Chapter 12

Feminist Therapy

Key Concepts of Feminist Therapy

- Problems are viewed in a sociopolitical and cultural context
- The client knows what is best for her life and is the expert on her own life
- Emphasis is on educating clients about the therapy process
- Traditional ways of assessing psychological health are challenged
- It is assumed that individual change will best occur through social change
- Clients are encouraged to take social action

Four Approaches to Feminist Therapy

1. Liberal Feminism
   - **Focus**
     - Helping individual women overcome the limits and constraints of their socialization patterns
   - **Major goals**
     - Personal empowerment of individual women
     - Dignity
     - Self-fulfillment
     - Equality

2. Cultural Feminism
   - Oppression stems from society’s devaluation of women’s strengths
   - Emphasize the differences between women and men
   - Believe the solution to oppression lies in feminization of the culture
     - Society becomes more nurturing, cooperative, and relational
   - Major goal of therapy is the infusion of society with values based on cooperation

3. Radical Feminism
   - **Focus**
     - The oppression of women that is embedded in patriarchy
     - Seek to change society through activism
     - Therapy is viewed as a political enterprise with the goal of transformation of society
   - **Major goals**
     - Transform gender relationships
     - Transform societal institutions
     - Increase women’s sexual and procreative self-determination

4. Socialist Feminism
   - Also have goal of societal change
   - Emphasis on multiple oppressions
   - Believe solutions to society’s problems must include consideration of:
     - Class
     - Race
     - Other forms of discrimination
   - Major goal of therapy is to transform social relationships and institutions
Principles of Feminist Therapy

- The personal is political
- Personal and social identities are interdependent
- The counseling relationship is egalitarian
- Women’s experiences are honored
- Definitions of distress and “mental illness” are reformulated
- There is an integrated analysis of oppression

Goals of Feminist Therapy

- To become aware of one’s gender-role socialization process
- To identify internalized gender-role messages and replace them with functional beliefs
- To acquire skills to bring about change in the environment
- To develop a wide range of behaviors that are freely chosen
- To become personally empowered

Intervention Techniques in Feminist Therapy

- Gender-role analysis and intervention
  - To help clients understand the impact of gender-role expectations in their lives
  - Provides clients with insight into the ways social issues affect their problems
- Power analysis and power intervention
  - Emphasis on the power differences between men and women in society
  - Clients helped to recognize different kinds of power they possess and how they and others exercise power

Bibliotherapy

- Reading assignments that address issues such as:
  - Coping skills
  - Gender inequality
  - Gender-role stereotypes
  - Ways sexism is promoted
  - Power differential
  - Society’s obsession between women and men with thinness
- Self-disclosure
  - To help equalize the therapeutic relationship and provide modeling for the client
  - Values, beliefs about society, and therapeutic interventions discussed
  - Allows the client to make an informed choice

Assertiveness training

- Women become aware of their interpersonal rights
- Transcends stereotypical sex roles
- Changes negative beliefs
- Implement changes in their daily lives

Reframing

- Changes the frame of reference for looking at an individual’s behavior
  - Shifting from an intrapersonal to an interpersonal definition of a client’s problem

Relabeling

- Changes the label or evaluation applied to the client’s behavioral characteristics
- Generally, the focus is shifted from a negative to a positive evaluation
Third-Wave Feminist Approaches

- Postmodern feminists provide a model for critiquing both traditional and feminist approaches
- Women of color feminists assert that it is essential that feminist theory be broadened and be made more inclusive
- Lesbian feminists call for inclusion of an analysis of multiple identities and their relationship to oppression
- Global/international feminists take a world-wide perspective in examining women’s experiences across national boundaries