

Feminist Perspectives in Therapy

Empowering Diverse Women

SECOND EDITION

Judith Worell
Pamela Remer



WILEY

FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES IN THERAPY

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Judith Worell and Pam Remer

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FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES IN THERAPY

To our four feminist daughters,
Amy, Beth, Randa, and Wendy

Preface

The field of counseling and psychotherapy with women is relatively new. The first book on counseling women was published in the 1970s. On a parallel track, the development of a feminist approach to counseling and psychotherapy is also relatively recent. Several new journals have appeared and are now thriving that address the psychology of gender and women, as well as therapeutic issues in treating women clients. The research is expanding, new applications of feminist principles are appearing in the literature, and more theorists are paying attention to both the goals and the process of feminist therapy with women. As a result, many of the theories and research data that now appear in mainstream literature, such as those related to sexual assault and violence against women, were introduced and promoted by the insightful work of feminist researchers. As new applications and insights develop, there is a need to organize and expand on current views, to integrate them with contemporary theoretical positions, and to suggest applications of these ideas to practical case materials with a diverse range of clients.

The changing demographics of the United States and the globalization of concern for issues of importance to women have added new dimensions to our understanding of women and the multiple problems that confront them. No longer do we speak of the universal woman. Rather, we recognize that the diversity of cultures, religions, ethnicities, and individual characteristics of our clients requires us to attend to the meanings that each client assigns to her life experiences. Thus, we explore each client's concerns within the framework of her personal and social identities. The convergence and integration of feminist and multicultural perspectives in psychotherapy is critical and timely. In the second edition to this book, we have created a new model that moves toward achieving this goal.

A number of core issues related to the psychological health of women suggest the need for a specialty in feminist psychological practice with women. Among these issues are (a) the special problems that women bring into the therapeutic setting; (b) the continuing gendered socialization and institutionalized oppression of women; (c) the inadequacies of contemporary theory, research, and practice in addressing the lives of diverse women; and (d) the development of innovative approaches to conceptualization and intervention with women. The application of feminist and multicultural principles to psychological intervention with women calls for additional integration of theory with practice. Finally, topics requiring additional consideration include diagnosis and assessment, ethical practices in counseling with women, research applications, and the training of psychological practitioners.

In this book, we have synthesized the diverse strands of feminist theory to create *Empowerment Feminist Therapy*. This model integrates both feminist and multicultural perspectives. Individual chapters address core issues in counseling women in the context of these two major perspectives and apply them to a sample of clients with diverse identities. The book is useful both to beginning graduate students as an introduction to counseling

women and to more advanced and professional clinicians. Advanced professionals may want to discover and integrate these emerging approaches into their therapeutic repertoire, or they may selectively adapt text materials for workshops and continuing education training. Each chapter contains a self-assessment pretest on knowledge or attitudes, an introductory overview, a chapter summary, and activities to enhance self-awareness and application. The self-assessment and applied exercises are excellent learning strategies and contribute to the usefulness of this book as a classroom or continuing education text. The underlying theme of the text emphasizes that effective psychological practice with women clients requires an awareness of personal stereotypes about these client populations, an understanding of self in relation to the diversity of women, and a sensitivity to the special psychological and social environments within which women's development takes place.

The authors are both feminist clinicians with wide experience in teaching, research, and therapeutic practice with women. As educators, we have an understanding of the principles of effective instruction, and we include components in the text that contribute to the learning process. As feminist educators, we believe learning is a collaborative process, and our students have contributed in important ways to our perspectives. As clinicians, we have both been active in the establishment and administration of a community mental health clinic. In this capacity, we infused our ideas about feminist principles into the values and operation of the agency. As psychologists, we have both been active in a range of feminist organizations and have participated in numerous conferences that address feminist and multicultural issues. Many of the ideas in this book have grown out of our experiences with putting feminist ideas into action.

Coming from clearly different theoretical viewpoints and employing a contrasting range of therapeutic goals and strategies, we each contribute to this project in unique ways. Through exposition in theory and case materials, we demonstrate how therapists with differing views can apply the principles of Empowerment Feminist Therapy with a diversity of women and can integrate these principles into their practice. Thus, the approach may be useful for individuals who prefer particular theoretical positions and who may differentially emphasize experiential, affective, cognitive, or behavioral strategies in their practice. Because more than two-thirds of the clients in nonresidential settings are women and increasing numbers of diverse women are in need of psychological services, it is incumbent on the therapist in training to become knowledgeable and competent in the important issues surrounding the well-being of all women.

