

A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE FEMINIST COUNSELING APPROACH IN THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION AND GENDER EQUALITY

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Abstract

The feminist counseling approach emerged as a response to patriarchal bias and power inequality embedded in traditional psychological theories and practices. This paper aims to conceptually analyze the theoretical foundations, objectives, techniques, and relevance of feminist counseling within the context of education and gender equality, including its integration with Islamic values. Drawing from both classical and contemporary sources such as Brown (2018), Enns (2004), Corey (2016), and hooks (2000), it is revealed that feminist counseling is not merely a therapeutic model but a critical framework that positions power relations, social context, and gender justice as integral components of counseling practice. This approach promotes empowerment through egalitarian relationships, validation of women's experiences, and the development of critical awareness toward oppressive social structures. Integrating Islamic principles further enriches the framework through its emphasis on justice, spiritual equality, and human dignity as reflected in the Qur'an. Within educational settings, this approach is relevant for strengthening the role of school counselors in fostering gender awareness, egalitarian character, and holistic personal development.

Keywords: Education , Feminist Counseling, Gender Equality



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INTRODUCTION

Feminist counseling (Feminist Therapy) is a humanistic and critical paradigm that rejects the traditional view that psychological problems stem solely from the individual (Lightly dkk., 2025). This approach emerged as a response to gender bias embedded in mainstream psychology, where male experiences were often treated as the universal standard for understanding human behavior (Zhang dkk., 2025). Feminist Therapy posits that social, cultural, and political factors particularly patriarchal structures and unequal power relations play a significant role in shaping an individual's psychological experiences (Morgan dkk., 2025). Originating from the second wave of the feminist movement in the 1960s, this approach emphasizes that therapeutic processes cannot be separated from the social context in which clients live.

A central principle in feminist counseling is the notion that "the personal is political," which highlights that personal experiences often reflect broader social realities (Mudiope dkk., 2025). Feelings of powerlessness, anxiety, or low self-worth experienced by women, for instance, do not always arise from intrapsychic dynamics, but are frequently the result of gender-based socialization that restricts their opportunities (Settegast dkk., 2025). From this perspective, counseling not only serves to support individual healing, but also helps clients understand the structural roots of their challenges and reclaim personal empowerment to pursue social change (Özcan & Temiz, 2025). Thus, feminist counseling constitutes both a psychological and social liberation movement aimed at promoting equality and justice for all genders.

Within the educational context, issues of gender inequality remain prevalent at various levels (Banaei dkk., 2025). Although women now have wider access to formal education, discriminatory practices and gender stereotypes continue to manifest in everyday school life (Wang dkk., 2025). Female students, for example, are often expected to be compliant, gentle, and emotional, whereas male students are encouraged to be rational and dominant (Anos dkk., 2025). Such expectations hinder individual potential and reinforce unequal social systems (March dkk., 2025). As a result, many learners especially girls internalize social roles that limit their aspirations and undermine their sense of self-worth (Weinryb dkk., 2025). This highlights the strategic role of guidance and counseling in helping students cultivate self-awareness and challenge restrictive gender constructs.

Guidance and counseling teachers carry both moral and professional responsibilities to create a counseling environment free from gender bias (Dominguez-Cancino dkk., 2025). Through a feminist counseling approach, they can develop services that are humanistic, egalitarian, and empowerment-oriented (Sande dkk., 2025). The principle of relational equality positions the counselor-client relationship as a collaborative and respectful partnership rather than a hierarchical one (Abdurrahman dkk., 2025). This approach enables students, both male and female, to recognize their personal strengths and develop authentic identities (Vynnytska dkk., 2025). Effective guidance and counseling must be grounded in respect for human dignity, diversity, and social justice values that align closely with the spirit of feminist counseling.

