

My Personal Pronouns - RFHS Resource Guide

Pronouns are used in every day speech and writing to take the place of people's names. We frequently use them without thinking about it. Often, when speaking of someone in the third person, pronouns have gender implied. These associations are not always accurate or helpful. As such, we use the term “personal pronouns” instead of “gender pronouns” in this resource guide. The term “gender pronouns” may not be accurate as some people are non-binary or genderqueer, and their pronouns are not necessarily meant to express any gender.

Mistaking or assuming peoples' pronouns, without asking first, often sends a harmful message. Using someone's correct personal pronouns is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their identity. When we treat people with dignity, we match in deed and rhetoric our belief that they are full and equal members of our community.

A person's personal pronouns are not just “preferred”; they're the pronouns that must be used when referring to that person to show respect and inclusion within our community at the Rady Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Manitoba.

People may choose to use a variety of personal pronouns to represent how they identify. These might include “he” or “she” or gender-neutral pronouns like “they” or “ze”. If you've just met someone, don't make assumptions or use an offensive pronoun like “it”.

Keep it simple: avoid pronouns altogether and use their name or ‘they’ until you know otherwise. Below is a list of some personal pronouns commonly used, and how they are used:

Subject	Object	Possessive	Possessive Pronoun	Reflexive
He	Him	His	His	Himself
"He studied"	"I called him"	"His pencil"	"That is his"	"He trusts himself"
She	Her	Her	Hers	Herself
"She studied"	"I called her"	"Her pencil"	"That is hers"	"She trusts herself"
They	Them	Their	Theirs	Themselves
"They studied"	"I called them"	"Their pencil"	"That is theirs"	"They trust themselves"
Ze (or Zie)	Hir	Hir	Hirs	Hirself
"Ze studied" ("zee")	"I called hir" ("heer")	"Hir pencil"	"That is hirs"	"Ze trusts hirself"

Please Note: This is not an exhaustive list. It is good practice to ask which personal pronouns a person uses.

Are we singling out transgender people?

You may have noticed that people are sharing their pronouns in introductions, on name tags, in their email signatures, and at the beginning of meetings. This gives everyone in the room the opportunity to self-identify instead of assuming someone's identity or which pronouns they use. Including pronouns is a first step toward respecting people's identity and creating a more welcoming space for people of all genders.

However, transgender people generally aren't thrilled about being the only ones whose pronouns are constantly being questioned. So, unless you're in a group situation where everyone is sharing their personal pronouns, your best bet is to ask the person privately what personal pronouns they use ("Do you have a personal pronoun?" or "What pronouns do you use?"), or stick with using 'they' or the person's name.

How Is This More Inclusive?

Pronouns can sometimes be a signifier of someone's gender identity; but, not always. We don't want to assume people's gender identity based on expression (typically shown through clothing, hairstyle, mannerisms etc.). By providing an opportunity for people to share their pronouns, you're showing that you're not assuming that their gender identity is based on their appearance.

Providing space and opportunity for people to share their pronouns doesn't mean that everyone feels comfortable or needs to share their pronouns. Some people may choose not to share their pronouns for a variety of reasons, e.g. they are questioning or using different pronouns, they don't use any pronouns, they don't feel comfortable sharing them at that moment or in that space, or they fear bullying or harassment after sharing. In the case that someone has left pronouns off the name tag or chosen not to share their pronouns, please refrain from using pronouns for that person, and refer to the person by what is on their name tag.

Mistakes and Misgendering

Misgendering refers to the experience of being labeled by others as a gender other than one that a person identifies with. Because many (not all) associate their pronouns with their gender identity, using the wrong pronouns intentionally or unintentionally is a form of misgendering. If you accidentally use the wrong pronouns when identifying someone, please apologize or say "thank you" if they correct you, and immediately use the right pronouns.

Everyone makes mistakes, please take accountability for your mistake and continue using the correct pronoun. The important thing to be mindful of, is to not unload your guilty feelings on transgender, non-binary, and gender nonconforming people, or expect forgiveness. They might have a strong reaction to the misuse of their pronouns, and need space to recenter themselves.

Why is it important to respect gender pronouns?

A key element of creating a safe space for people of all sexes and gender identities is the respectful use of personal pronouns. The Rady Faculty of Health Sciences sets a clear direction for all members of our community to appreciate and celebrate differences in others, and

creating an environment of equity, diversity and inclusion with opportunities for everyone to reach their potential. *“All Learners, faculty and staff, regardless of race, ethnicity, colour, religious beliefs, national origin, rurality, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, political beliefs, language, or socio-economic status, are to be valued for their individuality, advanced academic pursuits, and contributions to the diversity and functions of the RFHS and the University of Manitoba.”*

Asking community members what their personal pronouns are, and consistently using them correctly is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their gender identity. This can determine within the first few minutes if they will feel respected at University of Manitoba or not.

Discussing and correctly using gender pronouns sets a tone of ally-ship. It can truly make all the difference, especially for new community members that may feel particularly vulnerable in a new environment. You can't always know what someone's personal pronouns are by looking at them. When someone is referred to with the wrong pronouns, it can make them feel disrespected, invalidated, dismissed, alienated, or hurt.

Many people may be learning about personal pronouns for the first time, so this will be a learning opportunity for the Rady Faculty of Health Sciences community. You will be setting an example for your colleagues.

How can I be inclusive in using and respecting personal pronouns?

Incorporate personal pronouns in everyday use, with these strategies:

- Edit your email signature to include your pronouns (and include a link to this resource article).
- Verbal introductions and check-ins are great opportunities to solicit personal pronouns. As names and personal pronouns can change over time, it is preferable to regularly incorporate these questions into meetings and introductions. Asking about a person's pronouns may initially feel awkward or uncomfortable; but it is preferable to making hurtful assumptions and using the wrong pronouns. Here are some ways you can do this:
 - "What pronouns do you use?"
 - "How would you like me to refer to you?"
 - "How would you like to be addressed?"
 - "Can you remind me which personal pronouns you use for yourself?"
 - "My name is Joshua and my pronouns are he, him, and his. What about you?"
 - Include your pronouns on your name tag.

References: for a more in-depth examination of the use of pronouns, please refer to the following Web sites:

AboutMyPronouns.org
<https://www.mypronouns.org/about>

UCSF LGBT Resource Center
<https://lgbt.ucsf.edu/pronounsmatter>

GLSEN (formerly Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network)
<https://www.glsen.org/activity/pronouns-guide-glsen>

Rainbow Resource Centre
<https://rainbowresourcecentre.org/files/GetReal-RRC.pdf>

RFHS Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
https://umanitoba.ca/faculties/health_sciences/media/RFHS-EDI-Policy-approved-February-5-2020.pdf