

# GENDER PRONOUNS, TEACHING AND LEARNING, AND CULTURES OF RESPECT

College of Arts Workshop  
University of Guelph | April 2021

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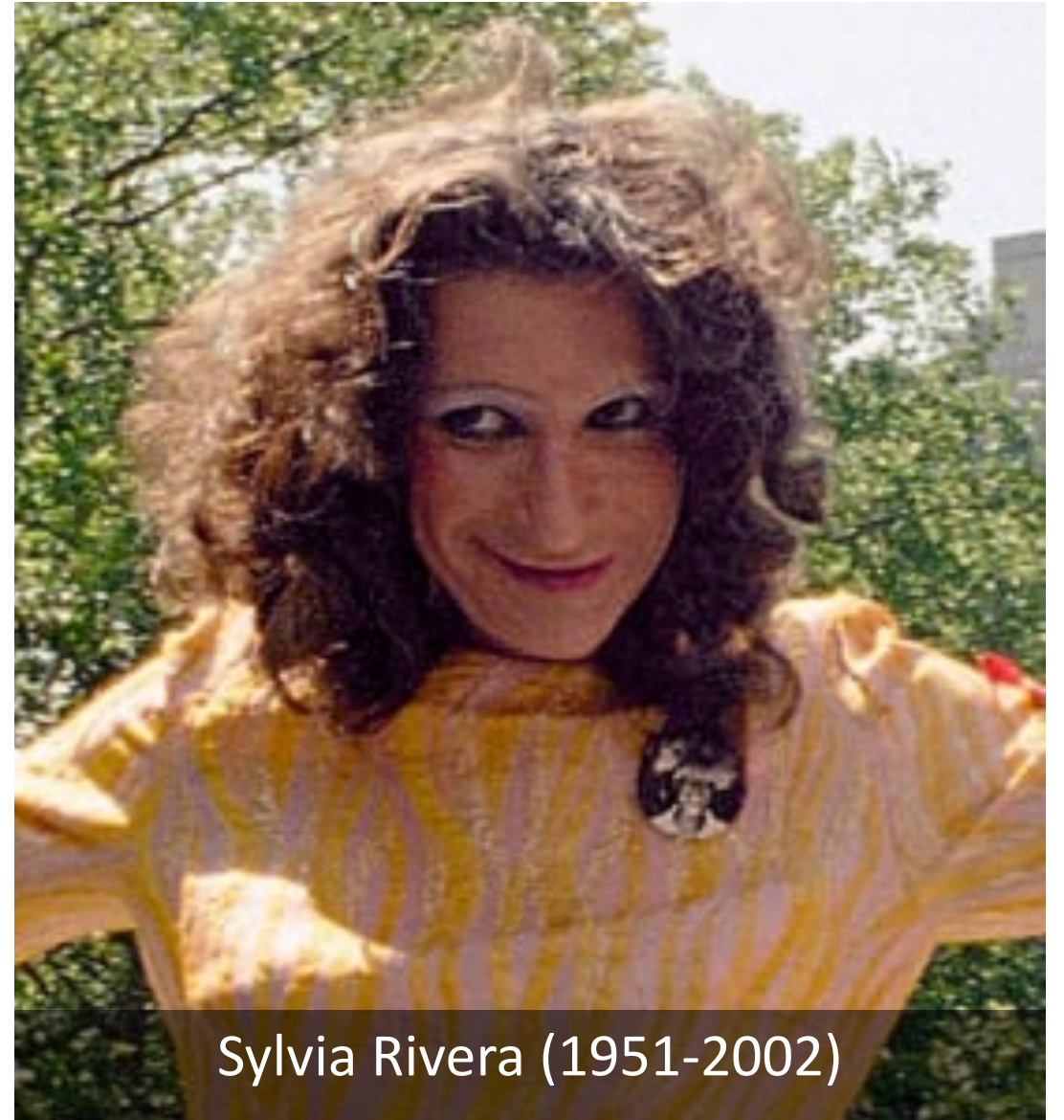
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*Federated with the University of Waterloo*







Marsha P. Johnson (1945-1992)



Sylvia Rivera (1951-2002)

# WORKSHOP OUTCOMES

By the end of this workshop, you should be able to:

- **define** and **discuss** pronouns, including gender pronouns, as parts of speech in English\* language discourse, history, and culture with a knowledgeable, inclusive, and respectful vocabulary;
- **identify** and **implement** strategies and resources for positive engagement with gender pronouns and teaching and learning;
- **use** pronoun awareness to signal cultures of respect, and **reflect** on whiteness, marginalization, trauma, and continued struggle.

