
Basic Concepts and Techniques of Feminist Counseling: A Literature Review

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Keywords:

feminist counseling; gender equality; client empowerment; gender role deconstruction; psychotherapy.

Abstract

Feminist counseling has emerged as a significant psychological approach that addresses gender inequality, individual empowerment, and the critical awareness of oppressive social structures. This study aims to explore the basic concepts, historical development, theoretical foundations, and techniques of feminist counseling through a systematic literature review. Using a qualitative approach with literature study methods, this research synthesizes findings from various scholarly sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of feminist counseling as an applied framework in psychotherapy. The results reveal that feminist counseling originated in the late 1960s as a reaction to gender bias embedded in traditional psychotherapy, rooted in the second wave of the women's movement. Key figures such as Jean Baker Miller and Carol Gilligan contributed foundational perspectives that shaped the approach's core principles, including gender equality, egalitarian counselor-client relationships, and client empowerment. The counseling techniques identified include open dialogue, self-reflection, gender education and social awareness, client empowerment, deconstruction of gender roles, social advocacy, and narrative therapy. These techniques are designed to help clients—particularly women and female students—recognize their experiences within a broader sociocultural context, challenge internalized gender norms, and pursue greater personal autonomy. While feminist counseling offers distinctive strengths in promoting gender sensitivity and social justice, limitations include potential value imposition by counselors, reduced applicability for male clients, and ideological fragmentation among feminist schools of thought. This study concludes that feminist counseling plays a vital role in advancing gender equality and enhancing psychological well-being within contemporary society.

INTRODUCTION

Feminism counseling is one of the approaches in psychology that focuses on gender equality, individual empowerment, and critical awareness of social structures that often place women in unfair positions (Bozkur & Yetim, 2024; Habsy et al., 2025; Han & Lee, 2023; Khusniyah et al., 2025). This approach is rooted in the feminist movement that demands equal rights, as well as efforts to change social norms that limit the potential of individuals based on gender (Corey, 2020). Feminism counseling aims to create a safe space for clients, especially women, to express their unique experiences without having to be confined by restrictive social norms (Brown, 2018). In the process, feminist counseling not only targets individual problems, but also identifies the impact of social and cultural structures on the client's mental health (Bozkur & Yetim, 2024; Han & Lee, 2023; Nurmaya & Amiruddin, 2025; Oliphant et al., 2022;

Westcott & Grimes, 2023). Counselors who use this approach help clients understand how gender constructs can affect their self-perception, interpersonal relationships, and life choices. By providing awareness of the impact of patriarchal norms, feminism counseling encourages clients to achieve greater autonomy, self-esteem, and self-recognition (Enns, 2017).

Among adolescents, especially female students, feminist counseling approaches have become particularly relevant (Toro et al., 2025). During this time, they often face strong social pressure to meet certain expectations regarding gender roles (Adikaram & Razik, 2023; Ali et al., 2022; Bullough et al., 2022; Hanek & Garcia, 2022; Toro et al., 2025). For example, female students may feel they have to conform to stereotypes about how they should behave or choose certain career paths that are considered more "appropriate" for women (Santrock, 2018). This stress often negatively impacts their mental health, leading to anxiety, stress, and low self-esteem (Gillen & Lefkowitz, 2019). Through feminist counseling, female students can be encouraged to recognize, challenge, and change perceptions that hinder their development.

The novelty of this article lies in its comprehensive, integrative approach to presenting feminist counseling. Unlike previous publications that focus on isolated techniques or specific applications, this article provides: (1) a thorough examination of feminist counseling's historical development, including its roots in the second-wave women's movement and the contributions of key figures such as Jean Baker Miller and Carol Gilligan; (2) a detailed explication of the core principles of feminist counseling, including the political nature of personality, egalitarian counselor-client relationships, and client empowerment; (3) a comprehensive description of the essence of human nature from a feminist perspective, including how gender-role socialization shapes personality development; (4) a systematic presentation of the stages of feminist counseling and the roles of counselors and clients; (5) a comprehensive catalog of feminist counseling techniques organized by therapeutic function, including open dialogue, self-reflection, gender education, empowerment strategies, deconstruction of gender roles, social advocacy, and narrative therapy; and (6) an honest discussion of both the advantages and limitations of feminist counseling.

