

A Feminist Group Counseling Model to Address Asian Female Pastors' Self-Esteem Related Issues

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Received August 17th, 2013; revised September 22nd, 2013; accepted October 19th, 2013

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A feminist group counseling model for Asian female pastors was developed and introduced in this manuscript. A major issue that this feminist group counseling model presented was based on Asian female pastors' lives and work in a patriarchal church structure guided by traditional patriarchal theology and culture. This model is applicable to the improvement of Asian female pastors' self-esteems and gender-related issues such as Asian female pastors' leaderships, intimate relationships, family of origins, and finance independence. This model is based on the positive feedback from 25 group sessions of five groups that were applied to 27 Asian female pastors. The application and recommendations for using this model are included in this article.

Keywords: Group Counseling Model; Gender Issues; Female Pastors; Self-Esteem

Introduction

Meyers (2004) introduced feminist perspectives on the *Self*. "In law, in customary practice, and in cultural stereotypes, women's selfhood has been systematically subordinated, diminished, and belittled, when it has not been outright denied" (para. 1). Meyers also argued that "[t]he claim that women are systematically subordinated and that this subordination has a grievous impact on women's lives is central to feminism" (Reclamation, para. 5). A feminist group counseling model for Asian female pastors (AFPs) has been developed to address Asian female pastors' self-esteem related issues. This model, originated by Author (2009), is based on the feedback from 25 group sessions of five groups involving 27 AFPs.

The application and recommendations for using this model are included in this article. This group counseling model is not a value-free counseling model in that the theoretical framework is grounded on feminist theology and feminist counseling in order to effectively address AFPs' self-esteem issues. Although the development of characteristics and behavior common to women are different from, but not less than those of males (Gilligan, 1982), feminists offer critiques by pointing out that women and men are limited through stereotypical sex roles assigned by society (Dutton-Douglas & Walker, 1988). The emphasis that society places on the disparity in characteristics and skills between men and women is a false stereotype developed artificially and perpetuated by the socialization process (Dutton-Douglas & Walker). Unfortunately, according to Worell and Remer (1992) sex-roles stereotype women on their whole lifespan development: "Sex-role conceptions affect the way we think about and evaluate ourselves" (p. 42). Major issues that this

feminist group counseling model presented were based on Asian female pastors' (AFPs') lives and work in a patriarchal church structure guided by traditional patriarchal theology and culture. Many times their congregations and male colleagues felt it inappropriate for AFPs to take a leadership role in the church. They struggled against such an ideology every day. For example, in our group sessions with AFPs, we found AFPs were often defined as assistants to male pastors. They were many times viewed as either *too weak* or *too tough* in comparison to a male pastor's leadership. In other words, this was a lose-lose situation for female pastors, because they were placed in a position to be compared with men. Since they are not men, it becomes an unfair and distorted game for AFPs. They often tried too hard to fit standards that may not have been suitable for them. They started to limit themselves in assistant roles solely because they had consistently heard such an ideology. They and the church did not believe it to be natural and fair to have a senior female pastor in the church or a female moderator in the presbytery or in General Assembly. Meyers (2004) introduced feminist perspectives on the *Self*. "In law, in customary practice, and in cultural stereotypes, women's selfhood has been systematically subordinated, diminished, and belittled, when it has not been outright denied" (para. 1). Meyers also argued that "[t]he claim that women are systematically subordinated and that this subordination has a grievous impact on women's lives is central to feminism" (Reclamation, para. 5).

Purpose of the Model and Overview of the Model

The purpose of this feminist group counseling model for

Asian female pastors (AFPs) is to improve AFPs' self-esteems. An approach is used that integrates feminist theology and feminist counseling to deal with Asian female pastors' self-esteem related issues. Regarding feminist theology, this feminist group counseling model for Asian female pastors uses biblical female stories and feminist commentaries to help AFPs narrate their own stories in focus groups. Focus groups are used in this model to provide AFPs an opportunity and a trustworthy environment to feel safe and to trust enough to share their personal experiences and to voice their deep feelings and their true thoughts with other female pastors in the groups. The feminist group counseling model for Asian female pastors includes discussion topics that are focused on gender-related issues. This approach was applied to five groups which consist of 27 female pastors participants who voluntarily took part in this study and had worked in a local church or church organization from three to over 25 years. The 27 AFPs were recruited through invitation e-mails sent out to all the female pastors that are on the list serve of the Female Pastor Association in Taiwan, and all members shared common backgrounds that assisted greatly in communicating and exchanging their experiences with one other on an intellectual, emotional and visceral level. A whole-day group took place with these 27 pastors who were recruited nationwide and were divided into five groups which took place in five cities in Taiwan. Feminist perspectives are provided as feedback along with the discussion process. All varieties of voices and values, traditional or liberal, are respected in the groups, even when the group members challenge one another's values.

