

# Beyond virtue signaling: Perceived motivations for pronoun sharing

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## Abstract

Sharing one's pronouns when introducing oneself is an emerging practice intended to prevent assumptions of what pronouns to use when referring to others. This practice may make people comfortable sharing their pronouns so that they are not misgendered and may signal inclusiveness to transgender and nonbinary (TGNB) people. How do people in the United States perceive the motivations behind pronoun sharing? Three preregistered experiments ( $N = 2641$ ), in addition to three pilot studies ( $N = 8219$ ; results presented in Supporting Information), conducted in the United States reveal that people perceive at least three underlying motivations for pronoun sharing when they learn that someone shared their pronouns in a workplace introduction: *reputation signaling* (trying to enhance one's own reputation), *identity signaling* (straightforwardly indicating one's identity and how one would like to be addressed), and *norm support* (sincerely endorsing pronoun sharing as a norm). We also show that the sharer's TGNB identity influences the motivations that observers infer. In general, we find that perceptions of straightforward *identity signaling* and collective benefit-oriented *norm support* are higher, and perceptions of self-oriented *reputation signaling* are lower, when the sharer is transgender rather than cisgender. This study provides a novel characterization of social perceptions of transinclusive behavior.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In an episode of the Netflix TV show *One Day At A Time*, the teenage protagonist Elena brings home a group of new friends before they head to a protest. They introduce themselves to Elena's family with their names and pronouns ("Hi, I'm Dani and my pronouns are 'she' and 'her.' 'I'm Syd and my pronouns are 'they' and 'them.'"). Elena's mother is perplexed: "I'm Penelope, and my thoughts are 'Huh?' And 'What?'"

Increasingly, people are introducing themselves along with their personal pronouns rather than assuming that others will infer their pronouns based on their appearance (Pew Research Center, 2019). For some, the association between their gender presentation and personal pronouns may seem obvious (e.g., a feminine woman who uses she/her pronouns). But this presumed association marginalizes some transgender and nonbinary (TGNB) people and even some cisgender people. Many people with marginalized gender identities see the explicit sharing of

pronouns as a way to disrupt the assumption that pronouns, gender identity, and gender presentation must align (Dembroff & Wodak, 2018; Morgenroth & Ryan, 2021; Wentling, 2015). Previous research shows that transinclusive practices create an affirming space for TGNB people (Brown et al., 2020; Case et al., 2009; Knutson et al., 2022; MacNamara et al., 2017; Mennicke & Cutler-Seeber, 2016). For example, including pronouns in employee bios serves as an important identity-safety cue for LGBTQ+ people, signaling that they will be welcomed and respected in the workplace (Johnson et al., 2021). This nascent TGNB equity practice is one of the most salient declarations of acceptance of others' gender identity that people may encounter in their day-to-day lives.

Like Elena's mother Penelope, however, not everyone is familiar with the practice of sharing pronouns. In some spaces, sharing pronouns is taken for granted; in others, it is counternormative, though perhaps becoming less so. How do people understand a behavior like pronoun sharing, the normative status of which is context-specific and in flux? And how do these perceptions help or hurt the adoption of this nascent

TGNB equity practice to create a more inclusive environment? In the present research, we investigate third-person perceptions of the motivations of someone who shares their pronouns at a workplace meeting. We note here that people can have a variety of motives for pronoun sharing that may differ based on social context and personal identity. This study examines only perceptions of pronoun sharing, and not people's actual motivations themselves. Specifically, we examine perceptions of pronoun sharing as signaling the sharer's identity (*identity signaling*), signaling the sharer's own reputational status (*reputation signaling*), or as endorsing pronoun sharing as a norm (*norm support*). We also study the effect of the sharer's TGNB identity on these perceptions. This study serves as a foundation for investigating people's willingness to engage in this behavior in the future.

### 1.1 | How is pronoun sharing perceived?

Sharing one's pronouns can indicate how one would like to be addressed, and help one to be recognized in one's personal and gender identity (Wentling, 2015). We call this *identity signaling*. People often express their social identities through actions (Gal, 2015). In doing so, they make their identities legible to others, and facilitate their association with similar and like-minded others (Gal, 2015; van der Does et al., 2022). In some cases, *identity signaling* also drives collective action around a goal with which people strongly identify (e.g., veganism as a social identity; see Judge et al., 2022). Pronoun sharing may serve to fulfill these purposes as well.

Although the explicit purpose of sharing pronouns is to indicate how someone would like to be addressed, people do not always take actions at their face value. For example, one might think that someone who shares their pronouns in an introduction is "virtue signaling" (Bartholomew, 2015)—in other words, inauthentically performing virtuous behavior. Sharing pronouns might be cynically perceived as a low-cost signal of one's commitment to gender inclusivity and therefore a shortcut to enhancing one's reputation (Bliege Bird & Smith, 2005; Zahavi, 1975). Other examples of such perceptions include discussions of moral outrage on social media (Crockett, 2017), "slacktivism" (Kristofferson et al., 2014), and "do-gooder derogation" or putting down those engaging in proenvironmental behaviors (Minson & Monin, 2012; Sparkman & Attari, 2020). In this paper, we refer to this concept as *reputation signaling*. We aim to avoid the pejorative connotation affiliated with the colloquial use of virtue signaling, and focus more on the potential benefit to one's *reputation* that comes with being seen as the kind of person who would behave virtuously. People care about managing and enhancing their reputations (Barclay & Willer, 2007; Emler, 1990; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Kraft-Todd et al., 2020; Silver & Shaw, 2018), and these behaviors offer status benefits (Bai, 2017). Signaling commitment to group norms is one way of obtaining a higher reputation (Wice & Davidai, 2021). We might consider *reputation signaling* to be a form of impression management (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Schlenker & Pontari, 2000; Schlenker, 1980); that is, strategic self-promotion via signaling a novel prosocial behavior.

