What Are Pronouns? *(and how do we use them?)*
by Keith Murray

Pronouns are how we refer ourselves and each other.
The ones we refer to when we talk about pronouns these days, or gendered pronouns, are **third-person pronouns**, which are often gendered in referring to people in a default English context.

Person	Subjective Case	Objective Case	Possessive Case
1st Person Singular	I	Me	My - Mine
1st Person Singular	We	Us	Our - Ours
2nd Person Singular & Plural	You	You	Your - Yours
3rd Person Singular	**He/She/It/They/**	**Him/Her/It/Them/**	**His/Her/Its/Their & His/Hers/Its/Theirs**
3rd Person Plural	They	Them	Their & Theirs

It/Its is the common 3rd person singular gender-neutral pronoun, however, it is not used to refer to people, as it is dehumanizing. Contrary to popular belief however **they/them/their** pronouns can be **both singular** and **plural**, and has for centuries been used to refer to a single person.

VIDEO: Here is a quick introduction on using pronouns:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qvCYkmHHWsg

VIDEO: Please Watch This to better understand **why this matters:**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p3jhJPPjEUE

Read all about pronouns here:
https://time.com/4327915/gender-neutral-pronouns/

Frequently Asked Questions about Pronouns:
https://uwm.edu/lgbtrc/support/gender-pronouns/

The most common pronouns used are **He/Him/His**, **She/Her/Hers** and **They/Them/Theirs** but here are some examples of other pronouns people use:

HE/SHE	HIM/HER	HIS/HER	HIS/HERS	HIMSELF/HERSELF
they	them	their	theirs	theirself
zie	zim	zir	zis	zieself
sie	sie	hir	hirs	hirself
ey	em	eir	eirs	eirself
ve	ver	vis	vers	verself
tey	ter	tem	ters	terself
e	em	eir	eirs	emself

It is often best practice *if you do* **NOT** *know someone's* **pronouns,** *or if you* **FORGET** *someone's pronouns, and need to refer to them to* **use neutral pronouns** *and language.*

> For example:
>
> Instead of "Did you see where that *woman* went, *She* left *her* scarf" say "Did you see where that *person* went, *they* left *their* scarf"
>
> Instead of "the *man* wearing a blue shirt" say "the *person* wearing a blue shirt" use other descriptors, like "*masculine-presenting*" or "*wearing a men's button up blue shirt*"
>
> Instead of "Was that your *boyfriend? He* looks good in a bowtie!" say "Was that your *Partner/Significant Other, They* look great in a bowtie!"

tip: in instances where pronouns are unknown, and the person you are describing may express/present with gendered clothing or traits commonly attributed to a binary identity of men or women, try to use neutral terms to describe them "They were wearing a suit and tie, had a moustache" or "they were wearing a red dress and had red lipstick on" and use "masculine-presenting" or "feminine-presenting." Expressing in gendered clothing markers, hair, grooming, and make-up styles, does not always correlate with the presumptive pronoun.

What if I misgender someone?
When someone tells you their pronouns or corrects you do your best to use them from then on. It takes practice, but it is possible to rewire our brains. We all slip up, we're all human, and we're all learning and rewiring our neurons, don't feel bad if you make a mistake or assumption, and are corrected.

Please note, it is often emotionally exhausting for people to constantly correct others when they are misgendered, so don't be surprised if someone doesn't correct you, or if they do make the effort to correct you, don't be surprised if they come across as curt, or abrupt, sheepish, or emotional. Try not to take it personally, over-apologize, and just accept the correction, try again and move forward.

Additionally, If you see someone being misgendered, an awesome thing you can do as an ally is to gently correct that person, so the person being misgendered doesn't have to!

*Important: pronouns, can and do change as people's sense of identity or expression changes, or understanding of their identity changes. People may also use multiple pronouns (eg: He/They or She/He/They) Genderfluid people may change their pronouns frequently, so it's always good to ask.

Yes, this is complex, but also, it's really not. Gender is a spectrum, and our language for a long time has only been black and white.

We're just beginning to wake up to the beauty of our diversity.

<u>**INTRODUCING PRONOUNS TO YOUR GROUP/COMMUNITY:**</u>
For some people learning about pronouns, it can be confusing, and awkward. But for people who often get misgendered, the effort we take to ask, learn and use their pronouns matters.

For people who have had the privilege of never considering their gender identity, and how they are perceived by others, it can feel awkward to contemplate one's gender and can bring up many feelings when having to declare their pronouns for the first time. Often you will find people who are new to this, will first shrug it off, or make jokes about their pronouns to ease the tension around the unknown of this protocol. Our job is to make this easier for everyone!

For Queer, Trans, Non-binary, Genderqueer, Genderfluid, Two-Spirit, and Gender Non-conforming individuals, pronouns matter. Our assumptions about one's gender identity, based on our interpretation of their gender presentation is not always accurate. Assumptions can cause hurtful interactions and it is always better to ask, and not assume what anyone's pronouns are. pronouns may not always be correct. Inviting people to share their pronouns gives us a chance to learn, and fosters an environment where people feel safe, and seen, and heard.

VOLUNTARY USE, OUTING & GENDER-DIVERSE CHILDREN
Important: There may be instances where children, people with ESL, and young people do not understand the concept of pronouns or gendered language. Often people of diverse SOGIESC feel pressured or unsafe to disclose pronouns, may be on a journey of self-awareness with their identity, or may not be fully out about their identity, and they may not want to engage in this conversation, or they may use multiple pronouns in different contexts: ie) *he/him* in LGBTQ+ safe spaces, and *she/her* in the larger congregation, among family, professional or other contexts.

