

# OpenTheo

## Should We Use Preferred Pronouns When Not Sure of a Person's Biological Sex?

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### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about using a person's preferred pronouns when we're not sure of their biological sex and whether we should ask why our employer is requesting we use pronouns in our email signature in case the purpose is to help people who are unfamiliar with English names know what sex we are.

\* What should I do about using a person's preferred pronouns when it's not clear what that person's sex actually is?

\* Since including pronouns may be helpful to immigrants who aren't familiar with English names, if requested to include pronouns in an email signature, must we always ask why?

### Transcript

- This is Amy Hall. I'm here with Greg Cokol and thank you for joining us on the #STRaskPodcast. Welcome Greg.

- Hi. - I think I got right into it last time. I never said.

- Yeah, yes. Left me a little lurch here. I was, yup.

So let's go though. All right. So we have a couple questions here from Robert.

They're both hitting the question about pronouns slightly differently. So I'll have one question from him and then I'll have a follow up from him. Here's the first one.

"Concerning preferred pronouns. It is sometimes not apparent what a person's real gender actually is. Maybe they are transgender or maybe they have a medical problem.

To push back on their nominated identity may require me to have more information than what I know. What are your thoughts?" - Well, it's interesting. In Saturday Night Live,

there was a character like this.

Do you remember? - Yes. - The character's name was Pat. And this is before all of this craziness that we're experiencing now.

And so part of the humor was they never knew what to do with Pat because her name was, or Pat's name was ambiguous. And there was just in the appearance and everything it was, you couldn't tell. And so there's a lot of humor that they were able to build around the ambiguity.

However, it is the case that in some cases it's difficult, all right? Now our point of view, and we've expressed this before, in fact, I'm just finished the almost done with the chapter on that, which is the last chapter ever right to this book. We express in the book an our view that when it comes to somebody's name, names are conventional. People choose names for themselves their parents do.

And so we should call people by the name they choose, okay? But pronouns are not conventions. They are descriptions of sex. And gender and sex, I think in reality, are synonyms.

Certainly, biblically they're synonyms. But now there's been this distinction that's being made between gender and sex so that one could believe one thing called gender in their mind. That could be opposite of what their body actually says.

Okay? So our general principle here is call people by the names they want to be called by, but do not give in to the narrative that a person's gender is something that's in their head. And by the way, the gender on this view is what matters. That's why changing the physical body is completely appropriate if your mental gender is doesn't match your body.

And so there's an active destruction to a perfectly healthy body that happens. And there are all kinds of consequences to that as well, especially when it has to to prepubest and repubest and young people, all kinds of other things that happen. All right.

So this is it turns out to be a very destructive trend. And people want details on this Abigail Shrier's book, irreversible damage is a good one. And I remember you when you read that you were just like shocked and speechless at the way she described the trends and the trends have gotten a lot worse since she wrote that piece.

Okay, so that's kind of the foundation. Go ahead and call people by their names. Now, if you don't, when you use a pronoun of somebody, you are not addressing the person.

Pronouns are third person references. So he or she or him or her, that is two people referring to in conversation, referring to someone else. So, you know, if you are, if you are, if you don't know what their actual sex is, then probably just maybe just sidestep it,

do a workaround and use their name, Pat or, or whatever, you don't have to do that.

And by the way, in a circumstance like that, if you mischaracterize their, their, the pronouns that are appropriate to their sex, I mean, that happened in the past, you just apologize, you know, if, or, you know, you just make mistakes. I don't, you know, the, the problem with it now is because this is so politically charged. I'm using my words carefully.

This is politics. And so, and it is the machinery of government that is being employed to enforce a particular worldview. Okay.

And I'm going to say it again, the machinery government is being used to enforce a particular worldview. And this is why pronouns matter. I wrote a piece on this, maybe a year or two ago as a mentoring letter, and I just titled it pronouns matter.

And why do you fuss over those little bitty words? Well, if they're just little bitty inconsequential things, there wouldn't be so much ink, spilt, or careers lost because of them. No, they're important things because what they do is they represent a narrative which represents a worldview that is being enforced upon people who don't believe it. Okay.

And so when it's enforced on people who don't hold the view, that means that they are requiring to confess things that are that are against their deeply held convictions. Okay. Under the pretext of being nice or being kind, right? Oh, it's being nice.

It's be kind. Why is it nice? Why isn't it unkind to force me to talk in a way that's inconsistent with my deepest convictions? Why isn't there respect for my convictions? And so with the, I'm just speaking very broadly here now because it's going to inform any particular response I have. The key here is not that we are demanding that other people have our view.

Remember the complaint? Oh, you Christians are forcing your views on other people. That was the complaint. But that's exactly what's happening here.