There is a tension, however, between these perceptions of *reputation signaling* and other, more sincere motivations for engaging in a behavior like pronoun sharing. In addition to or instead of a concern for their own reputation, someone who shares their pronouns may be signaling their support of pronoun sharing as a normative behavior. This may be driven by a sincere belief in the values of transinclusivity behind pronoun sharing. Collective engagement in this kind of signaling is a powerful tool for social change through adopting, and thereby promoting, prosocial norms (Tankard & Paluck, 2016). We define this as *norm support*. If pronoun sharing is already descriptively normative (it is commonly practiced, e.g., occurs at a LGBTQ nonprofit), *norm support* may simply manifest as conforming to the existing norm to contribute to ingroup harmony (Wenegrat et al., 1996; Wice & Davidai, 2021).

### 1.2 | How does TGNB identity influence perceptions of pronoun sharing?

We study pronoun sharing in the context of the workplace because of the importance of workplace culture to TGNB individuals' quality of life and the diversity of social norms within and across workplaces. Here, various features of the social context may shape how people perceive the tensions between straightforward *identity signaling* and other motivations such as *reputation signaling* and *norm support*. The present research focuses specifically on the sharer's TGNB identity—whether they are transgender or not.

When the sharer is transgender rather than cisgender, they may be perceived as more likely to be authentically motivated, having a personal stake in the values behind pronoun sharing, and invested in influencing the group's culture. For TGNB individuals, sharing pronouns serves to ensure that they are not misgendered by others (i.e., *identity signaling*). In addition, they may have more of a personal stake in ensuring that pronoun sharing becomes a common practice (i.e., *norm support*) to ensure their own comfort and that of those in their community, and reduce the need to out themselves when they are the only people sharing their pronouns in a group setting. Beyond possible personal drives for encouraging this norm's adoption, they may also have greater sympathy towards the others in a similar circumstance, and thus have a prosocial desire for this inclusive practice to become a mainstay. By contrast, a cisgender person who shares their pronouns may be perceived as more likely to be *reputation signaling* because of the potential to gain status by partaking in an emerging practice to signal one's trans allyship.

### 1.3 | Pilot research

In three pilot studies ( $N = 8219$ ), we examined the perceptions of the underlying motivations of someone who shares their pronouns in a workplace introduction. We established a preliminary factor structure of three perceived motivations for pronoun sharing, which are slightly different from those presented in the current research

(see Supporting Information Sections H–J)—*reputation signaling* (trying to enhance one's reputation), *norm signaling* (authentically attempting to influence others to adopt a new norm), and *rule following* (simply conforming to an existing norm). However, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in Pilot Study iii indicated inadequate model fit. In addition, free response data from participants indicated that the researchers had not sufficiently captured nonstrategic motivations for sharing pronouns (e.g., the motive to avoid being misgendered, to signal one's identity, to do what one thinks is right; see Supporting Information Analyses ii.e and iii.c for further details).

We also explored how five features of social context—the sharer's leadership status, size of the audience, descriptive normativity of pronoun sharing, the sharer's TGNB identity, and the presence of a TGNB colleague—influence perceived motivations for pronoun sharing (see Supporting Information Sections H–J). Notably, we found a robust effect of the sharer's TGNB identity on perceived motivations, such that transgender sharers versus cisgender sharers were perceived as significantly more likely to be *norm signaling*, and less likely to be *reputation signaling* or *rule following* (Supporting Information Analyses ii.b and iii.b).

## 1.4 | The current research

In this paper, we comprehensively measure the perceptions of the underlying motivations of someone who shares their pronouns in a workplace introduction. We revise the latent motivational inferences found in Pilot Studies i–iii, combining items from previous research, experimenter-generated items, and participant-generated items for possible motivations for pronoun sharing (see Supporting Information Table 3 for a list of items and studies in which they were used). We also study whether there is a difference between perceived motivations of (a) a TGNB person versus a cisgender person, and (b) a cisgender man versus a cisgender woman who shares their pronouns.

## 2 | STUDY 1

In this study, we explore how the motivations of someone who shares their pronouns at the start of a workplace meeting are perceived by participants imagining themselves as third-party observers, that is, the participants are not themselves part of the group in which the person shares their pronouns. We build upon the factor structure for perceived motivations for pronoun sharing developed in Pilot Studies i–iii (Supporting Information Sections H–J), and investigate whether an *identity signaling* factor emerges, in addition to the factors of *reputation signaling*, *norm signaling*, and *rule following* found in pilot data. Thus, Study 1 originally tests for a different set of factors than those established by the results in this and the following studies. In addition, we study how the gender identity of the sharer (cisgender vs. transgender, and cisgender man vs. cisgender woman) influences these perceived motivations.

## 2.1 | Method

### 2.1.1 | Hypotheses

Our hypotheses, which are based on findings from Pilot Studies ii and iii, and can be found in the preregistration for Study 1 ([https://aspredicted.org/9V5\\_VGD](https://aspredicted.org/9V5_VGD)), were as follows:

#### 2.1.1.1 | Establishing perceived motivations for pronoun sharing

H1: We hypothesize that a four-factor structure of perceived motivations for pronoun sharing will emerge, such that people perceive pronoun sharing as *norm signaling* (to influence others to adopt a new norm), *reputation signaling* (to make oneself look morally good), *identity signaling* (signaling personal/gender identity), or as simply *rule following* (e.g., to conform to an existing norm).