*\*Let's chat about pronouns and gender inclusive communication in more languages than just English, but the focus of this workshop is on the English language*



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# PRONOUNS: ENGLISH LANGUAGE

## What is a “pronoun”?

“[I]t’s a somewhat obscure grammar term, after all” (Spade)

Subject Pronouns	Object Pronouns	Possessive Pronouns
he	him	his
she	her	her(s)
they	them	their(s)
it	it	its

At their core, a pronoun is a part of speech that replaces a noun (a person, place, thing, idea, or emotion) to stand in for that noun in discourse and communication.



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# PRONOUNS: ENGLISH LANGUAGE

## What is a “gender pronoun”?

When a pronoun replaces and stands in for a noun who is a person, we are grammatically responsible for aligning the pronoun standing in with that person’s gender – our language itself dictates this.

Subject Pronouns	Object Pronouns	Possessive Pronouns
he	him	his
she	her	her(s)
they	them	their(s)
it	it	its

**But not “it.”  
Never lead  
with “it.”**

*Pronoun: “a word standing instead of a Noun, as its Substitute or Representative,” and “[i]n the Pronoun are to be considered the Person, Number, Gender and Case”*

*(Robert Lowth, A Short Introduction to English Grammar: with Critical Notes, 1762: 31)*



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# PRONOUNS: ENGLISH LANGUAGE

**But...isn't "they" plural?**

"I argue endless battles with **well-educated people who think their own grammar school lessons from 40 or 50 years ago preclude** them from referring to individual students as 'they'" (Manion)

"This year, my students are working to **advocate that our writing faculty stop teaching that the singular pronoun 'they/them' is grammatically incorrect** – a battle we still have to fight *even though even the mainstream press has recognized this use*" (Spade – emphasis added)

"They" as **a singular, non-binary pronoun** was named Word of the Year in 2015 (Abadi)

Abadi, Mark. "'They' was just named 2015's Word of the Year." *Business Insider*

Manion, Jen. "The Performance of Transgender Inclusion: The Pronoun Go-Round and the New Gender Binary." *Public Seminar* (November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018)

Spade, Dean. "We Still Need Pronoun Go-Rounds." *DeanSpade.net* (December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018)



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→ The MLA also includes “**themselves**” as the reflexive pronoun!

**Pro Tip:** Update writing style/brand guides to do this, too, and knock out Latinate gender suffixes (i.e., “alumnus” is gendered!)

# PRONOUNS: ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Okay...but isn't “they” plural, in academic and professional writing cultures?

**2017** – **CSM** (Chicago Manual of Style)

*“a generic third-person singular pronoun to refer to a person whose gender is unknown or irrelevant to the context”*

**2019** – *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*

*“a singular indefinite pronoun [used] to refer to an unknown or unspecified person[,] to a single person whose gender is intentionally not revealed[, and/or] to a single person whose gender identity is nonbinary”*

**2020** – **APA** (American Psychological Association) and **MLA** (Modern Language Association)

“How do I use singular *they*?” *The MLA Style Centre*, 2020.

“Pronouns.” *The Chicago Manual of Style Online*, U of Chicago, 2017.

*Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed., 2020.

“They.” *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 2019.



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# PRONOUNS: ENGLISH LANGUAGE

**Fine! ...but the singular “they” is at least new, right? (...RIGHT?!)**

It is remarkable that it took until 2015 (the Word of the Year) and beyond (academic culture) for this pronoun to gain “the considerable traction” that it has (Abadi) **since as early as our Middle English of the 1300s**, our language has had this in its employ:

In *The Wycliffe Bible* (1382), for instance –  
“**Eche on** in **per** craft ys wijs” (*Syrach* 38:35)

In Oliver Goldsmith's *The History of England* (1771) –  
“**Every person** who had been punished for seditious libels during the foregoing administration, now recovered **their** liberty, and had damages given **them** upon those who had decreed **their** punishment” (240-1)

Abadi, Mark. “‘They’ was just named 2015’s Word of the Year.” *Business Insider*  
Goldsmith, Oliver. *The History of England, From the Earliest Times to the Death of George II*. Vol. 3, London, 1771. 4 vols.  
*The Wycliffite Bible (E.V.)*. 1382.