Three evaluative questions were asked at the beginning of the closure session to qualitatively evaluate their changes in their self-esteem, self perspectives, and new awareness toward four important areas of their lives. Question one was: "After a full day session, what new perspectives about the subject of self-esteem have you gained?" Question two was: "How do you think and feel differently about yourself now?" Question three was: "Through reading and discussing the four stories in the Bible, what are some new thoughts and awareness that you received about each sub-subject, AFPs (Asian Female Pastors) and their leadership, AFPs and their intimate relationships, AFPs and their family of origin, AFPs and their ability to be economically independent?" These three questions were purposefully asked to gather data for research question two. Lastly, the participants were asked to write a short prayer to God as an offering and gift to the group. Also, if they chose to do so, the participants could share their prayer with other group members. While evaluating how the focus group helped the participants with their self-esteem, the following four themes were found: a) validation from within, b) AFPs' goals: finding my own leadership styles, c) more self-awareness, and d) my gender is great and my existence is valuable.

Theme 1: Validation from Within

The participants oftentimes felt encouraged by other group members' sharing and their old belief systems were also challenged by other participants. They felt safe and comfortable to share their experiences and inner voices in the group. Through the process, they felt empowered and validated by simply being themselves and sharing with each other. They started to believe that even the Church system does not validate and support them, they needed to look for validation from within in order to gain higher self-esteem. For example, here are a few statements

from my participants' evaluation of their day's experiences. One said,

從前，我總是從其他人找到肯定。今天我學習到了我需要肯定我自己。我不需要靠別人的掌聲與讚美來肯定自己。

I used to look for validation from others. Today, I have learned that I need to value myself. I do not need others' applause and praise to feel good about myself.

Another one stated,

要提高自尊，第一，我們需要學習自我接納，堅持我們的努力。相信上帝呼召我們成為女傳必有祂的目的。

To gain higher self-esteem, first of all, we need to learn to accept ourselves and to be persistent in striving to do those things that we want to do. I believe God had His/Her own purpose when He/She chose us to become female pastors.

A participant stated,

我要學習更欣賞自己。

I want to learn to appreciate myself more.

Another continued to say,

我今天的學習就是多一點的自我肯定，多愛自己，因為我們通常會先想到別人，我覺得要更多愛自己，更多接納自己。甚至可以不在意別人怎麼看待你。可以自己勇敢向前走。

The lesson I have learned today is to love myself a bit more, to accept myself a bit more. I used to love others more than I love myself. I care too much how people look at me and how they judge me. I need to care less and march forward bravely.

And one made a little prayer saying,

親愛的天父上帝，謝謝您對我們的愛，知道自己是獨特有價值的，謝謝祢讓我成為女性。

Dear God, thank You for loving me; because of Your love, I know that I am special and worthwhile. Thank You for creating me as a woman.

Through the prayer, she expressed the value of being a woman and feeling validated again. The following statement made by one of the participants clearly and strongly represents the theme—*validation from within*:

在一天過後，我所有的最深刻的體會是，要先看重自己存在的價值，不貶低自己，清楚自己的長處與特質，不用去跟別人做比較，不用想去像別人、學別人，我所要問的是有沒有發展出上帝所給我的特質。

For me, the most important lesson learned today is that I need to value myself before people around me can start valuing me. I need to learn not to devalue myself, but rather, to know my own strengths and characters. I do not need to compete with others, nor do I need to become someone else. What I need to ask myself is whether I can fully live out the potentials that God gives me.

Very similar messages were conveyed many times by different participants. It is fair to draw the conclusion that female

pastors look for validation more from within, and this includes being certain about their precious value as women in God's eyes. Here is a quote from another participant who felt her values and high self-esteem should not be coming from outside but from inside and should be an affirmation from God's perspective:

這是我今天在分享中更肯定與確信的，可以更清楚更確信說自我價值並不是決定於環境或者是其他的人，而是決定於上帝與你，上帝怎麼看你，你就要怎麼看自己，當然，人會受周遭環境的影響，但是，這些影響並不能影響上帝對你的看法。

Through today's discussions, I am further affirmed that the value of self is not determined by others or by the environment; it is determined by God. God values you; you should value yourself. Of course, we will all still be influenced by our environment on a day-to-day base; however, we should remind ourselves that God would never change His views for us.

One participant said,

通過今天的討論，幫助我對自己有更深的認識，也對自己的角色再一次有更多的肯定與認同，也幫助自己去調整面對別人對我有不同的期待，特別是價值觀有衝突的時候，怎麼去面對，去自處。

Today's group discussions help me accept my roles more and help me adjust and assert myself when facing conflicts.

Another participant said,

透過今天的過程，我知道自己想要什麼，我決定要更堅定自己，如果是我所喜歡的，是上帝把我擺在這裡，神有祂的美意，我會更堅定，知道神有在帶領。我現在單身，有現在的快樂與自由，不必急著走入家庭。在我現在的環境，雖然沒有完美，但我已經很滿足。

Through today's group process, I found out what I am looking for. I will be more assertive about my purpose and goal. I am more certain that God is leading my way and God placed me here in my ministry. I am single now; therefore I can enjoy my solitude, freedom, and happiness. I don't need to rush into marriage just because of society's point of view.

