparation for a full-scale proposal that was eventually funded by the National Science Foundation.

In the summer of 1970, Jerry and I began preliminary work on a monograph summarizing our research. In my free time, I began reading Churchill's *History of the English Speaking Peoples*. I had completed a chapter on the Wars of the Roses and was walking with Jerry toward our campus offices. I began telling him about the chapter. Early in my description, he began speaking about the major issues involved in the Wars. His command of the facts was impressive. He had read the book several years earlier and retained virtually all of the relevant facts. I knew he had excellent retentive capacity, but until that time I had not appreciated the degree of excellence and his encyclopedic knowledge of an astonishing array of facts.

Unquestionably, Jerry's academic credentials were superb. He is well-known for the classic Schachter-Singer research on cognitive and physiological determinants of emotion. The research monograph Jerry and I completed on urban stress became a citation classic and won the AAAS Socio-Psychological Prize for 1971. But his administrative achievements also warrant comment. He founded a strong health psychology department at USU and held it together for many years in the face of difficult internal and external pressures. The program grew under Jerry's guidance and became the current Medical and Clinical Psychology Department.

Jerry and I grew apart in the late 1990s, perhaps because of our changing interests and commitments. Whatever the reasons, I wish we had remained in closer contact over the past decade. Jerry was a truly amazing man. But given his dislike of sentimental commentary, I probably have written more than enough. I close only with a paraphrase of the final lines of our joint monograph, "In the end, the only sure criterion is to have fun. And we *did* have fun."

David S. Krantz

Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences

Jerry Singer, the founding Chairman of my Department at USU, was an educator, scientist, colleague, and friend who touched the lives of his fellow faculty members and his students. He was a man of great intelligence, wit, and wisdom — a man with an encyclopedic knowledge of almost any subject you could mention. You could ask Jerry about anything and the odds are that he would know the answer. Jerry loved this University — he loved his family and friends, but much of his life was dedicated to his work and contributions to USU.

Jerry particularly enjoyed the process of educating graduate students. He taught several graduate seminars, and he served as an unofficial advisor to dozens of graduate students. Because of his extensive knowledge of methodology and statistics and his accessibility to students, it became an unofficial practice for him to serve on almost every doctoral dissertation committee in the small department.

Jerry was a master of conveying wisdom about academia and about life in an incredibly witty way. Though I occupy his former job as Department Chairman, I could never hope to fill his shoes. However, he left me with a few pointers from the Singer model that have helped me to cope with the challenging situations and potential upsets that are inherent in the work of an academic administrator. One of my favorite Singer comments is posted on my office wall to the right of my desk: “Never assume malevolence as an explanation for the behavior of others when mere incompetence will suffice.” By this comment, he did not mean to be condescending — that was not in his makeup. Instead, this is a mindset that helps morph a potentially irritating interaction into a more helpful one. Jerry will be missed by all of us who were lucky to know him.

Martha M. Faraday

Center for Scientific Review, National Institutes of Health

Jerome E. Singer had a formidable and eclectic intellect. What made him extraordinary, however, were his humility and the clarity of thought that humility brought to his teaching. Because of the person that he was — both brilliant and kind — and because of the teacher that he was, he exerted enormous influence on the approximately 100 students that passed through the Department of Medical and Clinical Psychology at USU during his chairmanship although he did not formally mentor most of us.

The briefest interaction with him was enough to make clear that his intellectual gifts placed him far beyond the rest of us. This was particularly terrifying when one was a first-year graduate student sitting in his classroom. He knew this and always tried to dissipate the terror by minimizing his own powers. If asked how he could remember what seemed to be everything, he would always say, “I’m no different than anyone else. I just have a better filing system.”

I learned several critical lessons from Dr. Singer (even in this venue, I cannot call him by his first name, having never done so) that I use almost daily in my professional life. He taught us statistics — a topic with which most students struggle, partly because it is difficult and partly because they have been told it is difficult. To Dr. Singer, it was just another set of intellectual problems — no more or less intractable

than social psychology or the history of psychology or any other topic. More times than I can count, he said in the classroom, “It is all theme and variation, theme and variation.” What he meant, of course, is that once one grasps the core principles of any topic, one has the tools to move forward in that domain as far as one’s curiosity or discipline or intellect will take him or her. This is a tremendously powerful lesson about what mastery means and also about how psychological barriers may prevent us from learning what we are perfectly capable of grasping intellectually.

