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WHAT ARE PERSONAL PRONOUNS AND WHY DO THEY MATTER?

In English, whether we realize it or not, people frequently refer to us using pronouns when speaking about us. Often, when speaking of a singular human in the third person, these pronouns have a gender implied -- such as "he" to refer to a man/boy or "she" to refer to a woman/girl. These associations are not always accurate or helpful.

Often, people make assumptions about the gender of another person based on the person's appearance or name. These assumptions aren't always correct, and **the act of making an assumption (even if correct) sends a potentially harmful message** -- that people have to look a certain way to demonstrate the gender that they are or are not.

Using someone's correct personal pronouns is a way to respect them and create an inclusive environment, just as using a person's name can be a way to respect them. Just as it can be offensive or even harassing to make up a nickname for someone and call them that nickname against their will, **it can be offensive or harassing to guess at someone's pronouns and refer to them using those pronouns if that is not how that person wants to be known**. Or, worse, actively choosing to ignore the pronouns someone has stated that they go by could imply the oppressive notion that intersex, transgender, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people do not or should not exist. When we refer to "personal" pronouns, we don't mean that these pronouns are necessarily private information (generally they are not), we mean that they are pronouns referring to a unique and individual person.

Hopefully, you now have a fundamental understanding about why pronouns matter. If you'd like to know more and to hear stories from trans and gender nonconforming people about their lived experiences with pronouns, please check out some of the videos and links on this website: https://www.mypronouns.org/resources

Human Relations
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HOW DO I USE PERSONAL PRONOUNS?

When a person shares their pronouns, they are naming the pronouns that they want to be referred to by in the singular third person (when referring to that person while talking to someone else). Singular pronouns in the first person (when referring to yourself) or second person (when referring to a person when talking to that same person) do not vary. For reference, however, we have included examples of singular first person and second person pronouns, as well third person pronouns.

Singular first person pronouns (that you should continue to use, as is):

"**I** am a writer and wrote that book **myself**. Those ideas are **mine**. Do you like both **me** and **my** ideas?"

Singular second person pronouns (that you should continue to use, as is):

"**You** are a writer and wrote that book **yourself**. Those ideas are **yours**. I like both **you** and **your** ideas."

Singular third person pronouns (that you should use as appropriate based on the pronouns the person being referred to goes by):

Each of the following sets of pronouns may be the sets that certain people indicate should be used to refer to them. Below, they are presented in the forms of most common usage.
Usually, the "they/them" pronouns set is acceptable to use when you don't yet know if a person goes by another set or sets of pronouns. You can learn more about the centuries of history behind the singular "they" pronoun to refer to an individual in the resources section. It is also possible to avoid pronouns, as demonstrated below under "no pronouns."

Just because a person goes by a certain set or sets of pronouns is not indicative of that person's gender. A person could be transgender or not transgender (also called "cisgender"- the vast majority of the population is cisgender) and might share the pronouns they go by. A person could be a man or a woman or both or neither and share any number of these sets of pronouns as the correct ones to use for them, but which set they go by is not necessarily indicative of their gender, even though for most people there is an association between the pronouns they go by and the gender they are.

She/Her: "**She** is a writer and wrote that book **herself**. Those ideas are **hers**. I like both **her** and **her** ideas."

He/Him: "**He** is a writer and wrote that book **himself**. Those ideas are **his**. I like both **him** and **his** ideas."

They/Them: "**They** are a writer and wrote that book **themself**. Those ideas are **theirs**. I like both **them** and **their** ideas." Please note that although "they" pronouns here are singular and refer to an individual, the verbs are conjugated the same as with the plural "they" (e.g. "they are"). Also note that in this singular pronoun set many use "themself" rather than "themselves," although both are typically acceptable.

Ze/Hir: "**Ze** is a writer and wrote that book **hirself**. Those ideas are **hirs**. I like both **hir** and **hir** ideas." Please note that "ze" is usually pronounced with a long "e" and that "hir" and its forms are usually pronounced like the English word "here." Some people instead go by "ze/zir" pronouns because of the more consistent pronunciation and spelling - see the resources section for more pronouns sets.

No Pronouns - Use My Name (example for someone whose name is "Lan"): "**Lan** is a writer and wrote that book. Those ideas are **Lan's**. I like both **Lan** and **Lan's** ideas." If the reflexive component was important to communicate a message, you could use alternative language such as "**Lan** wrote that book unassisted" or "**Lan** was the sole author of that book." Some might simply say "**Lan** wrote the book **Lan's self**."

