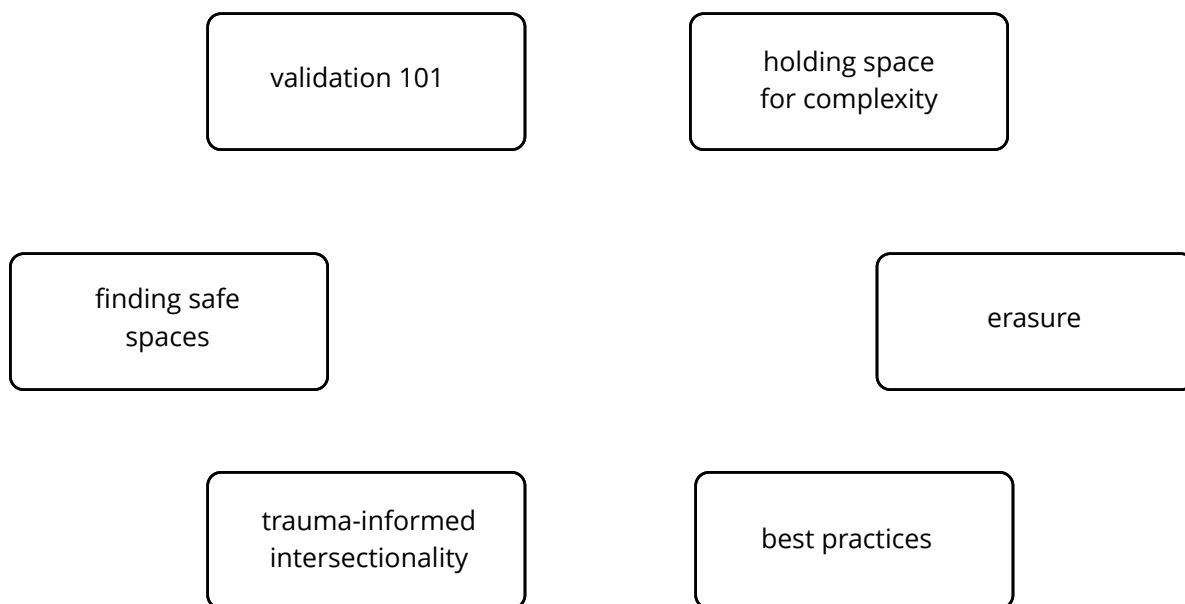




Cultural Competency in Counseling Non-Binary and Genderqueer People: 6 Themes

In Summer 2017, the peer support group QueerPDX conducted a participatory research action study to investigate how counselors can provide better services to nonbinary and genderqueer folks. Research group members generated and analyzed data in focus groups, interviews, and over email. In addition to the research goal, this study seeks to build community and increase visibility, social justice, and professional opportunities for non-binary and genderqueer people.

We found 6 primary themes. The best practices are given as the list on the other side of this handout; the other five themes are briefly explained below.



Validation 101: Non-binary/genderqueer people need to be basically validated as they are, without being told they should fit into a different identity, performance, or set of norms.

Holding space for complexity: NB/GQ identity and development are complex and can take many forms over time. Clients and helpers need to hold space for that complexity.

Finding safe spaces: NB/GQ people need to find and inhabit safe spaces, when accessing services, in home life, with friends, and in community. Peer support can be very helpful.

Erasure: NB/GQ experience is characterized by erasure in the mainstream social context. It is crucial that helpers understand the pain of erasure and that they not recapitulate it.

Trauma-informed intersectionality: NB/GQ people may have experienced trauma, and may belong to other oppressed groups. This complex issue demands sensitivity and discernment.



12 Best Practices for Culturally Competent Counseling with Non-Binary/Genderqueer Folks

1. Embrace gender transition as an open-ended, lifelong process of exploration and joy.
2. Be curious about NB/GQness in general and your clients' experience in particular.
3. Don't use your clients for your professional education.
4. Get our pronouns right (and if you mess up, apologize and move on).
5. Appreciate the rich complexity of trans*ness.
6. Start from within: Analyze your own gender assumptions and limitations.
7. Change your intake forms and processes to avoid binary gender assumptions.
8. Change your speech to avoid binary gender assumptions.
9. Develop a relationship with the community that goes beyond learning from us.
10. Understand that trauma and NB/GQ experience co-arise and are intertwined, but one does not necessarily cause the other.
11. Develop a critical analysis of systems of oppression and intersectionality.
12. Carry forth these principles and become an NB/GQ ally and activist!

Suggested Next Steps

- Reach out to nonbinary/genderqueer folks you know and make friends. We're people!
- Work on removing automatic binary language from your lexicon— refer to people in gender-neutral ways until they actually tell you what pronouns they use.
- Examine and undermine your automatic binary assumptions about gender roles— there are so many ways to be human!
- Notice the ways binary gender assumptions pervade popular culture and mainstream worldviews, and work to undo these assumptions in your organization and your community.
- Look at, understand, and release the ways that gender-non-conformity makes you feel uncomfortable. Acknowledge your own gender vulnerability and complexity.
- Learn about NB/GQ experience from NB/GQ people— we are the experts on our experience.
- Hire NB/GQ and other gender-non-conforming people. Treat us as a protected class; we face oppression and discrimination on a daily basis.
- Seek consultation from recognized experts on NB/GQ cultural competency in order to make your practice or organization more embracing and affirmative of our unique needs.
- Hire trainers to help your organization improve communications, practices, and understanding.
- Reject pathologization and marginalization of trans* and queer identities and expressions.
- Support gender fluidity, uncertainty, and diversity in your clients and in your organizations. Peoples' names, pronouns, identities, performance and experiences unfold playfully. There are examples, stories, and reference points of how people have done their gender, but there is no one "right way" to do it— there are so many creative ways.



