

SALEEM'S RULES

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Panel Members: John Monahan, Ed Mulvey and Henry Steadman

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On the 20th anniversary of the death of Saleem Shah

We welcome you all to this session to honor Saleem Shah. Those of us on this panel represent the elders in this tribe we call AP-LS. One of the things elders do is pass on the traditions—the history—the ethos of their culture. They speak of things woven into the beginnings of the culture, but that might be obscured as the culture grows. Saleem Shah was among the most important threads in that early fabric of AP-LS, and we want to help you recognize him in what the organization has become.

Most importantly, we want to tell you about him as a mentor. We'll focus not only on what he taught us, but how he taught us. We believe that you can learn something about how to be better mentors by hearing about the mentoring we received from him.

Who was this man, Saleem Shah? Why do we name our awards for him?

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A CV-like description of Saleem's career sounds impressive but not particularly remarkable. He obtained his Ph.D. in clinical psychology at Pennsylvania State University in 1957. For a few years he worked at the Spring Grove State Hospital in Cumberland, Maryland. Then from 1959 to 1966 he was on the staff, and eventually Chief Psychologist, of Legal Psychiatric Services, the court clinic in District of Columbia.

In 1968 he became Branch Chief of the Center for Studies of Crime and Delinquency at the National Institute of Mental Health in Bethesda. After about 20 years he became a Senior Research Scholar at NIMH. The year before that—1986—we gave Saleem the very first APLS Award for Distinguished Contributions to Psychology and Law. Then, in November 1992—20 years ago this year—his life was ended by a drunk driver crossing into his lane as he was driving to his home in Catonsville, Maryland.

That description of Saleem reveals little about why he is remembered and was mourned so keenly by those of us who knew him. We can go a bit further by examining the studies that his Center funded. Seeing in retrospect, many of them were very original—the opening preludes to lines of research that defined the early field and branched out to create its identity. Among these were:

- Monahan’s first project on violence prediction
- Teplin’s studies of mental illness in jails
- Steadman’s work on psychiatric predictions of dangerousness
- McGarry, and later Roesch and Golding, on competence to stand trial
- Wexler’s development of the concept of therapeutic jurisprudence
- Grisso’s studies of juveniles’ capacities, and concepts for evaluation of legal competencies
- Pittsburgh Group on informed consent in mental hospitals and prediction of violence
- Brodsky’s explorations of the role of psychology in corrections
- Elliot, Thornberry, Gottfredson, and others on causes of delinquency
- Sales’ development of psychology and law Ph.D/J.D. program at University of Nebraska

If we had room and time enough, we could create branching trees arising from each of these projects to show how they generated whole fields of research in which others joined.

But this still does not get to the heart of the matter. To understand why he is remembered, we have to tell you who he was, not as a professional with a career, not as a source of funding for APLS’s earliest works—but how he lived his life, what he taught others, and what he meant to them.

Certain approaches to doing this would be terribly confusing. For example, asking people then what Saleem was like, you could have heard all of the following adjectives without contradiction:

- generous and demanding
- inspiring and exasperating
- emotional and empirical
- principled and result-driven
- open-minded and convinced that he was right.

And these were not nuances. All of those traits stood out clearly and boldly for anyone to see.

It may seem difficult to imagine him being an inspiring mentor with so many difficult qualities. What you need to understand is that driving all of that—and I borrow Hank Steadman’s words here—Saleem “was a friend and a man of principle: a model for how to live one’s life with unselfish purpose, unimpeachable integrity, and an unrelenting sense of what is right.” When he was demanding, exasperating, doggedly result-driven, and stubbornly arguing his cause, you knew that his intentions were to make you better, not to enhance himself, and to show you a way to make the world better for persons with mental illnesses who were in the justice system.

His was an unusual sort of mentoring. Basically, when you got a grant from Saleem’s center, you got Saleem. If you allowed him, he became your mentor, often in surprising ways that some of us will be describing. And that is the context in which we want to reflect on Saleem today. We want to tell you what we learned from him about how to do our work in this world.

To help do this, I want to offer you what I call “Saleem’s Rules.” NCIS fans will recognize the analogy. Special Agent Gibbs is a hard man to work for, but he is an unfailing mentor. There are said to be 51 “Gibbs’ Rules” for criminal investigation and staying alive. But they are not written down. Those on his team whom he mentors learn them by experience.

I have developed Saleem’s Rules by studying an issue of *Law and Human Behavior* (February, 1995) in which several of us wrote articles about how Saleem influenced our lives and the field of psychiatry, psychology and law. As you peruse these articles, you find themes arising with remarkable similarity in

people's narrations of what Saleem was like. *Saleem's Rules* are a synthesis of what they say they learned from him.

Rule 1: You have to care about whatever you study.

What Saleem cared about was the dignity of people with mental illnesses in the legal system, especially the quality of our response to them, both clinically and legally. I don't know when or how this developed. It was very near the surface whenever he was mentoring us, and it permeated his interests at all levels—from forensic evaluations, to legal decisions about mentally ill persons, to forensic mental health systems. The word “mission” appears several times in peoples' descriptions of Saleem—not in the religious sense, but as a duty and a calling. It guided all he did, and his mentoring steered us in directions that would fulfill that mission.

Rule 2: If a study might find truth, but not help people, it's not worth doing.

Saleem was very result-driven. There was something you could count on whenever you began to tell Saleem about a research idea you were cooking. You'd describe the problem and your brilliant design, he would listen carefully and thoughtfully, and when you were done, he was likely to say: “*To what end?*” He had little patience for studies that would only test hypotheses. They had to have utility.

