

CHAPTER 2: Ways of Understanding and Perceiving Self and Others

Chapter Overview

This chapter presents seven perspectives that are used by helping professionals to understand seven ways of perceiving reality. These perspectives include the constructivist, ecological, resilience, systems, strengths, empowerment, and the dual perspectives. The opportunity to apply the concepts of these perspectives is provided through a case example.

Chapter Outline

1. Constructivist Perspective

- Constructivism focuses on how individuals describe their experiences in terms of personal constructs.
- A personal construct is an explanation of an event or series of events that becomes the lens through which the individual sees the world.
- Social constructivists focus on how relationships, language, and context influence an individual's or a group's interpretation of self, others, and the world.
- Applying the Constructivist Perspective:
 - Using a constructivist perspective helps practitioners remember that their view of the world may be different from their client's view. For example, a practitioner may think a problem is caused by physical illness, stress and demands, oppressive cultural factors, etc., but a client may have a completely different view.
 - When an individual, family, or group becomes aware of a construct that is unsatisfying or limiting, the individual can develop another meaning for events or experiences and begin to realize change is possible.

2. Family Systems Perspective

- Systems theory takes into account the entire "system" within which an individual interacts.
- A system is seen as a complex entity within which interactions are as important as individuals.
- Family systems are organized by a set of rules or patterns that enable each person to learn what is expected or permitted of him or her as well as others in family interactions.
- These rules, often unstated, help regulate and stabilize how families function as a unit.
- Changing one part of the family system will result in changes to other parts.
- A family system may be open or closed in various degrees.
 - Characteristics of closed family systems:
 - The family exists in relative isolation, with communication taking place primarily between members.
 - Change is avoided.
 - Members hold on to established traditions and values.
 - Characteristics of open family systems:

- Willingness to assimilate new information and to engage in ongoing interactions with their environment.
 - The family has no single correct way of doing things.
 - As the family matures, changes are tolerated, supported, and celebrated.
 - Applying the Family Systems Perspective:
 - Practitioners gain an understanding of how interactions within the family system affect clients.
 - Practitioners assist clients to identify reciprocal relationship between their behavior and influences of the systems within which they interact.
 - Clients realize both how someone else's behavior is influencing them and how their behavior is influencing others.
3. Ecological Perspective
- The ecological perspective views people and their environment as continuously evolving, adapting and interacting.
 - An ecological perspective is less concerned with cause and effect and more concerned with the transactions that occur between people and their environments. That is, the reciprocal processes used by people to shape their environment while being in turn shaped by their environment.
 - Additional key concepts:
 - Person-environment fit refers to how well a person's (or group's) needs, goals, and rights mesh with the traits and functioning of their physical and social environment.
 - Adaptations are the processes people use to sustain or increase the level of fit between themselves and their environment.
 - Life stressors are issues that are perceived as exceeding personal and environmental resources available to manage them.
 - Applying the Ecological Perspective:
 - Behaviors are not seen as dysfunctional or maladaptive. Instead behavior is viewed as adaptations to improve the goodness of fit between the individual and environment.
 - The ecological perspective emphasizes a focus on the strengths people demonstrate in response to a difficult situation or environment.
 - When working with a group, possible barriers to the achievement of group goals are recognized in order to gain a better understanding of how these goals might be achieved.
4. Strengths Perspective
- The strengths perspective views all people as having strengths, focusing on assets clients have developed throughout their life.
 - A strength is defined as any psychological process that enables a person to think and act in order to benefit himself or herself and society.
 - Incorporated into the strengths perspective is the belief that everyone has the capacity to develop new resources, to make positive changes, and to use his or her competencies to solve problems.
 - Applying the Strengths Perspective:

- Practitioners work with clients to identify their talents, strengths, interests, dreams, and goals.
- Practitioners invite clients to discover, think about, and figure out how to use their strengths.
- Working with individuals, families, groups, or organizations, practitioners look for their strengths, identify their resources (such as money, social support, adequate housing, education, past experiences, etc.), and invite them to focus on possibilities for the future.

