

PRONOUNS AND GENDER DIVERSITY

A pronoun is a word that stands in for a name.

Indicating a personal pronoun - for example during events, in an email-signature, in biographies, and in public profiles - can build respect for gender diversity and expression. Sometimes, a person may be mis-gendered by another person who has made an assumption about what pronouns that person uses.

This can be an all-too-common experience for people who are gender non-conforming, two-spirit¹ or transgender.² While “he/him” and “she/her” are the most common gender pronouns, someone may use other pronouns outside the gender binary, including: they/them, ze/zir, xie/hir, among others. Sometimes, someone may use a combination of pronouns or no pronouns at all. The singular use of “they” is now accepted as grammatically correct across various style guides.

By using the correct pronoun when referring to someone, we are practicing the use of gender-affirming language – language that validates someone’s gender expression and identity. Using gender-affirming language is just one important step to creating more inclusive and respectful spaces.

1 A term used by many Indigenous communities on Turtle Island (typically known as Canada and the US) to describe people with diverse gender identities, gender expressions, gender roles, and sexual orientations. Two-Spirit people have been and are viewed differently across different Indigenous nations. Two-Spirit people were included and respected in most Indigenous communities, sometimes considered sacred. Two-Spirit is something embodied exclusively by Indigenous people. (Taken from “Queer terminology from A to Z,” by Qmunity.)

2 An umbrella term for people who identify with a different gender than the one assigned at birth, and can include a wide range of identities (such as non-binary, genderqueer, gender non-conforming, pangender, and agender). A person may identify with both, neither, or a combination of feminine or masculine genders. Someone may choose to use these terms exclusively or in combination to describe one’s own gender expression and/or identity.



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