



illustration by | DANIELLE ZHANG

PANO PERSPECTIVE

The Ladue community is obligated to respect our peers' pronouns

29 out of 29 Panorama staff members agree

Suppose a hypothetical: a student finds a stray textbook in the hallways. They bring it to a teacher whose classroom is nearby. The teacher then thanks them for taking the time to bring the book back. The teacher smiles as the student waves goodbye and heads to their next class.

Now, what gender is the student? Nobody knows; the hypothetical veils the gender of the student with the singular use of “they/them” pronouns. “They/them” as singular pronouns isn’t bad grammar. It’s a valid way to describe someone. But there are those who think otherwise, refusing to acknowledge the evolving language surrounding gender. The act of referring to someone with the wrong pronouns, otherwise known as misgendering, has long denied the authenticity and legitimacy of transgender and gender non-conforming people. The Ladue community must stop accidental misgendering and even more harmful, purposeful misgendering. Ladue doesn’t need to be perfect, but it must strive for perfection, which is to make an effort to end misgendering and adapt our language to include trans and gender non-conforming identities.

The revelation that people needed a better way to describe gender isn’t new. The usage of gender-neutral pronouns has a rich history, dating back to medical documents from the 1600s. According to Kory Stamper, former associate editor for Mer-

riam-Webster dictionaries, “There’s a 17th-century literature about ‘hermaphrodites,’ many of whom we would today describe as trans or nonbinary... Medical texts, thinking of them as a blend of two genders, called individuals ‘them.’” The prevalence of gender non-conforming and trans people throughout history is undeniable.

Just as people respect each other’s names or ethnicities, which are integral parts of people’s identities, people ought to respect each other’s pronouns. To use correct pronouns and respect gender identities is to let Ladue’s trans and gender non-conforming members know that they are wanted and welcome in this community. And to be unable or unwilling to alter one’s language to accommodate pronouns is to deny trans and gender non-conforming identities in favor of one’s prejudices and “conveniences.” Ultimately, respecting others’ pronouns was never about the ability of doing so, but rather the conscious choice to negate certain identities to affirm a gender binary of “males” and “females” that has harmed, alienated and exploited the populations that don’t fit into its rigid and contrived boundaries.

Now more than ever, the Ladue community has an obligation to make sure trans and gender non-conforming people feel safe in our schools, neighborhoods, stores and homes. ☐

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