Furthermore, applying a feminist counseling approach in educational settings aligns with Indonesia's national education mission, which emphasizes character development, equality, and universal humanity (Yulianti dkk., 2026). In schools, the principle of empowerment can be implemented through various counseling services, including assertiveness training, gender role analysis, and reflective activities that foster critical awareness of social stereotypes (Wiss & LaFata, 2025). Such initiatives allow learners not only to understand gender differences, but also to develop the capacity to advocate for equality in their daily lives (Morganti dkk., 2025). In this way, feminist counseling can serve as a transformative instrument for promoting a fair, inclusive, and humanizing learning environment.

Based on these considerations, a conceptual analysis of the feminist counseling approach is essential for examining its relevance within the context of education and gender equality in

Indonesia (Pienahah dkk., 2025). This analysis is expected to broaden both theoretical and practical understanding in the field of guidance and counseling, while reinforcing the commitment of counseling teachers to develop services that are gender-sensitive, culturally contextual, and grounded in values of social justice and humanistic spirituality.

RESEARCH METHOD

The following section contains the type of research, research design, targets/subjects, procedures, instruments, and data analysis techniques used in this study (Chachu & Maboe, 2025). The details are organized into sub chapters using sub-headings written in lowercase with an initial capital letter, following the formatting guidelines.

Research Design

This study employs a conceptual literature review utilizing a descriptive-analytical approach. The core design involves a comparative analysis of various scholarly sources concerning the theories and practices of feminist counseling. This design aims to produce a theoretical synthesis that is contextually relevant to education and gender equality, focusing specifically on five core analytical dimensions.

Research Target/Subject

The research target is the body of scholarly literature encompassing the theories and practices of feminist counseling. The data are drawn from both classical and contemporary works, including influential scholars such as Brown, Enns, Corey, hooks, Miller, and Worell & Remer (among others) (Caldwell dkk., 2025). The subject of the analysis is the conceptual content derived from these sources, rather than human participants.

Research Procedure

The research procedure began with the systematic identification and collection of seminal texts and contemporary research relevant to feminist counseling. This was followed by a focused, deep reading and coding process (Kim & Lecavalier, 2025). The procedure involved extracting and organizing information from the literature based on the five core analytical dimensions: historical development/theoretical foundations, perspectives on human nature, goals/fundamental principles, counseling techniques, and educational relevance/integration of Islamic values (Yuan dkk., 2025). The final step involved the theoretical synthesis and comparative analysis across these dimensions to generate new insights.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

The primary instrument used in this study is a conceptual coding framework designed around the five core analytical dimensions (historical context, goals, techniques, etc.). The main data collection technique is systematic document analysis (or literature study). This technique involves the comprehensive review and extraction of theoretical arguments, definitions, and practical applications from the selected scholarly sources.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis technique is descriptive-analytical. This involves interpreting and comparing the extracted conceptual data across the five defined dimensions (Frigerio, 2025). The analysis focuses on identifying similarities, differences, and thematic convergence among the diverse sources (Peel, 2025). The ultimate goal is theoretical synthesis, wherein the various theories and practices are integrated and critically evaluated to propose a feminist counseling model that is contextually relevant, particularly regarding its integration with educational practices and Islamic values.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Feminist counseling emerged as a response to androcentric biases within classical psychological theories that positioned male experience as the universal norm. During this period, psychology tended to overlook women's experiences by treating men as the standard of normality and women as deviations. Early critics challenged these assumptions by arguing that many concepts related to female inferiority stemmed from patriarchal cultural norms rather than biological factors. Further critiques highlighted the ways psychiatry had been used to regulate women's behavior and reinforce traditional and oppressive gender roles.

In the 1970s, new theoretical contributions expanded the foundation of feminist counseling. One major development was Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT), which emphasized that women grow through mutually supportive relationships characterized by empathy and connection. This perspective reframed women not as inherently weak but as individuals whose psychological strength emerges through meaningful relational bonds.

Another significant contribution came from the argument that women possess a distinct moral voice rooted in an ethic of care, as opposed to justice-oriented frameworks that tended to reflect masculine norms. This perspective challenged developmental theories that ranked moral reasoning using criteria that favored male patterns of thinking.

