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UUCSV service

# They're Already Here

## Section 1: How do we approach gender?

### *Pre-activity introduction*

Good morning, everyone! I'm Katie, and I use she/her and they/them pronouns. This morning, we're going to talk about gender.

Gender is confusing. Even for the people who are most familiar with the concept of gender and gender identity, gender is still confusing. Conversations about it are everywhere, from the monumental rise in anti-trans legislation to appeals for social media users to put their pronouns in their bios to the removal of gendered language and imagery from stores, public bathrooms, and corporate spaces. Hopefully today we can make those conversations a little more accessible and easy to understand, and even open them up regarding our UUCSV community.

We're going to start that learning process with a vocabulary activity. For those of us in person, everyone will receive a card with a definition written on it, and when it's time, you'll get up and try to match your definition with one of the terms on a colored piece of paper being held up by one of our youth, who will be standing around the room. If you're unable to stand up and walk around, you can participate in spirit and in the discussion afterward. Those of you online will receive a definition in the chat, and you'll have to collectively try to come up with the term that matches.

### **Terminology**

**Gender binary:** The concept that there are only two genders, man and woman, and that everyone must be one or the other; also assumes that gender is biologically determined.

**Gender identity:** One's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves.

**Sex assigned at birth:** The sex (male or female) given to a child at birth by a medical professional, most often based on the child's external anatomy.

**Non-binary:** A gender identity and an umbrella term for people whose identity falls outside of the binary of male and female. Some people don't identify fully, or at all, with the gender they were assigned at birth and some people have no gender at all.

**Cisgender:** A person whose gender identity and biological sex assigned at birth match.

**Transgender:** Means that a person's gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. This word is also used as a broad umbrella term to describe those who defy conventional expectations of gender identity or expression.

**Intersex:** Refers to people who have sex characteristics that do not fit within the male and female binary. These characteristics could be a combination of chromosomes, internal organs, hormones, and/or anatomy that are both male and female.

## Section 2: What about pronouns?

As you most likely know, a pronoun is any word that takes the place of a noun: "I," "she," "it," "we," "them," "you," or "his." Everyone has a preferred set of third-person pronouns to use when referring to them. In English, the pronouns someone uses usually align with the gender they identify as, but this isn't always the case.

First, let's talk about different sets of pronouns and their meanings.

**She/her** is most commonly used to describe women and feminine-aligned people. It is singular.

**He/him** is most commonly used to describe men and masculine-aligned people. It is also singular.

**They/them** is most commonly used to describe either multiple people or people who don't identify within the gender binary. It can be both plural and singular.

It's important to note that pronouns do not ALWAYS equal gender. Pronoun usage is always about the comfort of the individual. Usually, that means their pronouns fit their gender identity, but not always. Some people use multiple sets of pronouns. Some people use pronouns that aren't usually associated with their gender identity. That doesn't mean their pronouns are wrong.

I like to think of pronouns as *gently indicative* of gender. If someone uses a set of pronouns, they probably identify with aspects of the associated gender. However, it's never okay to assume – that's why you should provide your own if you're comfortable doing so and ask what someone's pronouns are if they're willing to share.

People use many different kinds of pronouns in English to refer to themselves. There are the three most common – she/her, he/him, and they/them – but those are not the only kinds. As our understanding of gender evolves, we create new sets of pronouns to deviate from traditional concepts of gender. These new sets of pronouns are called neopronouns.

Neopronouns are any third-person pronouns that aren't officially recognized in a given language. They can be variations of existing pronouns and nouns or any short combination of

letters that make new pronouns. Some of the most common neopronouns are xe/xem, ze/zir, and fae/faer, but the list is infinite and ever-growing!

If someone tells you their pronouns and mentions a pronoun set you're unfamiliar with, it's best to ask them how to use the pronouns. You don't want to accidentally mispronounce or misspell their pronouns. It's like names! Just remember to be respectful and only ask if you're in a setting where this wouldn't be disruptive. You can always ask later. And remember, every pronoun was considered a neopronoun at some point, even the ones we're most familiar with.

### **Section 3: Why does it matter?**

Quick trigger warning: In this section, I'll be discussing hate crimes and anti-trans violence. If this is a sensitive topic for you, feel free to leave the room or turn off your sound if you're online. You'll know the section is over when the offering starts.