Because of Dr. Singer’s influence, I also became a teacher of statistics and a statistical consultant although my PhD is in medical psychology. Armed with the confidence generated by his mantra — “It is all just theme and variation” — I have found myself passing it on to my students and tackling complex statistical projects. I would not have the confidence to take on these challenges except for Dr. Singer’s influence.

I am just one student who carries his legacy. We all carry it in different ways. Every time we help a student or a colleague think about a problem in the way that Dr. Singer would have, we pass the legacy on and we honor him for his substance as a person, his kindness, and his marvelous intellectual gifts that he so thoughtfully shared.

Staffan Hygge

University of Gävle

I met Jerry for the first time in the early 1970s when he was a guest researcher in Stockholm with Marianne Frankenhaeuser. I was in Uppsala, north of Stockholm, at that time doing my PhD in psychology. One day, I noticed in the local newspaper that a person named Jerome E. Singer would be giving a talk at the Department of Education on children and TV. The name was familiar. I had been very much intrigued by a paper from 1962 by Schachter and Singer on a two factor model of emotion. So, I went to the talk and saw Jerry’s imposing figure in a red vest take the stage. Quickly, it became apparent to me that this was the Jerome E. Singer I had hoped to hear. After his talk, I impolitely ignored the subject of the talk he had just given and raced on to ask for details about the two-factor theory of emotion.

Some years later on when I had finished my PhD and had started to work for the Swedish Building Research Institute, I came to think about Jerry again from the perspective of his very influential work with David Glass on noise and its after-effects. I wrote Jerry a letter about exchanging noise research ideas. His reply was more than kind, and some time later he offered me to be a post-doc at his new Department at USU.

That year spent as a post-doc at USU remains the single most important year in both my professional and private life. I made friends with a group of bright and insightful people, whose professional skills and open minds taught me a lot. Ever since then I could always turn to my colleagues Jerry Singer, Nancy Ostrove, Paul J. Brounstein, David S. Krantz, Bob Gatchel, Neil Grunberg, and Andy Baum. And some of them remain very strong and close personal friends to this day. I also had the opportunity to deepen these professional and personal bonds when I was a visiting scholar at USU in 1992-93.

Jerry was proud of his Swedish connections. He learned some Swedish and could almost adequately

pronounce the Swedish word for “nurse,” which is a random juxtaposition of all the voiced and unvoiced sch-sj-s-sk-sounds in which the Muppets’ Swedish chef excelled. He was also interested in Swedish folk-music and came to appreciate the 18th century composer Carl-Michael Bellman as well as the 20th century songwriter Evert Taube, who both very much shaped the national character of Swedish folk-music. In 1979, I also had the rare opportunity to hear him play the banjo and sing Woody Guthrie’s “This Land is Your Land” in one of his sons’ classes.

Jerry’s warm hearted and generous personality and behaviors turned out to be decisive factors for me and my family, professionally and personally. The ripples he started in my life were necessary antecedents for several of the important turning points in my life and the life of my family. For all of this, I’m so grateful!

Robert M. Krauss

Columbia University

I knew Jerry Singer from his work long before I had the opportunity to meet him, particularly the famous *Psychological Review* paper on the two-factor theory of emotion that he wrote with his mentor, Stanley Schachter. We first met, I think, when I interviewed for a position at the SUNY-Stony Brook department that Jerry had just joined. This must have been in the early 1960s. At that time, the campus was very much under construction and as I recall it consisted mainly of large patches of mud and buildings-in-progress. But as Jerry described it to me, it was clear that he was seeing it not as it was at that moment, but as it would be when work was completed. And that ability — to see things not as they were but as they could be — was one of Jerry’s most impressive qualities. We spent a good part of that day talking about where we thought social psychology was headed and the kind of psychology department we wanted to be part of. It was obvious that Jerry had given a great deal of thought to these issues. His conclusions were impressive.

As it turned out, I decided to remain at Bell Labs, but I was so impressed by Jerry that a few years later, when I was appointed editor of *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, I invited him to be associate editor. To my great delight, he accepted. Jerry was a superb editor. Somehow, his rejection letters managed to convey a genuine appreciation for the author’s endeavor, while pointing out its technical shortcomings. Young investigators particularly benefited from these tutorials, which constituted a kind of informal post-doc. Jerry’s standards were high, and he had no trouble telling even quite distinguished social psychologists when their contributions failed to live up to their reputations.

Over the years our substantive interests diverged — Jerry’s came to be focused on issues related to medical psychology — and as a result we saw each less often at meetings and conferences. Nevertheless, my admiration and affection for this brilliant and accomplished man continued undiminished.