A participant learned,

講到自尊，我學習到要愛別人也要愛自己，才可以達到真正的高自尊。

Talking about self-esteem, today I learned that I need to love others as well as love myself so that I can achieve true high self-esteem.

Another participant said to the group,

我不斷在學習不要讓自己做一個「應該」要是怎樣的人。

From today, I want to keep reminding myself of not being limited by all the "shoulds" and "oughts" of my belief.

Theme 2: AFPs' Goals: Finding My Own Leadership Styles

Through the group process, female pastors in Taiwan were encouraged to establish their own styles of leadership by find-

ing their own strengths and potentials. They said,

在領導權的討論時間裡，我得到一個新的啟發，好的領導權是找到自己的潛能與長處，發揮在對的環境中。

In the leadership discussion session, I discovered that good leadership means to find our potentials and to use them fully in the right environment;

我認為女性的能力並不輸給男生，但我認為我們要發揮上帝所賜女性的特質去完成上帝所交給我們的使命；

I do not agree that women are less competent than men are; however, I do think that we women need to live out the strengths and characters that God has created in us and to fulfill the mission that God assigns us;

肯定自己女性的角色與特質在加上與神建立親密的關係，就會發展出屬於自己很棒的領導權。

I think that to validate my feminine characteristics and to build a solid and intimate relationship with God is the key to assuming great leadership.

Further, they said things such as:

女性在領導權上要形塑自我的風格，覺得自己的能力在哪裡就去做；

Women need to form our own leadership styles. We must find our strengths and abilities and carry them out; and

我們女性要找到適合自己的職場去發揮，如果找到不是和自己的地方，就永遠在挫折，我所服事的教會是一個弱小的教會，相對對女傳的部份會比較接納，在那個地方就比較少挫折。

Women need to find our own territory which will allow us to live out our potentials. If we are in an unfit working environment, we will constantly feel frustrated. For example, the church I am serving now is a small church. They greatly appreciate me as their minister because it is hard for them as a small church to have a pastor willing to serve them for a long time.

The participants described leadership styles using terms such as humble, non-directive, communicative, diplomatic, more initiative, and not second to man's leadership.

They described the leadership styles they want to establish as follows:

我想在領導權上學習成為更圓滑的領導者。

I want to learn to be a more well-adjusted, diplomatic, and polished leader;

女性的領導善於溝通，特別是在同工關係中若有摩擦時。

I think one example of feminine leadership is demonstrated when there is communication even though there are conflicts between the colleagues.

One participant especially stated what she has learned through the Bible story and the commentary that we use in the group.

女性的領導風格一定不一樣，像底波拉一樣，大家去請教她的意見，必定是出於內心敬重此人的意見。我

要努力的是成為一個很謙卑的領導人，是由下往上的領導，不是由上往下的領導。

I now think women's leadership can be unique and special. For example, we learned about Deborah's leadership. The people of Israel would go to her for her decision. I want to learn to be more like Deborah and earn people's respect. People came to her willingly, not because of a mandatory requirement. My leadership would not be authoritative and directive, it would be humble and non-directive.

One participant made the following remarks related to finding her female style of leadership:

關於領導權，有實權的領導，有心靈的領導，上帝的領導；我也在思想傳統的領導風格與女性的領導風格有何區別，有待我去釐清。

About leadership, I think that some lead through power, some lead spiritually, and some simply follows God's guidance. Many times, I wonder what the differences are between the traditional style of leadership and uniquely feminine way of leadership. I may need to take more time to figure it out.

Participants also shared their struggles during the group process and finally found their direction as female pastors. They said,

在讀底波拉的領導權時，我注意到我內心中的抗拒。因為我以前是較刻板與傳統的，認為女性的領導權應該是在男性之後，在緊湊的研討之後，我看到底波拉在不平等性別當中，與其他同工的互動，忠實活出神僕人的角色。

In reading about Deborah's leadership, I noticed some resistance in me. I always thought that the female's leadership should be behind (second to) the male's leadership. In our discussions, I see that Deborah was loyal to the role that God assigned her, which was to lead men.

and

要比較勇敢與積極，我過去就是要配搭而已，我沒有要當牧師，上帝就慢慢帶，必須要學底波拉，常常去棕樹下坐著，勇敢積極肯定自己的角色。

I used to identify myself as a helper and assistant in my ministry. After reading Deborah's story and the commentary, and from going through the discussions, I want to learn to be braver and take more initiative as Deborah did when she sat under a palm tree and gave advice to people who came for her decisions.

A female pastor spoke for many other female pastors with a very strong statement,

雖然台南縣市是全台灣大男人主義的大本營，但我相信依然能夠走出一條堅定的女傳之路。

Even Tainan City is the base (center) of chauvinism in Taiwan. I believe that I still can participate in a solid female pastor's journey.

