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Pronouns & Us: Pronoun use and the Impact on Mental Health

Corrin Marier (he/they)
Sheridna College

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Pronouns & Us

Pronoun use and the Impact on Mental Health

Content Trigger Warning

This literature contains themes of gender-based oppression, mental health, suicide, and systemic challenges.

Should you benefit from support, please contact Sheridan's student resources.

Sheridan Counselling Services

askanadvisor@sheridancollege.ca (905) 845-9430 x 2557

24/7 Supports

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Terminology

- **Gender Identity**
 - One's internal sense of being male, female, neither of these, both, or another gender(s). Everyone has a gender identity, including you. For transgender people, their sex assigned at birth and their own internal sense of gender identity are not the same. Female, woman, girl, and male, man, and boy are also not necessarily linked to each other, but are six common gender identities.
- **Gender Expression**
 - The physical manifestation of one's gender identity through clothing, hairstyle, voice, body shape, etc. Many transgender people seek to make their gender expression (how they look) match their gender identity (who they are), rather than their sex assigned at birth
- **Gender Diverse/Gender Non-Conforming**
 - Broad terms referring to people whose gender does not align with or conform to the gender associated with their sex assigned at birth, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category.
- **Sex Assigned at Birth**
 - The sex given to a child at birth, most often based upon external anatomy.
 - Related terms you may see are AMAB (assigned male at birth) and AFAB (assigned female at birth).
- **Transgender**

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- A person whose gender identity differs from the social and cultural assumptions based upon their sex assigned at birth. This term is inclusive of non-binary, gender diverse, and gender non-conforming individuals.
- Transgender should be used as an adjective, never a noun.
- **Cisgender**
- Someone whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth.
- **Nonbinary**
- An umbrella term for all genders that fall outside of the binary system of man/woman. Nonbinary people may identify as being both, somewhere in between, or somewhere outside these categories entirely.
- should be used as an adjective, never a noun.
- Not all nonbinary people identify as trans, and not all trans people are nonbinary.
- **Misgender(ing)**
- Referring to or addressing someone using pronouns or terms that do not correctly reflect their identity. This can be done intentionally or unintentionally.
- **Sexual/Romantic Orientation**
- This denotes who a person is physically or emotionally attracted to, in a sense of their relationships. This is unrelated to their gender identity; a transgender person can be gay, straight, bisexual, pansexual, or any other orientation.
- **Outing**
- The act of disclosing a persons' gender, gender identity, or sexual/romantic orientation without their permission. Outing someone

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can put them in danger depending on their living situation, employment, home and family life.

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Mental Health and Misgendering

Statistics

- 40% of trans people have attempted suicide at some point in their lifetime (compared to the 4.9% average in the US)
- The life expectancy of trans women of colour is 35 years old.
- 75% of trans youth have felt unsafe in school.
- 54% reported being verbally harassed in school (K-12)
- More than 50% of trans people reported they felt unsafe in asking the police for help.
- Queer people experiencing rejection are six times more likely to have high levels of depression.

A lot of these statistics are exacerbated due to trans people regularly feeling unsafe when accessing mental health supports. When seeing someone like a therapist, unless it is someone who specializes in trans and LGBTQ+ individuals, it is commonly expected for trans people to prove their identity, or repeatedly justify who they are. A lot of people will avoid seeking help for these reasons. Similar scenarios happen in healthcare as well; individuals are often misgendered and/or deadnamed despite informing the practitioner of the correct way to address them due to their identification/documentation not reflecting their identity.

Protective Factors

- Support from friends and family – Studies show that trans youth who have at least one supportive adult in their life are four times less likely to die by suicide.
- Access to mental and physical healthcare – There are an increasing number of LGBTQ+ friendly resources being developed in recent years, including resources listed on the [RainbowHealthOntario](#) directory.

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- Membership in local LGBTQ groups like GSA's in schools, local community support groups. These help people feel like they're less alone.

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Allyship and Support

Allyship

Being an ally is a lifetime commitment. It is not a self-defined identity; it is a commitment shown through continued action for those you aim to support.

To be an ally, ask yourself these questions in relation to the group you intend to support:

- How much space are we taking up in conversations? In rooms? In organizing?
- How do we actively improve access to our meetings? Our actions?
- How are our identities taking up space? Physically? Verbally?
- How much do we know about the people we seek to work with? What are our assumptions and from where did they originate?
- Who are we leaving behind?

It requires a continued effort to recognize where we have privilege and what we can do to make use of it to support those who don't have it.

[Trevor Project on Trans Allyship](#)

Support

Here are some simple ways that you can show your support for trans people.

- **Display your pronouns in online spaces!**
 - This helps to normalize – If everyone is sharing their pronouns willingly, it won't be something that automatically connects people to that individual being trans. You can do this in your email signature, LinkedIn profiles, Facebook profiles, Twitter bios, and so on.
- **Correct others when they make a mistake!**
 - Just make sure that the person is already out to whoever you are correcting, so not to put them in potential harm's way.

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- **Educate yourself!**

- It's not the job of trans people to educate you on the details of their gender identity or their challenges. It is great if they want to share with you! But you should do your best to learn what you can on your own.
- This is a good series created by a trans youtuber that gives an overview for people. [Trans101 by Chase Ross](#)

- **Support organizations that work to help the community!**

- This includes policy makers, charitable organizations, and social services. There are a lot of areas where change needs to be made, supporting these initiatives helps everyone!

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What if I make a mistake?

Mistakes happen. The best thing that you can do is apologize, correct yourself, and move on.

Try not to make a big deal out of it. If you emphasize what happened and your own feelings, you're putting the responsibility of comforting and reassuring on the person you've hurt. It compels them to respond with things like "it's okay" or "it's fine" when it likely is not.

If you do mess up, make sure you listen, be accountable, and commit to do better.

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Types of Pronouns

Pronouns are defined as any of a small set of words that are used as substitutes for nouns.

Common sets are:

- He/Him/His
- She/Her/Hers
- They/Them/Theirs

Words like I, me, we, and us are also pronouns.

Using someone's correct pronouns is an important way to show them respect.

Pronouns ≠ Gender

Keep in mind that pronouns do not equal gender. Pronouns are a facet of a person's whole identity and expression. Pronouns are important to who a person is as a whole, and they aren't preferred – they are required.

Anyone can use any set of pronouns they feel represents them. Some people prefer to not use any pronouns and only be referred to as their name.

Gender-Neutral Pronouns

- They/Them/Theirs – First recorded use in singular form was in 1375, predating the singular "you"
 - Typically used when a gender is unknown or not disclosed.
 - "Someone forgot their wallet! I hope they come back for it".
- Ze/Zie/Zir – Appeared circa 1920 as a gender-neutral pronoun in print.
 - "Kai? Ze came by my house yesterday – Zir sense of fashion is amazing!"
- Xe/Xem/Xyr

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- “Did you hear the news from Luke? Xe just got a new puppy! I got xem some treats to give to it.”
- Fae/Faer/Faers
 - “Did you see Theo today? Fae has been playing Pokémon and filled faer entire Pokédex!”

Here’s a chart with examples of more neo-pronouns and their history:

[Neopronouns Explained](#)

Here’s a link to a game where you can practise using different pronouns!

[Pronoun Practise Game](#)

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