As you likely know, anti-trans violence in the U.S. is rising. Trans people feel incredibly unsafe, and it's not hard to understand why. According to the ACLU, there are currently 126 anti-LGBTQ+ bills either introduced or advancing in state legislatures across the United States. Those are only the ones proposed; the amount of hateful legislation already on the books at state and federal levels is unfathomable.

Unfortunately, legislative, social, and cultural violence leads to physical violence and in the worst cases fatality. Today is the 22nd day of 2023, and already two murders of trans people have been reported. Both victims were women of color.

These hate crimes are not anomalies. They are a direct result of the misinformation and fear spread and stoked by those in power for centuries.

This rhetoric isn't exclusive to physical hate, either. Social media and cyberbullying have taken it to a whole new level. For a long time, having your pronouns in your bio signaled to bigots that you were trans – because why would you have your pronouns listed if they were the 'default' ones? – and being openly trans subjected you to doxxing, intense bullying, and even death threats.

This power trip carries over to real life, too. Every day, trans and nonbinary people have to deal with constant microaggressions that aren't always subtle. Misgendering is one of the most common ones, and it can hurt the most.

So why does all this matter to UUs in particular? When you hear about anti-trans violence, it's easy to write it off and say, "Well, other people talk about it enough." Imagine how many people say that to themselves, though. When you stay silent about these issues, it leads to the kind of misinformation that is a direct cause of violence.

As UUs, it is our obligation to affirm the worth and dignity of all people. And affirmation means action, not just recognition. Taking steps to educate yourself and treat the oppressed social groups around you with the utmost respect is completely necessary.

And remember that you never know who will be helped by your allyship. For all you know, one of your coworkers could be struggling with their gender identity. When you put your pronouns in your Facebook bio, they might see it and gain the confidence to add new pronouns to theirs. Small things can make an enormous difference in the lives of the people who need them. That's why this work is necessary for us.

## Section 4: What can we do?

Inclusion and affirmation of people who identify outside the gender binary is an ongoing journey. As an aspiring ally, it can be hard to determine what the best steps to take to fight oppression are. As is the case with all forms of discrimination, listening to those who are directly affected by hate is the single most important thing you can do to further any liberation movement.

Taking the first step can be difficult, but it's easier and more approachable than you think! Here are three things we can do to further shape this community into a welcoming congregation.

Number one, we can **reimagine what our bathrooms – and all gendered spaces – will look like in the future**. Having multiple gender-neutral bathrooms is one of the most important things public spaces can do to be welcoming to nonbinary people. And this will serve multiple purposes! For parents, caretakers, and people with accessibility barriers, larger gender-neutral bathrooms will help tremendously. In the meantime, though, until we can renovate, we'll be putting period products in every single stall in both bathrooms, not just on the counters. You can look out for those in the coming week.

Number two, we can **start making our language more inclusive**. It can be incredibly ostracizing for nonbinary people to only ever hear two options - "ladies and gentlemen" hurts more than you think. This may seem trivial, or like something you don't think you need to work on, but I promise introducing more inclusive language can make an incredible difference in the lives of the people it affects. Instead of "he or she," you can say "they." Instead of "Mr." and "Mrs.," you can use "Mx." Instead of "ladies and gentlemen," you can say "gentlefolk," "distinguished personages," "Your Royal Highnesses," or "esteemed chaotic villains and ne'er-do-wells and their heroic counterparts."

Number three, we can **make our pronouns readily available**. Just like having your pronouns in your bio, making your pronouns available and conspicuous is one of the easiest and most important things you can do as an ally. For those of us in person, there's a very easy way to make that happen - pronoun stickers! We're going to pass around baskets with pronoun stickers for your nametags and scissors to cut them with. For the people on Zoom, you can all put your pronouns in your Zoom names!

Of course, these aren't the only things we can do. The UUA has a wonderful resource on steps congregations can take to make their communities more inclusive, and I'll make sure it gets included in this week's newsletter, along with a few other articles on gender terminology and how to navigate pronouns. I highly recommend you check them out!

<https://www.uua.org/lgbtq/identity/transgender>

<https://greatist.com/health/nonbinary#under-the-nonbinary-umbrella>

<https://www.hrc.org/resources/understanding-neopronouns>

<https://www.aclu.org/legislative-attacks-on-lgbtq-rights>

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/article/730061#:~:text=Other%20terms%20commonly%20used%20are,to%20match%20their%20gender%20identity.>

<https://maestramusic.org/blog/angela-morley-a-pioneering-musician-in-the-lgbtq-community/>