#### 2.1.1.2 | Examining how sharer TGNB identity affects perceived motivations for pronoun sharing

H2: Given our hypothesized (H1) structure of perceived motivations for pronoun sharing, when the sharer is transgender versus cisgender, participants will perceive them as more likely to be *norm signaling* and *identity signaling*, and less likely to be *reputation signaling* and *rule following*. H3: We will examine the effect of the cisgender sharer's male versus female identity on perceived motivations for pronoun sharing. This is an exploratory hypothesis; we do not have any directional predictions about differing perceptions of motivations for cisgender sharers who use “he/him” versus “she/her” pronouns.

### 2.1.2 | Participants

A nationally representative (by age, sex, and ethnicity) sample of 858 US participants was recruited on Prolific in response to an ad for a “Psychology study (8–10 min).” As per our preregistration, we exited 75 participants who failed the pretask attention check (8.69% of total participants) from the study, and the remaining 788 participants (383 women, 364 men, 22 nonbinary, 3 unknown; mean age = 45.71,  $SD = 16.15$ ) completed the study and were compensated \$1.60. All participants filled out an online survey designed on Qualtrics. We excluded 16 participants who completed the survey in less than half of the median time (1.85% of total participants) (e.g., Shevlin et al., 2020), resulting in a total of 772 participants retained for analysis.

### 2.1.3 | Design and procedure

After consenting to participate in the study, participants were given a pretask attention check (see Supporting Information Section B) and then given a brief introduction to the phenomenon of people sharing their personal pronouns in different situations (adapted from <https://www.mypronouns.org/>, see Supporting Information Section A for full text and complete experimental instructions). Next, they were randomly assigned to conditions (see Materials below).

Participants then responded to a set of questions that measured their perceived motivations for the sharing of pronouns, their own reported likelihood of pronoun sharing, perceptions of normativity of pronoun sharing, and so forth (see Materials below). Finally, participants were also asked to report on a number of demographic measures (see Supporting Information Section B for a description of these measures). They were debriefed at the end of the survey.

## 2.1.4 | Materials

### 2.1.4.1 | Stimuli

Participants read a vignette in which a person attends a workplace meeting in which the team decides to start the meeting with a round of introductions because there are some new colleagues at the meeting. When it is the person's turn (note that in all conditions we keep the person's place in the order of introductions ambiguous), they introduce themselves with their name, role, and personal pronouns (e.g., "I'm Nico, I'm the social media manager and I use he/him pronouns."). We chose names that were ethnically ambiguous, and manipulated whether the sharer's name was traditionally masculine ("Nico") or feminine ("Maya"), as well as whether the sharer used gender-neutral pronouns ("they/them") or not ("he/him" or "she/her"). Thus, participants were assigned to one of four between-subjects conditions in a 2 (pronouns: gender-neutral vs. gender-specific) × 2 (gender-stereotypical names: masculine vs. feminine) factorial design. The main manipulation of interest was whether the sharer was transgender or cisgender (see Table 1 for full text of vignettes).

### 2.1.4.2 | Dependent variables

Participants responded to a set of dependent measures after viewing the stimulus. They reported their judgments on an unmarked slider scale (i.e., participants did not see the values on the slider) ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 100 (*certainly*). All continuous dependent variables were z-score standardized across participants.

2.1.4.2.1 | *Perceived motivations for pronoun sharing.* All participants reported on their perceptions of the sharer's motivations by answering a series of 32 questions presented in randomized order (e.g., "Is Maya motivated to share their pronouns to make other people think that they are morally good?"; see Table 2 below for item labels). Fifteen of these items were drawn from previous research (Bai, 2017; Blanton & Christie, 2003; Grubbs et al., 2019; Steg, 2016; Tamir & Thornton, 2018; e.g., "Is Nico motivated to share his pronouns because he wants to gain status?"), 12 items were experimenter-generated through discussions and informal feedback, and the remaining five were participant-generated in Pilot Studies i–iii (see Supporting Information Table 3 for a complete list of DVs with the exact wording that participants saw and citations).

2.1.4.2.2 | *Secondary dependent variables.* Participants also responded to 21 secondary dependent measures (the results of which we do not report here) regarding (a) miscellaneous perceptions of pronoun sharing in the vignette, (b) reported likelihood of and perceived normativity of pronoun sharing, and (c) personal values and affinity for the sharer (see Supporting Information Table 3 for a list of these items).

Next, we once again showed participants all 32 of the possible motivations for the sharer's behavior that we had presented earlier in the study, and asked them if they felt that we had missed any potential reasons for the sharing of personal pronouns. If participants indicated "Yes," we asked them to report which motivations they believed we had not covered in a text box. The purpose of these questions was to ensure that the range of possible motivations offered to participants was maximally inclusive by avoiding the exclusion of items representing other possible real-world factors.

