



PROFESSIONAL AS EXPERT PARADIGM:

Impact on Family Engagement in Social
Services

Kameelah M. Mu'Min, MS.Ed
International Institute for Restorative Practices
Graduate Student: Masters in Restorative Practices and Youth Counseling
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A stylized, dark brown illustration of a plant with several large, elongated leaves and a cluster of small, round buds or flowers on the left side, set against a dark brown background.

PURPOSE:

to understand the impact a helping professional's level of self-awareness, relational stance, and degree of cultural competency has on a family's subjective experience of therapy or social service delivery.

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The **Professional as**

Expert paradigm is characterized by the tendency of the helping professional to view herself or himself as the definitive authority on a family's narrative, devaluing the power and legitimacy of a family's understanding of their lived experience.

Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham 1955

- ❑ Two American Psychologists develop a model of communication while studying group dynamics at the University of California ~Los Angeles (UCLA)
- ❑ Luft and Ingram called their model the Johari Window ; it is widely used in Business Management, Organizational Dynamics and Leadership Development
- ❑ The Johari Window is often referred to as a 'disclosure/feedback model of self awareness' as it represents information - feelings, experience, views, attitudes, skills, intentions, motivation, etc - within or about a person - in relation to their group, from four perspectives or quadrants:

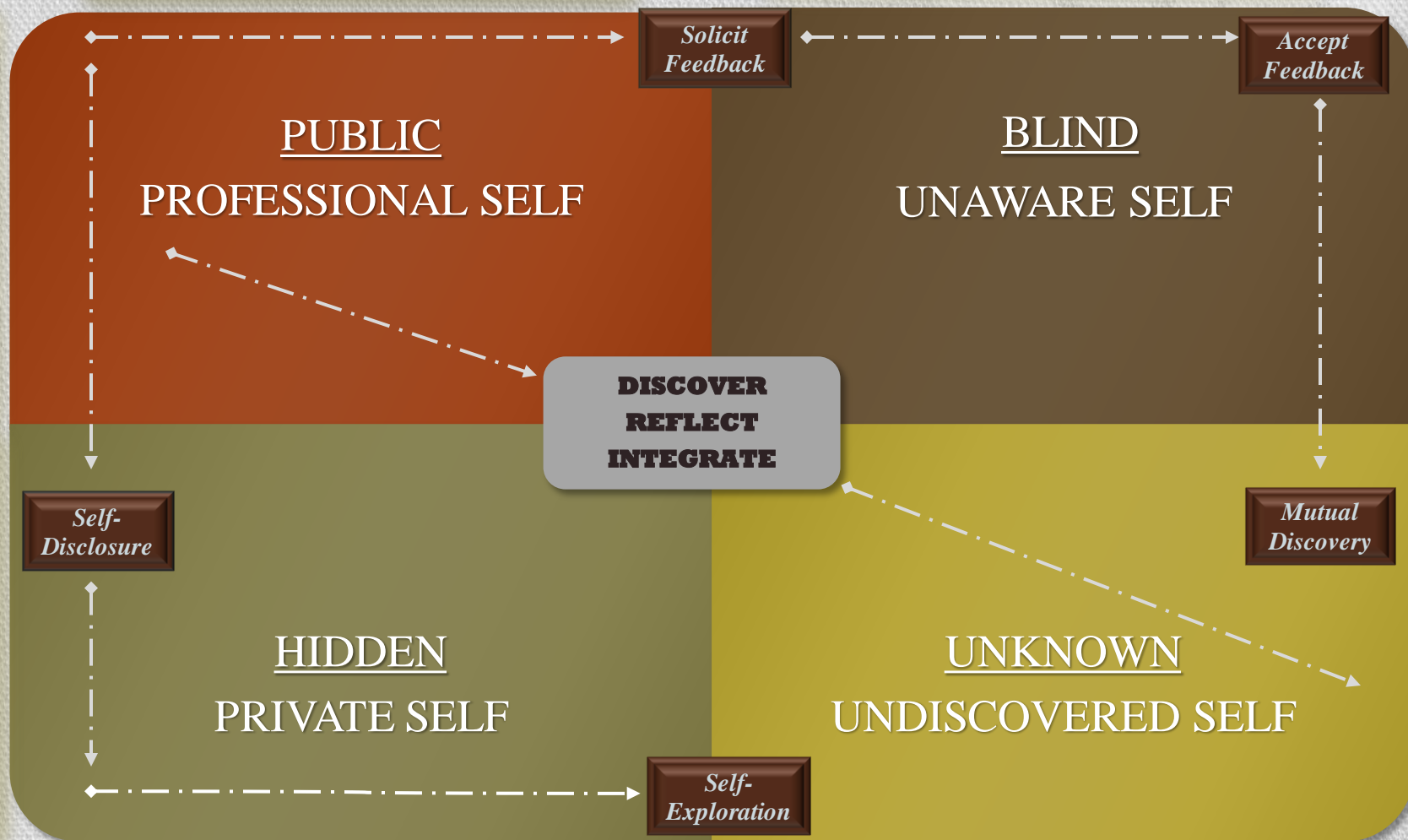


Known To Self

Unknown To Self

**Known To
Family**

**Unknown To
Family**



Professional Self-Awareness & Family Engagement

Adapted by K. Mu'Min from Luft & Ingham: Johari Window

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Professional Self

PUBLIC

Pub-lic

adj.

- Open to the knowledge or judgment of all

Known To Self



**Known To
Family**

Reflection:

Goal

- ❑ Expand PUBLIC quadrant to increase honesty, transparency, and accountability

Objectives

- ❑ Acknowledge what you do not know or understand
- ❑ Recognize the limitations of your framework/ideology
- ❑ Limit the use of technical/diagnostic language when speaking with a family

- Lack of faith in a family's competence, resilience and ability is grounded in long held beliefs about the value of professional expertise.
- The 'Expert' tends to reside in this quadrant if dominant professional discourse regarding a family goes unchallenged.