Theme 3: More Self-Awareness

One participant spoke for many of her colleagues who attended the session when she said that because of today's group,

she realized that,

我有時比較沒有自信，我也不知道為什麼，我應該要去了解為什麼我會如此。

Because of today's group, I notice that I am not very confident in myself. I do not know why I am like this. I think I need to explore why I am who I am.

Another participant stated,

身為女性牧者，我們很多時候要維持形象，但其實那是很辛苦的偽裝，只有在可以卸下這個偽裝時才可以看到真正的自我。

As female pastors, many times we take too much energy to maintain a good image and it usually exhausts us. I think we can only see our true selves when we drop our disguises.

One participant felt like knowing herself from a newer and deeper perspective.

She said,

通過今天的討論，幫助我對自己有更深的認識。

Today's discussions helped me understand myself in a deeper way.

Another participant shared a new finding of her awareness of the inner struggles.

She said,

我從早上到現在，心中有許多拉鋸、衝突、與矛盾。我有時對自己的角色沒有很大的自信，有時我將它理解成是上帝給我的一根刺，如果我沒有這根刺的話，我可能會很驕傲，有時我覺得如果一個女人做小女人覺得很快樂，一直跟她說女權也不一定必要，當然，我覺得我自己還沒找到那一個平衡點，所以我裡面才會有如此多的衝突。

From this morning till now, there have been many struggles, conflicts, and contrasts, in my mind. Many times I do not have confidence in my female pastor's role; I consider it to be a challenge that God wants me to overcome. Many times I see myself as a little woman and I enjoy being a little woman. I do not think that it is necessary for women to have equal rights as men. I think that I haven't found a balance in myself and that is why I feel so many contradictions inside myself.

One participant felt benefited by the group sessions by saying,

這個團體提供我一個機會去了解自己是如何成長並如何成為一個傳道人，成為一個領導的人，我將學習一方面有自尊，一方面不過度看重自己。

This group provides me an opportunity to understand the journey I began when I became a minister as well as a leader in the church. I am going to learn to be a person with high self-esteem yet not to become egotistic.

One participant stated that she learned how to understand and analyze the phenomena of male pastors' negative attitudes to female pastors. She said,

經過一天，我更了解女性所面對的困難，了解為什麼

男性會對女性有那麼多的反應，害怕權力被女性瓜分等，以後面對同樣的情況的時候我就不會那麼容易生氣。

Through today's group process, I've shared and heard more about female pastors' daily struggles in our working environment and I've learned how to analyze and understand why some male pastors are so defensive and reactive to female pastors. I've learned about some male pastors' fears to share power and how they feel threatened by their female colleagues. After today's lesson, I think I can react calmer in the future whenever I face offensives by male pastors because I will better understand why they act the way they do.

Another participant also shared how she came to a new realization that female pastors are different to male pastors. She realized, unlike male pastors, most female pastors do not desire power.

與許多男牧師不同的地方是，大部份的女牧師並不想取得權力高的位置。因此，當我被選為中委時，我不怕講出自己的意見，因為我對這個位置並不戀棧，相反地，男性就相當在意。

Different from many male pastors, most female pastors have no desire to attain a powerful position. Therefore, when I was elected to a presbytery position, I had no fear to speak up because I have no worry about how my opinion would affect my position. On the contrary, many men do.

Theme 4: My Gender Is Great and My Existence Is Valuable

The participants' stories portrayed how many Taiwanese women, beginning from their childhood, receive a message that a girl is an inferior gender compared to a boy. It is not surprising to hear one participant share how she resented her gender; however, she also shared how she was changed by joining my focus group. She said,

我曾經認為身為女性是較不重要的。現在我不這麼覺得了。我覺得做女生很好。即使整個社會都認為女性是較次等的，這正給我們一個機會去挑戰和改變這樣的不公義。

Once I thought that being a girl was inferior. Now I don't think that way anymore. I feel good about being a girl. Even though the whole society considers women to be an inferior sex, it gave us an opportunity to challenge the injustice in this belief system and ways to make changes.

Another participant shared how she benefited from this study. She said,

今天的小組讓我更加肯定上帝賜給我的尊嚴，因為這樣的相信，我肯定我的生命與我的存在是有價值的。

Today's group affirms my belief that I have the dignity that God gives to me and because of this belief; I claim that my life is a valuable existence.

One participant also made a firm statement by the end of the group:

我為自己身為一個女人引以為傲，我很喜歡做一個女人。

I now feel proud to be a woman and I like being a woman.

Another participant purported aptly,

我的教會已經 130 幾年，我是第一個女牧師，我相信既然上帝讓我做一個牧師，為什麼不行？

The church I am ministering to now has been established for 130 years. I am the first female pastor in this church's history. God calls me to be a pastor, who can deny me?

Her statement strongly expressed the groups' declaration that their gender would not be denied.