They're forcing their view on us. And not only, of course, when the Christians are saying, Jesus is the only way, the, what they mean by forcing is we believe that their, our view actually applies to them even if they don't believe it. And that bothers them.

Okay. But we're not requiring them to do anything different. In this case, though, they are, they have their point of view.

They think we're wrong. And they are requiring us to do something different, to live and speak and act as if their view is correct. And if we don't do it, they will actually punish us.

And punishment takes different forms, but sometimes it's the loss of a job. And that's

happening more and more often now. Okay.

So, so, what we're trying to do is not change their view, but we're fighting to be allowed to keep our own view. It's a completely defensive posture at this time. And what a lot of Christians are, end up doing unfortunately.

And I think there are exceptions to this, you know, you got to decide which who you're going to die on and what price you're going to pay for a pronoun. But what's going on here is Christians are being intimidated. And so they are affirming a false worldview in order to protect themselves from being persecuted.

Now persecution happens at different levels. And so this is where there's a judgment call. But if people are just going to be mad at you, because you won't use the right pronoun, why are we going to just go along with a false worldview and affirm a false worldview that is not just inconsistent with Christianity, but it is it's denying the order that God created in the very beginning for human flourishing.

And by the way, when Jesus in Matthew 19 is asked about marriage, he starts with pronouns. Essentially, he starts with gender, I guess is a better way of putting it. He says, have you not read that from the beginning, he made them male and female.

He starts with gender in answering a question about marriage. All right. And so he's going back right down to foundational realities.

This is God's world and he made it for a purpose. So it's not surprising then that from a spiritual perspective, there will be attack on those things that are essential to the foundations that accomplish human flourishing. And of course, when that's successfully done, the attack is successful, then humans don't flourish, no duh.

And this is exactly what we're seeing in our culture today. I think it's helpful to remember in all of this, and I'm going to have some specific things about this, but this is actually causing damage to a lot of people, this misunderstanding. So when we speak the truth on this, it isn't just for the sake of like keeping ourselves pure in some way.

We're actually upholding the truth for the sake of others, for the sake of the specific people, for the sake of our entire society, for the sake of human flourishing, for all sorts of goods. I just today saw a video of a girl who was just, she'd done a TikTok video just devastated and saying she lost her voice, she lost her breasts. Well, it is just somebody that's trans.

This is a girl who had taken the hormones and then detransitioned and said she had borderline personality disorder, but instead of addressing that, they just said, "Oh, then you must be male." And now she's devastated saying, "I don't know if I'll have kids. I don't know if anyone will want me. I've damaged my body irrevocably." So that is a real harm.

And going along with that is not good for her. It's not good for a lot of other detransitioners. I don't think this is going to last much longer, to be honest, because I think the suing of the doctors will start soon.

Well, that happens successfully in the UK and famously. So this is interesting, this development, but just to put it in more broad theological categories, what I was speaking to is the first great commandment. Love God with your whole heart, mind, soul, and strength.

This is God's system. This is what we have to affirm. Amy's talking about love your neighbor as yourself.

This is not loving your neighbor. The in Sweden, where the entire culture is much more sanguine about this issue than here in this country. Though, by the way, it's almost impossible to find any social structure that isn't 100% in favor of this.

So it isn't like transgendered are feeling so oppressed in our culture. Everything is in their favor in terms of the social structures and the government. But in any event, in Sweden, the suicide rate is still 20 times higher for transgendered and surgery doesn't help that at all.

And the reason, and I'm going to give you my assessment, the reason is, is because even those who are gender dysphoric and moving to gender reassignment, surgery, etc, they know something is wrong. And this is why they say, for example, "I'm a woman trapped in a man's body." I mean, that statement itself acknowledges a fracturing of the self. These things don't fit.

And in an attempt to make them fit, they change the body because they think that's the problem, which can't be done because sex change is impossible biologically. It's biologically impossible. All you can do is mutilate the body and do kind of a cosmetic shift, but you can't change the body.

And so this conflict continues even with the surgery. And that's why the suicide rates are so high. And they are not because, I mean, do not buy this for a second.

The suicide rates are not high because Christians are dissing transgenders. Like I said, our culture is full force in favor of all of this stuff everywhere you turn. All right.

And the bigger pressure is against Christians. Christians are being dissed everywhere, but they're not committing suicide because they're being dissed. All right.

So this is a red herring. It's kind of a fancy ad hominem that's being used. It has nothing to do with the suicide rate, our point of view.

That is pure nonsense. So to get back to the specific question, Robert, you're asking if

you can't tell of their transgender and should you push back or how should you push back if it requires more information than what you know? And my thought is, if they truly look like the sex and you don't know otherwise, there's no problem with using the whatever name and the associated pronouns that they give you because there's nothing wrong with that. It's not our job to figure that out, I guess is what I'm saying.

