



Tribute to Lyman Wynne

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To give a tribute to Lyman Wynne in five minutes and to do justice to what he has achieved in his life is a virtually an impossible task. One only has to look at the various tributes that have been written in *Family Process* and other *Family Therapy Journal* by different people. The striking thing is that each tribute is written completely different from the others as if it was written about a different individual. Some have written about Lyman as a clinician, some as a teacher or mentor, others have written about his role in the development of family therapy as a scholar etc.

So I am only going to focus on one aspect of Lyman's work, which for me has a particular significance. This is Lyman's contributions to the field as a research clinician.

In the 1950's and 1960s the persona of the therapist included something that today is very rare: it included a research persona. In the early years most of the pioneers of the field were involved in research; this included people like Lyman but also Don Jackson, Jay Haley, Paul Watzlawick, Nathan Epstein, Antonio Ferreira and many others. This should not come as a surprise; after all the major impetus for the development of family therapy was a research project. The interaction between family research and family therapy in those years was highly productive as can be seen in an authoritative review of family interaction research by Jules Riskin and Elaine Faunce (1972) which listed over 250 papers. A conference in 1969 entitled *Family Therapy and Family Research*, brought together virtually all the leading names in the field and two quotes from that conference encapsulate for me the relationship between research and clinical practice as it was then understood. The first comes from Antonio Ferreira reflecting on his own position:

“I was somewhat apprehensive about the supposed dichotomy between clinicians and experimentalists. I am very pleased to see now that I don't have to make an effort to reconcile both views, since the two camps are perhaps coming together in much greater harmony than we had anticipated. I for one have always felt that I could be a clinician in the morning and a researcher in the afternoon and again become a clinician the next morning.” (Ferreira 1972, pp 109-110).

Earlier at the conference, Lyman (responding to Jay Haley presenting a critical overview of family research) is more cautious:

“...I would like to warn against a possible danger, which is one side of what I feel, that it is hopeless to get back to [research] work. This, I think would be a very unfortunate interpretation to give to Haley's comments. One unfortunate reaction

people may have, especially clinicians, is to feel that the methodological problems, the problems of controls, the problems of specifying the context of the experiment or the context of observations, including the observer's effect on the interaction, together with numerous other issues, all make systematic research impossible. I think this fear is certainly not necessary to act upon." (Wynne, 1972, p 49)

Lyman Unfortunately, this warning was not heeded and the links between family research and family therapy went into decline from the early 1970s onwards. There were of course a variety of reasons for this (cf Eisler et al 1988) but perhaps the most important was the one alluded to by Lyman in the above quote. The hopes that research into family interaction would lead to clinically important insights into how families functioned were undermined by the perception that increasing the rigorousness of research methodology inexorably led to clinically trivial findings. Lyman was one of the few people in the field who continued to combine a strong interest in research and clinical practice not only through promoting the importance of the links between the two (e.g. Wynne, 1983; 1988; Pinsof & Wynne, 2000) but also through continuing to be highly active in the research field (over 2/3 of Lyman's long list of publications are research based).¹

In his work Lyman both managed to show the importance of building on earlier work to provide continuity but also the need to include new ideas without abandoning the old. Lyman for instance took on board the criticisms of the early work on schizophrenia not by abandoning it but by changing the way he thought about schizophrenia and families and broadening his research interests. He retained his interest in family communication patterns around schizophrenia but later combined it with research on the role of genetics and gene-environment interactions in schizophrenia (e.g. Wynne et al 2006).

To me Lyman Wynne's work represents one of the opportunities that was available to the family therapy field in the early days that should have continued and hopefully will continue again. I hope one of Lyman's legacies to the field is that people will rediscover those areas of work that used to inform us so we can come back to them again. This is important not just in relation to research. The history of the development of ideas in the field of family therapy has been one of emphasizing difference and newness at the cost of also understanding the importance of continuity, sameness and sharing common ideas both across the field and with those outside the field. Lyman's work encompassed both continuity and difference. We need to rediscover the shared, the similar, the common ground and then we can really think about the differences that make a difference.

References:

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¹ Perhaps symbolically, Antonio Ferreira, quoted above in fact did not continue to combine the role of family therapist and family researcher and abandoned the field altogether to become a marine biologist

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