## 2.2 | RESULTS

All statistical analyses were conducted using R[1.3.1056] software. All data and analysis codes can be found at [https://osf.io/4qyzs/?view\\_only=f25c4d6db273436a9e018b3b94f4b8ff](https://osf.io/4qyzs/?view_only=f25c4d6db273436a9e018b3b94f4b8ff) <https://osf.io/4qyzs/>

**TABLE 1** Full text of vignettes used in Study 1.

Condition	Vignette
A: Cisgender man	<i>Nico is a cisgender man who attends a workplace team meeting. Because there are a few new employees at the meeting, the team decides to start the meeting with a round of introductions. When it is Nico's turn, Nico says, "Hi everyone! My name is Nico and I'm the social media manager. I use he/him pronouns."</i>
B: Transgender person	<i>Nico is a transgender person who attends a workplace team meeting. Because there are a few new employees at the meeting, the team decides to start the meeting with a round of introductions. When it is Nico's turn, Nico says, "Hi everyone! My name is Nico and I'm the social media manager. I use they/them pronouns."</i>
C: Cisgender woman	<i>Maya is a cisgender woman who attends a workplace team meeting. Because there are a few new employees at the meeting, the team decides to start the meeting with a round of introductions. When it is Maya's turn, Maya says, "Hi everyone! My name is Maya and I'm the social media manager. I use she/her pronouns."</i>
D: Transgender person	<i>Maya is a transgender person who attends a workplace team meeting. Because there are a few new employees at the meeting, the team decides to start the meeting with a round of introductions. When it is Maya's turn, Maya says, "Hi everyone! My name is Maya and I'm the social media manager. I use they/them pronouns."</i>

**TABLE 2** Perceived motivation factor loadings in EFA model in Study 1.

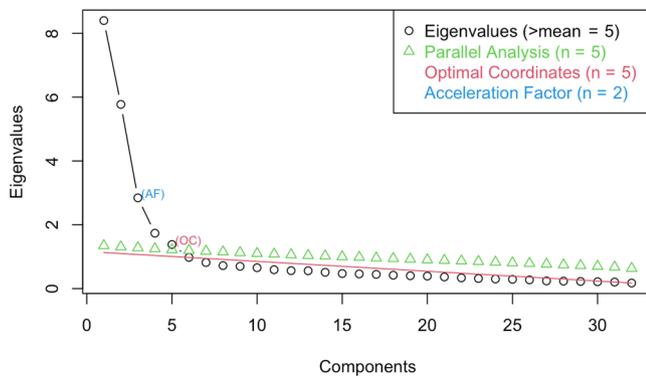
Item	Reputation signaling	Identity signaling	Norm support
MotiveStatus: Motive to gain status	0.87		
MotiveInfluencePower: Motive to have power to influence others	0.85		
MotivePower: Motive to gain power	0.84		
MotiveValence: Motive to make others like oneself	0.81		
MotiveReputation: Motive to enhance reputation	0.80		
MotiveAttention: Motive to attract attention	0.80		
MotiveSuperior: Motive to make superiors think highly of oneself	0.79		
MotivePeer: Motive to make peers think highly of oneself	0.76		
MotiveBenefit: Motive to benefit oneself	0.66		
MotiveMoral: Motive to look morally good	0.65		
MotiveSociality: Motive to make others want to interact with oneself	0.55		
MotiveCompetence: Motive to display competence at one's job	0.42		
MotiveLose: Motive to avoid social cost	0.42		
MotivePersonalID: Motive to signal personal identity		0.82	
MotiveSocialID: Motive to signal social identity		0.79	
MotiveGenderID: Motive to signal gender identity		0.79	
MotiveMisgender: Motive to avoid being misgendered		0.64	
MotiveShare: Motive to share how one wants to be addressed		0.62	
MotivePersonalImp: Motive to do something that is personally important		0.54	
MotivePersonalValue: Motive to reflect personal values		0.53	
MotivePersonal: Motive to make oneself feel safe and comfortable		0.43	
MotiveOther: Motive to benefit TGNB people			0.68
MotiveImportance: Motive driven by belief in importance of action			0.68
MotiveBelief: Motive driven by belief in the value of gender-inclusive workplace			0.65
MotiveSamePage: Motive driven by belief that colleagues are on the same page about gender inclusivity			0.60
MotiveInjNorm: Motive to follow an injunctive norm			0.56
MotiveCommunityValue: Motive to reflect workplace values			0.54
MotiveRight: Motive to do the right thing			0.51
MotiveDescNorm: Motive to follow a descriptive norm			0.46
MotiveInfluenceBehav: Motive to influence behavior			0.42
MotiveSignal: Motive to signal that the action is the right thing to do			0.41
MotiveConsistency: Motive to remain consistent with past words/actions			

Note: Factor loadings based on an exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation for 32 items testing participants' perceptions of the sharer's motivations ( $N = 772$ ). Items in this table are explanatory labels for original DVs; see Supporting Information Table 3 for the exact wording of these items that study participants saw. Factor loadings  $<0.4$  are suppressed.

### 2.2.1 | Establishing perceived motivations for pronoun sharing

H1: We hypothesized that an underlying factor structure of perceived motivations for signaling behavior would emerge, such that people

perceive pronoun sharing as *norm signaling* (to influence others to adopt a new norm), *reputation signaling* (to make oneself look morally good), *identity signaling* (to signal personal/gender identity), or as simply *rule following* (e.g., to conform to an existing norm). Instead, we find that a three-factor structure explains 48% of the variance in our 32 “perceived



**FIGURE 1** Scree plot of eigenvalues of factors in exploratory factor analysis ( $N = 772$ ) in Study 1.

motivation” items using an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with oblique rotation. This factor structure explains a relatively low proportion of the variance, and we consider this in more detail in the Discussion section. All factors in this model had eigenvalues  $>1$  (see Figure 1), and the three-factor model was the most theoretically interpretable, compared to a four-factor model, which also only explained an additional 4% of the variance (see Supporting Information Table 6 for the correlation matrix of items in the three-factor EFA model; see Supporting Information Table 5 for factor loadings in the four-factor model).

