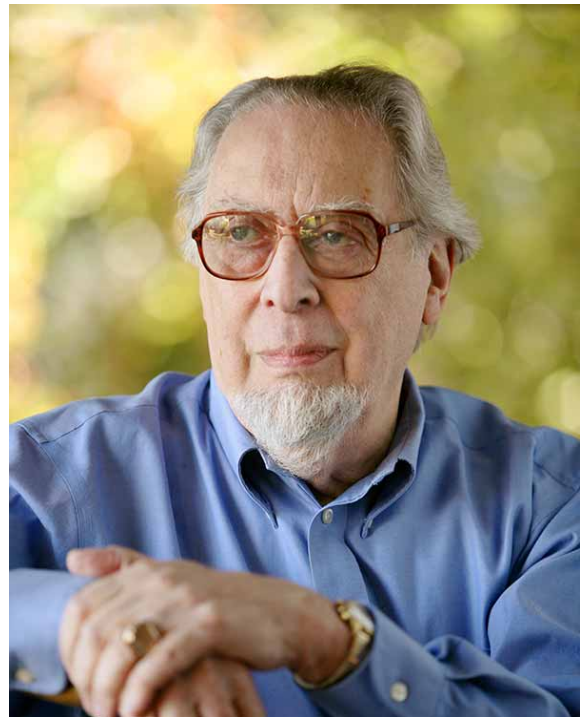


May 19, 2016 | By Inga Kiderra

Obituary: UC San Diego Psychology Department Founder George Mandler, 91

George Mandler – founding chair of the University of California San Diego’s Department of Psychology and one of the central figures in psychology’s cognitive revolution – died in his Hampstead, London home on May 6, 2016. He was 91.

Mandler, who left his native Austria after its annexation by Nazi Germany, made signature contributions to the psychology of memory, consciousness and emotion. His decisive influence is felt to this day. The cognitive revolution in psychology, or “evolution” as Mandler referred to it, began in the 1950s and took off in the ’60s. It was an intellectual movement that emerged in reaction to the behaviorism then dominant in the field. Behaviorists focus on observable behavior, while Mandler and others argued that researchers could also study the mind and, by applying information-processing concepts from computer science, make testable inferences about hidden mental processes too, such as attention and memory. Their approach evolved into cognitive psychology and now dominates along with neuroscience.



George Mandler

Mandler arrived with his wife, Jean, at UC San Diego in 1965 as chair and as founding director of the Center for Human Information Processing (CHIP). At the time, UC San Diego only had a handful of buildings and fewer than 100 faculty members. Together with Norman Anderson and Bill McGill, Mandler built a strong experimental psychology department on the fledgling campus from scratch, focusing his energies in the early years on recruiting distinguished faculty and on expanding facilities.

Mandler directed CHIP until 1990. The center brought in many international scholars and played a role in advancing the study of neural networks by Geoff Hinton, Jay McClelland, the late David Rumelhart and Terry Sejnowski, for example, and the field now known as Human-Computer Interaction, led by Don Norman.

Retiring from UC San Diego in 1994, Mandler and Jean became visiting professors at University College London, though they continued to maintain strong ties to the San Diego campus as distinguished professors emeritus, spending half the year at their home in La Jolla.

In 2004, UC San Diego named the building that once housed CHIP and Mandler's office – and which Mandler had helped build with funds from Washington – “Mandler Hall.”

Mandler was born in Vienna into an upper middle class Jewish family on June 11, 1924. His father ran a successful wholesale leather business. But their comfortable lives began to change as the Nazis took over in the 1930s. After Germany annexed Austria in 1938, George was sent alone to boarding school in England. In addition to learning English and attending to his studies, he spent his time hunting for a U.S. citizen who would sponsor his family's immigration to the United States. He was successful, and in 1940 George, a younger sister and their parents arrived in New York.

A veteran of World War II, Mandler joined the U.S. Army in 1943. He trained in military intelligence and, as a native speaker of German, ended up as a front line interrogator with the 7th Army in Germany.

Mandler earned his bachelor's degree from New York University in 1949 and his Ph.D. from Yale in 1953. Before arriving at UC San Diego, he taught at Harvard University and the University of Toronto. He met Jean at Harvard, when she was a graduate student and he, a young assistant professor. He was the only member of her dissertation committee to be critical, she said, but he must have seen merit in her work because he asked her to be his research assistant on a project about stress and emotion. Love bloomed, she said, amidst tracings of a polygraph machine and trips to nearby Quincy. They married in January 1957 and had two sons.

In his episodic memoir, “Interesting Times: An Encounter With the 20th Century,” Mandler described himself as a “good boy” who grew into “a quite contentious adult.” But he is also remembered by many for his self-deprecating sense of humor. His first scientific publication, he said, was his appearance in a medical journal – as a patient from whose lung a glass shard had been removed. Jean recalls also his claim that his most impressive academic achievement was passing the Oxford School Certificate before the end of his first year in England. He insisted that, academically, it was all downhill after that.

The “downhill” featured numerous books and research papers. Mandler is the author of “Mind and Emotion,” “Mind and Body: Psychology of Emotion and Stress,” “Human Nature Explored,” “A History of Modern Experimental Psychology” and other well-regarded volumes. His many honors include a Guggenheim Fellowship and the William James Award from the American Psychological Association (APA). He was a fellow of the Society for Experimental Psychology and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Mandler served as editor of the journal *Psychological Review*, governing board member and chair of the Psychonomic Society, president of two divisions of the APA (experimental psychology and general psychology), chair of the APA’s Council of Editors, chair of the Society of Experimental Psychologists, and founding president of the Federation of Behavioral, Psychological, and Cognitive Sciences.

Over the years, Mandler mentored many young researchers. His former students include neuropsychologist Karalyn Patterson, now at Cambridge, who became a close and lasting friend, educational psychologist Arthur Graesser, at the University of Memphis and Oxford, and Rita Anderson, at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Colleagues, friends and former students published “Memories, Thoughts, and Emotions: Essays in Honor of George Mandler” in 1991. In 2009, he was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Vienna.

Mandler is survived by his wife, Jean; sons Peter and Michael; daughters-in-law Ruth Ehrlich and Sophie Mandler; grandchildren Ben and Hannah; and step-grandchildren Giovanni and Diana.

In lieu of flowers, the Mandler family suggests donations in George’s memory be made to the “George Mandler Memorial Fund.” Donations can be made [online](#), or checks payable to the UC San Diego Foundation can be sent to University of California San Diego, 9500 Gilman Drive #0940, La Jolla, CA 92093-0940.

For memorial plans, please contact the UC San Diego Department of Psychology at 858-534-3000. The department has set up an [in memoriam page](#).

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