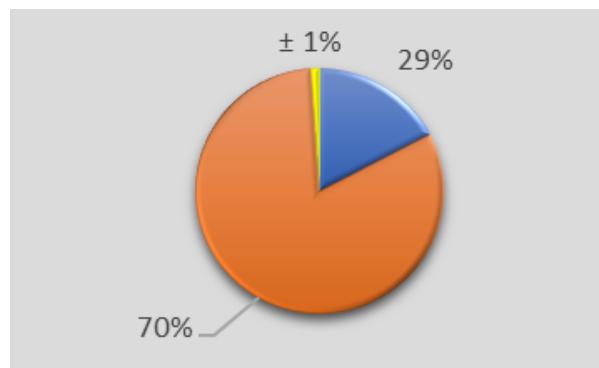


Figure 1. Thematic Distribution of Key Theoretical Contributions to Feminist Counseling

Additionally, the influence of critical pedagogy strengthened the emphasis on awareness of sociopolitical structures within feminist counseling. It reinforced the idea that personal struggles cannot be detached from broader systems of oppression, shaping the core principle that "the personal is political" within feminist therapeutic practice.

Altogether, Feminist Therapy evolved from the convergence of social movements, psychological theory, and liberation-based philosophy. It adopts an intersectional perspective by acknowledging the interplay of gender, social class, race, and religion in shaping individual experience. This approach has become a significant paradigm in contemporary counseling due to its integration of social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions.

Feminist Therapy presents a distinctive view of human beings as social, political, and spiritual entities (Orie dkk., 2025). It holds that individual identity develops through social interaction and power relations, meaning psychological problems cannot be fully understood without examining their social context. The principle that "the personal is political" underscores the notion that individual suffering often reflects structural inequalities and the influence of patriarchal norms.

This perspective argues that feelings such as guilt, insecurity, or powerlessness should not be interpreted merely as personal shortcomings, but rather as outcomes of social systems that marginalize women (Kanga-Parabia dkk., 2025). Accordingly, feminist counseling helps individuals recognize the external origins of their distress and cultivate critical awareness of their surroundings.

Relational-Cultural Theory further explains that human development is rooted in healthy and supportive relationships (Alhajiri dkk., 2025). Oppressive or disconnected relationships hinder psychological growth, while empathetic and respectful connections foster emotional well-being.

From an Islamic standpoint, human beings are regarded as inherently dignified and equal in the sight of God (Wyman dkk., 2025). The Qur'anic view affirms that men and women are created from a single origin, highlighting equality as a fundamental moral principle. This perspective reinforces the values of justice and gender equality supported within Feminist Therapy.

The primary goals of Feminist Therapy are empowerment and the development of critical consciousness (Thompson dkk., 2025). This approach helps individuals understand the social, cultural, and political forces that shape their lives, while simultaneously strengthening their capacity to challenge oppressive conditions.

A core principle of this approach is the egalitarian relationship between counselor and client (Rajagopaul & Naidoo, 2025). The counselor does not function as an authoritative figure but rather as a collaborator in the client's process of awareness and growth. This relational equality reflects moral values such as mutual respect, consultation, and human solidarity.

Another foundational element is the commitment to social change. Personal transformation is viewed as meaningful only when accompanied by broader social transformation. Within educational settings, these principles can help students understand how their environment shapes their self-perception and interactions with others (Volovăț dkk., 2025). Counselors may use this approach to encourage confidence among female students and promote empathy and fairness among male students.

Techniques used in Feminist Therapy are intentionally flexible to support self-awareness, challenge social domination, and strengthen individual autonomy. Common techniques include, Gender Role Analysis: Helping clients understand how socially constructed gender roles influence personality and life choices, Power Analysis: Identifying forms of power imbalance in daily life and exploring strategies for reclaiming personal agency, Self-Disclosure: Allowing counselors to share personal experiences in a balanced way to build trust and egalitarian relationships, Assertiveness Training: Helping clients express thoughts, feelings, and rights in a healthy and confident manner, Reframing and Relabeling: Assisting clients in interpreting negative experiences from a more constructive perspective, Bibliotherapy and Social Action: Encouraging clients to read inspirational stories and engage in social activities that promote awareness and advocacy. In educational contexts, these techniques can be adapted to suit students' developmental stages: At the elementary level, counselors may use illustrated stories to introduce values of gender equality and mutual respect, In middle and high school, assertiveness training can help students develop confidence when speaking in group settings, At the university level, students may be encouraged to participate in social projects such as gender-awareness campaigns or seminars on preventing sexual violence.