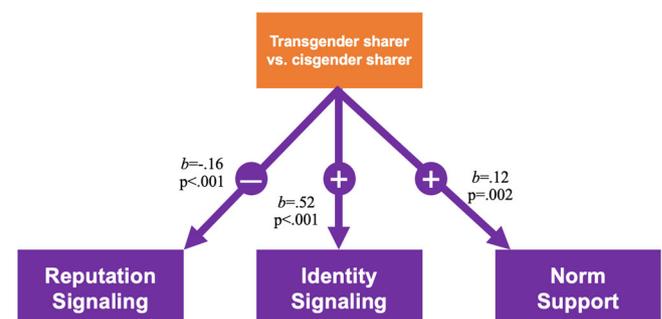
Factor 1 explains 23% of the variance, and we interpret it as *reputation signaling* because of high loadings ( $>0.4$ ) by items such as *motive to gain status* and *motive to enhance reputation* (see Table 2 for the factor loadings of each of the 32 items measuring perceived motivations for pronoun sharing). Factor 2 explains 13% of the variance, and we label it as *identity signaling* due to high loadings ( $>0.4$ ) by items such as *motive to signal personal identity* and *motive to signal gender identity*. Finally, Factor 3 explains 12% of the variance, and we interpret it as *norm support* because of high loadings ( $>0.4$ ) by items including *motive to benefit trans and gender nonconforming people* and *motive driven by belief in the value of a gender-inclusive workplace* (note that we use abbreviated explanatory labels for these items; see Supporting Information Table 3 for the exact wording of the items that participants saw). All motivation items except one (*motive to remain consistent with past words/actions*) loaded uniquely and highly ( $>0.4$ ) onto one of the three factors (this item loaded weakly, that is,  $<0.4$ , on all factors). These findings partially support our hypothesis of people’s perceptions of a few primary underlying motivations for sharing one’s pronouns. They suggest that people do perceive pronoun sharing as *reputation signaling* (to make oneself look morally good) or as *identity signaling* (to signal personal/gender identity). However, the items predicted to load onto the *norm signaling* and *rule following* factors instead loaded onto the same factor labeled *norm support*, in addition to items indicating the sincerity of the sharer’s motivation. The same factor structure holds across the manipulation of the sharer’s transgender versus cisgender identity (see Supporting Information Analysis 1.b for details). See Supporting Information Figure 2 for mean ratings of all 32 “perceived motivation” items collapsed across conditions.

## 2.2.2 | Examining how sharer TGNB identity affects perceived motivations for pronoun sharing

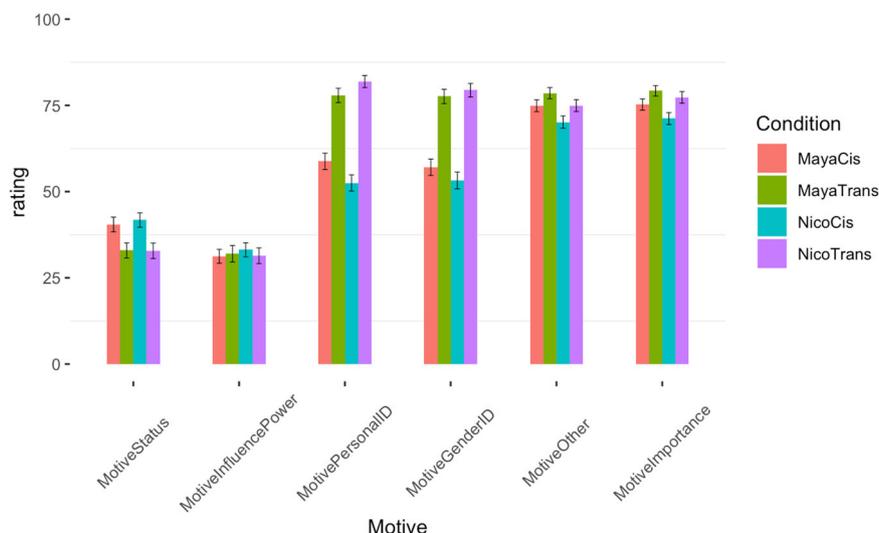
H2: We use a generalized structural equation model to fit a multivariate model to examine how TGNB identity influences perceptions of the sharer’s motivations (defined using the top five items loading onto each factor in the EFA above). To do this, we collapse across the gender-stereotypical name manipulation, that is, we combine and compare the two conditions in which the sharer is transgender (B and D) with the conditions in which the sharer is cisgender (A and C). We use a false discovery rate controlling procedure for multiplicity control (Cribbie, 2007). The directional effects of these analyses do not change when controlling for covariates such as participant age, race, gender, and education level (see Supporting Information Analysis 1.c). Consistent with our hypothesis, we find that the transgender sharers compared to the cisgender sharers are perceived as significantly less likely to be *reputation signaling* (coeff =  $-0.16$ ,  $z = -3.86$ ,  $p = .005$ ), and significantly more likely to be *identity signaling* (coeff =  $0.52$ ,  $z = 14.53$ ,  $p < .001$ ). We also find that the transgender versus cisgender sharers are perceived as significantly more likely to be *norm supporting* (coeff =  $0.12$ ,  $z = 3.11$ ,  $p = .002$ ; see Figure 2). See Figure 3 and Supporting Information Table 9 for mean ratings of the top two items loading on each factor by condition.

H3: We find no significant difference between the conditions in which the sharer is a cisgender man (Condition A) versus cisgender woman (Condition C) in perceptions of *reputation signaling* (coeff =  $0.01$ ,  $z = 0.26$ ,  $p = .817$ ), *identity signaling* (coeff =  $0.06$ ,  $z = 1.05$ ,  $p = .322$ ), or *norm support* (coeff =  $0.09$ ,  $z = 1.65$ ,  $p = .116$ ).