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# WHAT CAN I CLARIFY?



[This is a photo of my Pekingese-Chihuahua, Sam. He is sitting in my desk chair at my work station in my home office with a very messy desk looking up at my computer screen.]



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# PRONOUNS: ENGLISH LANGUAGE

*pronominal* (adj.) – “relating to and/or serving as a pronoun”

## What are gender pronouns that people use?

When we talk about people’s personal pronouns and gender pronouns, it can be helpful to think of them in “series” as well as in cases:

“Series”	Subject Pronouns	Object Pronouns	Possessive Pronouns
“He” Series	he	him	his
“She” Series	she	her	her(s)
“They” Series	they	them	their(s)
“Ze” Series	ze	hir	hirs
“Ve” Series	ve	vem	vir
“Just my name” Series	[person’s name]	[person’s name]	[person’s name + ‘s]

*This table is neither exhaustive nor complete!*

### Notes:

- Some people use gender-neutral pronoun series that might be unfamiliar – such as “ze” and “ve” series.
- Some people’s pronominal system is just their names and not a series of pronouns.
- Some people use and are open to being referred to by more than one series of pronouns.



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# TOMMY MAYBERRY (HE/SHE/THEY)

**AMAB** –  
Assigned Male  
At Birth

Visually-presents  
most often as  
**culturally-coded**  
“male”

**Same-sex partner**  
(also named Tommy)  
– we appear as **gay**  
**male couple**



Academic Drag Queen



**LGBTQIA2S+**

**Nails** did, **hair** on  
fleek, and **make-**  
**ups** on – in *and*  
out of drag

**Flamboyant**  
and **fierce**

I use “they” when I **refer to myself** in the third-person



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# GENDER PRONOUNS AND TEACHING AND LEARNING

## Fostering Inclusivity in Teaching and Learning

We can foster inclusivity in our teaching and learning work and efforts with gender pronouns in two keys ways:

1. Creating and maintaining an inviting place around us as teachers
2. Modelling

And with both of these, **we need to be intentional and meaningful.**



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# GENDER PRONOUNS AND TEACHING AND LEARNING

## Creating and Maintaining an Inviting Place

“When someone with the **authority of a teacher** describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing. Yet you know you exist and others like you, that **this is a game with mirrors**. It takes some strength of soul – and not just individual strength, but collective understanding – to resist this void, this nonbeing, into which you are thrust, and to **stand up, demanding to be seen and heard**” (Rich)

“I tell my students, “When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that **your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else**. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else. This is not just a grab-bag **candy game**.” (Morrison)

Morrison, Toni. “Interview with Pam Houston.” 2003.

Rich, Adrienne. “Invisibility in Academe.” 1986.



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# GENDER PRONOUNS AND TEACHING AND LEARNING

## Creating and Maintaining an Inviting Place

Within Canada and other OECD\* countries, **nearly one in three individuals identifying as LGBTQ[IA2S]+ report experiencing discrimination.**

The report also notes that social acceptance of sexual and gender minorities by Canadian citizens is approximately half the population surveyed.

In addition, **only 44% of respondents** said they **would accept a child who expressed themselves differently from the sex to which they are assigned at birth.**

\*Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). *Society at a Glance 2019 – OECD Social Indicators – En – OECD*. 2019, <http://www.oecd.org/social/society-at-a-glance-19991290.htm>.





# GENDER PRONOUNS AND TEACHING AND LEARNING

## Creating and Maintaining an Inviting Place

“[B]eing called by what you go by, rather than being mis-gendered and mis-named, can **reduce anxiety, depression, and suicidality**” (Spade)

So, how do we begin to create and maintain these inviting places?

By **modelling our own pronouns/pronominal systems** and by **transparently inviting others to do so** as well.



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SH 1012



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Visit our website for information about Special Visit Days!