5. Resilience Perspective

- Resilience is defined as the ability to survive and thrive in the face of overwhelming life challenges and is developed from the dynamic interaction of risk and protective processes involving individual, family, community and societal factors in a certain context.
- Risk factors are any influencing factors that can bring or predict negative outcomes on the functioning and overall development of the individual.
- Protective factors are any factors (strengths, capabilities, talents, coping skills, resources and assets) that can exert either direct or indirect influences to buffer, mediate, lessen or alter the negative effects of risk factor(s).
- Resilience represents both a *process* and the *outcome* of competent functioning.
- Applying the Resilience Perspective:
 - Practitioners using the resilience perspective start with an assessment of the relevant factors and then focus on helping clients build on the resilience they have developed.
 - Practitioners focus on helping clients:
 - Develop a positive outlook on life and self-confidence by increasing their awareness of their strengths and competencies.
 - Learn to maintain, promote, and enhance protective factors.
 - Recall successful events in their lives and identify what they learned from these events.
 - Identify resources within themselves and their families, friends, neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces.
 - Trust others and establish close and secure relationships with them.
 - View a mistake as a window of learning and failure as an event that does not mean they failed.
 - Focus on the present and future rather than dwelling on their past failures.

6. Empowerment Perspective

- Empowerment describes the process by which individuals, groups and/or communities take control of their circumstances to achieve their goals.
- Empowerment is a process as well as an outcome
- Applying the Empowerment Perspective:
 - Using an empowerment perspective allows clients to develop a sense of power and competency as they experience using their skills and knowledge in new and challenging ways and realize that they are able to accomplish difficult tasks.

- Practitioners can help people discover their strengths, identify their goals, and develop a plan to reach their goals, allowing clients to accept responsibility for change and experience a greater sense of empowerment.

7. Dual Perspective

- The dual perspective views an individual as interacting and adapting to two surrounding systems or environments: the nurturing environment and the sustaining environment.
 - The nurturing environment is composed of family, friends, and close associates at school or work.
 - The sustaining environment consists of the people encountered in the wider community and broader society.
- While most Euro-Americans experience these two environments as fitting together, other ethnic and racial groups experience a poor fit between them.
- Individuals in the non-dominant group constantly evaluate disappointments in life, such as not being selected for a job, to determine whether they are based on their qualifications or on racism from the dominant culture.
- They must constantly shift between the *home culture* and the dominant culture to choose acceptable behavior in each situation.
- Applying the Dual Perspective:
 - Practitioners using the dual perspective attempt to understand the structural barriers that those in other groups experience.
 - Practitioners are aware of the day-to-day challenges these clients face and keep in mind that their clients are living in two worlds: the nurturing world and the sustaining world.

Supplemental Resources

- *The Feminist Perspective: Empowering Diverse Women* by J. Worell and P. Remer published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., in 2003 also offers another perspective.
- After students have become acquainted with the various cases (introduced in Chapter 7), it is useful to return to these perspectives and invite students to reflect on the cases from differing perspectives.

Expected Competencies

Students have learned about several perspectives that can help them better understand how they and clients think, feel, and make choices. Students should now be able to:

- Give an example of how a personal construct might influence a decision.
- Describe how the ecological perspective would provide a broader view of a client.
- Compare and contrast a strengths perspective with a deficit-focused view.
- Give two examples of how the dual perspective provides a deeper understanding of a marginalized group of people.
- Explain several ways that a family functions as a system.
- Explain what is necessary for a person to gain a sense of empowerment.
- Explain the relationship between risk factors, protective factors, and resilience.

Key Words: adaptations, compelling forces, constructivist perspective, dual perspective, ecological perspective, empowerment, force field, life stressors, nurturing environment, personality, person-environment fit, personal construct, protective factors, restraining forces, resilience, risk factors, social constructivist, system, system theory, strengths perspective, sustaining environment

Answers	Test Bank: Chapter 2
	Multiple Choice:
d, p. 2, Medium	1. All of the following are ways of perceiving self and others EXCEPT a. constructivist perspective. b. dual perspective. c. resilience perspective. d. individualistic perspective.
b, p. 3, Medium	2. Which of the following is NOT an example of a personal construct? a. I am smart. b. I like eating apples. c. The world is a dangerous place. d. If you put your mind to it, you can do it.
d, p. 5, Medium	3. Language is an important factor in this process of making meaning of experiences because a. people who cannot speak often do not experience things the same way as people who can speak. b. meaning comes from what others tell you to believe. c. one cannot have experiences without language. d. the ways that people talk about themselves and their world influence their perceptions.
d, p. 5, Easy	4. Which of the following is NOT included in the text's description of personality? a. Behavior patterns b. Traits c. Characteristics d. Emotions
a, p. 5, Medium	5. Constructs are often difficult to change because a. individuals experience the ideas as truth. b. people generally don't want to change. c. there are no right or wrong constructs. d. they are hard to identify.
c, p. 6, Easy	6. _____ is important in the meaning-making process, since it influences perceptions of self and world. a. Personality b. Therapy c. Language d. Resilience
b, p. 8, Medium	7. Constructivists contend that change occurs when all of the following