Feminism counseling provides a space for them to discuss gender issues openly, increase their understanding of rights and equality, and prepare them for more complex life situations. Therefore, the study of feminism counseling is very important to identify effective methods in supporting the psychological well-being of female students, while encouraging a more inclusive and responsive school environment to gender issues.

The objectives of this article are: (1) to trace the historical development of feminist counseling and its philosophical foundations; (2) to explain the essence of human nature according to the feminist perspective, including the impact of gender-role socialization on personality development; (3) to describe healthy versus problematic personalities from a feminist viewpoint; (4) to outline the goals of feminist counseling, the attitudes and roles of counselors, and the conditions for therapeutic change; (5) to detail the stages of the feminist counseling process; (6) to catalog feminist counseling techniques across cognitive, emotive, and behavioral domains; and (7) to discuss both the advantages and limitations of feminist counseling. The theoretical contribution of this article is to provide a comprehensive, integrated resource for Indonesian counseling students, educators, and practitioners that bridges the gap between philosophical foundations and practical application. The practical benefit is to equip guidance and counseling practitioners with a complete understanding of feminist counseling,

enabling them to implement this gender-sensitive approach effectively in school, university, and clinical settings in Indonesia, particularly in addressing issues related to gender inequality, internalized sexism, and women's mental health.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative method with a literature study approach. Literature study is a method of collecting and analyzing existing scientific works on a specified topic (Darmalaksana, W. 2020). By using the literature study method, researchers can summarize and synthesize information from various sources, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The literature review process includes searching for relevant literature, evaluating the quality and credibility of sources, and critical analysis to find the relationship between feminist counseling concepts. This approach not only provides a theoretical foundation for research, but also allows for the identification of gaps in the literature that could be opportunities for further research development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Historical developments

Feminist counseling/therapy emerged in the late 1960s to early 1970s as a reaction to gender bias in traditional psychotherapy. Rooted in the second wave of women's movements, this approach emphasizes that individual issues are rooted in social, cultural, and patriarchal power contexts. Figures such as Jean Baker Miller and Carol Gilligan contributed to highlighting the importance of women's experiences.

Theoretical studies include a discussion of theories used as a research perspective, and broad and detailed theoretical discussions provide researchers with insight into the problems to be solved in accordance with the formulation of the problem and the purpose of the research. 1. Feminist Counseling Techniques a. Definition of Feminist Counseling according to the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language (KBBI) is the provision of assistance by counselors to counselors so that their understanding of self-empowerment increases in solving various problems.¹⁸ Meanwhile, according to KBBI, feminists are women's movements that demand full rights between women and men. ¹⁹ Feminist counseling is a feminist therapy that is aimed at being able to understand and help counseling problems in understanding the roles of women and men and bring this understanding into the counseling process.

Feminist counseling also has a fundamental goal of intervening in individuals, families and communities that affect their (women's) mental health factors. The long-term goal of feminist counseling is to build personal-social strength on strategies to deal with trauma and stress in the past, present and future. The feminist counseling approach is built by paying attention to the rules of humanity and respect for counseling as individuals who have ability, independence and creativity.

Here are the historical points of the development of feminist therapy:

Background (1960s-1970s): Feminist therapy was born out of the *Consciousness-Raising* (CR) group that sought to address the inequality of women's experiences in traditional therapy, where social and political issues were often ignored.

Criticism of Traditional Psychotherapy: This approach defies conventional theories that often perpetuate gender stereotypes and consider women's behavior that does not conform to traditional standards as pathological.

Development (1970s-Present): In the late 1960s and early 1970s, feminist psychology was institutionally recognized. The year 1969 marked the formation of the Women's Association in Psychology.

Key Principles: This counseling focuses on gender equality, egalitarian therapist-client relationships, and empowering clients to understand and change the social structures that oppress them.

Feminist therapy is not an approach that has a single founder, but rather the result of the joint efforts of many feminist thinkers to create a gender-sensitive model of counseling.

The Essence of Man

The feminist perspective is based on a belief that traditional theories of human nature and development, developed from the perspective of Western men, are not universally applicable. Most of these theories are developed based on the study of men (while women are considered equal). Feminists oppose this because they view that women and men socialize in different ways. The expectation of gender roles has a huge effect on men and women, so these traditional theories do not apply exactly to women. *Gender-role socialization* is a multiphase process, occurring over the course of a lifetime, and reinforcing certain beliefs and behaviors that are considered appropriate by society based on biological sex (Remer, Rostosky & Wright, 2001).