Pronouns can be an especially sensitive topic with gender diverse children who may be afraid of being teased or outed by other children. It is best to let the child lead, and if parents are affirming, invite them into a conversation about this. If you are concerned about family dynamics around gender expression or identity in children, please **be aware of local & national support organizations and resources** to **direct** those you support to them.

BEST PRACTICES (PRONOUNS)
Here are recommendations for ways we can integrate these best practices around pronouns:

1. Include **pronouns** on your **virtual nametags** (online)

   - in **Zoom (Teams, Asana, Discord etc.)** and social online platforms (twitter, linked-in) include your pronouns in your name identifier.
   - If you are hosting a meeting, instruct your group to add their pronouns as part of check-in.

     How to permanently add your pronouns to your Zoom account

     1. Go to the Zoom web portal and sign in to your account.
     2. Click Profile.
     3. In the top right corner across from your name, click Edit.
     4. Under Display name, add your pronouns in parentheses after your name. For example, Jane Doe (She/Her). Click Save changes.

     How to add or change your pronouns for each individual Zoom meeting

     1. After you enter the meeting, click the three dots next to your name.
     2. From the drop-down menu, click Rename.
     3. Add your pronouns in parentheses after your name, and click OK. Just note that this will only change your name for your current meeting, not any others in the future.

2. Use **nametags** with **pronouns** (in person)

   - Make them available at registration and Sign-in tables for meetings and events.
   - Invite your guests upon arrival with the explicit instructions:
     "Fill in a name and pronoun tag."
   - If you see folks reluctant to fill in their pronoun, ask them if they need help, or have any questions. If they are confused by what a pronouns is, you can model for them, by sharing your name and pronouns, and provide further information.

3. **Wear a pronoun button**
   - Pronoun buttons can be ordered online or made in house if you have a button maker. Consider making them available for your community event or organization.
   - Make them available at registration and sign in for events with nametags as an option for folks to use as well.

4. **Introduce yourself with your pronouns,** and **Invite others to also:**
   - Invite others to introduce themselves at meetings, Ministry Gatherings, Sharing Circles, by inviting them to "Share your Name, Pronouns (if you like), and anything else you would like us to know about yourself."
   (this also gives people the opportunity to share information about disability, medical conditions, allergies, or sensitivities, nationality, tribe or band)
   - Disclosing pronouns, or any other information is always optional, and voluntary: normalize the sharing of pronouns, but invite and affirm the option to pass.

5. **Include your pronoun on mail signatures / business cards / website biographies**
   - you can use this format with hyperlink to a FAQ:

   > Jane Doe
   > Lead Minister
   > Pronouns: they/them/their

FURTHER PRONOUN RESOURCES
Courtesy of Shylo Rosborough (He/Him)

1. **Gender Inclusive Language Poster**
2. **Gender Pronouns Resource**
3. **Pronouns 101 Pamphlet**
4. **They/Them/Theirs Pamphlet**

Watch this Bonus video on the Origin of Gender!

Important Concepts:

Gender Identity & Expression

The difference between gender identity and expression is often described as the internal and external aspects of gender. Identity is who we conceptualize ourselves as, and expression is how through cues, we present our gender to the world. According to Butler, "Gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self."[1] Gender is performed according to Butler, "Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed."[2] Gender is unstable, as Marchall points out, "because it must always be repeated to be recognized as normal,"[3]

Gender Attribution (assigning and passing)

Gender attribution, the process by which an individual assesses one's gender and assigns a gender based on comparing the cues of one's gender presentation or expression (clothing, hairstyle, make-up, voice, mannerisms) with the socially agreed upon lexicon of gender signifiers. Kessler and McKenna assert "the social construction of gender and the gender attribution process are a part of reality construction,"[4] and that genitals are the primary cue upon which all other secondary cues are interpreted. In the absence of genital cues, secondary cues like hairstyle and, clothing take prominence. The reason we are compelled to make gender attributions, trans author and activist Kate Bornstein, postulates, is because of primacy of binary gender roles and compulsory heterosexuality therein: **"when we look at someone, we're [going to ask ourselves] 'am I allowed to be attracted to that?'"[5]** Permission to live ones truth, to act on ones impulses are always bound by the codes and laws of the dominant culture.

"Stealth," "passing" and "clockablity" are controversial terms in the modern vernacular around transgender identities, focusing around the ability to be correctly attributed to one of the binary gender identities one is presenting as, and thus 'pass' in society without one's noncongruent gender cues being noticed or 'clocked,' betraying ones 'otherness,' allowing one to abide in 'stealth' among binary-gendered society.

Important: As these terms center privileged binary gender identities, and are 'of' and 'for' the transgender (and non-binary) community, they can be harmful when used by cisgender people.

Gender Essentialism

Modern notions of gender essentialism influence conservative thought and conflate sex and gender to be synonymous: there are two binary identity/roles of males/men and females/women. This is in opposition to a modern constructivist approach: sex and gender are distinct, and exist as spectrums of physical and psycho-social experience.

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[1] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 519, https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893.

[2] Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 527.

[3] Marchal, "Female Masculinity in Corinth?: Bodily Citations and the Drag of History," 95.

[4] Adrian Thatcher, *God, Sex, and Gender: An Introduction* (Chichester, West Sussex [England] ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 19.

[5] CreativeMornings HQ, *Kate Bornstein: Q&A with Kate Bornstein*, 2017, 20, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CR50bnGuOlg.