



# Working with Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming People in Your Reiki Practice

BY GILLIAN POWER, MTECH HOM, MBA

I AM A transgender woman and Holy Fire® Karuna Reiki® Master. Reiki was integral to successfully navigating the challenges of gender transition as an adult. I know from experience that Reiki can offer immense benefits to clients and students who identify as LGBTQIA+. These people can often be working to overcome immense adversity in living authentically in the world. Using pronouns correctly is a foundational skill that Reiki practitioners and teachers must master to provide an affirming space for these clients and students. However, the correct use of gender pronouns may feel challenging for Reiki practitioners and teachers. This article will explore why using correct pronouns is important with gender-expansive clients and students and ways to gain more proficiency.

Many people who identify as LGBTQIA+ will refer to their chosen families or found families.<sup>1,2,3</sup> For these people, the level of rejection, censorship, and abuse they have endured is heartbreaking. However, in their chosen or found families, people find love, acceptance, and support. Yet, despite all the trauma in their lives and challenges to their identities, many community members find ways

to survive and thrive. To be out as an LGBTQIA+ person in many parts of the world is often to have experienced being put out of love by others. Therefore, when a person shares with you as a Reiki practitioner they are a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, you must be prepared to meet them in their truth and wholeness.

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In Reiki, we have the concept of the culturally created self, the sense of self that develops as a child in response to feedback and reinforcement from parents and caregivers. It is distinct from the authentic self, which is the part of us that connects directly to God consciousness. For many LGBTQIA+ people, the threat and risk of losing essential resources and love for asserting a gender

identity or sexual orientation that is not approved or sanctioned by the people and culture around them and that they depend on for survival causes them to suppress how they experience their sense of gender or to whom they are attracted. However, gender identification and attraction to others are so fundamental to navigating the world that, at some point, these parts of us need to be asserted to live in congruence. For many people in the LGBTQIA+ community, some of the language used is of *coming out* and *living authentically*. For some fortunate people, this assertion of self goes well. But for others, the journey is fraught with challenges and adversity.

Languages are deeply gendered in the way they refer to people and objects. This arises partly because the dominant experience of the world is one of the binary genders—male and female. For much of the population, the gender they identify as aligns with the gender assigned to them at birth. This gender assignment is done in seconds from the most cursory examination of the sexual anatomy of the newborn child. However, studies show that in the US, for example, 1.6 million people aged 13 and older identify as transgender. The same study reports that nearly one in five people who identify as transgender are ages 13-17.<sup>4</sup>

Much of the early modern medical understanding of transgender people arises from when clinicians imposed gender choices for children born with ambiguous sexual anatomy. These cases lead to untold suffering for these children as the medically assigned gender did not align with how the person understands themselves to be. The medical community observed that the gender someone identifies as develops in its own way over time and is intensely personal to each person, and cannot be imposed externally. These insights have led to a mature understanding of people who assert a sense of gender different from that which they were assigned at birth. Supporting people in discovering this and finding their own path to personal identity results in healthy outcomes for these people.<sup>6, 7, 8</sup>

Pronouns are an integral part of our conversations. They indicate how a person would like to be referred to or addressed. They signal how a person relates to the world in terms of gender. When used according to an individual's wishes, they set a tone of immense respect and create an affirming environment for the individual. The client or student may feel erased and invalidated with improper or insensitive pronouns. Here are some examples of pronouns:<sup>9</sup>

- he/him/his
- she/her/hers
- they/them/theirs
- ze/zir/zirs
- she/they or he/they
- Just my name, please!

To understand and affirm a person's personal pronouns through learning and correct, fluent usage is to

align with their personal expression and assertion of authenticity and to assist them in their journey of aligning with their authentic self as we understand it in Reiki.