Since the first edition of this book, we have developed many new understandings. Among these is an increased appreciation for the ways in which each individual constructs her personal and social identities. We have become more aware of the importance of addressing the complex intersects of these identities as they function in the context of women's lives. This insight required that we revise and expand the principles of feminist therapy to incorporate the impact of diverse social locations on problems in living. The process of revising our model involved reflecting anew on who we are and what social locations we occupy. We acknowledge a limitation in our expertise. As White, married, able-bodied, middle-class, and relatively privileged women, we struggle to understand and appreciate the lives of our diverse sisters. Throughout the book, we include applications to women from heterogeneous groups, but we necessarily view them through our own lens. The reader who wishes to apply the principles in this book to groups other than those we cover may wish to supplement the suggested references with further reading. We also made hard decisions about what topics to cover. We

mention briefly many issues for women that require a much lengthier volume: body image, eating disorders, multiple concerns with health, sexuality, growing older and aging, distressed relationships, and so on. We hope that the selected sample of women's concerns will provide a model for feminist practice and research with other issues as they arise in your professional experiences.

We believe it is important to communicate to the reader about the way in which the book was written. As committed feminists, we dedicated ourselves to a collaborative and cooperative project. We view collaboration as a process in which each contributor has an equal part, but in which each may contribute in differing ways. For us, the collaborative venture involved an interrelated set of processes that included trust, protection, egalitarianism, respect, flexibility, self-disclosure, and affirmation.

In trusting ourselves and each other, we felt free to take risks with ideas and suggestions without fear of ridicule or criticism. In respecting each other's identity, we each valued and validated the other's theoretical and epistemological views. Neither of us attempted to mold the other to her own image. In maintaining an egalitarian working relationship, we each reserved the right to contribute our own knowledge, skills, and expertise to the format and content, and to contribute more substantially to those chapters in which we felt most competent. In doing so, we each maintained respect for the other's expertise and the legitimacy of her views, even when disagreements occurred, as indeed they did. In negotiating conflict, we each valued the other's perspective as real and legitimate, and we tried to apply our counseling skills to the process of active listening and offering constructive feedback. Throughout the process of writing this book, we attempted to maintain flexibility and openness, looking at each issue from alternative perspectives.

In applying feminist principles to the lives of other women, we tried as well to apply them to ourselves. In this context, we valued personal self-disclosure and shared the events in our lives that helped to frame current perspectives. We discovered that we are both survivors; between our two lives we have experienced incest, rape, wife abuse, sexual harassment, career and employment discrimination, dual-career marriages, motherhood, divorce, single parenting, grandparenting, and the professional superwoman syndrome. We have coped with our "Woman's Body" through menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, hysterectomy, menopause, growing older, and an endless obsession with thinness. For us, then, the personal became political as we considered the external forces that shaped our lives and the personal triumphs that enabled us to emerge empowered with strength and self-affirmation.

We have come to realize that all women are survivors, having faced and met special challenges as a result of being women in a society that devalues women. We celebrate our success in meeting stress and challenge with creative solutions. In writing this book, we shift the focus from "Woman as Problem" to "Woman as Survivor and Thriver." In doing so, we acknowledge our own strengths as we affirm each other. And we celebrate and appreciate the many wonderful and courageous women whose lives have contributed to the collective tapestry of this book.

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First, we want to extend a very special appreciation to the men who share our lives, Rory Remer and Bud Smith, for their continuing support and encouragement.

We also want to recognize the many people who were important to us in the process of completing this task: friends, students, mentors, clients, family, reviewers, and the many women whose lives construct the fabric of this book. Naming some of these people probably leaves out some others—in particular, the following played important roles:

Diane Banic	Sherman Lee
Adena Bargad	Jeanne Marecek
Adam Blatner	Lori Montross
Andrea Blount	Melissa Moose
Redonna Chandler	Roberta Nutt
Carolyn Enns	Danielle Oakley
Linda Forrest	Rory Remer
Rachel Hare-Mustin	Damon Robinson
Carl Hollander	Sherry Rostosky
Janet Hyde	Janice Steil
Dawn Johnson	Rhoda Unger
Norine Johnson	Karen Wyche
Shirley Lange	Alice Zollicoffer

Prologue

We are born into, grow up, and grow old in a society that teaches us that the democratic phrase "all men are created equal" does not include women.

Benokaritis & Feagin, 1986

This is a book about women, but it is also a book about yourself. In reading this book and its perspectives on the lives of women, you may arrive at a place that is different from where you started. You may revise your views and thinking about some theories, clinical interpretations, and information about women's experiences in contemporary society. In your journey through the book, you may begin to revise some of your attitudes toward women's roles and your ideas about the value of feminism in professional practice. We hope you begin to view the world through a different lens.

