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International Pronouns Day

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International Pronouns Day is an education and advocacy day about pronouns; it occurs on the third Wednesday of October. Founded in 2018 by Shige Sakurai, the event engages prospective allies in respecting others' pronouns, sharing one's own pronouns, and raising understanding about gender liberation, with pronouns and inclusive language as an entry point to building respect, awareness, and greater learning. The campaign is grassroots in nature, with participation from numerous countries, and is also supported by an executive board and volunteer committees.

History and Focus

International Pronouns Day is the first campaign on the topic to gain major international participation and attention. It was preceded by decades of activism and education by numerous advocates around the world, including localized campaigns to raise awareness about pronouns.

The modern practice of going around a circle and sharing one's own name and pronouns in a group setting has existed since at least the late 1990s, particularly among LGBTQIA+ youth activist spaces. Since that time, cultural practices around pronoun awareness have expanded into many more spaces and communities.

In 2018, after publishing MyPronouns.org, a website about personal pronouns and inclusive language, and involvement with a localized advocacy day on pronouns, Shige Sakurai suggested a larger collaborative day of action and formed an executive board to give direction and support the development of International Pronouns Day. The inaugural board was co-chaired by Sakurai and by Genny Beemyn, both trans activists and higher education professionals working in LGBTQIA+ campus centers in the United States.

While the initial campaign's formulation focuses on pronouns, the campaign website also encourages grassroots participation and localized adaptations of the campaign to various languages and contexts, as desired. Adaptations could include a focus on inclusive language rather than just pronouns, depending on local needs.

Furthermore, the campaign leaders assert that discussing pronouns is meant as an entry point into respectful dialogue with and about trans communities and acknowledges that intersectional social justice requires efforts around racial justice, multilingualism, antiviolenace work, restroom access, health care, and beyond. The campaign seeks to open up some of these conversations through the lens of respecting basic human dignity by referring to people by their correct names and pronouns.

Participation and Results

International Pronouns Day received official registrations and endorsements from more than two dozen countries in all continents except Antarctica. During International Pronouns Day in 2019, Twitter listed "#pronounsday" as the number one globally trending hashtag. Campaign organizers reported 500 million as the estimated potential impressions of the hashtag on social media.

Endorsements and participation came from hundreds of businesses and organizations, such as Rwanda Gender Pride, TransgenderIndia.com, Reason Beer, Pride at Work AFL-CIO, Doula Canada, BlackTransConnection, and the Unitarian Universalist Association.

In addition to an expansive social media impact, the grassroots nature of the event encouraged local organizers to produce their own events and initiatives. Some examples have included an art exhibit in the Netherlands; numerous colleges that organized pronoun cookie decorating or "Pronouns and Pizza" discussion events; a formal proclamation recognizing the day, issued by the mayor of Ithaca, New York; a photos and testimonials series developed by a youth organization in Slovenia; and a short documentary video produced in England. Other local groups conducted workshops, film screenings, outreach, or button making in order to raise awareness and build more supportive communities.

Some local governments and officials also voiced support or announced trans inclusion initiatives on

International Pronouns Day, such as acknowledgments of the day from the New York City Mayor's Office, and an announcement from the City of Philadelphia, which said that the city would begin a campaign to include pronouns in city communications and in email signatures of the city's employees.

Media and Recognition

International Pronouns Day has been acknowledged by celebrities on Twitter, such as nonbinary actor Asia Kate Dillon and nonbinary musician Sam Smith. Additional celebrities, such as Alyssa Milano and George Takei, also posted during the event. The campaign hashtag was used by a number of politicians running for president of the United States, resulting in an article about politicians sharing their pronouns published by The Hill.

Publishers of several major dictionaries, including the Oxford English Dictionary and the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, posted tweets for International Pronouns Day. Additional social media posts came from high-profile organizations and companies such as the Human Rights Campaign, Lambda Legal, American Civil Liberties Union, Penguin Random House, and Entertainment Weekly. The news-based television channel CNN also published an explainer piece about pronouns in recognition of the campaign. In January 2019, International Pronouns Day received a Special Recognition Award from the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals in conjunction with the National LGBTQ Task Force's Creating Change conference.

Public Criticism

International Pronouns Day has been publicly criticized by numerous individuals on social media, and the campaign was lambasted by well-known conservative commentators, including Glenn Beck in the United States and Katie Hopkins in the United Kingdom. International Pronouns Day has been mentioned in conservative-leaning media such as Fox and Friends, The Daily Mail, The Conservative Woman, Weekend Australian, American Thinker, Blaze Media, PJ Media, and Daily Caller.

The vast majority of the criticism of International Pronouns Day has been of an anti-trans nature, often relying on a presumption of prejudice among audiences by focusing on sarcasm and jokes. When more clear critiques have been presented, they have tended to assert language tyranny and liberal indoctrination, that trans people are insane, that bodies determine gender, that bodies/genders are binary, that people will be punished for using the wrong pronouns, that the issue lacks importance, or that supporting the campaign is a waste of energy and resources.

Future Directions

International Pronouns Day leaders have encouraged and stated a vision for further expansion of the campaign by supporting grassroots volunteers working in a greater diversity of world regions and languages. Such engagements may require different entry points than pronouns, depending on the language. Furthermore, leaders have pointed toward the longer-term needs and practices that must be engaged at all times, not just on one annual day of action, in order to ensure that gender-inclusive language and human dignity in communications are adopted as a structural change and not just an individual behavioral change.

Shige Sakurai

See also [Activism](#); [Bathroom Discrimination](#); [Communication](#); [Discrimination](#); [Gender Pronouns](#); [Health Care, Discrimination](#); [Microaggressions](#); [Misgendering](#); [Violence](#)

Further Readings

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