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Obituary James E. King (1937-2021)

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Dr. James E. King ("Jim"), whose career in comparative psychology and primatology spanned six decades, died from complications related to West Nile virus on October 12, 2021, in Tucson, Arizona. His daughter (Jennifer Seedorf) and son (Roger King) were present. Jim was born in Baker, Oregon and grew up there and in Casper, Wyoming until the family moved to Tucson, Arizona. His beloved wife, Priscilla ("Penny") King, parents, Robert and Ruth King, and brother-in-law John Vacca predeceased him. In addition to his children, he is survived by son- and daughter-in-law Steve Seedorf and Kathie King (née Rhodes), and grandchildren James and Joshua Seedorf, and Zoe and Eliza King, and by his sister-in-law, Deborah Matteson. He is also survived by his beloved dog and constant companion, Rosie.

Jim received a B.A. (1959) in Psychology from the University of Arizona and an M.S. (1961) and Ph.D. (1963) from the University of Wisconsin-Madison where his principal supervisor was Harry Harlow. The title of his doctoral dissertation was *Transfer Relationships Between Learning-Set and Concept Formation in Rhesus Monkeys*. In 1963 he was hired as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Arizona where he was promoted to Associate and then Full Professor in 1967 and 1976. His work was funded by NIMH and NASA, and in 1976 he was appointed as a visiting fellow at

what is now Yerkes National Primate Research Center in Atlanta, Georgia. Jim supervised more than 50 MA and Ph.D. students, often continuing research with them for decades.

Throughout his career, Jim studied numerous species, including some non-primates, and published papers on mathematical psychology and animal learning, sensory capacities such as color vision in New World monkeys, and handedness. In addition, although he was not the first to do so, starting in the early 1990s and with the support of the ChimpanZoo program of the Jane Goodall Institute, he began to investigate the nascent topic of personality in nonhuman primates. What made his first study in this area stand out was that he and his co-investigator, Aurelio J. Figueredo (“AJ”)—who was in the same department—devised a rating scale for chimpanzees by sampling traits from a taxonomy of the Big Five, a model of human personality that had gained prominence at around the same time, and which is still considered by many to be the dominant model of human personality. Jim and AJ showed that ratings of personality made by humans who knew the chimpanzees were reliable and that correlations between these traits could be explained by six factors—five analogues to the human Big Five and a sixth that appeared to be related to dominance. Later, using a similar approach, Jim and his former Ph.D. student Virginia Landau, devised a scale to measure subjective well-being in chimpanzees, and showed that ratings using this scale were reliable and that the single factor that emerged was associated with personality in similar ways to what had been found in humans.

The studies on primate personality and welfare were followed by research over the next 20 years with the first author, Alex, starting when he was Jim’s Ph.D. student, and others, including, eventually, Alex’s Ph.D. students. This work examined the genetic bases of personality and subjective well-being in chimpanzees, expanded the use of ratings to assess other primate species, replicated the chimpanzee structure in multiple samples, examined relationships between ratings and behavioral observations, tested whether ratings were ‘tainted’ by anthropomorphic projections, and examined age differences in personality and relationships between personality and longevity. This work, and especially that up to

2012, destigmatized the use of ratings for studying personality in animals. It also, to paraphrase a junior researcher, gave scientists a reason to stop (despite what some critics insisted they do) putting quotation marks around the word “personality” when referring to nonhumans. Until shortly before his death, Jim was actively involved in a number of discussion and research groups about primate personality, welfare, and cognition. His deep knowledge and innovative ideas were important guides.

Jim’s modesty belied a deep penetrating knowledge about not just animal learning and behavior, but of research in personality and subjective well-being, statistics and research methods, physics, and in literature and history. Jim’s modesty also meant that he did not pursue fads and fashions, anything, really, that might have raised his profile. He did not like being the center of attention. He instead preferred to focus on incremental research that was grounded in theory and/or empirical data.

Penny King, a School Psychologist and a bright, creative, kind and generous person, was influential on Jim’s life and work. They often discussed current topics in psychology, sometimes from different standpoints, always with respect and often with humor. They published a paper together in 1973, *A Children’s Humor Test*, with Penny as first author, on the topic of what kinds of humor children prefer and whether that preference differs by age and sex. Jim was an avid reader, and he and Penny traveled often. Jim and Penny especially loved Scotland and visited many times, where they formed lifelong friendships with Dick and Jen Byrne and Hannah Buchanan-Smith. Their friends there often found them admiring the rain, as this happened so infrequently in Arizona. When Penny became ill, Jim took care of her until her death. To continue his and Penny’s commitment to helping underprivileged children, Jim took up volunteer work and tutored children on literacy.

Along with his modesty, Jim will be remembered for wit (and wonderful laugh), for the fun he got from sharing ideas, and for his love of his family and friends. Jim will also be remembered for his immense kindness and generosity, which shaped the future of many who were fortunate to interact with him. In the case of the first author, Alex not only

remembers Jim for starting him, with a question, on his research trajectory, but for the many long discussions about not just primate personality and animal behavior more generally, but history, literature, and many other topics. In the case of the second author, Francine will remember Jim in so many ways, one of which was when presented with one of her 'out of left field' ideas, he would say, "Well, I don't know..." and then proceed to elaborate on why and how it could work. He was always generous and so knowledgeable, and never failed to find some kernel upon which she could build.

Jim will be greatly missed, and already is, not just as a researcher, but as the unique individual and dear friend to many that he was. If anybody wishes to honor his memory, we would say to take time everyday to be kind to someone.

Acknowledgements

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