- The 'Expert' seeks to exercise power and control over a family by virtue of specialized knowledge and training.
- The 'Expert' views the family from a deficit-based point of view, highlighting pathology.
- From this viewpoint, the professional believes that his/her role is to "fix" the problematic behaviors or concerns in a family. This stance is not only disempowering and disrespectful, but potentially robs the family of an opportunity to use the therapeutic experience as a *catalyst* for change..

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Unaware Self

BLIND

Blind

adj

- Unable or unwilling to perceive or understand; Difficult to comprehend or see

Unknown To Self



Reflection:

Goal

- ❑ Minimize BLIND quadrant to understand impact of self on client and family
- ❑ Expand potential for GROWTH by being receptive and humble

Objectives

- ❑ Actively solicit feedback from Family
- “How was this for you?”
- ❑ Pay close attention to your contribution to ruptures and impasses in the Therapeutic Alliance

- Professional ‘Therapeucentrism’ is very active in this quadrant and the family experiences this as paternalistic and demeaning.

Therapeucentrism: tendency to privilege our categories of understanding clients’ lives above others. We can mistake our categories for objective facts rather than interpretative frameworks that we develop to support our work. We become oblivious to clients’ perspectives, either assuming they are the same as ours or simply placing more stock in our own values and beliefs... Therapeucentrism inadvertently suppresses the reality of different perspectives. In the process, valuable information is lost and we risk cross-cultural negotiations that are experienced by others as dishonoring them. (Madsen, p. 27)

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Undiscovered Self

UNKNOWN

Un-known

adj

- Not established or verified; unidentified

Unknown To Self



Reflection:

Goal

- ❑ Minimize UNKNOWN quadrant to discover new aspects of self which may lead to more effective engagement practices and collaboration

Objectives

- ❑ Be open, curious, willing
- ❑ Utilize supervision and team consultation to highlight those areas neither you nor the family perceive as barriers to progress



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Private Self ~ Façade

HIDDEN

Hid-den

adj

- Concealed or obscured; secret; designed to elude detection

Known To Self



Reflection:

Goal

- ❑ Minimize HIDDEN quadrant to increase confidence, authenticity
- ❑ Embark on acts of self-discovery
- ❑ Understand that who you ARE, impacts what you DO

Objectives

- ❑ Actively seek supervision
- ❑ Values clarification exercises
- ❑ Emotional Intelligence Quotient