Goals and the Expected Outcomes of the Feminist Group Counseling Model for AFPs (Asian Female Pastors)

Three goals for applying this model are listed as follows: Goal 1: To bring new awareness of self-worth to the AFPs, Goal 2: To empower the AFPs, and Goal 3: To increase AFPs' ability to understand and analyze their problems in feminist perspectives within a currently patriarchal context. With Goal 1, to bring a new awareness to the AFPs, numerous AFPs, in our findings stated that they understood themselves in a newer and deeper way through the group discussion process used. Goal 2, to empower the AFPs, is demonstrated in the example of the many AFPs who felt empowered by their ancient foremothers in the Bible and by other participants; they finished a whole-day group session and went home feeling more valued and validated as female pastors, more supported by other colleagues, more empowered to continue their ministry, and more willing to make extra efforts to change the current patriarchal situations they faced daily. For Goal 3, to increase AFPs' ability to understand and analyze their problems in feminist perspectives within a patriarchal context, AFPs who participated in our study stated that they now understand why many male pastors kept telling them in every way that they were not good enough to be pastors. After learning to analyze gender issues through power distribution perspectives via biblical stories, they no longer took their problems too personally, considering the problems were their own fault for being women and feeling they were not doing their jobs *good enough*. As Butler and Wintram (1991) stated, "It is group process which provides women with the experience and the tools to comprehend the political and personal dimensions of existence" (p. 73).

Procedures for Using the Feminist Group Counseling Model for Asian Female Pastors

Due to the outcome and feedback from the AFPs are positive, the specific steps for applying this model are listed as follows.

Step One: Decide on the Participants

The selected participants should be able to contribute to group discussions through their ministry and personal experiences. We suggest setting at least three years of work experience in a local church or church organization as criteria. This would ensure that the participants have sufficient experiences to share with the group and to understand other group members.

Step Two: Decide Recruiting Methods and Recruit Participants

E-mails, invitation cards, and telephone calls are excellent ways to invite female pastors to participate in the group. Another good way to invite potential group members is through female pastor associations if there are any available. The number should include four to seven group members, a size that would provide each participant with ample time and opportunity to share their own experiences. The format should be closed group because the group would involve intimate sharing. After the participants are selected, the members should remain the same from the beginning to the end of the group.

Step Three: Prepare the Setting of the Focus Group

Select a warm and inviting setting for the group. Consider a familiar place that is in close proximity to the majority of group members. Coffee, tea, and snacks can be provided to the group members.

Step Four: Make Selections from the Bible

The group facilitator may use the biblical selections I chose or may select other women's stories from the Bible in addressing the same four topics—leadership, family of origin, intimate relationships, and economic independence.

Step Five: Make Selections of Commentaries to the Stories or Write the Commentaries

The group facilitator may compose his/her own commentaries or choose our commentaries.

Step Six: Conduct the Group Sessions

Following are brief session guidelines utilizing our selections and commentaries as examples:

1) Conduct an introduction. At the beginning, the group facilitator invites group members to introduce themselves; for example, their names, educational backgrounds, marital status, churches where they served as ministers, and so forth.

2) Explain group rules. Confidentiality as the group's ground rule should be explained and stressed at the beginning of the session and repeated several times during the day.

3) If applicable, have the group members sign consent forms that refer to confidentiality or to any agreement for video or audio taping methods. These forms may be provided by the group facilitator.

4) Implement the five sessions:

Session one. 90-minute session one—AFPs and their leadership—Judges 4:4-21; 5:7 & 12 (Deborah). Further details are included in the strategies section.

Session two. 90-minute session two—AFPs and their family of origin—Judges 11:27-40 (Jephthah's daughter). Further details are included in the strategies section.

Session three. 90-minute session three—AFPs and their intimate relationships—Judges 19 (the Levite's concubine). Further details are included in the strategies section.

Session four. 90-minute session four—AFPs and their economic independence—Ruth 3:1-18 (Ruth and Naomi). Further details are included in the strategies section.

Session five. 90-minute session five—closure session. AFPs

make reflections about their whole-day experiences and give feedback to other group members. Further details are included in the strategies section.

Strategies of the Feminist Group Counseling Model for Asian Female Pastors

The strategies of this model include: (a) using a focus group as a form to gather AFPs together and (b) using biblical stories and feminist commentaries of the stories to facilitate group sessions. Four stories are used to address AFPs' self-esteem related issues: their leadership, family of origin, intimate relationships, and economic independence. Feminist commentaries of the stories must emphasize women's perspectives and their experiences with the intention that the participants of the focus group can relate to the story as well as to the commentaries with their own life experiences. The commentaries should also provide an analytical perspective that addresses the power distribution between the two genders in the story as well as in today's society. Ideally, the commentaries should reflect gender issues from the participants' context. Certain leading questions can be raised to help participants begin their discussions. Following is a brief introduction to each session's goal and focus. **Figure 1** is also included at the end of the paper to depict an overview for each session's goal and strategies.