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**Note: Each of these photos appears on their own slide at the end of the slideshow for future reference.**



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Design: Insignia Creative Group  
Photography: Light Imaging  
Editorial: Barb Trotter



2019 EDC CONFERENCE  
via BlueButton  
Positive Resilience and the  
of ED(C)  
on 22, 2019  
am 12 - 3pm EST  
Interactive workshops,  
conference sessions,  
and EDC AGM  
Registration fee for  
and Centre  
via Pippoc  
yorku.ca)  
EDC-FFPE  
in a scripps scholar living and  
tory of the Mississaugas of the  
the Arawandaron people (on  
Neutral, Anishnaabe, and  
and the city and University of  
farad).  
ships with the land continue  
ing about and strengthening  
peoples. I am humbled to be  
living, working, learning, and



# GENDER PRONOUNS AND TEACHING AND LEARNING

## Modelling

- Share your pronouns/pronominal system (if you are comfortable) in your teaching and learning activities
  - include them by your name on your introductory slides
  - say them out loud when introducing yourself
  - pronoun buttons, badges (in the physical world)
  - pronoun suffixes, Bitmojis (in the digital world)
  - e-mail signatures, business cards, more!

\*use the singular “they” as the default for others  
-it’s not perfect, but it’s more inclusive,  
and it is a powerful signal

**This all comes back to intentionality and transparency.**



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# CULTURES OF RESPECT

## Pronoun Awareness

“[U]se **pronoun awareness** as a way to **signal a culture of respect**” (Spade)

“[I]f we explain th[is] to folks really clearly, it will do the job we want it to do and **make the group spaces easier for people to participate in**, and **build skills** in each of us to **make less assumptions** about each other” (Spade)

“I wish more people would behave like my partner’s son and **simply ask, politely and without judgment**, what pronoun an individual prefers” (Halberstam 154)

- “I also wish more people would use a pronoun system based on gender and not on sex, based on comfort rather than biology, based on the presumption that there are many gendered bodies in the world and ‘male’ and ‘female’ do not even begin the hard work of **classifying them**” (Halberstam 154)

Halberstam, Jack. *Trans\*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*. Oakland, CA: U of California P, 2018.

Spade, Dean. “We Still Need Pronoun Go-Rounds.” *DeanSpade.net*



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# CULTURES OF RESPECT

## Pronouns in Popular and Public Cultures

“I wish to share this with anyone who is listening — not just in this theater, but around the world — **ask the question: What is your pronoun?** Because for a lot of people it’s really hard and their pronoun is not respected or they’re not asked, and for me, **I’ve grown and changed over the years in a lot of different ways. I’ve felt misunderstood in a lot of different ways.** All of our hardships are different — I don’t mean to compare — I just mean to say we’re in this together and I’ve had a million reasons to want to give up, but sometimes, if you’re lucky you just need one good reason to stick around” — **Lady Gaga**

(Monday June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019 during her concert at the Apollo Theatre)