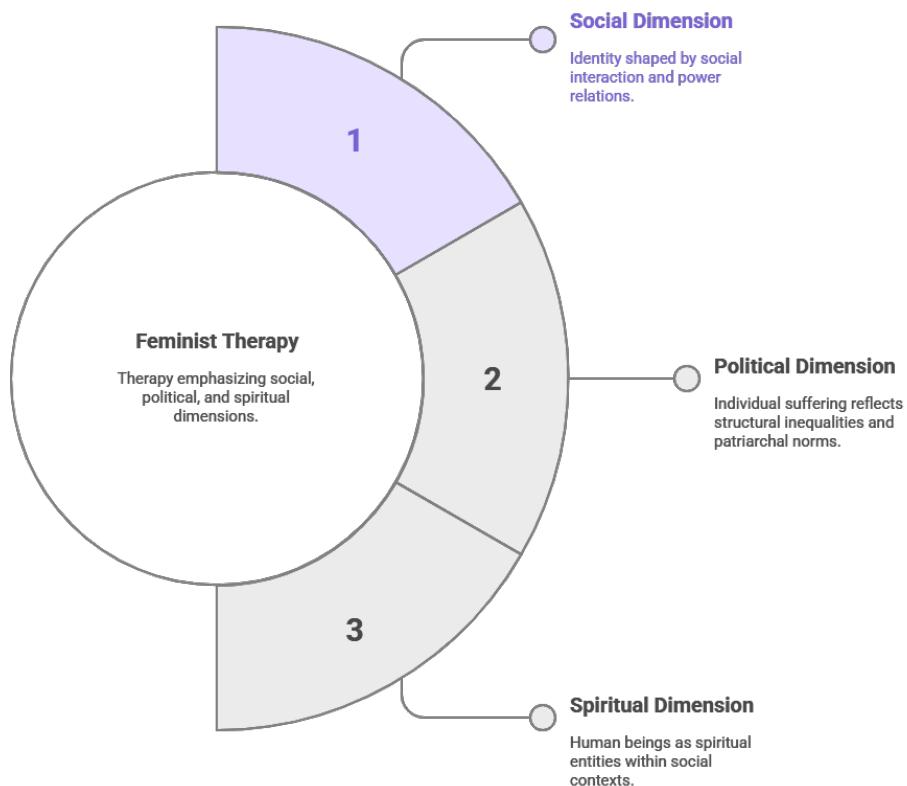


Figure 2. Unveiling the Dimensions of Feminist Therapy

Integrating Islamic values enriches Feminist Therapy by incorporating dimensions of spirituality and moral ethics (Nygård dkk., 2025). The concept of equality is firmly rooted in Islamic teachings, which describe men and women as originating from a single soul and emphasize that neither is inherently superior to the other.

A spiritually grounded counseling approach encourages awareness of social justice and universal compassion. This integration does not aim to transform Feminist Therapy into a religious model but rather to complement it with ethical principles that align with justice, dignity, and human welfare (Wainstein dkk., 2025). In schools, counselors can connect empowerment principles with moral teachings that emphasize promoting good and preventing injustice.

The application of Feminist Therapy in education is highly relevant for promoting a learning environment that is equitable, reflective, and respectful of diversity (Hochman & Santasier, 2025). Counselors serve as agents of social change who help students understand the influence of gender stereotypes and roles on their behaviors and aspirations.