	occur EXCEPT - clients see problems with their constructs. - the client adopts a new perspective at the insistence of the practitioner. - constricting personal constructs are challenged. - constructs are developed that embrace new ideas and behavioral possibilities.
d, p. 10, Difficult	8. Which of the following is NOT a characteristic of family rules? - They demonstrate the family's values. - They guide decision making. - They are influenced by culture. - They change from generation to generation.
b, p. 11, Medium	9. All of the following are characteristics of a closed family system EXCEPT - They tend to exist in relative isolation. - As the family matures, changes are tolerated and supported. - Family members are suspicious of outsiders. - Families hold onto their established values and traditions.
c, p. 14, Medium	10. Which of the following is NOT one of the three components of the ecological perspective? - Life stressors - Adaptations - Individuality - Person-environment fit
c, p. 16, Difficult	11. From an ecological perspective, if a client decides to engage regularly in cocaine use, her behavior would be considered - dysfunctional. - maladaptive. - sensible given the context. - acceptable.
a, p. 30, Easy	12. There is a direct correlation between empowerment and - level of participation. - independence. - happiness. - wealth.
a, p. 16, Easy	13. From the ecological perspective, problems arise when challenges occur in _____ environments. - unresponsive - overly responsive - family - intrapsychic
b, p. 5, Easy	14. Some of the firmest constructs of the self are developed _____. - in vitro. - in childhood. - in adolescence. - individually.
d, p. 6, Medium	15. Language is an important factor in this process of making meaning of experiences because

	a. people who cannot speak often do not experience things the same way as people who can speak. b. meaning comes from what others tell you to believe. c. one cannot have experiences without language. d. the ways that people talk about themselves and their world influence their perceptions.
d, p. 24, Medium	16. Protective factors that play a role in developing and sustaining resilience include all of the following EXCEPT a. individual and family characteristics. b. community factors. c. socio-cultural factors. d. previous stressors.
a, p. 24, Hard	17. Which of the following is NOT an example of a protective factor according to the resilience perspective? a. Being an ethnic minority b. Attachment to others c. Tolerance of negative affect d. Participation in traditional practices
a, p. 28, Hard	18. When working with a client from a resilience perspective, the practitioner should explore a. protective and risk factors, life challenges, and relationships. b. relationships, context, and person-environment fit. c. behavior, emotions, and constructs. d. life challenges, risk factors, and institutionalized racism.
b, p. 29, Hard	19. A practitioner works with the client to take control of circumstances, and develop aptitudes, strengths, and a sense of competence to be recognized as an equal. From which perspective is the practitioner operating? a. Constructivist b. Empowerment c. Family systems d. Strengths
c, p. 34, Medium	20. The dual perspective views an individual as a. having two or more identities. b. either Euro-American or ethnic minority. c. interacting and adapting to two surrounding systems or environments – the nurturing and sustaining environment d. facing two life challenges in two areas – work and home.
d, p. 34, Easy	21. Euro-Americans tend to experience a _____ fit between the sustaining and nurturing environments; ethnic and racial groups tend to experience a _____ fit between them. a. good; good b. poor; poor c. poor; good d. good; poor
b, p. 38, Medium	22. A practitioner views a client's stealing as unacceptable behavior but understandable given the context. The practitioner is likely practicing from a(n) a. constructivist perspective.

	b. ecological perspective. c. empowerment perspective. d. dual perspective
	True / False:
T, p. 36, Medium	23. The dual perspective recognizes that life is viewed differently by people in marginalized groups since culture maintains the dominant group's power by objectifying the "other."
* T, p. 8, Easy	24. The Constructivist practitioner works with clients to find out if there are exceptions to their negative constructs.
F, p. 28, Medium	25. One of the tasks of practitioners using the resilience perspective is to have clients dwell on past failures since mistakes are windows of learning.
	Short Answer:
p. 29, Medium	26. Briefly describe the internal and external components of empowerment. How might these components be addressed in treatment?
p. 21, Easy	27. Describe Appreciative Inquiry and give an example that is not already listed in the text.
p. 16, Difficult	28. According to the ecological perspective, behaviors must be viewed as adaptations that change to improve the goodness of fit between the individual and their environment. Give three examples of behaviors and how their meanings change in different environments.
p. 38, Difficult	29. Describe at least two ways to apply each of the perspectives to the following scenario: A client's excessive drinking (12 to 16 bottles of beer every evening with his drinking buddies) makes his wife angry, to the point that his wife is threatening to take the kids and leave him.
p. 21, Difficult	30. A client is struggling with suicidal urges, though he has not engaged in any suicidal attempts. Using a strengths perspective, what might you focus on? What types of questions would you ask?