Group Session I: Deborah's Story

The feminist group counseling model for Asian female pastors uses Deborah's story (Judges 4 & 5) and its feminist commentary to deal with AFPs' leadership issues. The goals for session one are a) to explore the phenomenological experiences of AFPs' leadership in a patriarchal church structure and b) to encourage AFPs' own styles of leadership. In the session, a group leader can focus the discussion on the following subjects: a) differences in style between participants' leadership styles from Deborah's leadership style and male pastors' leadership styles, b) the impact of society's stereotypes on AFPs' self-image and self-esteem, c) how AFPs face and deal with male pastors' fear, d) how AFPs deal with the pressures of being single female pastors, and e) how AFPs deal with situations when there are women suppressing women. In conclusion, this session is designed to help participants share their struggles as leaders in their context.

Group Session II: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter

The story of Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11:27-40) and the feminist commentary is used in the feminist *group counseling model for Asian female pastors* to deal with the related issues of AFPs' family of origin. The goals for this group session are a) to explore how AFPs' families of origin and their unfinished business from the family of origin affect their present lives and b) to encourage more emotionally independent from their families of origin. In this session, a group leader can focus the discussion on the following: a) How AFPs view and evaluate Jephthah as a father who sacrificed his daughter, b) what their names and personal physical space in the family mean to them, and c) whether they experience lower expectations from their family due to their gender. In conclusion, the group discussion strives to explore the issues with AFPs' family of origin and how AFPs are affected by their family of origin in both positive and negative ways. In addition to the three topics above that

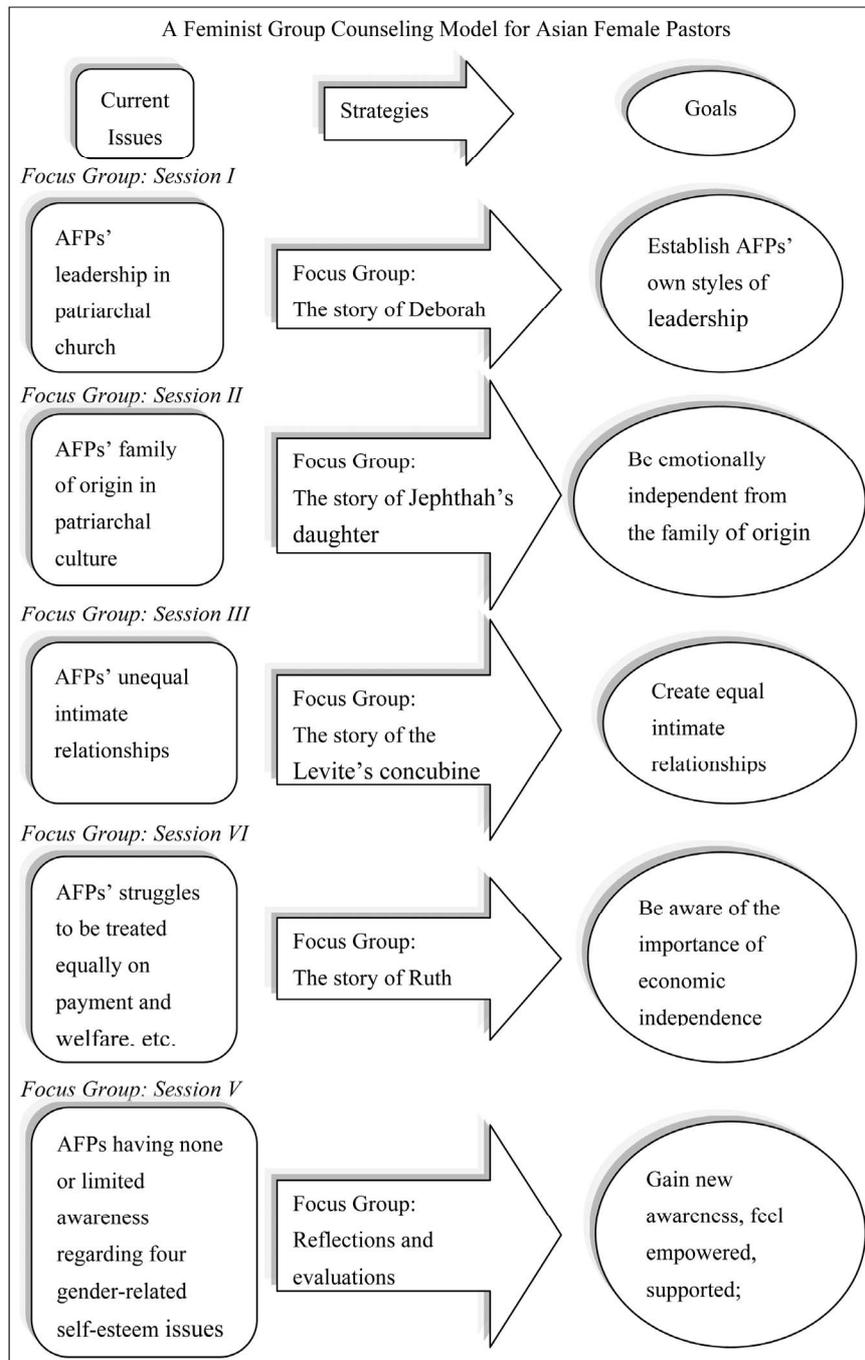


Figure 1.
The feminist group counseling model for Asian female pastors.

were the themes I reported in Chapter IV, the discussion may go further to discuss what AFPs can do to resolve their issues regarding family of origin and become more emotionally independent from their family of origin.