And I think about Paul's commands about eating meat that was sacrificed to idols. And he says, don't ask questions. But if they tell you, then don't eat it.

It's a good application of that. For the sake of the other person's conscience. So this is where it comes into play, what I was saying about it's the loving thing to do to speak the truth.

You don't have to go around asking people, are you really a man? Are you really a woman? You don't have to do that. Sometimes it is obvious, but it isn't always obvious, especially in the case of women who take testosterone and then they have beards or whatever. There was a contestant on Survivor who went through an entire season and a half without anyone knowing that he was transgender.

Well, actually it was a she appeared completely like a man. There was nobody new until halfway through this second season. Now, it wasn't necessary for anyone to say, I just want to make sure you're really a man.

So I don't think we need to worry about that. If you get that wrong, that's okay, that you do your best. By the way, in the Olympics, they used to have to take a test, a blood test to find out.

Oh, really? Oh, yeah, the Olympics of the past. Of course, a woman acting as a man is not going to cause any problem. Usually you can tell if it's the other way around.

That's right. But that was a standard procedure to make sure that women were competing against women and men were competing against men. So in other words, if everyone thinks this is a woman and there's no reason to think otherwise, there's no problem with referring to her as a woman.

Now, I also think that usually now, at these days, people are going to be open about it and they're going to advertise the fact that they're transgender and they will make it obvious. And if that's the case, then we, there's no need to figure it out because they will make it clear to you, even if you can't tell by looking at it. So simply put in a circumstance that was described here by Robert, just go with appearances, just go with the flow and the appearances because there's no reason to press any further.

And that's a good advice. And if you can't tell for sure, you go with what they say, yeah, that's right. Exactly.

Okay, so here's the follow up from Robert, including pronouns in an email signature may be helpful for immigrants, not familiar with English names or for people with foreign names where gender is not obvious to English speakers. If requested to include preferred pronouns in an email signature, must we always ask why? Well, I don't know, why can't you just decline? Why can't you just not put any preferred pronouns or instead of using a preferred pronoun, and this is a recommendation I've made in the past, is you could say something like, I don't have a preferred pronoun, I have a sex, I'm male. And there you're bypassing the preferred pronoun appeal, you're not playing that game, but you're making clear what your sex is.

No, some might say, well, wait a minute, if I'm a male, I could just say my preferred pronoun is he or him. But see, if you say that, what you're identifying he and him as as your preferred pronoun, not your biological sex. And so you're just, it just turns out that what you prefer matches your body.

But what matters is what you prefer. So even with that approach, you're still affirming the narrative. Okay, and that's why I say, it's better to point out, I have no preferred pronoun, I'm a male, I have a sex, I'm male, or something like that.

If you could just bypass it, you just give your signature. Now people demand that you put preferred pronoun, that's when you can say, I have no preferred pronoun, I'm a male, I have a sex, my sex is male, maybe that's a way to put it. Because you're tying, or you're tying your, you're tying your, your gender expression to your, your physical body.

And therefore you're not affirming it. Now, of course, this won't guarantee you won't get in trouble. The irony here is your statement is completely self-reflexive.

In other words, you're talking about yourself, you're not talking about anybody else, you're not putting your view in anybody else, you are, they want your opinion, you're declaring your opinion. So why can't you just declare your sex instead of your preferred gender? And I'll tell you the reason, because it does not go along with the narrative. They demand you affirm the narrative.

And this is where we have to just say, no, we are not going to live by lies. All right. And I think it's fair to offer what why, why should I make us, if you get pressed on this, why should I make a statement that is completely disingenuous and against my personal convictions? Why are you forcing me to do that? And I, that's an entirely fair question to ask.

I'm not exactly sure how they're going to answer. I mean, some people are going to say, oh, because it's nicer, it's kind and it's nice other people. Well, it's not nice to me.

You want them to be allowed to have their view of themselves. Why don't you let me have my view of myself? Now, I think those are entirely legitimate and fair responses.

But I don't look at in the state of the community, the community right now in our culture right now, they're not going to say, Oh, well, that's, that is fair minded for us to do that a few.

That's reasonable. No, these are people who demand conformity. This is what's going on.

And you can maybe this will run itself out, you know, before too long, but it sure is getting a lot. I think it's going to get a lot worse before it gets better. When a doctor in the UC system, medical school apologizes to his students, this is the UC system graduate medical school, apologizes to his students for using the phrase a pregnant woman.

Because as he tells them, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to suggest that only women can get pregnant. When this is the trainer of future doc medical doctors says this, you know, we're in a bad place. And so my encouragement is do not cooperate with this.

That's my blanket encouragement. And by the way, if nobody pushes back on this, then nothing's going to change. It's bullies will continue to bully if we let them bully.