Some key takeaways and exercises to help you become comfortable and fluent in using pronouns are:

1. Realize that everyone has a gender identity. For people whose sense of gender aligns with their gender assigned at birth, the term is cisgender. For people for whom it does not align, the term generally used is transgender or trans. Sit quietly somewhere and ask yourself how you feel and think about your gender in the world. Ask yourself how you would feel if referred to with pronouns different from what you are accustomed. A strong reaction to being misgendered exists for most people, cisgender or trans.
2. For transgender people, the process of coming out as their true gender and transitioning in the ways that they elect (socially/medically/legally) can be a challenging time. It is a time of change, which has carried significant amounts of vulnerability, gain and loss, and personal empowerment. Correctly using someone's preferred pronouns and chosen name is affirming as the person grows into their new outward expression. Even though many transgender people have known their gender identity to be different, often from a young age, living their true gender identity may take time to grow into and feel comfortable and formed.
3. As a Reiki practitioner or teacher, the support you can provide people is immense. I experienced a profound spiritual transformation at the same time as transitioning and learning Reiki. I used Reiki in many situations to help smooth fraught and risky conversations, legal name changes, and medical procedures.
4. Spend time reading and learning about all the pronoun options. Most importantly, practice being fluent with the correct use of pronouns. Please don't wait for your first transgender or gender non-conforming client or student to stumble through using their pronouns correctly. A great resource is [pronouns.org](http://pronouns.org).
5. Ask all clients and students their preferred pronouns in client intake and class registration forms. Share your pronouns when you meet new people, and in classes, use name tags that have space for people to declare their pronouns.
6. Do a deeper study into the understanding of the mystery of gender in different traditions. Ask Reiki to guide you in exploring the rich mystery of gender. For instance, many in Reiki know Guanyin. However, did you know Guanyin is the female form of the male Buddha, Avalokiteśvara?

In my experience, many in the transgender and gender non-conforming communities seek the truth. Indeed, transitioning genders is a form of ego death undertaken in one lifetime. For many people, it is like living two lives in one. Know that through practice and learning as a Reiki professional, you can provide a level of support and affirmation for a group of people so intensely misunderstood and maligned in many societies. As many of us who have come to Reiki because of our compassion and empathy for others, affirming transgender and gender non-conforming people in your Reiki practice, teaching, and broader life can literally be a lifesaving act. In allowing your compassion for transgender and gender non-conforming to flow without reservation and judgment, one can also achieve a deeper understanding of one's own sense of gender and how you relate to the world and Source. In my experience, the potential for all gender expression is contained within Source. It arises naturally in the world to add to the incredible diversity we experi-

ence. Honoring this diversity in life is to honor Source. ■

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**Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> Pallas Gutierrez, "The Importance of Found Families for LGBTQ Youth, Especially in a Crisis," GLAAD, April 15, 2020, <http://www.glaad.org/amp/importance-of-found-families-lgbtq-youth>.
- <sup>2</sup> Dani Blum, "The Joy in Finding Your Chosen Family," *The New York Times*, June 27, 2022, <http://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/25/well/lgbtq-chosen-families.html>.
- <sup>3</sup> Kyle Casey Chu, "Why Queer People Need Chosen Families," VICE, November 13, 2017, <http://www.vice.com/en/article/ywbkp7/why-queer-people-need-chosen-families>.

- <sup>4</sup> UCLA School of Law, "How Many Adults and Youth Identify as Transgender in the United States?," Williams Institute, September 27, 2022, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/trans-adults-united-states>.
- <sup>5</sup> Kyle Knight, "I Want to Be like Nature Made Me," *Human Rights Watch*, December 15, 2020, <http://www.hrw.org/report/2017/07/25/i-want-be-nature-made-me/medically-unnecessary-surgeries-intersex-children-us>.
- <sup>6</sup> Erin Digitale, "Better Mental Health Found among Transgender People Who Started Hormones as Teens," *Stanford Medical News Center*, January 12, 2022, <https://med.stanford.edu/news/all-news/2022/01/mental-health-hormone-treatment-transgender-people.html>.
- <sup>7</sup> Cleveland Clinic, "Transgender: Gender Dysphoria and Ensuring Mental Health," *Cleveland Clinic Health Library*, <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/21963-transgender-ensuring-mental-health>.
- <sup>8</sup> Diana M. Tordoff, "Mental Health Outcomes in Transgender and Nonbinary Youths Receiving Gender-Affirming Care," *JAMA Network Open*, February 25, 2022, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2789423>.
- <sup>9</sup> Pronouns.org, "Pronouns Matter," *Pronouns.org Resources on Personal Pronouns*, <https://pronouns.org>.