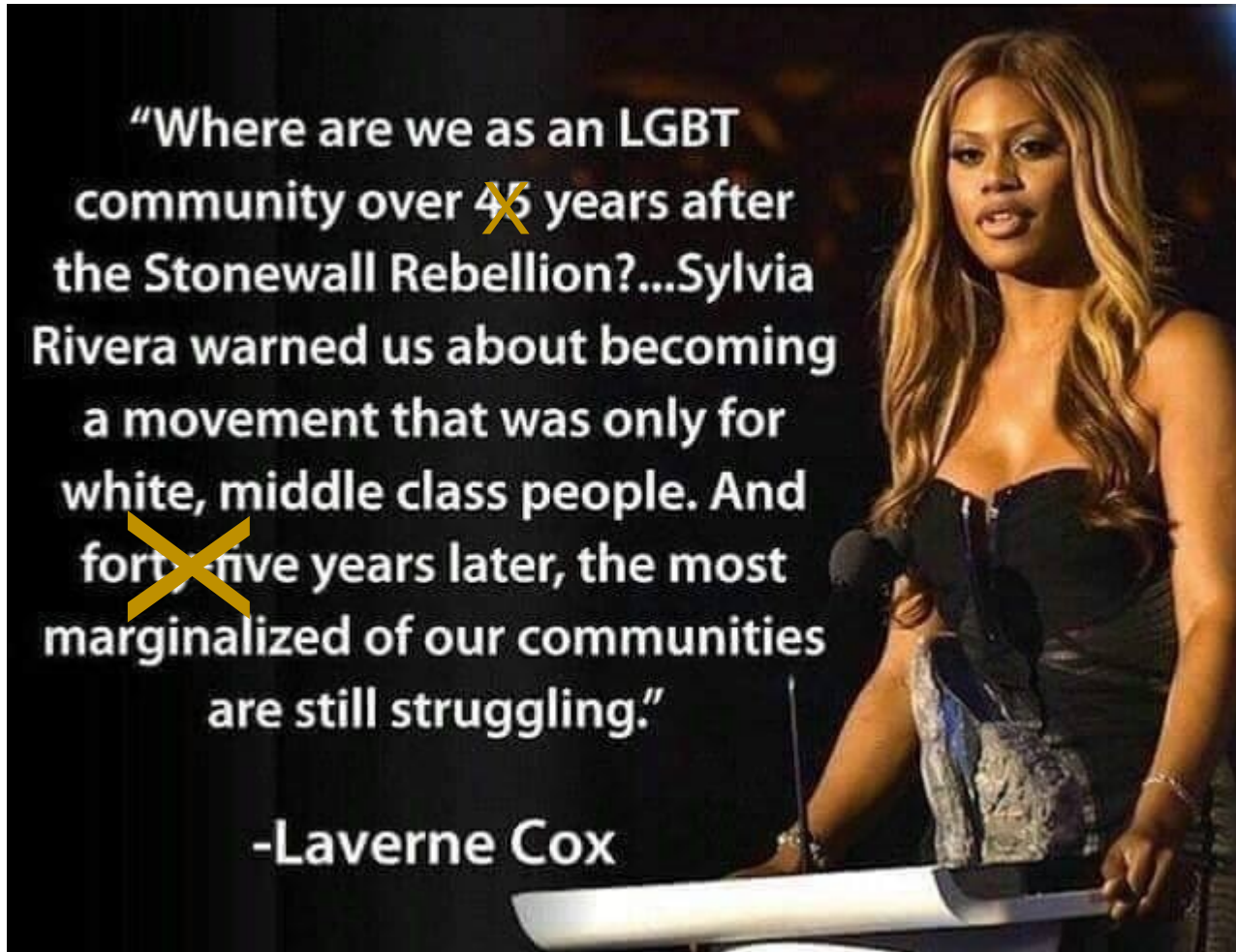


[Image on left is Lady Gaga with her perfume bottle, and image on right is Jo Calderone, Lady Gaga’s drag king persona, smoking.]



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# CULTURES OF RESPECT



**51 years later now.** (June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1969)

## Wrapping Up

But let's be caring.  
And careful.

Medicalization of queer,  
trans, and intersex bodies.

Trauma and retraumatization.

Reflecting on whiteness,  
marginalization, and struggle.



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# CULTURES OF RESPECT



[The flag pole at the front of St. Jerome's University, flying the Canadian Flag, the flag of Ontario, and the Progress Pride Flag. Front view of St. Jerome's building in background.]

## Wrapping Up

But let's be caring.  
And careful.

Medicalization of queer,  
trans, and intersex bodies.

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Reflecting on whiteness,  
marginalization, and struggle.



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[@tommymayberry](https://twitter.com/tommymayberry)

# THANK YOU! + Q&A



[This is a photo of my dog Sam – maybe you're feeling like you're coming up for air at this point.]



[Sam again – maybe you're feeling alert and still curious about the goings-on.]



[One more Sam – maybe you're go to go.]