Ecford Voit, who worked for Saleem at NIMH, recalls Saleem's description of the work of the review panel that evaluated grant proposals for the Crime and Delinquency Center. “The committee,” Saleem once wrote, “should not function as though its only concern is to evaluate the scientific merit of the proposal.” But that was, in fact, the only concern that NIMH itself acknowledged at the time, in order to avoid an appearance of favoritism in reviewing proposals.

Rules 1 and 2 came together in the way Saleem saw the role of his Center. He actually conducted seminars for his Review Panel on the importance of evaluating proposals not only on scientific merit, but also on whether they had potential to fulfill the mission—to create legally-fair and clinically-beneficial conditions for persons in the legal system

Rule 3: If you say you'll do it, you're accountable—and I'm accountable to help you do it.

Typically, when one is awarded a grant from NIMH, one gets the funding and does the work and reports back to the agency at the end. But when you got a grant from Saleem's center, you got Saleem. You got his numerous phone calls—often at 5:00 PM when you were getting ready to go home—to see how your grant was going. You got his guidance when things were not going well, and you got his suggestions about a recommended change in course when you thought things were actually fine. You were likely to get a call sometime in the year saying that he was going to visit your lab next week and check things out. No other director at NIMH—before or since—so consistently ran their research branch this way.

Rule 4: You won't solve most problems by thinking like a _____. (Insert any discipline)

Saleem had little patience for professionalism. The 1970s was a time when forensic psychology and forensic psychiatry were competing for recognition in the courts. Most lawyers were skeptical of both disciplines, and criminologists were following their own path. Saleem valued them all, but had particular disdain for lines of thought that were dominated by any one of them. The problems he saw that needed to be solved were far too big for any one discipline's theories and ways of thinking. Clinicians had to be scientists, and scientists had to be clinicians. Both of them had to understand the social systems and organizations in which their contributions were expected to lead to things of value. As a mentor, he was constantly directing you across disciplinary lines to help you find the concepts that you needed for solving important problems.

Rule 5: Research never changes policy or practice—you do.

Saleem was not satisfied with a successful research project until it had been translated in a way that might change policy or practice. After all, that was what justified doing the research in the first place. He tended to see at least the first steps in this translation as belonging to the researchers.

So he usually had suggestions for you as your project neared an end. The suggestions, however, came across as “imperatives”—things that you were nearly obligated to do because you had developed something that could serve the mission. He convinced you; then he provided the means for you to do it. Sometimes it was publication of your results in the monograph series that he developed for his NIMH center. Sometimes, it was additional funding he would provide to hold conferences at which you’d describe your research to judges, lawyers, or justice system personnel. In my case, it was a road trip that took me to eight state hospitals, to translate my fancy academic ideas for forensic evaluations into something clinicians could actually use.

Rule 6: If you don’t know something empirically, you’re not an expert.

Saleem gave me a manuscript he wrote that was never published. He wrote it in 1963, when he was Chief Psychologist at the court clinic in District of Columbia, before his NIMH days. This was the year after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled, in *Jenkins v. U.S.*, that courts could choose to accept expert testimony on diagnostic matters from psychologists, not only psychiatrists. Psychology was excited at this new opportunity, and the American Psychological Association told Saleem that they might like to fund him to do a white paper and some legal research on the potential.

The manuscript I have is a version of Saleem’s proposal. APA decided not to fund his work, and when one reads the paper, one can guess the reasons. He wrote that before rushing into the courtroom, (quote), “It would be far more desirable for behavioral scientists to concentrate on making more precise, reliable, valid and accurate their instruments and methods for assessment and prediction of behavior.” Don’t rush into this, he said—don’t bow to guild interests and a new market for psychologists—don’t join psychiatry in simply making guesses about people’s futures. Do the work that’s necessary to first show that what you have to say has some sort of empirical validity. What you see here is his integrity and his unwillingness to bow to professional interests if it’s not in society’s broader interests. It was a strong message that he continued to provide us when he mentored our projects in later years.

Rule 7: Don’t be influenced by opposing views—unless they are right.

Saleem usually entered an intellectual conversation with a strong opinion. He often argued it just as strongly, and he often walked away at the end of the debate with the same opinion as when he arrived. But he was open to influence. He could change his opinion if you could give him the right argument. Some of that potential is seen in a little vignette that Linda Teplin relates. Something she’d written had been rejected for publication. She told Saleem that she thought it might be because the reviewers didn’t like her because of theoretical differences. Saleem admonished her: “Don’t worry about whether they rejected the article because they don’t like you. Read what they have to say and worry about whether they were right!” The mentoring message was clear. Weigh people’s views on the basis of the quality of their arguments. It’s your responsibility to decide whether they are right or wrong based on their logic, not on who they are or whether you like them or they like you.

Rule 8: The best food is Indian food.

Saleem had strong preferences in his everyday life as well about how to enjoy himself. He liked Indian food and knew where to get it all over the world. Usually he concluded his meals with a single Jack Daniels on the rocks. He dressed for comfort, not show, most often as you see him here. [Photo] He had a keen sense of humor. Again, Linda Teplin relates that at dinner when she was first getting to know Saleem, he told her that he had six children, and she said, “Oh yes, of course, large families are a tradition in your culture.” He replied: “Hell no, not in my culture. I married an Irish Catholic!”

Today we honor Saleem by describing the values that guided his work and the manner in which he passed on those values to those whom he mentored. The panel members here, as well as members of the audience who knew Saleem, will offer examples of how *Saleem’s Rules* influenced their lives. May those values continue to be part of the fabric of our tribe called AP-LS as it continues to mature in service to individuals and society.