

The problem with normal: A gift from queer theory

A hope for this exercise is to invite therapists/community workers to resist being located in the normalizing center of identity, specifically in relation to gender: To resist any acceptance of our locations as normal, as 'prototype human beings'. This invites us to be ethically located in our intersectionalities, resisting the construction of people from marginalized identities as "serviceable others" (Sampson).

Some possible Questions:

- Before you were born were there any stories about whether you would be a boy or a girl? Did your family have any preferences?
- When you were born, how was your gender defined? By whom?
- When did you first realize that people were divided into two distinct genders? How was this gendered identity constructed, meaning how are you spoken to, and spoken of?
- Have you always identified within the gender you've been assigned to? Have you ever transgressed this gendered identity? How were these transgressions responded to? Were there consequences for these gender transgressions? Who and what was involved in policing this?
- Did anyone serve as an ally to your resistance of a particularly concretized gender location? Who made room? Who performed solidarity for these transgressions?
- When did you first start to problematize the dominant discourse of two distinct genders?
- Have you ever considered your preferred gender performance/s? Who is in solidarity with you around this preferred performance/s?
- Within the culture or your community whose gender performances create more space for others?
- Have you ever considered relationships with gender as fluid, as performative, as a site of resistance? If not, what practices from the dominant discourse and dominant culture have silenced this questioning? If you have, what is the history of this questioning of gender as "real"?
- Have your ethical concerns with gender constructed the problem as entirely a struggle of men's power and women's subjugation? If so how has this perpetrated the invisibility of transgendered people, gender variant people, and others who identify outside of binary locations of male and female? How can you continue to problematize the construction of the dominant gender binary, simultaneously attending to the material reality of men's power?
- What differences might a rich critique of gender, and a philosophical stance of gender as fluid and performative, bring to your work's relationship with ethics and justice?
- How can you structure resistance of the dominant gendered identities into your practice? How would you bring any of these *gender bending* ideas into your therapeutic practice? What differences do you think this might make for you, your clients, and your community?