## Reminder:

Works Cited and modelling pronouns photos in following slides (Appendix)



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# WORKS CITED

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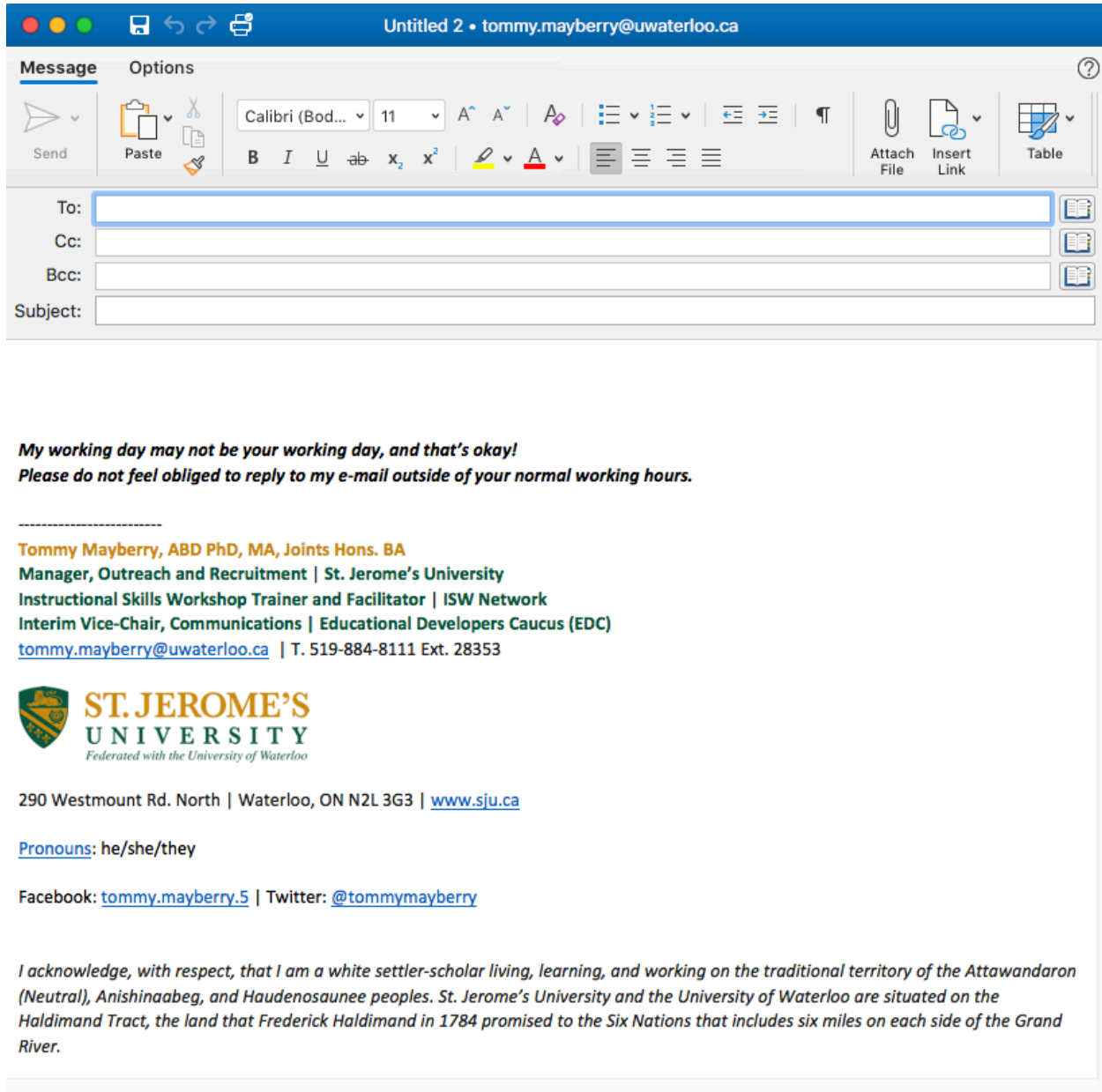
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*The Wycliffite Bible (E.V.)*. 1382.



