

Working with LGBTQIA+ Reiki Clients and Students

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Have you ever found yourself unprepared as a Reiki teacher? This experience happened to me in a Reiki class when I had a student whose pronouns were “they/them.” I didn’t handle it well and couldn’t figure out what I was supposed to do or how to use they/them in a sentence. And worse yet, I didn’t ask the student what they wanted me to do. As a result, all my counseling techniques went unused, and I found myself out of date on information and skills. When the student commented on the evaluation about being misgendered all weekend, I realized I needed to improve my skills because I genuinely want to serve a diverse population. I have enjoyed having students in my class who are gay, lesbian, transgender, multi-partnered, bisexual, sex workers, and more.

As Reiki practitioners and teachers, we teach and serve the mainstream, which includes diversity. To serve the LGBTQIA+ population, we need to know what this term means and how to serve best the people it represents. In this article, I’ll cover definitions, pronouns, interviews, and how it all ties in with Usui/Holy Fire® Reiki. If you are like me, you may not know what all the letters in LGBTQIA+ mean.

Definitions

LGBTQIA+ is an abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and more. We use these terms to describe a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity. Below is a brief definition list.¹

Lesbian—A woman whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to other women.

Gay—People whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attractions are to people of the same sex.

Bisexual—A person who can form enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attractions to those of the same gender or more than one gender.

Transgender—An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from

what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. Some transgender people are prescribed hormones or undergo surgery to bring their bodies into alignment with their gender identity. But not all transgender people can or will take those steps, and a transgender identity is not dependent upon physical appearance or medical procedures.

Queer—People whose sexual orientation is not exclusively heterosexual or straight. This umbrella term includes people who have nonbinary, gender-fluid, or gender-nonconforming identities.

Questioning—Sometimes, when the Q is seen at the end of LGBT, it can also mean someone who is questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Intersex—A person with one or more innate sex characteristics, including genitals, internal reproductive organs, and chromosomes, which fall outside of traditional conceptions of male or female bodies.

Asexual—A person who does not experience sexual attraction.

Plus—The plus sign is used to signify all of the gender identities and sexual orientations that letters and words cannot yet fully describe.

After I read the above definitions, I wanted to know about the meanings of genderfluid and nonbinary. One source states, “Gender fluidity refers to change over time in a person’s gender expression or gender identity, or both.”² Another source says, “Nonbinary or gender-queer is an umbrella term for gender identities that are not solely male or female—identities that are outside the gender binary. Non-binary identities fall under the transgender umbrella since non-binary people typically identify with a gender that is different from their assigned sex, though some non-binary people do not consider themselves transgender.”³

As you can see from the above definitions, gender goes beyond the male/female poles and is a range. Gender expression is how a person presents their gender to the world,⁴ and sexual orientation is to whom a person is attracted sexually and with whom they want to have relationships.⁵

Proper Use of Pronouns

Pronouns are integral to our conversations and indicate how a person wants to be addressed. When used according to an individual's wishes, they set a tone of respect and create an affirming environment for the individual. When used improperly, the student may feel erased and invalidated.⁶

Here are some examples of pronouns:⁷

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

We can share our pronouns during introductions, on our Zoom names, email signatures, name tags, and social media bios. We can include a place for pronouns on forms where we request a name. When addressing a group or when we don't know a person's preferred pronouns, we can use gender-neutral terms such as students, class, classmates, client, partner, folks, everyone, or perhaps even y'all. It could be a good idea to practice using they/them for an individual, since it may initially feel awkward. For example, in class, you might say, "Give Reiki to him, her, or them," or make it even easier and say, "Give Reiki to your partner."

Hello

my name is

my pronouns are

What the LGBTQIA+ Population Wants Their Practitioner/Teacher to Know and Do

For further education, since I identify as cisgender, I sought counsel from some of my colleagues in the LGBTQIA+ community. "Cisgender is a term that is used to describe people whose gender identity matches the sex assigned at birth."⁸ I asked them what they wanted their Reiki practitioner or teacher to know and do to serve them best.

Kris Valentine, a Reiki Master Teacher who identifies as lesbian, considers herself gender fluid. Her pronouns are she/her mainly because that is what she is used to and with which she feels comfortable. When someone refers to her as he/him, she is comfortable with that too, and it occurs frequently. She loves that people now consider using new pronouns to make others feel more comfortable. In this way, we are addressing their authentic self. She suggests that if your client or student wants to share their pronouns, let them do that and ask the other class members to share theirs if they would like. A consideration she has is that of being judged by others. If anything should arise in a class situation, the teacher can be an advocate.⁹ Kris says, "People want to be treated as normal and not odd because there is nothing to fix. We were born this way."