Feminist counseling can be integrated into the three main functions of school guidance and counseling: Developmental function, by instilling awareness of equality from an early age, Preventive function, by reducing the risk of discrimination, bullying, and gender-based violence, Remedial function, by assisting students facing identity crises or experiencing social injustice.

This approach supports the achievement of the Eight Dimensions of the National Graduate Profile by fostering: Spiritual awareness of equality before God, Civic responsibility rooted in justice and social participation, Critical reasoning to examine cultural influences on thought and behavior, Creativity through freedom of expression beyond gender stereotypes, Collaboration built on equal and respectful partnerships, Independence through confidence and healthy decision-making, Emotional and social well-being supported by empathy and self-regulation, Communication skills grounded in openness and respectful assertiveness.

Implementation varies across educational levels: In elementary schools, counselors may use role-play to teach cooperation and fairness. In middle and high schools, discussions on social issues such as gender stereotypes in media can deepen student understanding. In universities, social advocacy projects may be used to cultivate empathetic and justice-oriented leadership (Lambinon dkk., 2025). Thus, feminist counseling functions not only as a psychological intervention but also as a comprehensive strategy for character formation and social awareness within modern educational settings.

CONCLUSION

The feminist counseling approach emerged as a response to patriarchal biases embedded within traditional psychological theories that often overlooked women's experiences and perspectives. This paradigm seeks to critique and dismantle oppressive social structures by situating individual experiences within broader social, cultural, and political contexts. Its focus extends beyond resolving personal issues, aiming instead to cultivate critical consciousness so individuals can recognize the social factors contributing to their problems. Thus, empowerment becomes the central element of the feminist counseling process, viewing every individual as possessing the strength and reflective capacity to understand themselves and their environment.

From a humanistic-transcendental perspective, feminist counseling regards human beings as spiritual creatures with inherent dignity and equality before God. Islamic values—such as justice, compassion, and respect for human dignity—strengthen the moral foundation of this approach. Principles of divine unity, justice, and equality reflected in the Qur'an reinforce that the pursuit of gender equity aligns with Islam's universal humanitarian teachings. Therefore, feminist counseling is not a movement of opposition toward men but a collective effort to establish balanced, respectful, and just human relationships.

In educational settings, the application of feminist counseling plays a strategic role in cultivating an inclusive learning environment that values diversity and upholds fairness. Guidance and counseling teachers act as facilitators helping students develop self-awareness, understand the influence of social roles on their behavior, and build the confidence to express themselves in healthy ways. Through techniques such as gender role analysis and assertiveness training, students learn to strengthen their self-esteem, enhance empathy, and develop critical thinking concerning restrictive social norms. This process supports the development of learners who are intellectually capable, emotionally mature, and socially aware.

The feminist counseling approach also aligns with the Eight Dimensions of the Indonesian National Graduate Profile, encompassing faith and piety, citizenship, critical reasoning, creativity, collaboration, independence, health, and communication. Through its reflective, empathetic, and participatory values, feminist counseling helps students cultivate a balanced integration of moral, social, and spiritual intelligence. Students are encouraged to become individuals who are faithful yet critical of injustice, cooperative without losing autonomy, emotionally healthy, communicative, and committed to upholding human values.

Academically, feminist counseling provides new avenues for the advancement of guidance and counseling studies in Indonesia. It offers a foundation for research exploring the effectiveness of gender-equitable counseling techniques, the development of inclusive school-based counseling models, and the integration of spiritual values into modern educational frameworks. This paradigm also enriches discussions on critical pedagogy and character formation by positioning guidance counselors as agents of social transformation who foster reflective awareness and justice within the school environment.

Overall, feminist counseling is more than a therapeutic approach; it is a consciousness movement that integrates humanity, social justice, and spirituality. Within educational practice, it serves as a pathway to shaping empowered, empathetic, and justice-oriented generations—individuals who think critically while remaining grounded in faith and human dignity. Feminist

counseling reminds us that true education does not merely cultivate cognitive intelligence, but liberates individuals from various forms of injustice and oppression, guiding them toward lives of peace, equality, and dignity.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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