



Being Inclusive - Understanding Gender Pronouns

A pronoun is a word used to refer to either the people who are talking (like “I” or “you”) or a person being talked about in the third person (like “she/her,” “he/him,” and “they/them”). Since some pronouns are gendered (“she/her” and “he/him”), it is important to be intentional about the way we use pronouns as we all work to create as inclusive an environment as possible.

Pronouns are Important. You cannot always know what someone’s pronouns are by looking at them. Asking and correctly using someone’s pronouns is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their gender identity. When someone is referred to with the wrong pronoun, it can make them feel disrespected, invalidated, dismissed, or alienated.

If you don’t know someone’s pronouns, it’s okay to ask. You can say, “What pronouns do you use?” or “What pronouns do you go by?” or “What pronouns would you like me to use when I refer to you?”

So what is “misgendering?” Misgendering is incorrectly referring to a person’s gender by incorrectly assuming their gender identity (perhaps by outward appearance) or using incorrect pronouns. Misgendering someone can be done intentionally or unintentionally but it has long lasting harmful impacts.

If you make a mistake, apologize and move on. It is totally fine to make a mistake, it happens to everyone! What is most important is that you do not make a big deal about it. Just apologize quickly, correct yourself, and move on. Ex: “Oh, I’m sorry, I meant they.”

If you make it a big deal, you draw more attention onto someone who maybe does not want it. As long as you portray that you are sorry and you try harder next time, it is going to be okay. Remember; this is more for them and not you, so never make your apology about you. Always make it about the person you have wronged.

Being an ally is not a thing you are, it is a thing you do. Practice makes perfect and you are always evolving as a person. Mistakes happen, but what matters most is that you are dedicated in making this world a better place for everyone. Keep at it! You are incredibly valuable to the community!

Examples in Use:

She/Her/Hers	He/Him/His	They/Them/Their
She is excited for the event.	He is excited for the event.	They are excited for the event.
Her phone call just started.	His phone call just started.	Their phone call just started.



Some Basic Definitions and Terms

LGBTQ+: This is often the acronym used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer individuals. The plus is used to be inclusive of many other gender and sexual identities such as pansexual, two-spirit, bigender, etc.

Trans or Transgender: an umbrella term and identity for someone whose gender identity doesn't match their sex assigned at birth

Cis or Cisgender: A person whose gender identity is the same as their sex assigned at birth

Nonbinary: umbrella term for people with gender identities that fall outside of the traditional conceptions of strictly either female or male

Genderqueer: umbrella term with a similar meaning to non-binary; it can be used to describe any gender identities other than man and woman, thus outside of the gender binary

Gender Non-Conforming: a personal identity, behavior, or gender expression that does not conform to masculine or feminine gender norms

Gender Fluid: Denoting or relating to a person who does not identify themselves as having a fixed gender and can vary over time

Gender Identity: A sense of one's self as trans, genderqueer, woman, man, or some other identity, which may or may not correspond with the sex and gender one is assigned at birth.

Gender Expression: How one expresses oneself, in terms of dress, hairstyle, body modifications, accessories, makeup, and/or behaviors. Society, and people that make up society characterize these expressions as "masculine," "feminine," or "androgynous." Individuals may embody their gender in a multitude of ways and have terms beyond these to name their gender expression(s).

Sex versus gender: Sex is the category a person is assigned at birth; in the United States this would be under male and female. This is generally determined based on genitals either in utero or after birth. The reality though, is that people's biology is more diverse than society's categories and requirements. Gender is what society determines you are, based on outward appearance and expression, such as man or woman. Gender is a socially constructed classification system that relies on "normative" assumptions of femininity and masculinity. Sex and gender are often conflated due to the cisnormative (the belief that all people identify with the sex they were assigned at birth) assumption that female = woman and male = man for everyone.