



Adult Learning Within Reach

Member Lecture – 21 October 2021

Starting the conversation: using gender-neutral pronouns
Rachel Turner, WEA tutor & Gender Studies Masters student

Questions answered post-lecture

Q1 Many older people find this subject incomprehensible and complex. How would you suggest approaching this subject if their grandchild wishes to express themselves as gender diverse?

Listen, show empathy, do not judge or make assumptions. Acceptance is important and showing that you care by using the correct pronouns. Ask the young person which pronouns they would like to be identified as and read up on the subject using some of the links below.

Q2 In your studies, have you found that the move to non-binary language has helped / will help end the rigid social constructs of what it is to be man or woman?

I do hope so but the use of heteronormative binary language is unlikely to end in my life-time. It is an opportunity for the younger generation to really make a difference in society, employment and education.

Q3 If there are only male and female toilets, then does this mean anyone can use them depending on how they identify?

Good question and there has been much debate around this by the radical feminist movement and others. If someone identifies as non-binary it should be their choice and how they feel comfortable. A trans individual should be able to also use toilets of their choice. I would like to see gender-neutral toilets in all public buildings and education providers.

Q4 What would you say instead of Sir or Madam?

I know that these two patriarchal salutations are still used for letter writing but I would advise using a gender-neutral alternative such as Colleagues, Folks, Members, Customers, Friends, Manager.

Useful links and further reading

Is Gender Fluid? – Sally Hines (2018), Professor of Sociology and Gender Studies, University of Leeds – accessible and easy to read

Gender Trouble – Judith Butler (1990), an American academic has written many books about gender but they can be challenging to read

Queer Phenomenology – Sara Ahmed (2006) has written many books on gender, feminism and Queer studies

PTO

www.mypronouns.org

www.amnesty.org.uk/LGBTI-equality

www.mermaidsuk.org.uk – charity providing support to gender diverse young people

www.stonewall.org.uk – UK charity supporting LGBTQ+ people