
Looking in the Looking Glass: A Glimpse of PAS and the Professional Development of a Counseling Psychologist

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I first met John during my doctoral training in Counseling Psychology at the University of Oklahoma in 1980. As the only African American in the program and on the Counseling Center staff at that time, I had developed a quite effective adaptive style of observing and evaluating all that I saw according to my own personal set of rules. I consistently watched for rules to play the game out in this world where I had chosen to function...a world where I knew that no one around me, at least in my immediate work and training environment, had any understanding of who I was and what I experienced on a day to day basis. Clients intrigued me, but little else. I watched; I learned; and, my primary task was always to attain my degree so that I could most effectively assist others in daily living and achievement. This task guided all behavior while attending classes and working in the center...looking for rules. Seldom were there any surprises, for I was soon becoming an expert on the identification of rules that seemed to guide most others around me. Though many of them seemed foreign to who I was, or at least how I perceived myself to be, by now, most were familiar.

That is, until I met John Gittinger. Dorothy Foster had invited John to provide an ongoing inservice for counseling center staff one afternoon a week. I had long ago rejected testing as legitimate and felt that it was a direct affront to 'my' people. To even consider the results of testing and any standardized instrument as

meaningful in any way was an anathema to me. Did I use tests? Well, of course. That was part of the game, the rules; and, even though test interpretation was somewhat of a forté for me, my skepticism remained about the competence of others, particularly Whites, to sensitively and accurately interpret test findings to those who differed culturally.

Nevertheless, this gentleman was to come and talk to the staff, both senior and junior staff, about a unique way of using the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS). "Oh-hum" was my reaction, or maybe more appropriately stated, I probably really had no reaction at all. I saw this as one more experience to observe and judge. I was mistaken.

John's unassuming gentleness was intriguing, and it was this observation that first brought up my defenses. He seemed too kind and comfortable to be true. He appeared to 'know' something that none of us did, but no arrogance was attached to this knowing. It was as if he had a story to share, maybe more an adventure, and we were invited to go along. I watched in awe as he took the profiles of my colleagues and our clients and told us who they were. Being somewhat of an expert observer, I watched him validate my perceptions of my colleagues and of my clients. I heard him tell me about my clients before I validated his assessment with my knowledge of them. I was stunned, excited,

and yet at that time, would have been much more comfortable believing him to be psychic than to believe that somehow this man had conjured this all up from a test, a standardized instrument of assessment, of all things. He was a pleasant surprise in training. The guidelines presented in order to make a Personality Assessment System (PAS) interpretation seemed to make sense. It seemed logical, but I couldn't get it out of my mind that he might have been some kind of trickster. But, my time was coming.

Soon it was my day to undergo the scrutiny of John Gittinger. I must admit that I could barely wait to stump the man. I wasn't nervous at all because I had watched him give the most sensitive assessments to other colleagues in such a manner that the only options open to the recipients were feelings of validation and awe. I was no different from any of my colleagues. For the first time in my life, I had a framework to explain and understand my sense of 'difference'. This framework assisted in reflections about my varying interactions and relationships with clients, colleagues, friends, and family. John had presented an assessment without judgment or the concept of illness. I left the overall experience with a sense that 'people are' and our primary tasks as clinicians and members of humanity are acceptance and understanding their experience as a consequence of being in this world. This felt relevant to Counseling Psychology in general, and to me as a Counseling Psychologist in training. I left with an unexpected respect for test interpretation, having been reminded that it is not the test, but the interpreter, that does damage if damage is done. I left feeling a new sense of how complex, and yet, how simple, understanding and respecting intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics could be. I left knowing and understanding myself much better. I left being able to laugh at myself in relationships to others with great ease. I smile when I think of John Gittinger and those afternoon meetings. At that time, I didn't know he was who he was. I didn't know that he had influenced world

policies and had been a mover and shaker in the US government. Once I'd been 'read', none of this would have mattered anyway.

Though I have experienced many 'ah-hah' experiences in my professional development, seldom have I had the pleasure of a "well, knock me over with a feather" experience. This exposure to John Gittinger and his PAS was one of them. As with all proselytes, I spoke of PAS wherever I went, at home, at work, and at play. The junior staff at the counseling center at that time spoke of PAS as a means of understanding each other in relationships. My husband was assessed and we learned and understood so much for the first time. I spoke of PAS during my doctoral internship. I used the assessment in supervision and clinical work. I observed friends and tried to figure out profiles. I now watch my daughter for signs of IRU (me) and EFU (my husband). I watch. Well, I guess even knowledge of PAS can't change some things (smile), yet in spite of this minor limitation, it has certainly played an important part in my personal and professional development. For the first time, John Gittinger, thank you.