There are additional sets of pronouns that some people might use (e.g. ze/zir, per/pers, ey/em, xe/xem, etc.). Please check with the person who goes by those pronouns and/or look for online resources to determine the proper ways to utilize them. Some people go by multiple sets of pronouns, and usually that means that it is okay to use any of the sets they go by. Some people ask that others vary the pronouns that are used within certain sets of pronouns. If in doubt about what that means for someone or to request examples of how to do that in practice, let the person know you want to be supportive and ask the person for more information or examples so that you can get it right.

Please note that there are also nonbinary, gender-neutral titles (e.g. "Mx." usually pronounced like "mix" instead of "Mr." or "Ms.") and nonbinary, gender-neutral language that can be used for everyone (e.g. "friends and guests" instead of "ladies and gentlemen"). While this website is focused on pronouns, you can find more information about gender-neutral language through our resources page.

You can also find more information about some of the more common pronouns sets through these links, which can also be used as a way to point others towards information about that pronoun set:

- http://mypronouns.org/she
- http://mypronouns.org/he
- http://mypronouns.org/they
- http://mypronouns.org/ze
- http://mypronouns.org/neopronouns

MYPRONOUNS.ORG
RESOURCES ON
PERSONAL
PRONOUNS

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HOW DO I SHARE MY PERSONAL PRONOUNS?

The vast majority of people go by the pronouns sets "he/him" or "she/her." A small but increasing number of people use "they/them" pronouns or another pronouns set -- sometimes simply because they don't want to go by pronouns with a gender association (just as some folks go by "Ms." whether or not they are married, because they don't think their marital status should be a relevant issue), and sometimes people use pronouns that aren't associated with one of those two most common (binary) genders because they are nonbinary (i.e. people who are neither exclusively a man nor exclusively a woman -- e.g. genderqueer, agender, bigender, fluid, third/additional gender in a cultural tradition, etc.).

Please note that many nonbinary people identify with the word "trans" (short for "transgender"), but that some do not; and many people who are trans are also men or women (binary). All people, whether they are trans or not trans (cisgender), whether they are men or women or nonbinary -- all people can choose to go by whichever sets of pronouns they are most comfortable with.

So, a great way to create and normalize space for people to share their pronouns is first to share your own. You can do this by saying, for example, "**Hi, my name is Farida and I go by the pronoun 'she'**" or "**I'm Yoshi and I'm referred to by 'he/him' pronouns**."

Sharing your own pronouns is a great idea, but it isn't requisite. Keep in mind, however, that there is a privilege of appearing in a way that fits both your gender and the pronouns that many people associate with your gender. In other words, if people's assumptions are correct, never having to name those assumptions begins to normalize the very process of making assumptions (which for others may be incorrect). Thus, sharing pronouns is a great way to disrupt the normalization and privilege of assumption.

If you are attending an event, you can write on your name tag the pronouns that you go by in the corner, near your name. Sometimes the pronoun alone is sufficient (e.g. "she"), though sometimes it is helpful if there is space to write "pronouns" first before listing which pronouns you go by (e.g. "**Pronouns: he or they**" -- note that some people are open to be referred to by multiple different sets of pronouns, as in this example).

If you are writing an email, you could include your pronouns in your signature line. You could also include a link to this website or another resource that helps people reading your email to understand why you are listing your pronouns. (e.g. write: "**My Pronouns: they/them ~ See www.mypronouns.org to learn more**.")

You can also share your own pronouns by sharing a link to the pronoun you go by. Here are some of the more common ones:

- http://mypronouns.org/she

- http://mypronouns.org/he

- http://mypronouns.org/they

- http://mypronouns.org/ze

If you use business cards, you can also include your pronouns, usually near or below your name, for example:

Jamaal Johnson
Pronouns: he/him

OR

Jamaal Johnson (*pronoun: he*)

There is no singular way to list and share pronouns. Many people say, for example, "she/her/hers" or "she/her" or just "she" and it's generally understood that this refers to a larger set of pronouns (e.g. that includes "herself") without having to list every one of those pronouns. You'll also find on our resources page links to additional resources and items that one can get to assist in sharing pronouns.

When you share your pronouns, you may find that you get questions about what that this means or why you are sharing your pronouns. It may be very helpful to review the other sections of this website so that you will feel comfortable explaining the purpose of sharing pronouns.