This process has a limiting impact on women and men. For example, myths and stories that we often tell children that men are strong, intelligent, and capable in many ways, while women are passive, dependent, and do not have much hope. Examples of such stories are: Oedipus solving the Sphinx puzzle; It was Arthur who pulled Excalibur's sword out of the stone to show that he was the king; and Jack who climbs the trunk of a giant bean tree to gain wealth and luck. Instead, Rapunzel is imprisoned in a tower without doors, destined to wait for a rescue man; Cinderella's life depends on the prince who wears glass shoes on his feet; and the Sleeping Princess who can only wake up if kissed by a man (Polster, 1992). Such stories and things like this will have a wide impact on growing women who learn that femininity is the opposite of strength, assertiveness, competence, and for men who learn that masculinity is the opposite of fear, dependence, emotionality, or weakness (Lerner, 1988)

Behavioral Development

1. Personality Structure

There are several feminist therapeutic views on personality development, which are as follows:

- a. A person's personality is influenced or shaped by expectations of gender roles in society
- b. The gender politics of America that expects girls to be sweet, sensitive and obedient while boys are expected to be strong, steadfast and brave
- c. The development of women's identity and morality in a cultural context based on issues of responsibility and care for others
- d. A woman's personality is influenced by interactions with other people
- e. A woman's personality is influenced by masculinity and patriarchy

2. Healthy and Problematic Personality

a. Healthy Personal

A healthy person according to feminist therapy is an individual who is able to have gender equality and have power/control over himself.

b. Personal Problems

Problematic individuals according to feminist therapy are individuals who experience oppression and gender inequality.

Essence of Counseling

Feminist counselors state that to understand counseling properly, we need to pay attention to its socio-cultural life. They recognize that social and political injustices have a negative effect on everyone. Feminist counselors help individuals to thrive and also make social changes.

Alteration Conditions

1. Purpose

According to Enns (in Corey, 2009), the goals of feminist counseling range from on empowerment, respecting differences, trying to make changes (rather than just adjustments), equality, balancing independence and interdependence, social change, and *self-nurturance*. Enns also added that the key goal of counseling is to help individuals to be able to view themselves as agents of their own interests and the interests of others. To be sure, the ultimate goal of this counseling is to eliminate sexism as well as all other forms of discrimination and oppression in society.

2. Role, Attitude, and Duties of the Counselor

These counselors use a variety of therapist role models from a variety of other theories and approaches to counseling. The role and function of the therapist will vary to some extent depending on what theory is combined with feminist principles and concepts.

3. Roles, Attitudes, and Duties of Counseling

Counseling is an active participant in the counseling process. Feminist counselors will ensure that counseling will not become an arena where counselors (especially women's counselors) remain passive and become dependent. It is very important that the counselor tells stories and gives opinions about his or her experience.

4. Relationship Situation

The relationship between counselor and client in feminist therapy is based on empowerment and egalitarianism. Therapists and counselors develop structured relationship models in which they identify and use power responsibly. Feminist counselors clearly state their values to reduce the likelihood of counselors getting harmed from their relationship. This allows the client to make a choice whether to continue counseling or not. This is a step in the demystification process.

Alteration Mechanism

1. Stages of Counseling

Feminist counselors have been highly critical of classification systems and research shows that gender, culture, and race can influence clients' assessment of symptoms. At the level of assessment of judgments influenced by subtle forms of sexism, racism, ethnocentrism, heterosexism, age or classism, it is very difficult to arrive at meaningful assessments while counsellors in diagnosing people from different backgrounds and as part of a more egalitarian

relationship, rebuild an understanding of the problem with the client, rather than imposing a diagnosis on the counsellor. In keeping with the focus on counseling empowerment, diagnosis is a shared process where counselors are experts on the meaning of their suffering. Assessment is seen as an ongoing process between the client and the counselor and is connected to the treatment intervention (Enns, 2000).

