Why Share Gender Pronouns

The Interhelp Network offers the following explanation of why sharing pronouns is important when introducing oneself.

Pronouns are words that are used to replace names such as she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/them/theirs, or per/pem/pers. Example – Edward parked *his* bike over there.

Because a person's gender identity, and another person's perception of their gender based on appearance do not always match, it is important to learn from a person which gender pronouns they identify with and would like to have used to refer to them.

Gender can be very important to a person's sense of self, so to misgender someone by using pronouns other than the ones they choose for themselves can feel disrespectful, alienating and invalidating.

Thus, including gender pronouns with name introductions and on name tags helps everyone be clear from the very beginning how a person wishes to be referred to.

In the dominant gender binary conditioning of Western civilization, people are labeled either male or female. However, gender exists on a spectrum. Many people historically and today do not identify as male or female. For example, two-spirit people exist in many Native American cultures. People may identify as non-binary, gender fluid, or transgender (meaning their gender identity is different from the sex registered for them at birth).

In dominant culture, cisgender identity (meaning a person's gender identity is the same as their sex registered at birth) has been normalized and carries a privilege, while people who do not conform to the gender binary often face a lot of discrimination.

When everyone shares gender pronouns during introductions, this shifts the burden of responsibility from already marginalized people, for whom identifying themselves can be quite vulnerable. For this reason, everyone sharing gender pronouns can be an important act of solidarity. It may also be too vulnerable to share one's gender pronouns, so it is good to use invitational language in introduction prompts such as "Share your name, pronouns if you use them, or however you would like people to refer to you."

Some people prefer that no gender pronouns be used for them, and that only their name be used. Example: Edward parked *Edward's* bike over there.

If you use gender pronouns for yourself, we ask you to join this community in identifying which gender pronouns you would like people to use when referring to you. Knowing and accurately using someone's gender pronouns is a demonstration of respect, inclusion and validation in our community.