

I'LL use your pronoun no BIG Deal

“ I support transgender people, but I won't use someone's pronoun if it's political.”



EXPLANATION

How do you know whether someone's gender pronoun preference is 'political' or not? Some people's preferences are obvious and others aren't. When something isn't obvious it stands out because it takes more thought. Some transgender people stand out because they don't look like what we think a man or a woman should look like. Maybe they don't identify that way, or maybe they don't have the money or support to access hormones, surgeries, or new clothes. Some pronoun sceptics feel like it's too much to ask that they expend a little extra effort because 'it should be easy' to know which pronoun someone uses. But it's only 'easy to know' when someone looks exactly like what you want them to look like in the gender department. Needing a transgender person to look a certain way in order to use their pronoun isn't being supportive of transgender people.

ACTUALLY...

Everyone has a gender pronoun preference. Saying another person's preference is 'political' is basically telling them they should look more 'like a man' or 'like a woman.' That is extremely unsupportive of transgender people.

“ You can't use a plural pronoun in English to refer to one person! ”



EXPLANATION

Some say he and she are the only grammatically correct singular personal pronouns, and that you can't change grammar just because it doesn't work for a few people. But languages are living tools created by and for the people who speak them, and when the needs of those speakers change, so do languages. English pronouns have already changed several times in history. From Old to Middle English, people said thou (singular) and ye (plural) instead of our modern you. After the Norman Conquest of England brought a French influence into English, plural ye became singular and was used to indicate someone's higher status, kind of like plural vous conveys respect in French. However, because social class boundaries were becoming more fluid in England, thou started to feel like an insult as it implied a lower status, so you gradually took over despite facing initial resistance.

ACTUALLY...

Actually, plural pronouns have already been used this way in English. Singular you was resisted at first just like singular they is today. But it's been centuries since anybody objected to singular you!

“ Under Bill C-16, I could be charged with a hate crime if I get someone's pronoun wrong! ”



EXPLANATION

Bill C-16 adds "gender identity" and "gender expression" to the hate crimes provisions of the Criminal Code (sections 318 – advocating genocide, and 319 – public incitement of hatred). These provisions already set out identifiable groups based on things like national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, and mental or physical disability. They are rarely used and are carefully written to only apply in extreme cases, like where someone calls for the destruction of an entire group. The third provision changed by Bill C-16 (section 718.2) only applies when someone is being sentenced; it instructs judges to treat hate-motivation as a factor that may lead to a more severe sentence for an offence like assault or vandalism. Even with Bill C-16's changes, you can't be 'charged with a hate crime' just for using the wrong pronoun.

ACTUALLY...

Unless you've also committed a crime like assault or vandalism while intentionally calling someone the wrong pronoun, a mistake can't send you to jail. So keep on not doing those things and you should be fine.

“ If we agree to use zie/hir or singular they, soon we'll have to memorize a different pronoun for everybody! ”



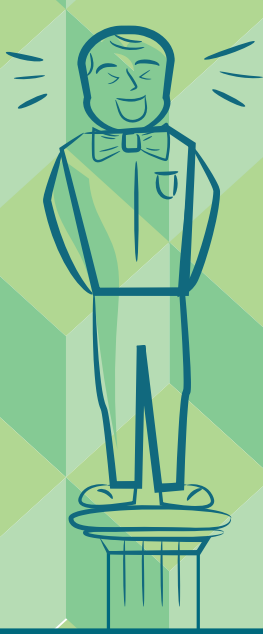
EXPLANATION

It's true that there is more than one gender-neutral pronoun, like singular they/them, or zie/hir (instead of she/her). But agreeing to use someone's gender-neutral pronoun today doesn't mean agreeing to memorize an endless list of pronouns down the road. This is what philosophers call a 'slippery slope' argument. In a slippery slope argument, there's no evidence for the big bad outcome people fear, just like there's no evidence that people everywhere are beginning to make up their own pronouns. Without evidence, people try to prevent the first step by making the outcome sound as scary as possible. But a major problem with slippery slope arguments is that most situations aren't slippery. They're more like staircases, where each 'stair' is a different decision, and each decision is made separately based on its own unique issues and evidence. The slippery slope just isn't a good reason not to use someone's preferred pronoun.

ACTUALLY...

Respecting a few people's gender-neutral pronouns isn't the same thing as agreeing to use a different pronoun for everyone you know. That doesn't make any sense.

“ A professor should be able to say whatever they want! ”



EXPLANATION

A professor can write a scholarly essay critical of gender-neutral pronouns. If it's relevant to the course topic, the essay can be assigned as a course reading. But academic freedom doesn't mean a professor can knowingly address their students in ways these students have indicated are undesirable. Imagine a professor insisting on their right to address a student with a name that doesn't match the student's ethnic identity:

Professor: "Hi, John."
Student: "Actually, Professor, it's Juan."
Professor: "I can't pronounce Hispanic names. And besides, you don't look like a Juan."

ACTUALLY...

Academic freedom means that professors can research and write about whatever they like. But it doesn't mean a professor can say anything they like to their students.

If these were two equals encountering each other in public, Juan could just walk away. But in many cases students are required to remain in a course or supervisory relationship in order to graduate on time and obtain a good reference. The knowing misrecognition of a student's identity based on a professor's own personal views is not an expression of academic freedom. It is a form of disrespect that has no place in the classroom.