Finally, 89 participants (11.53% of all participants included in analyses) responded “Yes” to the question about whether the experimenters had missed any other potential motivations for the actor’s pronoun sharing behavior. No novel explanations for the sharer’s behavior were provided, as determined by a manual coding



**FIGURE 2** SEM visualization of perceptions of *reputation signaling*, *identity signaling*, and *norm support* in the sharer TGNB identity manipulation in Study 1. Edge labels indicate standardized parameter estimates and  $p$  values. Edges with “+” signs represent positive relationships and edges with “-” signs represent negative relationships. Dotted edges indicate insignificant effects and solid edges indicate significant effects.



**FIGURE 3** Mean ratings and SE bars of the top two items loading on each factor in the three-factor EFA model in Study 1 by condition. Ratings are nonstandardized for ease of visualization (participants reported their responses on slider scales ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 100 (*certainly*). “Motive to gain status” and “Motive to have the power to influence others” loaded on the *reputation signaling* factor, “Motive to signal personal identity” and “Motive to signal gender identity” loaded on the *identity signaling* factor, and “Motive to benefit TGNB others” and “Motive driven by belief in the importance of the action” loaded on the *norm support* factor.

of the responses by the first and fifth authors (see Supporting Information Section 1.e for details).

### 3 | STUDY 2

In this study, we attempt to replicate the factor structure for perceived motivations for pronoun sharing, and condition effects of gender identity on these perceived motivations, found in Study 1.

#### 3.1 | Method

##### 3.1.1 | Hypotheses

Our hypotheses, which are based on findings from Study 1, and can be found in the preregistration for Study 2 ([https://aspredicted.org/P5D\\_S8T](https://aspredicted.org/P5D_S8T)), were as follows:

##### 3.1.1.1 | Establishing perceived motivations for pronoun sharing

H1: We hypothesize that a three-factor structure of perceived motivations for signaling behavior will emerge, such that people perceive pronoun sharing as *reputation signaling* (trying to enhance one's own reputation), *identity signaling* (straightforwardly indicating one's identity and how one would like to be addressed), or *norm supporting* (sincerely endorsing pronoun sharing as a norm).

##### 3.1.1.2 | Examining how sharer TGNB identity affects perceived motivations for pronoun sharing

H2: When the sharer is transgender versus cisgender, participants will perceive them as more likely to be *norm supporting* and *identity*

*signaling*, and less likely to be *reputation signaling*. H3: We will examine the effect of the cisgender sharer's male versus female gender identity on the sharer perceived motivation factors. We do not expect significantly differing perceptions of motivations for cisgender sharers who use “he/him” versus “she/her” pronouns.

##### 3.1.2 | Participants

A nationally representative sample of 917 US participants was recruited on prolific in response to an ad for a “Psychology study (8–10 min).” As per our preregistration, we exited 82 participants who failed the pretask attention check (8.94% of total participants) from the study, and the remaining 835 participants (398 women, 380 men, 17 nonbinary, 40 unknown; mean age = 47.64, SD = 70.02) completed the study and were compensated \$1.60. All participants filled out an online survey designed on Qualtrics. We excluded 54 participants who completed the survey in less than half of the median time (5.88% of total participants), resulting in a total of 781 participants retained for analysis.

##### 3.1.3 | Design and procedure

The study design and procedure were the same as in Study 1. After consenting to participate in the study, participants were given a pretask attention check (see Supporting Information Section B) and then given a brief introduction to the phenomenon of people sharing their personal pronouns in different situations (adapted from <https://www.mypronouns.org/>, see Supporting Information Section A for full text and complete experimental instructions). Next, they were assigned to one of four conditions in which we manipulated the gender identity of

the person who shared their personal pronouns (see Materials in Study 1).

Participants then responded to a set of questions which measured their perceived motivations for the sharing of pronouns, their own reported likelihood of pronoun sharing, perceptions of normativity of pronoun sharing, and so forth (see Materials in Study 1). All continuous dependent variables were z-score standardized across participants. Finally, participants were also asked to report on a number of demographic measures (see Supporting Information Section B for a description of these measures). They were then debriefed at the end of the survey.

### 3.1.4 | Materials

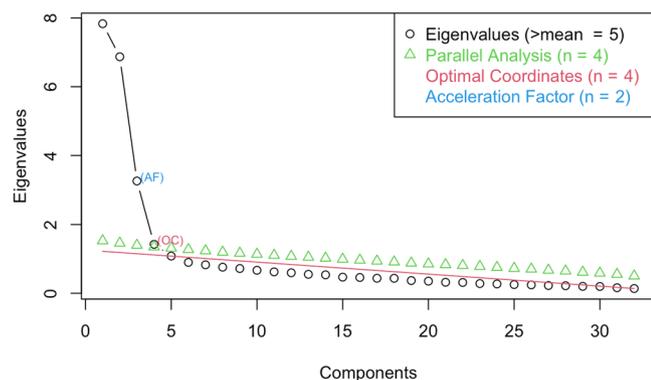
The materials used were the same as in Study 1.

## 3.2 | RESULTS

All statistical analyses were conducted using R[1.3.1056] software.

### 3.2.1 | Establishing perceived motivations for pronoun sharing

H1: We hypothesized that an underlying factor structure of perceived motivations for signaling behavior would emerge, such that people perceive pronoun sharing as *reputation signaling* (to make oneself look morally good), *identity signaling* (to signal personal/gender identity), or *norm supporting* (e.g., to signal community values and conform to an existing norm). To test this hypothesis, we randomly split our sample into a “training” and a “testing” dataset. On the “training” dataset ( $N = 390$ ), we conduct an EFA with oblique rotation and find that a three-factor structure explains 52% of the variance in our 32 “perceived motivation” items. All factors in this model had eigenvalues  $>1$  (see Figure 4), and the model was theoretically interpretable (see



**FIGURE 4** Scree plot of eigenvalues of factors in exploratory factor analysis ( $N = 390$ ) in Study 2.

Supporting Information Table 10 for the correlation matrix of items in the three-factor EFA model).