“The stories we create influence the stories of other people, those stories give rise to still others, and soon we find meaning and connection within a web of story making and story living”

~~The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self

by Dan P. McAdams

I am aware that this quadrant fuels my strongest personal convictions and professional commitment to poor families and families in treatment. My past history fertilizes my present and future, and accounts for my commitment to honoring family wisdom and strength

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SUMMARY:

Self-awareness and reflection on strength and resiliency are critically important aspects of development for a professional working with families, particularly those families with multi-agency/professional involvement. Self-awareness improves one's capacity to challenge the predominant ideological framework about a family, focus on resiliency and address biases that diminish the ability to relate in a meaningful, restorative manner. Reflection should push an individual to challenge the “professional as expert” paradigm, and to recognize the personal biases and weaknesses which reduce the ability to engage a family in a sincere way.

From: Collaborative Therapy with Multi-Stressed Families

By William Madsen

p. 331

“Although professional identity has traditionally been rooted in client deficits, professional expertise and professional responsibility for clients... It is interesting to ponder what a definition of professionalism might look like grounded in possibilities, collaboration and professional responsibility to clients...”

“Imagine the effect if a definition of professionalism included accusations like:

- ❑ It is unprofessional to inquire about difficulties without having first built a foundation of competence, connection and hope
- ❑ It is unprofessional not to actively elicit client or family members’ wisdom that could contribute to resolving difficulties in their lives
- ❑ It is unprofessional to use objectifying language in any clinical discussion without considering how clients might experience it or how it might shape our thinking about clients
- ❑ It is unprofessional not to actively think about the ways in which our own assumptions about race, gender, class and sexual orientation affect our interactions with clients
- ❑ It is unprofessional not to routinely solicit clients’ feedback about their preferences for the direction of therapy and the effects of our actions on them.”

CONCLUSION:

As a professional, in order to work collaboratively and restoratively with a family, you must discover, reflect and integrate all aspects of the self.

Therefore, the goal is to expand the PUBLIC quadrant. From the perspective of your professional self, your task as a helper, is to be aware (minimize the blindness), discover unknown aspects of self through relationship with a family, which can also lead to personal growth, and understand the impact your personal narrative (private self) has on the stories you privilege and attend to in relationship.





CONCLUSION:

My narrative has included themes of critical self-reflection and using the challenges I have faced in the past to shape a more positive future; and to help other individuals and families do the same.

Unspoken personal histories which drive our present and future actions are essentially 'veils' we subconsciously create and perpetuate; consciously removing the veil (thereby widening the open quadrant) can be liberating. It is my hope that deliberately tapping into the power of my story and sharing it with others can be both a redemptive and restorative act.

“If you know want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. And if I want to know *myself*, to gain insight into the meaning of my own life, then I too must come to know my story... the personal myth that I have tacitly, even unconsciously, composed over the years. It is a story that I continue to revise, and tell to myself (and sometimes to others) as I go on living”
(McAdams, 1993, p. 11).

Further Reading

- Additional Resources, Suggestions, etc.

- ***Of Human Interaction (1969)***
by Joseph Luft
- ***The Self-Awareness Workbook for Social Workers (1999)***
by Juliet C. Rothman
- ***Self-Supervision: A Primer for Counselors and Helping Professionals (2001)***
by Patrick J. Morrisette
- ***Bread & Spirit: Therapy with the New Poor ~ Diversity of Race, Culture and Values (1994)***
by Harry Aponte
- ***Collaborative Therapy with Multi-Stressed Families (2007)***
by William Madsen
- ***Strengthening Family Resilience (2006)***
by Froma Walsh
- ***Therapeutic Intervention with Poor, Unorganized Families: From Distress to Hope (2000)***
by Shlomo A. Sharlin & Michal Shamai
- ***Working with Families of the Poor (2007)***
by Patricia Minuchin, Jorge Colapinto, and Salvador Minuchin
- ***The Power to Care: Clinical Practice Effectiveness with Overwhelmed Clients (1995)***
by June Gary Hopps, Elaine Pinderhughes, Richard Shankar

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CONTACT INFO:

Kameelah Mu'Min, MS.Ed

kam_mumin@yahoo.com

+1 (267) 455-4357