It's just a simple fact of reality, you know, and human nature. And Robert, you're asking, you're trying to imagine areas where it would be legitimate to have your pronouns. And you want to know if we, if we need to always ask why they're asking for pronouns.

And I would just say, I have never heard of anyone putting requesting pronouns for any reason other than this. And the reason why I say that is we've gone for decades and decades with email signatures. Yeah, with foreigners who'd quit speaking.

And letters with, yeah, where we didn't have that. And so here's something simple you can do if you think that is genuinely the reason why they're asking you. And if there's nothing wrong with asking why you could ask that, that actually might be helpful because then that will give you an opportunity to explain why you're not going to do it.

But just use your title, just say, I'll, I'll just use my, I'll just use Mr. with my name. And then it'll be clear what my sex is by my title. That's a simple way you can always use Mr. or Mrs. or Mrs. or whatever.

My nature. And so this isn't recommendation for anybody else, but I wouldn't even do that. But that's a, that's a practice that's been around.

Let me give you an example, Greg. Ocean on our staff is a woman. But for some reason, people often think when they see her name that she's a man, they assume that she's a man because of her name.

I don't know why it seems like Ocean is a woman saying, but that happens. So she puts her, she puts Ms or whatever it is in her email signature for that reason. Sure.

There's nothing wrong with that. That's something we've been doing forever. Yes, but



this isn't, you know, okay, if you have a name like, oh, I should do that.

Okay. But I, I, but his question is about foreigners who wouldn't understand our, our names. I don't believe that.

And I don't believe it that that's a real issue for the same reason that you don't believe it. Okay. And that, and that is we've been doing this for years and years and years and ages and ages and nobody's seen a problem with that.

And plus foreigners then can, they'll just simply learn what names are associated with what sex. It's not a real problem. What it is, is a subtle way in my view.

Okay. I realize this is my assessment of this, but it's a subtle way of enforcing a narrative. That's what it is.

It's just another way of doing it. What Amy is offering is a workaround. Okay.

And if you want to go that way, fine. I wouldn't do it personally. No, I don't think anybody does it is being immoral or anything like that.

But it's just, I'm just saying, I don't want to cooperate with these people. I'm just offering it as work around. If you genuinely think that there is some other reason, or if that's the reason they give you, then you could just say, okay, well, I'll just use my Mr. Mrs. And then everyone, it'll be clear.

Well, you know, I've never heard of that happening. So I have a part of the problem and see Amy and I've been working together on this last chapter for the book for Street Smarts, and it's dealing with gender, marriage, and sex. And I say in the book, this is a really hard one to write because there's so much confusion on this issue.

Okay. And, and, and you know, I write this stuff and then Amy comes in and she, she, she helps me makes it work. This isn't going to work.

This isn't going to work. This is going to work. So we get this combined effort in the editing process of the major of the text itself.

So it's massively improved because of Amy's input. But I made a comment to her this morning. It suddenly occurred to me that one of the reasons it's so hard to talk about this stuff is because the the the the left doesn't speak English anymore.

They don't speak English anymore. And this is true in politics and words like fascist, you know, it just to explain what you mean. You're not saying that they're speaking a foreign language.

You're saying that they're using different meanings for all the words. Of course, this is it's a hyperbolic phrase. But but yes, they all their words mean something entirely

different.

But they carry with certain connotations. All right. So the word fascist means something entirely different than what it used to mean.

But it still sounds really bad. And so if you stick that word on somebody, even somebody who has no fascistic tendencies whatsoever, we were just talking about the the new prime ministry elected in Italy and they ought to know what fascism is. And she's nothing fascistic about her, but she's being called that.

So why it's because the languages change so much, the manipulation of language. And so my way of characterizing this is the problem is they don't speak English anymore. They use English words with totally different meanings.

This is especially true in the way we address the gender issue. But these are cloaks. This is these are rhetorical maneuvers, cloaks for darkness.

And look, I I I'm not a chicken little kind of guy. That's not my style. Those of you who listen for a long time for years and years and years, you know, this is not me.

But there's these are nasties that are happening all around us. And I'm not exaggerating this stuff. There's a spiritual scheme, Allah, Ephesian six that's in play here to attack the foundations of human flourishing.

Okay. And the language is what's being used to change people's minds to manipulate people. This is always the case in this kind of thing.

And that's what we have to be very careful about how the language is used and not participate even in the language because language has, you know, life and death are in the power of the tongue. Right? That's proverbs. All right, Greg, we didn't go over too much for that.

Thank you, Robert, for your questions. And if you have a question, send it on Twitter with the hashtag #STRask or you can go through our website, just go to our hashtag #STRask podcast page and you'll find a link there to submit your question. And we will consider it for the show.

Thanks for listening. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.