Group Session III: The Story of the Levite's Concubine

The feminist group counseling model for Asian female pastors uses the story of the Levite's concubine (Judges 19) and

the accompanying feminist commentary to deal with AFPs' issues concerning intimate relationships. The goals for this group session are to explore any phenomenological experiences of AFPs' unequal intimate relationships that may have occurred and to encourage them to create equal intimate partnerships. In this session, a group leader focuses the discussion on the following subjects: a) How the traditional social construction of value systems regarding gender and intimate relationships influence AFPs, b) whether or not AFPs have difficulty in receiving emotional support from their spouses, c) the struggles

and challenges that AFPs face daily within their marriages or being single, d) how AFPs fight against some traditional teachings regarding marriage within the church, and e) issues related to divorce. A further discussion topic can be what AFPs can do to make changes if their intimate relationships are unequal.

Group Session IV: Ruth's Story

Economic independence is the major topic of session four, which uses the story of Ruth (Ruth 3:1-18) and the feminist commentary to deal with AFPs' issues of economic independence as it affects their self-esteem. The goals for this group session are to explore AFPs' struggles to be treated equally in pay and welfare, and to encourage their economic independence. In this session, a group leader focuses the discussion on the following topics: a) How economic independence or dependence affects their self-esteem, b) depending on men as their providers or financial rescuers, what are the advantages and disadvantages for AFPs, c) what their challenges and feelings are when they receive only one income even though the wife and husband are both working as ministers, and d) personal experiences of single participants relating to their economic situations resulting in feelings of freedom or bondage to be financially independent. In addition to these four subjects, the discussion could include other available options that women may choose in becoming economically independent.

Group Session V: Closure Session

The feminist group counseling model for Asian female pastors includes a semi-structured reflective session. After the focus group sessions, a reflective discussion with the following goals is held to bring closure: a) to help AFPs review and summarize their new awareness and b) to facilitate feedback from AFPs to the group leader and other participants. In this session, the group facilitator can focus on the following topics: a) the new things that are learned in an all-day group and b) how this group process empowered them and increased their self-esteem. Specific evaluative questions are given to the participants to facilitate feedback from them. Question one is: "After a full day session that we have had with our focus/discussion group, and after we have discussed four biblical stories, what new perspectives about the subject of self-esteem have you gained?" Question two is: "How do you think and feel differently about yourself now?" Question three is: "Through reading and discussing the four stories in the Bible, what are some new thoughts and awareness that you developed about each of the following topics: AFPs and their leadership, AFPs and their intimate relationships, AFPs and their family of origin, and AFPs and their ability to be economically independent?" At the end of this reflective session, the group facilitator will encourage the participants to compose a short prayer to reinforce their commitment in helping themselves to increase their self-esteem and to support other AFPs to face life in the patriarchal context.

Roles and Tasks for Group Leaders

Critical to the success of *the feminist group counseling model for Asian female pastors* is how the group leaders play their roles and how they facilitate the group and use their group techniques. Ramsay (2000) stated, "In mutually empathic relationships, we expand one another's ability to affect the world and each other. Empowerment emerges from mutually em-

pathic relationships in which we are truly engaged or heard and experience ourselves as also hearing others" (p. 276). The rationale for using focus groups is to provide participants such an environment for giving and receiving mutual empathy in group interactions. Therefore, helping participants to hear others and to be heard by other group participants is one of the most important tasks for the group facilitator.

When group facilitators make efforts to provide opportunities for empowerment, they should keep in mind constructs which, according to Ramsay (2000), often disempower women:

- 1) We internalize a subordinate status (i.e., women clergy and female physicians).
- 2) We pathologize experience (i.e., "hysterical" woman).
- 3) We discount experience (i.e., "just being emotional").
- 4) We deny experience (i.e., no right to be angry, have an idea, or express an idea worth sharing). (p. 278)

A group facilitator who uses *the feminist group counseling model for Asian female pastors* must be aware when issues pointed out by Ramsay arise and address them by listening and validating AFPs' experiences rather than internalizing, pathologizing, discounting and/or denying them.

A group facilitator using *the feminist group counseling model for Asian female pastors* should "keep a balance between group structure, planning and spontaneity which avoids rigidly prescribed patterns. These provide the necessary boundaries within which safety, warmth and compassion can flourish" (Butler & Wintram, 1991: p. 187). While using this model, a group facilitator should not hold to a rigid agenda but should afford the group certain flexibility to form its own pace, patterns and even discussion topics.