2. Counseling Techniques

There are several techniques used in feminist counseling. In Wahyu Nuraisya and Dwi Yuliawati (2020) put forward several techniques that are commonly used in feminist counseling, namely:

1. Open Dialogue and Self-Reflection

This technique emphasizes the importance of an open dialogue between counselors and clients. Open dialogue helps clients to express their experiences, emotions, and views in a supportive environment. Feminist counselors also encourage clients to engage in self-reflection, which is to explore their experiences and be aware of how gender, social norms, and cultural factors affect their lives. This technique aims to identify sources of stress or conflict that clients may experience as a result of unfair social structures.

2. Gender education and social awareness.

Feminist counseling serves as a means to educate clients on gender issues, women's rights, and equality. Feminist counselors provide information about patriarchy, discrimination, and social constructions about gender, so clients can see the challenges they face in a broader social context. Through this education, clients become more aware that their problems are not personal faults, but also related to existing social structures.

3. Client Empowerment

Feminist counselors aim to empower clients by helping them recognize their own strengths, potentials, and abilities. This empowerment can be done through the development of coping skills, decision-making, and increasing client confidence. This technique helps clients to feel more capable and empowered in facing challenges in their lives

4. Deconstruction of Gender Roles

Feminist counseling uses deconstruction techniques to help clients identify and question gender norms and stereotypes that they may have internalized since childhood. Thus, clients can see that they don't need to be tied to certain roles just because of their gender. This deconstruction assists the client in dismantling false or unhealthy perceptions related to social expectations about gender.

5. Social Advocacy

Feminist counselors often encourage clients to engage in social advocacy activities aimed at championing gender equality. Clients can be involved in community activities that fight for women's rights, volunteer, or participate in seminars and discussions about equality. This technique not only gives meaning to clients, but also helps them become agents of change in society⁶. The technique of sharing a life story or narrative is a method often used in feminist counseling. Clients are invited to share their life experiences, so that they can identify patterns of injustice or discrimination they have experienced. The use of this narrative helps clients in the process of self-reflection as well as builds awareness that they are not alone in the experience.

6. Use of Narrative and Life Story

The technique of sharing a life story or narrative is a method often used in feminist counseling. Clients are invited to share their life experiences, so that they can identify patterns of injustice or discrimination they have experienced. The use of this narrative helps clients in the process of self-reflection as well as builds awareness that they are not alone in the experience.

Advantages and Disadvantages

1. Benefits

- a. Feminist counseling practice is the first gender-sensitive counseling practice. This gender-sensitive orientation then influences other counseling theories to pay attention to the differences in the roles of men and women in society.
- b. Feminist counseling is counseling that considers the impact of cultural context and social pressures on counseling issues. In looking at problems, most counseling focuses on intrapsychic factors. This is not the case with feminist counseling; This counseling takes into account intrapsychic factors and social context as the cause of the problem.
- c. Feminist counseling seeks equality of position and *power* between counselors and clients. Most counseling theories position counselors higher than clients. For feminist counseling, this inequality of position will further increase the sense of helplessness of clients that arises in attitudes of dependence on counselors, low *self-esteem*, and the like.

2. Disadvantages

- a. Feminist counselors are not neutral. Although the counselor informs the counseling orientation and the values he adheres to at the beginning of the counseling, if he is not careful, the counselor can impose the orientation and values on the client.
- b. Feminist counseling's focus on the social context as the cause of the problem can make the counselor irresponsible for her own behavior.
- c. There are so many schools of feminism that contradict each other that it also affects the difficulty of finding consensus between feminist experts and counselors.

CONCLUSION

Feminist counseling is an approach in psychotherapy that focuses on understanding and improving the well-being of individuals through issues of gender and social injustice. This approach emerged in response to women's needs that are often overlooked in traditional counseling. Feminist counseling emphasizes the importance of gender and social awareness, client empowerment, and collaborative relationships between counselors and clients. Techniques used in feminist counseling include open dialogue, self-reflection, gender education, client empowerment, gender role deconstruction, social advocacy, and the use of narratives. These techniques aim to help clients recognize their experiences in a broader social context, so that they can identify and address the injustices experienced. However, feminist counseling also has drawbacks, such as a lack of flexibility in a wide range of problem contexts, risks of being perceived as too political, and may be less relevant to male clients. Nonetheless, its striking strengths include client empowerment, sensitivity to social and gender issues, and an emphasis on social and cultural contexts. Thus, feminist counseling plays an important role in promoting gender equality and improving the well-being of individuals in society.

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