



Corrective Pronouns

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Abstract

With the world reuniting it is important to recognize others for who they are and misgendering is an important topic that needs to be addressed. Everyone lives their lives differently which should be respected unless it is harming or endangering others however gender expression is not one of those. Just because someone does not agree with the lifestyle of others does not give them the right to blatantly disrespect them. Misgendering is just like someone purposely pronouncing your name wrong consistently. That is the same concept when someone continuously decides to assume or ignore the pronouns of others. The steps to creating a less hostile environment for those that do not only limit themselves to she/her/hers and he/him/his pronouns would first be education a lot of the issue is simply that people are ignorant to the fact that there are more than just those two pronouns to describe gender expression. Second would be asking a lot of the time if someone's gender is just assumed instead of being asked what their pronouns are or which pronouns they prefer instead of just giving them pronouns that are assumed and deemed as fact. Lastly, respecting the decision of the other person although some may not agree with the pronouns, they choose for themselves it should be respected and they should be approached and addressed as such. Although this will not completely fix the issue of misgendering, it is a great guideline for those reuniting with their loved ones and people dear to their heart that may be expressing themselves differently, have changed their pronouns, or even thinking about it. It will help both parties understand while still respecting the boundaries of one another.

Imagine a world where there's no such thing as self-identity or pronouns. A world where self-expression didn't exist for anyone. This is exactly the world society creates when people aren't correctly approaching people as their preferred pronouns. Just because someone looks like they may identify a certain way does not mean the way they identify adds up to your

assumptions of them. Gender does not always coincide with biological anatomy.

Misgendering is a communal problem. For instance, although some people do not particularly show up in the world as feminine their pronouns are still, she/her/hers. Many people assume masculine presenting women and girls identify as he/him and they are incorrect. A lot of masculine presenting women and girls

have been called he, him, sir, and mister based on the assumptions of others.

In the graph below there is a small range of pronouns that people use. The standard pronouns we all were taught are she and he. However, they aren't the only ones them/Zir/Hir are gender pronouns as well. These pronouns are used but not limited to those that may identify as trans or nonbinary. Non-binary is an umbrella term for those whose identity does not fall under just one gender such as she or her.

Subject	Object	Possessive Adjective	Possessive Pronoun	Reflexive
She	Her	Her	Hers	Herself
She has a bike.	I saw her riding the bike.	Her bike is red.	The bike is hers .	She bought the bike herself .
He	Him	His	His	Himself
He has a bike.	I saw him riding the bike.	His bike is red.	The bike is his .	He bought the bike himself .
They	Them	Their	Theirs	Themselves
They have a bike.	I saw them riding the bike.	Their bike is red.	The bike is theirs .	They bought the bike themselves .
Ze	Hir	Hir	Hirs	Hirself
Ze has a bike.	I saw hir riding the bike.	Hir bike is red.	The bike is hirs .	Ze bought the bike hirself .
Ze	Zir	Zir	Zirs	Zirself
Ze has a bike.	I saw zir riding the bike.	Zir bike is red.	The bike is zirs .	Ze bought the bike zirself .

The first step to properly approaching people is to stop making your own assumptions of others' identities; it's ignorant and distasteful. Ask them what their pronouns are and whatever may come out their mouth, accept it because it is their identity, not yours. Another thing we all need to understand is that sex and gender identity are completely different. Sex is the biology that a human is born with depending on their chromosomes. For example, xx chromosomes in the human body makes the genetic makeup of a female while xy chromosomes make up the genetics of a male. While gender identity is an individual's personal sense of having a particular gender or both genders and no gender at all.

I talked to a Millersville University faculty member to learn more about solutions for the problem of misgendering. Dr. Jess Hughes (pronouns she/her/hers) is a professor in the Department of Communication and Theatre. I sought out her insight given the fact that pronouns are a

part of everyday communication in college classrooms, and because I wanted to understand what navigating pronoun usage looks like from a teacher's standpoint. The first question that I asked was, does she feel as though pronouns are important? Her response: "I definitely think they are, especially as a teacher. I want to recognize everyone that is in my class communities with me as themselves. I want them to feel free to be their authentic selves. Calling them by the name they want to be called and the pronouns they want to use is just entry level decency."

There are many ways we as a community can respect everyone as whole just by respecting someone's pronouns. There are many ways you can be more confirming and comprehensive when it comes to correctly calling someone by their pronouns. To reiterate, the first step is to ask; don't just assume.

Another thing to be aware of is that pronouns can be interchangeable. Anyone can have more than one. It is all about what they are comfortable with you calling them. For example, I asked J Whitlow, director of Millersville University campus life (pronouns they/he), how they think we as a community could correctly approach people with their pronouns. His response: "The bottom line is a respect thing. If I say my name is J and my pronouns, are he/him or they /them, out of respect for me, whether you understand it or not, you misgendering me or you not calling me by my personal name or my chosen name or my personal pronouns is you deeming it as it's optional or you do not have to do that. You are erasing me, and you are not seeing me, and you are not respecting me."

When referring to someone with pronouns, you need to respect the pronouns they identify themselves with. Although you may not necessarily agree with their pronouns or may simply not understand

them, it is not for you to question their identity. It is not our place to disagree with how someone self-identifies, nor is it our place to question the pronouns someone uses or the name they prefer to be called.

Pronouns give people a sense of visibility when they do not identify with or feel they belong in a dominant, heteronormative society. Queer people and gender non-conforming people exist, as J Whitlow and many others prove daily.

Humans are always growing and evolving as are the identities attached to them. I asked J Whitlow how the pronouns they use have helped him evolve as a human being. J Whitlow responded in the humblest way, saying, "I think for me that I have learned about myself through this process is being comfortable, because I think it is a self-journey. Then when you start to open and tell people, like for example, for a long time my pronouns have been they/them. Recently, they are he/him now. In certain instances, I may use both...[or] I might not care. It just really depends on the day. ...It is one thing for you to feel it, but it is one thing for you to verbalize it and live it. And I think pronouns and the ability to wear buttons to put it in my email signature, the ability to put it in my introduction, allows me to own more and to feel liberated more."

In conclusion, do not purposely misgender people. If it happens by mistake, it is understandable, we are all human and no one is perfect. We all make mistakes. But do not get defensive and cause a scene about it, simply correct yourself and move forward. Some people will not correct you because they do not like confrontation or do not want the backlash of how they choose to self-identify. That does not give you free range to consistently misgender them, though. Think about how you would want someone to say your name or refer to you using pronouns. How would you feel if someone refused to honor how you

self-identify? Understanding how it feels to be misgendered can help us to correctly identify others and set the intention to use their preferred name and pronouns as we want our own to be used.

Remember not to assume, you do not get to delegate who people can and can't be; that is not in your authority. Respect whatever pronouns someone uses regardless of what you think. Also know that it is not anyone else's job to educate you. Just like everyone else, you have access to tools and resources to help you navigate pronoun usage. Use resources like this article or seek out community centers such as Dr. Rita Smith Wade-El Intercultural Center to educate yourself and others about things you do not understand. Lastly, do not belittle someone's identity because you do not approve or agree with it. Call them the name and pronouns they tell you they would like to be called. If these steps are followed, we as a community will be well on our way to approaching people respectfully. These steps can help create a better understanding and mutual respect for all parties involved.

References

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