

Gender, Sexuality and Identity

Identity - Video 3

D:

Hi, my name's Deanna. I like going by the name D - either/or is fine - it's basically interchangeable for me. Pronouns - I like being referred to as 'they', but I don't care if you refer to me as 'she'. Even 'he' - that doesn't come up, but... I'm more neutral about that; I don't really identify as male or female or a combination of anything. It's just - I'm me - that's it, really.

Christine D:

Pronouns are - in the transgender community are very, very important. If I'd go into an agency and I introduce myself as 'Christine' and the person behind the desk will say "Have a seat, sir" - and this happened at an agency where I did some intervention on - where the person came in, wasn't passing [as a woman, in this case]: "I'm here to do an intake; my name is Mary", and the person said "Have a seat, sir." I got called in to talk to the person and my first question was, "How many men do you know with the name of Mary, first of all?" So my advice to this person where they were volunteering was they had to take Transgender 101 [like a class in school]. If you're not passing [your physical appearance doesn't match your internal gender identity] it's - sometimes it's hard. And people are very snide at making remarks. And there's people that are very feminine-looking; there are people that are very androgynous-looking [neither female nor male]; there are people that are very masculine-looking. And I always say, "If you don't know, ask."

Hershel Russell:

One of the ways to show respect, one of the most important ways to show respect to us is to use the right pronoun. And the right pronoun for someone who looks like me, with the beard and all of those clearly masculine things - the right pronoun, oddly enough, is 'he'. For someone who is wearing a skirt and makeup, obviously the right pronoun most of the time is going to be 'she'. And then there are people where you can't necessarily tell. It's really okay to ask; it's really okay to say "What is your preferred pronoun?" And then to get it right, which can be a real challenge. And you're going to stumble sometimes; everybody stumbles sometimes. But to really work at that is immensely important to our well-being, and to our access to healthcare. It's really humiliating to be misgendered. It's not just painful, it's humiliating. And I remember watching a young trans man doing a

presentation on stage. He was still quite anxious about presenting, and somebody, in asking a question, got his gender wrong, and I saw him fumble and lose his confidence - just so upsetting.

I also want to say it is an extraordinary, liberatory experience to work to get that pronoun right. I'm sitting perhaps in my office, and the person sitting in front of me is 6 foot 4 [6 feet and 4 inches tall] with broad shoulders and a heavy beard, and has just been brave enough to tell me that she's a woman. And so while my eyes say 'man' my heart and my mind say 'woman', and that effort to get the pronoun right, it messes with something in your brain in this beautiful way that you begin to walk around looking at people and stop making those assumption about this boring, two-dimensional, on or off, male or female - like it doesn't really apply to so many people. It's a real effort, but it's so worth it, even for the person who is doing it. And then there's these other lovely pronouns that are emerging that make me very excited where some people, increasingly, especially young people, are using the pronoun 'they' in the singular - so "Hershel loves to cook; they use garlic in pretty much everything, including chocolate." So practice using 'they'; it can feel a little tricky but practice it, get the hang of it. Shakespeare used it; Oscar Wilde used it; it has tons of grammatical super-authoritative people who use it. Get the hang of it, and enjoy it. And it can also be one of the ways, if you're not sure of someone's pronoun, and you feel concerned that asking them will upset them, use 'they'. Problem solved.