Brilliant Counseling

4531 SE Belmont St, Suite 316, Portland OR, 97215 · 971-279-7261 · sasha@brilliantcounseling.com

Academic and Professional Literature on Counseling Non-Binary and Genderqueer Clients

ALGBTIC Transgender Committee, Burnes, T. R., Singh, A. A., Harper, A. J., Harper, B., Maxon-Kann, W., ... Hosea, J. (2010). American Counseling Association Competencies for Counseling with Transgender Clients. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 4(3-4), 135-159.

The ACA's competencies for counseling trans* clients is a long list of best practices.

Barker, M. J., & Richards, C. (2015). Further genders. In *The Palgrave handbook of the psychology of sexuality and gender* (pp. 166-182). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

A synopsis of beyond-binary gender possibilities from a psychological perspective.

Budge, S. L., Rossman, H. K., & Howard, K. A. S. (2014). Coping and psychological distress among genderqueer individuals: The moderating effect of social support. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 8(1), 95-117.

Social support reduces anxiety and depression among genderqueer individuals.

Budge, S. L., Thai, J. L., Tebbe, E. A., & Howard, K. A. S. (2016). The intersection of race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, trans identity, and mental health outcomes. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 44(7), 1025-1049.

A quantitative analysis of privilege, oppression, and mental health outcomes for trans* folks.

Donatone, B., & Rachlin, K. (2013). An intake template for transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, gender nonconforming, and gender variant college students seeking mental health services. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*, 27(3), 200-211.

Rethinking intake paperwork and interview procedures for gender-nonconforming clients.

Moe, J., Bower, J., & Clark, M. (2017). Counseling queer and genderqueer people. In M. M. Ginicola, C. Smith, & J. M. Filmore (Eds.), *Affirmative Counseling With LGBTQI+ People* (pp. 213-226). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

Genderqueer 101 plus specific counseling concerns that may arise for genderqueer folks.

Nadal, K. L., Whitman, C. N., Davis, L. S., Erazo, T., & Davidoff, K. C. (2016). Microaggressions toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and genderqueer people: A review of the literature. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 53(4-5), 488-508.

This review of queer microaggression literature explores many dimensions of oppression.

Richards, C., Bouman, W. P., Seal, L., Barker, M. J., Nieder, T. O., & T'Sjoen, G. (2016). Non-binary or genderqueer genders. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 28(1), 95-102.

An introduction to non-binary and genderqueer identities from a psychiatric perspective.

Saltzburg, S., & Davis, T. S. (2010). Co-authoring gender-queer youth identities: Discursive tellings and retellings. *Journal of Ethnic And Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 19(2), 87-108.

A narrative study of genderqueer youth reworking identity through discourse.

Stachowiak, D. M. (2016). Queering it up, strutting our threads, and baring our souls: Genderqueer individuals negotiating social and felt sense of gender. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 1-12.

This interview-based insider study theorizes genderqueer identity through a queer lens.



Brilliancy Counseling

4531 SE Belmont St, Suite 316, Portland OR, 97215 · 971-279-7261 · sasha@brilliancycounseling.com

Selected Queer Theory, Genderqueer/Nonbinary Anthologies, and Self-Help Titles

These books should be helpful to clients and therapists alike, both to understand the realities of genderqueer/non-binary/trans experience, and to provide needed support and encouragement.*

For folks beyond the binary, it is momentous to learn that there are other people like you out there, they have written books, and you can be who you are and take pride in that (and if you want to, you can write books about it, too).

Bornstein, K. (2006). Hello, cruel world: 101 alternatives to suicide for teens, freaks, and other outlaws. New York, NY: Seven Stories Press.

A self-help guide for surviving a cruel world, written by a trans*gender activist.

Bornstein, K. (2013a). A queer and pleasant danger: The true story of a nice Jewish boy who joins the Church of Scientology, and leaves twelve years later to become the lovely lady she is today. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

A hilarious and poignant memoir about gender, religion, family, and transformation.

Bornstein, K. (2013b). My new gender workbook: A step-by-step guide to achieving world peace through gender anarchy and sex positivity (2nd ed). New York, NY: Routledge.

A snarky, playful, definitive self-help/self-understanding guide through analyzing gender, sexuality, and other form of oppression. A great resource for clients and therapists alike.

Bornstein, K. (2016). Gender outlaw: On men, women, and the rest of us (2nd rev. ed.). New York, NY: Vintage Books.

A thorough analysis of gender norms and gender possibilities through the lens of personal experience.

Bornstein, K., & Bergman, S. B. (Eds.). (2010). Gender outlaws: The next generation (Reprint ed). Berkeley, CA: Seal Press.

An anthology of gender rebels.

Nestle, J., Howell, C., & Wilchins, R. A. (Eds.). (2002). GenderQueer: Voices from beyond the sexual binary (1st ed). Los Angeles, CA: Alyson Books.

An anthology of genderqueer and non-binary writers.

Wilchins, R. A. (2013). Read my lips: Sexual subversion and the end of gender (Rev. ed.). Riverdale, NY: Magnus Books.

A collection of essays and presentation transcripts about the author's experiences with gender, transitioning, and activism.

Wilchins, R. A. (2014). Queer theory, gender theory: An instant primer (Rev. ed.). Riverdale, NY: Magnus Books.

A brief and very readable introduction to queer and gender theories.