Since this model was based on feminist values and philosophy, the group facilitator should make certain not to "put the blame for societal ills on women's shoulders" but to "reshape personal experience within a socio-political framework" (Butler & Wintram, 1991: p. 187). According to Butler and Wintram, "[e]nhanced self-awareness brings with it an increased self-esteem and a sense of continuity in the world" (p. 187). When AFPs are able to get in touch with their inner world as well as the reality of the existing traditional context in which they work, reflect on it and enhance their self-awareness through the group process, they may feel that their experiences and thoughts are validated, heard, encouraged, and sometimes even challenged. They also may feel empowered in their thinking and in their ability to face their daily challenges. In this process, their self-esteem can be increased.

Discussions of the Study

Recommendations

The feminist group counseling model for Asian female pastors provides church leaders and counselors a feminist group counseling approach for helping Asian female pastors address their self-esteem issues, and, incidentally, to challenge the traditional patriarchal church system and make changes. The following section addresses the potential opportunities for other populations to use this model as well as possible directions for future research.

For Other Populations

Meyers (2004) stated, "Worldwide, women confront invidious, hazard packed, social structures" (p. xi). *The feminist*

group counseling model for Asian female pastors can be replicated to assist other Christian female pastor populations in addition to Asian female pastors when these same types of problems arise. For example, Asian women and American women face many of the same hardships of having to work harder and perform better than men to win credibility and reputation (Butler & Wintram, 1991; Sou, 2005).

The decision to recommend this model for other female pastor populations comes as a result of feedback from non-Asian women who assessed this model. Along with the process of our study, many non-Asians read our writings and provided us feedback indicating that they have encountered similar situations and have similar experiences as those of Asian female pastors.

During the sessions it became evident that the feminist group counseling model for Asian female pastors could be replicated to assist other female populations. The following provides an example to help other female pastor populations: In our AFPs' economic independence session, one subject was discussed repeatedly—not being equally compensated as male pastors. Also, if they are married, AFPs do not receive welfare benefits equal to those of male pastors. McDuff (2001) stated that there is a gender gap in payment, benefits and employment opportunities between male and female clergy. Sandberg (2013) also stated that women earn 77 cents for every dollar men made by year 2010. AFPs shared similar situations with American female pastors. This enhances credibility for using this model to assist other female pastor populations; for example, American female pastors.

For Further Research

Our study has provided examples of how the church's traditional patriarchal values affect AFPs' self-esteems in general and, in specific, AFPs' leadership, intimate relationships, family of origins, and their ability to live financially independent. The rich outcome that this study gained can serve as a ground for future research. More AFPs' stories need to be voiced, heard, and recorded in the hope that this minority group will be less marginalized.

Our study also upheld the importance of emphasizing women's perspectives by using women's stories in the Bible and using feminist perspectives to interpret these stories to help this population focus on their gender-related issues during their discussion sessions. A connection to feminist theology perspectives and feminist counseling is introduced through this study. The combination of two disciplines integrated well and created a new model that can be applied to Asian female pastors. Future research should focus on using other stories of women in the Bible to address female pastors' or women's gender related issues. Even if the same stories are chosen, the feminist group commentaries may be written from various viewpoints to emphasize different issues that women have in their own context. Besides the choices of the stories, future research topics can include finding ways to build female pastor' solid support systems, forming networks for this population and challenging the traditional patriarchal church system collectively.

We believe that based on the study and development of the model that there is a clear and great need for Asian female pastors to obtain as much possible support from their church, from their family, from each other, and from within. Further research should focus on finding more practical ways a) to build female

pastors' solid support system, b) to form a network for this population, c) to challenge the traditional patriarchal church system, and d) to support female pastors by counseling them using collaborative purposeful focus group discussions.

Summary

When Simone de Beauvoir (1949) argued that women are the second sex to men, she said, "He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the other" (Introduction: Women as others, para. 5). If one person views her God as only a male God and a God against women, this person would also live her life with the same attitude. On the other hand, if such an ideology and system can be challenged and overturned, new beliefs can be formed and lives can be changed; Christian female leaders should be and can be respected, accepted, and appreciated. Reciprocally, these female pastors not only will build higher self-esteem but also will be able to contribute to their churches with their abilities and talents.

It is noteworthy that our participants benefited by going through the process of *the feminist group counseling model for Asian female pastors*. They were able to support and empower each other through five discussion sessions during a whole-day focus group. *The feminist group counseling model for Asian female pastors* advocates for AFPs' unique needs in regard to their mental health. As AFPs have continued to join the seminary and to seek ordination and service in the ministry, there was and remains a need to study this female population, along with the roles that they play in the church system and the challenges that they face and their unique needs. The church leaders and counselors for the AFPs need to have sensitivity, knowledge, and skills when helping this group. An important goal of *the feminist group counseling model for Asian female pastors* is to help AFPs learn new ways to conceptualize their problems and act in new ways to develop healthier self-esteem and live more fulfilling lives. In order to accomplish such an important goal, this manuscript described the problems that *the feminist group counseling model for Asian female pastors* deals with, the goals and the expected outcome of this model, the strategies, and the group leader's role in this model.

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