The self-assessment "Self and World Views" that follows will be a useful way for you to evaluate some of the ways in which your ideas and attitudes change. Before you start to read the book, take a few minutes to complete the inventory and to score yourself on the four factors on the profile. At the end of the book, we ask you to complete the inventory once more, thereby evaluating the extent of change, if any, on each of the four factors. We hope this exercise will lead to some insights for you. The best way for you to determine its utility is to commit yourself to a pre- and postassessment. Your scores should be your own personal property, but sharing the outcomes with a partner or friend may be an enlightening experience. Please try it.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: SELF AND WORLD VIEWS

Look at the series of statements that follow. Some of these statements represent ideas about how the world works. Other statements are about how people might describe themselves. Read each statement carefully and decide to what degree it currently describes you or your ideas about the world. Then select one of the five answers that best describes your present agreement or disagreement with the statement.

For example, if you strongly agree with the statement, "I like to return to the same vacation spot year after year," you would rate the statement by writing the number 5 in the space provided. Remember to read each statement carefully and decide to what degree you think it describes your views at the present time.

- | | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
-
- ___ 1. I don't think there is any need for an Equal Rights Amendment; women are doing well.
- ___ 2. I used to think that there isn't a lot of sex discrimination, but now I know how much there really is.
- ___ 3. I just feel like I need to be around people who share my feminist point of view right now.
- ___ 4. I want to work to improve women's status.
- ___ 5. I think that most women will feel most fulfilled by being a wife and a mother.
- ___ 6. It only recently occurred to me that I think it's unfair that men have the privileges they have in this society simply because they are men.
- ___ 7. Being a part of a feminist community is important to me.
- ___ 8. On some level, my motivation for almost every activity I engage in is my desire for an egalitarian world.
- ___ 9. I've never really worried or thought about what it means to be a woman in this society.
- ___ 10. When you think about most of the problems in the world—the threat of nuclear war, pollution, discrimination—it seems to me that most of them are caused by men.
- ___ 11. My social life is mainly with women these days, but there are a few men whose friendship I enjoy.
- ___ 12. I have a lifelong commitment to working for social, economic, and political equality for women.
- ___ 13. If I were a woman married to a man and my husband was offered a job in another state, it would be my obligation to move in support of his career.
- ___ 14. It makes me really upset to think about how women have been treated so unfairly in this society for so long.
- ___ 15. I share most of my social time with a few close friends who share my feminist values.
- ___ 16. It is very satisfying to me to be able to use my talents and skills in my work in the women's movement.
- ___ 17. I do not want women to have equal status with men.
- ___ 18. Recently, I read something or had an experience that sparked a greater understanding of sexism.
- ___ 19. Especially now, I feel that the women around me give me strength.
- ___ 20. I care very deeply about men and women having equal opportunities in all respects.
- ___ 21. I think that men and women had it better in the 1950s when married women were housewives and their husbands supported them.
- ___ 22. When I see the way most men treat women, it makes me angry.
- ___ 23. If I were to paint a picture or write a poem, it would probably be about women or women's issues.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

- ____ 24. I feel that I am a very powerful and effective spokesperson.
- ____ 25. I don't see much point in questioning the general expectation that men should be masculine and women should be feminine.
- ____ 26. I am angry that I've let men take advantage of women.
- ____ 27. Particularly now, I feel most comfortable with others who share my feminist point of view.
- ____ 28. I am very committed to a cause that I believe contributes to a more fair and just world for all people.
- ____ 29. I am not sure what is meant by the phrase "women are oppressed under patriarchy."
- ____ 30. I am willing to make certain sacrifices to effect change in this society to create a nonsexist, peaceful place where all people have equal opportunities.
- ____ 31. Generally, I think that men are more interesting than women.
- ____ 32. I think that rape is sometimes the woman's fault.

Scoring

The scale that you have just completed is a revised version of the Feminist Identity Development Scale (FIDS) discussed in Chapter 12. Both women and men can use this scale for self-assessment. To score your responses, please follow the following format. For each factor, add the numbers you assigned to each item in the scale to determine the total. Then, divide by the number of items in the factor: Insert this score in the grid provided, under the column for Pretest.

Factor I:	Items 1, 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 25, 29, 31, 32	Total/10
Factor II:	Items 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, 22, 26	Total/7
Factor III:	Items 3, 7, 11, 15, 19, 23, 27	Total/7
Factor IV:	Items 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, 24, 28, 30	Total/8

Factor	Score	
	Pretest	Posttest
I: Acceptance	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
II: Revelation	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
III: Embeddedness	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
IV: Commitment	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

At the completion of the book, we ask you to take the scale once more. After scoring your responses again, insert the factor scores in the column under Posttest. Assess any change and discuss with a friend or colleague. What have you discovered? See p. 318 for a display of scores.

