
Julius Wishner (1921–1993)

Julius Wishner, Emeritus Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania and a pioneer in experimental psychopathology, died on August 22, 1993, after a long illness. He is survived by his spouse, Dorothy, and two daughters, Amy and Karen.

Wishner was born July 7, 1921. He received his bachelor's degree in psychology from Brooklyn College in 1946. There he studied with Edward Girden, among others, and began a lifelong friendship with Solomon Asch. As with so many others of his generation, his formal education was interrupted by World War II. He served in the Eighth Air Force, flying 30 combat missions over Germany (19 as lead navigator), and received the Distinguished Flying Cross. After the war he enrolled in the graduate program at Northwestern University, where he studied the Rorschach technique with Samuel Beck and did clinical work at the Michael Reese Hospital and the Illinois Neuropsychiatric Institute. After completing his dissertation research on the physiological correlates of the Rorschach index of "experience balance," he received his doctoral degree in 1950.

Wishner moved in 1948 to the University of Pennsylvania, where he directed what became one of the nation's leading clinical training programs. From this position he insisted on the priority of research experience, believing that the practical difficulties encountered in the psychological clinic would yield to research oriented toward basic psychological theory. As a teacher and researcher, Wishner's career was devoted to the application of the methods and theories of experimental psychology toward understanding of mental illness. Many of his early publications were on the Rorschach, which he once described as "psychology's most interesting test." He taught the Rorschach because he wanted his students to appreciate the history of the field. But he also taught his students to evaluate the Rorschach, and all other clinical tests and techniques, according to principles of reliability, validity, and utility. In this way, he hoped, clinical practice would be established on the firm ground of empirical science.

Wishner's approach to experimental psychopathology was exemplified by his work on *psychological efficiency*, which he defined as the ratio of focused to diffuse behavior displayed in a particular situation. He then offered efficiency as an objective alternative to subjective, culture-bound, ordinary-language concepts of mental health such as "normality" and "appropriateness." In this way, he hoped to develop a quantitative index of psychological health that would be valid across age, time, and social circumstances. A focus on efficiency would go beyond the symptom focus preferred by behavior therapists but would lack the well-known problems of the traditional diagnos-

tic categories and would avoid biological reductionism. Efficiency, objectively measured, could substitute for more traditional assessment techniques and serve as an end point in the evaluation of therapeutic outcome. By defining efficiency in terms of the individual's behavior in relation to a particular environment, Wishner anticipated later efforts to go beyond the abstract language of traits and develop a truly interactionist concept of normal personality.

Over the years, Wishner made a number of other important contributions to psychological science. For example, his friend Solomon Asch had shown that some traits were "central," in that they exerted a disproportionate influence on impressions of personality, but there was no way of predicting which traits would have this quality. Wishner solved this problem by showing that central traits were those that were correlated with a relatively large number of other attributes. This work laid the foundation for later structural approaches to impression formation and social cognition.

Wishner was also a leading American figure in the International Association of Applied Psychology, seeking to link basic research with clinical practice. He always insisted that the relationship between laboratory and clinic was bidirectional: Clinical practice should be based on scientific principles, but basic theory should be informed by clinical phenomena. For Wishner, psychopathology and personality constituted the living material of the field.

Wishner's academic interests ranged far beyond his department and discipline, and over the years he contributed greatly to the institutional life of Penn. He was chair of the University Senate from 1965 to 1967, a time of deep trouble in American universities over Vietnam and military research, and he was instrumental in formulating policies barring secret research projects on campus. Later, as chair of the Educational Policy Committee, he helped Richard Solomon establish the undergraduate honors college at Penn, as well as the School of Public and Urban Policy.

In his insistence that clinical practice be based on scientific principles, and that his nonclinical colleagues pay attention to what could be learned about normal processes from the study of patients, Julius Wishner exemplified the Boulder model of the scientist-practitioner. Throughout his career, he strove to achieve a truly general psychology encompassing the basic and the applied, the normal and the abnormal. As a teacher and researcher, that is his legacy to his colleagues and students.

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