Factor 1 explains 21% of the variance, and we interpret it as *reputation signaling* because of high loadings ( $>0.4$ ) by items such as *motive to gain status* and *motive to enhance reputation* (see Table 3 for the factor loadings of each of the 32 items measuring perceived motivations for pronoun sharing). Factor 2 explains 17% of the variance, and we interpret it as *norm support* because of high loadings ( $>0.4$ ) by items including *motive to benefit trans and gender nonconforming people* and *motive driven by belief in the value of a gender-inclusive workplace*. Factor 3 explains 14% of the variance, and we label it as *identity signaling* due to high loadings ( $>0.4$ ) by items such as *motive to signal personal identity* and *motive to signal gender identity* (note that we use abbreviated explanatory labels for these items; see Supporting Information Table 3 for the exact wording of the items that participants saw). All motivation items except two (*motive to avoid social cost* and *motive to reflect personal values*) loaded uniquely and highly ( $>0.4$ ) onto one of the three factors (these items loaded weakly, i.e.,  $<0.4$ , on all factors). All items loaded on the same factors as in Study 1, except for three (the two items that did not load onto any one factor, and *motive to remain consistent with past words/actions*, which now loaded on the *reputation signaling* factor). These findings support our hypothesis of people's perceptions of *reputation signaling*, *identity signaling*, and *norm support* as a few underlying motivations for sharing one's pronouns. See Supporting Information Figure 5 for mean ratings of all 32 “perceived motivation” items collapsed across conditions.

Next, on the “testing” dataset ( $N = 391$ ), we conduct a CFA using the top five items that loaded onto each of the three factors in the EFA above. In this CFA model ( $\chi^2(87) = 302.49$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.08, SRMR = 0.06), we defined three factors: *reputation signaling*, *identity signaling*, and *norm support* (see Table 4). The incremental fit indices of CFI and TLI, and the absolute fit index of SRMR indicate good model fit; the absolute fit index of RMSEA indicates acceptable model fit (Kline, 2015). The same factor structure holds across the manipulation of the sharer's transgender versus cisgender identity (see Supporting Information Analysis 2.a for details).

### 3.2.2 | Examining how sharer TGNB identity affects perceived motivations for pronoun sharing

H2: We use a generalized structural equation model to fit a multivariate model to examine how TGNB identity influences perceptions of the sharer's motivations (defined using the five items loading onto each factor in the CFA above) in the entire dataset ( $N = 781$ ). To do this, we collapse across the gender-stereotypical name manipulation, that is, we combine and compare the two conditions in which the sharer is transgender (B and D) with the conditions in which the sharer is cisgender (A and C). We use a false discovery rate controlling procedure for multiplicity control (Cribbie, 2007). The directional effects of these analyses do not change when controlling for covariates such as participant age, race, gender, and

**TABLE 3** Perceived motivation factor loadings in EFA model in Study 2.

Item	Reputation signaling	Norm support	Identity signaling
MotiveStatus: Motive to gain status	0.88		
MotiveInfluencePower: Motive to have power to influence others	0.82		
MotivePower: Motive to gain power	0.81	-0.40	
MotiveAttention: Motive to attract attention	0.77	-0.43	
MotiveReputation: Motive to enhance reputation	0.76		
MotivePeer: Motive to make peers think highly of oneself	0.75		
MotiveSuperior: Motive to make superiors think highly of oneself	0.73		
MotiveValence: Motive to make others like oneself	0.73		
MotiveSociality: Motive to make others want to interact with oneself	0.67		
MotiveMoral: Motive to look morally good	0.62		
MotiveBenefit: Motive to benefit oneself	0.58		
MotiveCompetence: Motive to display competence at one's job	0.41		
MotiveBelief: Motive driven by belief in the value of gender-inclusive workplace		0.78	
MotiveImportance: Motive driven by belief in importance of action		0.75	
MotiveOther: Motive to benefit TGNB people		0.73	
MotiveRight: Motive to do the right thing		0.66	
MotiveSamePage: Motive driven by belief that colleagues are on the same page about gender inclusivity		0.63	
MotiveCommunityValue: Motive to reflect workplace values		0.57	
MotiveInjNorm: Motive to follow an injunctive norm		0.56	
MotiveSignal: Motive to signal that the action is the right thing to do		0.56	
MotiveInfluenceBehav: Motive to influence behavior		0.52	
MotiveDescNorm: Motive to follow a descriptive norm		0.52	
MotiveConsistency: Motive to remain consistent with past words/actions		0.45	
MotiveGenderID: Motive to signal gender identity			0.88
MotivePersonalID: Motive to signal personal identity			0.86
MotiveSocialID: Motive to signal social identity			0.77
MotiveShare: Motive to share how one wants to be addressed			0.73
MotiveMisgender: Motive to avoid being misgendered			0.72
MotivePersonalImp: Motive to do something that is personally important			0.56
MotivePersonal: Motive to make oneself feel safe and comfortable			0.54
MotiveLose: Motive to avoid social cost			
MotivePersonalValue: Motive to reflect personal values			

Note: Factor loadings based on an exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation for 32 items testing participants' perceptions of the sharer's motivations ( $N = 390$ ). Items in this table are explanatory labels for original DVs; see Supporting Information Table 3 for the exact wording of these items that study participants saw. Factor loadings  $<0.4$  are suppressed.