Jay Jackson, a Reiki Master Teacher who identifies as gay and whose pronouns are he/him, wrote, "I think it is important for the practitioner or teacher to become comfortable with the LGBTQIA+ community. Questions to ask yourself are would you be comfortable being seen in public with a lesbian, gay man, or someone who is transgender or does not identify with a gender? If you are unsure of your comfort level, seek out members of the LGBTQIA+ community and befriend some before you have a client or student come to your healing center. Many LGBTQIA+ are used to being marginalized and may be sensitive to any hint you are uncomfortable with them. In addition, most LGBTQIA+ individuals appreciate professionals who are allies and support genuine consideration of everyone."

Jay continues talking about Reiki sessions, writing, "In Reiki sessions, it becomes vitally important to move our ego mind aside and allow Reiki to do its work. Reiki then allows that divine love to flow into them. Because many in this community have been alienated from their families and spiritual communities, the love of Reiki can be a transformative experience for them."

David Quiroz, a millennial Reiki Master who identifies as a gay man and whose pronouns are he/him, says he wants to be included and feels open about sharing his orientation. He doesn't like labels because they feel limited to him. He enjoys having others get to know him, respect who he is, and be welcoming of him. David shared, "If you misgender someone, apologize and be willing to learn along with the person. People love hearing the sound of their name and how they identify. If it is difficult to remember a pronoun, use their name." A teacher can add that they are excited to get to know each student in all their identities and who they are, besides saying that class is a safe and welcoming environment. He's excited for people from different walks of life and communities to learn and embrace Reiki because he knows how much it can benefit someone, particularly with identity and self-acceptance.

Being Affirming in Social Media

After thinking about serving the LGBTQIA+ population in classes and sessions, I wondered about the situation in social media and found the following information. When we create social media posts, we can use images that reflect diversity in gender and sexual orientation. We can consider using images of LGBTQIA+ role models, such as artists, writers, and historical figures.

Authentic Self

In Usui/Holy Fire® III Reiki Master, we have the terms "authentic self," "culturally created self," and "dormant self."¹¹ As part of the class, students become empowered to get in touch with their authentic selves, the part of them that is their light, wholeness, and brilliance right there inside them. It is who they really are. They learn to recognize their culturally created self, the part of themselves that cultural conditioning formed. The dormant self consists of parts of themselves not considered acceptable by others. Taking the Usui/Holy Fire® III Reiki Master class or receiving Usui/Holy Fire® III Reiki sessions helps to identify the culturally created self, heal the dormant unhealed energy, and reveal the authentic self. Using this information and energy is a great way to serve the LGBTQIA+ population and help heal the damage caused by an unaware and unaccepting society.

Conclusion

Karen Caig, a Reiki Master Teacher, commented that perhaps gender fluidity is moving us closer to unification con-

sciousness, another term from Usui/Holy Fire® III Reiki that indicates a connection between all people and an awareness that we are all one.¹² As we realize we are all one, we want to extend compassion to others and ourselves. In the spirit of compassion, I grew from my lack of knowledge and used this as an opportunity to help myself and others by sharing what I have learned. Let's continue growing and learning together as we see the authentic self in each other. ■

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Endnotes

- ¹ "Defining LGBTQIA+," *The Center*, <https://gaycenter.org/about/lgbtq>.
- ² Sabra L. Katz-Wise, PhD, "Gender Fluidity: What It Means and Why Support Matters," *Harvard Health*, December 3, 2020, <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/gender-fluidity-what-it-means-and-why-support-matters-2020120321544>.
- ³ "Non-Binary Gender," *Wikipedia* (Wikimedia Foundation), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-binary_gender.
- ⁴ Kendra Cherry, "What Does Gender Expression Mean?," *Verywell Mind* (Verywell Mind, February 14, 2023), <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-gender-expression-5187952>.
- ⁵ "Sexual Orientation: Understand Your Sexual Orientation," *Planned Parenthood*, <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/sexual-orientation>.
- ⁶ Personal communication with a gender-fluid student, October 23, 2022.
- ⁷ "Pronouns," *The Center*, <https://gaycenter.org/pronouns>.
- ⁸ "Cisgender Women and Girls," *International Association of Providers of AIDS Care*, May 19, 2021, <https://www.iapac.org/fact-sheet/cisgender-women-and-girls>.
- ⁹ Personal communication with Kris Valentine, November 11, 2022.
- ¹⁰ "Use Inclusive Language to Affirm Diversity," *Inclusive Education*, New Zealand Ministry of Education, November 23, 2018, <https://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/supporting-lgbtqiqa-students/use-inclusive-language-to-affirm-diversity>.
- ¹¹ William Lee Rand, *Usui/Holy Fire® III Reiki Master Manual, Online and In-Person* (Southfield, MI: Vision Publications, June 2020 Revision), 49.
- ¹² Personal communication with Karen Caig, November 11, 2022.
- ¹³ Rand, *Usui/Holy Fire® III Reiki Master Manual*, 59.