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# APPENDIX: MODELLING PRONOUNS PHOTOS



e-mail Signature



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# APPENDIX: MODELLING PRONOUNS PHOTOS

Zoom Names



[Change](#)

[Delete](#)

**First Name**

Tommy Mayberry

**Last Name**

(he/she/they)

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Enrolment and Upper-Year Transitions

**Job Title**

Manager, Outreach and Recruitment

**Company**

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# APPENDIX: MODELLING PRONOUNS PHOTOS

Bitmoji Avatars (Search Stickers: "Pronouns")



he / him



she / her



they / them



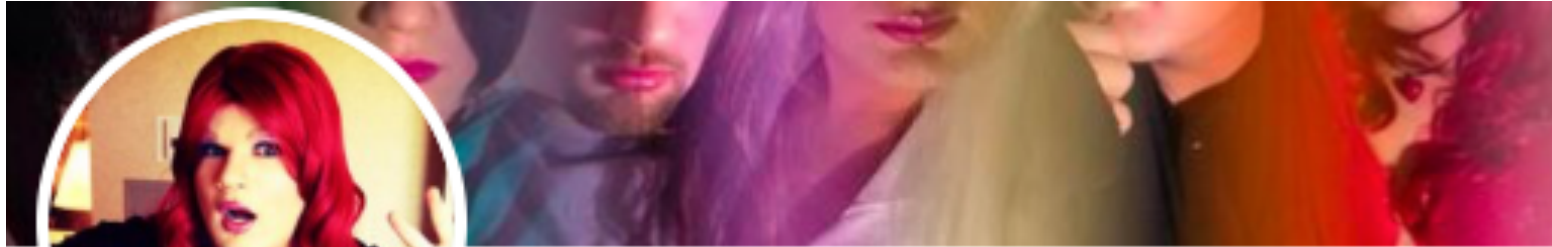
they / them



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# APPENDIX: MODELLING PRONOUNS PHOTOS

## Social Media



Edit

**Tommy Mayberry**

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@UWaterloo's premier academic drag queen + Manager, Outreach and Recruitment @StJeromesUni

Pronouns: he/she/they

Research: Drag/Trans-; #WilliamBlake; #RuPaul

📍 Waterloo, Ontario 📅 Joined July 2011



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# APPENDIX: MODELLING PRONOUNS PHOTOS

## Website Bios and Photos

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Visit our website for information about Special Visit Days!

### CONTACT US

#### FUTURE STUDENT ADVICE:

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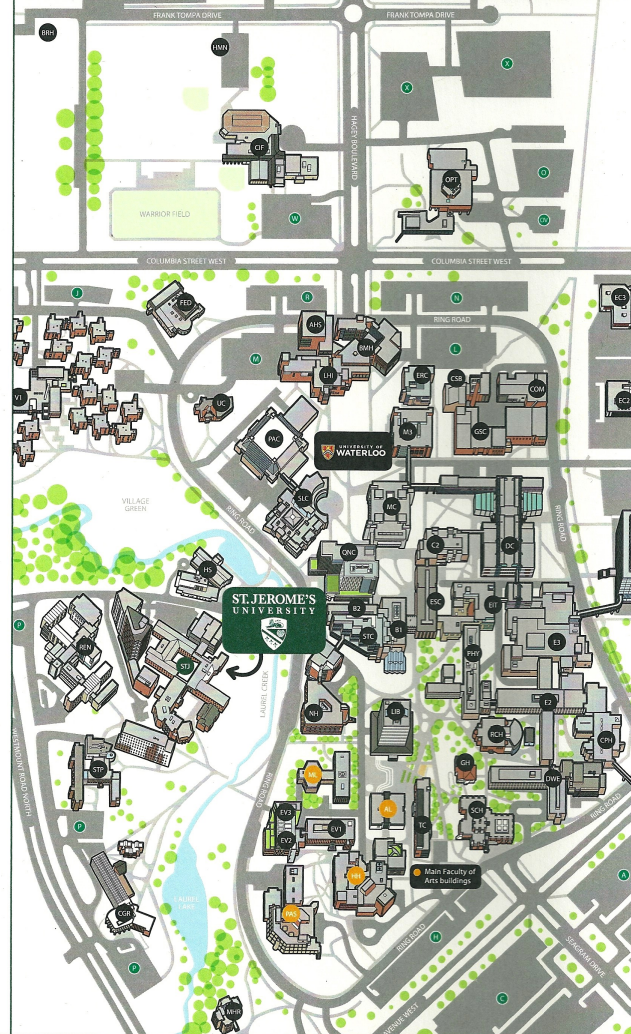
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Design: Insignia Creative Group  
Photography: Light Imaging  
Editorial: Barb Trotter



