Gender and Pronoun Guide

The concepts of gender identity, gender expression, and biological sex are frequently confused and used interchangeably, but it is important to understand that each term refers to a different aspect of identity.

Gender Identity

Refers to a person's internal sense of being male, female, or somewhere else on the gender spectrum. Since gender identity is internal, one's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others and may or may not align with their gender expression.

Examples: women, man, nonbinary, transgender, agender, demigender, genderqueer, pangender

Gender Expression

External appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, body characteristics, and/or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being masculine or feminine. Often how we present is related to our gender identity, but not always.

Examples: masculine, feminine, androgynous

Biological Sex

A medical determination based on primary and secondary sex characteristics, hormones, and chromosomes. Often this is assigned at birth.

Examples: female, intersex, male

Each of these is also different than sexual orientation. Each of these components of identity are independent of each other, although they may intersect. Therefore, even if you know any one of these things about a person, you do not necessarily know the others. The same is true for pronouns.

Personal Gender Pronouns

Words used to refer to a person in place of the person's name. There are many pronouns in the world, and it is up to each individual to choose the pronouns that are most fitting for themselves. People select the pronouns that make them feel most comfortable, so it is important to ask others for their personal pronouns, listen carefully to their answer, and use their correct pronouns when referring to the individual.

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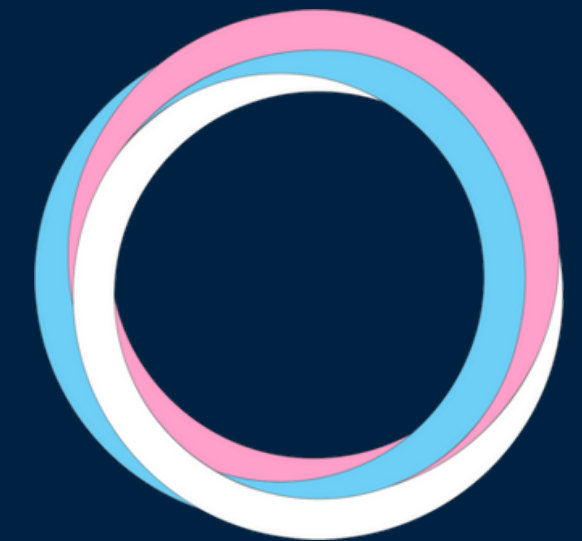
Respectful ways to ask about pronouns

It is important to remember that by asking everyone you encounter which pronouns they use, you can help create a more normalized and safe way for others to share their pronouns, which they may not have been able to do before. You could ask something like:

- "What pronouns do you use?"
- "Sorry, I forgot to ask. I use they/them/theirs pronouns, how about you?"
- "Can you remind me which pronouns you use?"

Practices for Inclusion

Campus community members can update their prefered name, gender identity, and personal pronouns via the "Personal Information" tab on Self-Service. Individuals are also invited to include their pronouns in the following mediums to promote visibility and inclusion:

- During introductions
- With their name on Zoom
- In their email signature

Subjective	Objective	Possessive Adjective	Possessive Pronoun	Reflexive
She smiled	I called her	Her dog barks	That is hers	She likes herself
He smiled	I called him	His dog barks	That is his	He likes himself
They smiled	I called them	Their dog barks	That is theirs	They like themself
Ze Smiled	I called zir	Zir dog barks	That is zirs	Ze likes zirself
Ve smiled	I called ver	Vis dog barks	That is vis	Ve likes verself
Xe Smiled	I called xem	Xyr dog barks	That is xyrs	Xe likes xemself
Ae smiled	I called aer	Aer dog barks	That is aers	Ae likes aerself

A person's pronouns may change. Using pronouns other than the ones a person has asked you to use can make them feel unwelcome, invisible, or unsafe. If you make a mistake, quickly correct yourself and briefly apologize. Making a big deal out of the mistake could make the misgendered person feel worse.