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PART 1

FOUNDATIONS OF FEMINIST THERAPY

The groundwork for becoming a feminist therapist extends far beyond a discussion of theory and technique. Working with women who seek help requires that you are aware of and understand the full context of their experiences and development across the lifespan. Readers may wonder why we have limited our focus to counseling and therapy with women, since many of the techniques and strategies of feminist therapy are applicable to both women and men. Excellent materials on the psychology of men and masculinity (e.g., Good & Sherrod, 2001; Levant, 2001), and on feminist family therapy for heterosexual couples (Silverstein & Goodrich, 2001) provide valuable sources for redefining the male self and patterns of relationship between women and the men that impact their lives. However, the extensive volume of recent theory and research as well as the scope of our own expertise led us to concentrate this book on issues that are relevant to the lives of girls and women.

New research on the importance of cultural diversity and pluralism on women's experiences made it critical that we integrate multicultural and feminist perspectives into a cohesive model for feminist practice. The task of integrating the experiences of inequality and oppression across the diversity of women with the goals and practices of feminist counseling and therapy is a challenging one. In this book, we attempt to meet this challenge with the full recognition that it offers not a recipe for practice, but a guidepost to helping you on your journey to becoming a competent multicultural feminist practitioner.

Part I provides the foundation for feminist therapy by offering a perspective in which to view the experiences of girls and women from the diverse context of their lives. The two introductory chapters set the stage for viewing the development of women's personal and social identities in contemporary society. First, we provide a rationale for recognizing the field of counseling and therapy with women as a separate specialty. In this framework, we explore concepts related to sex, gender, feminism and feminist psychology, multicultural diversity, and empowerment. We outline a feminist empowerment model of women's mental health that we apply to the process and outcomes of Empowerment Feminist Therapy (EFT) with women. This model offers a positive and enabling approach to intervention for the concerns that motivate women to seek help. Next, we

2 Foundations of Feminist Therapy

review the changing roles for women and men in contemporary Western societies, and relate these changes to the issues that women bring to counseling. We consider the psychological worlds of developing women from a range of social identity locations, pointing to the complex interplay of variables such as gender, ethnicity, sexual and affectional orientation, age, socioeconomic class, culture, physical characteristics and abilities, national and regional origin, and religious commitment. We consider how these factors intersect to influence gendered socialization practices and other external forces that shape who we are as women and men. Finally, we explore the psychological advantages of egalitarian relationships.

The remaining two chapters of Part I expand the discussion of feminist therapy and explore its application to diagnosis, assessment, and theory transformation. First, we describe the worldview assumptions that underlie EFT. The four principles of EFT are presented and we provide specific goals and strategies for each principle. We then assist you in integrating your current theorizing about how to do counseling and therapy in an empowerment feminist format. Finally, we present a critique of mainstream assessment and diagnosis and offer alternative strategies that are more compatible with a feminist perspective.

Each chapter begins with a self-assessment and ends with experiential exercises and further readings. The self-assessments are designed to encourage you to be reflective about your attitudes, values, and beliefs about women and men from differing cultural and social standpoints. Many of the self-assessments involve stereotypes that are commonly held by members of Western cultures. Although you may believe that you are unbiased, we challenge you to complete these self-assessments conscientiously. Do any of your current attitudes reflect biased attitudes or stereotyped thinking? Are these stereotypes primarily negative or positive? It might be interesting to retake each self-assessment after you have read the chapter and compare your two sets of responses. The exercises, on the other hand, bring you into more personal contact with the material covered in the chapter by asking you to apply some of the concepts to your own experiences. The exercises may be completed alone, but you will find it more enjoyable and enlightening to share your responses with a colleague or friend. At the end of the book, a final assignment is to retake the "Self and World Views" assessment on page 331 and consider how your progress through this book has altered your overall views and attitudes about women and men in all their diversities, and about yourself.

Chapter 1

FOUNDATIONS OF FEMINIST COUNSELING AND THERAPY

SELF-ASSESSMENT: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN

A series of statements concerning women and men and their relationships in contemporary society follow. Please indicate in the space to the left the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement using the following scale:

0 = Disagree strongly; 1 = Disagree somewhat; 2 = Disagree slightly;
3 = Agree slightly; 4 = Agree somewhat; 5 = Agree strongly

- _____ 1. No matter how accomplished he is, a man is not truly complete as a person unless he has the love of a woman.
- _____ 2. Many women are actually seeking special favors, such as hiring policies that favor them over men, under the guise of asking for "equality."
- _____ 3. In a disaster, women ought not necessarily be rescued before men.
- _____ 4. Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist.
- _____ 5. Women are too easily offended.
- _____ 6. People are often truly happy in life without being romantically involved with a member of the other sex.
- _____ 7. Feminists are not seeking for women to have more power than men.
- _____ 8. Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess.
- _____ 9. Women should be cherished and protected by men.
- _____ 10. Most women fail to appreciate fully all that men do for them.
- _____ 11. Women seek to gain power by getting control over men.
- _____ 12. Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores.
- _____ 13. Men are complete without women.

(continued)