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# APPENDIX: MODELLING PRONOUNS PHOTOS

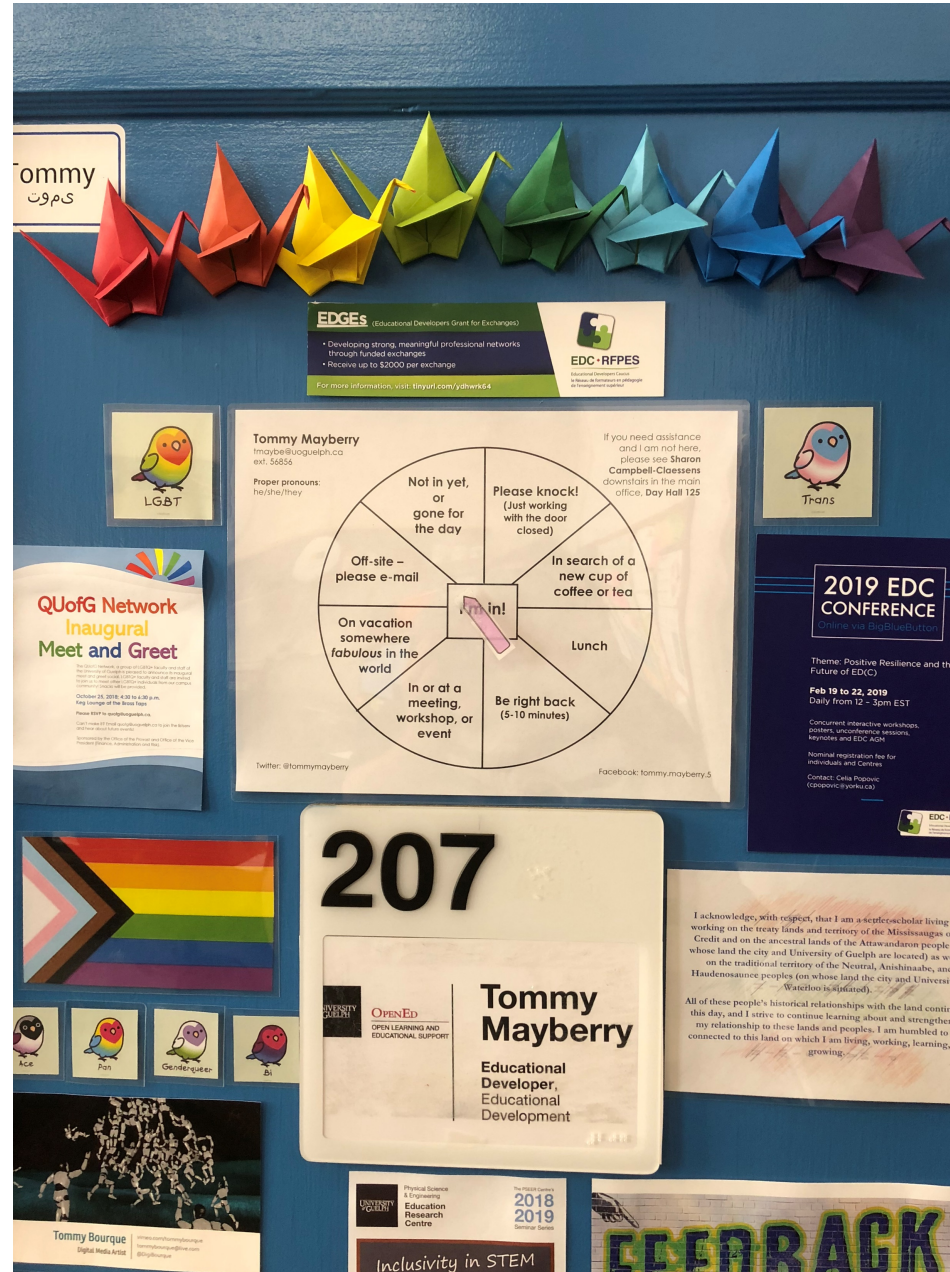
## Business Cards



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# APPENDIX: MODELLING PRONOUNS PHOTOS

## Office Doors



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# APPENDIX: MODELLING PRONOUNS PHOTOS



Pronoun Buttons



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