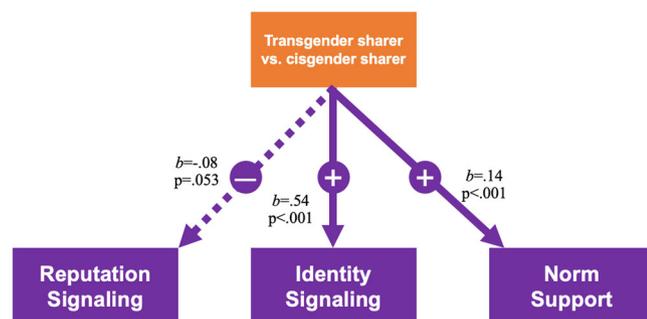
education level (see Supporting Information Analysis 2.b). Consistent with our hypothesis and results from Study 1, we find that the transgender sharers compared to the cisgender sharers are perceived as significantly more likely to be *identity signaling* (coeff = 0.54,  $z = 13.73$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and *norm supporting* (coeff = 0.14,  $z = 3.68$ ,

$p < .001$ ). However, inconsistent with results from Study 1 and Pilot Studies ii–iii, we find an unpredicted null effect of sharer TGNB identity on *reputation signaling* (coeff =  $-0.08$ ,  $z = -1.94$ ,  $p = .053$ ; see Figure 5). See Figure 6 and Supporting Information Table 13 for mean ratings of the top two items loading on each factor by condition. See

**TABLE 4** Perceived motivation factor loadings in CFA model in Study 2.

Item	Reputation signaling	Norm support	Identity signaling
MotiveStatus: Motive to gain status	0.89		
MotivePower: Motive to gain power	0.88		
MotiveInfluencePower: Motive to have power to influence others	0.87		
MotiveAttention: Motive to attract attention	0.84		
MotiveReputation: Motive to enhance reputation	0.76		
MotiveBelief: Motive driven by belief in the value of gender-inclusive workplace		0.84	
MotiveImportance: Motive driven by belief in importance of action		0.81	
MotiveRight: Motive to do the right thing		0.72	
MotiveOther: Motive to benefit TGNB people		0.71	
MotiveSamePage: Motive driven by belief that colleagues are on the same page about gender inclusivity		0.54	
MotivePersonalID: Motive to signal personal identity			0.88
MotiveShare: Motive to share how one wants to be addressed			0.88
MotiveGenderID: Motive to signal gender identity			0.87
MotiveSocialID: Motive to signal social identity			0.78
MotiveMisgender: Motive to avoid being misgendered			0.78

Note: Standardized factor loadings based on a confirmatory factor analysis with 32 items testing participants' perceptions of the sharer's motivations ( $N = 391$ ). Items in this table are explanatory labels for original DVs; see Supporting Information Table 3 for the exact wording of these items that study participants saw.



**FIGURE 5** SEM visualization of perceptions of *reputation signaling*, *identity signaling*, and *norm support* in the sharer TGNB identity manipulation in Study 2. Edge labels indicate standardized parameter estimates and  $p$  values. Edges with “+” signs represent positive relationships and edges with “-” signs represent negative relationships. Dotted edges indicate insignificant effects and solid edges indicate significant effects.

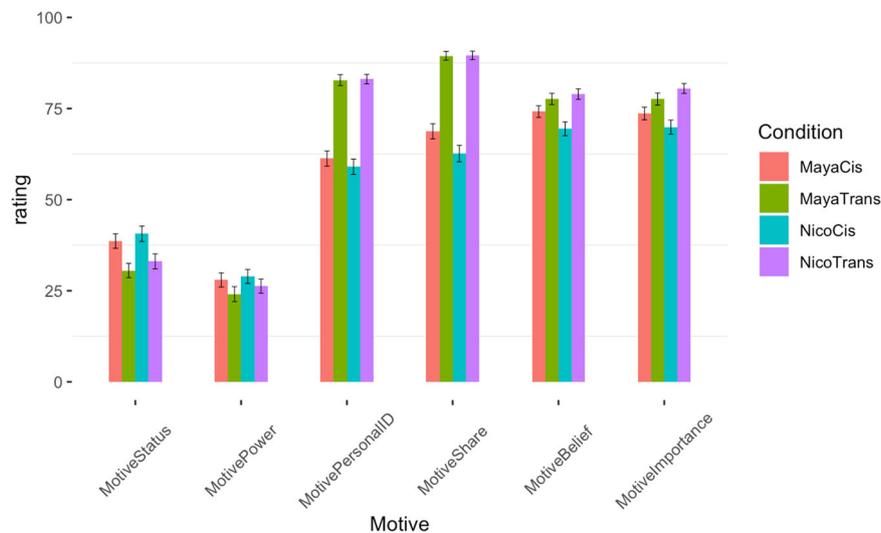
*aggregate analysis* below to reconcile differences in *reputation signaling* perceptions between Studies 1 and 2.

H3: Consistent with our hypothesis and results from Study 1, we find no significant difference between the conditions in which the sharer is a cisgender man (Condition A) versus cisgender woman (Condition C) in perceptions of *reputation signaling* (coeff =  $-0.02$ ,  $z = -0.44$ ,  $p = .670$ ), *identity signaling* (coeff =  $0.06$ ,  $z = 1.19$ ,  $p = .283$ ), or *norm support* (coeff =  $0.07$ ,  $z = 1.27$ ,  $p = .253$ ).

Finally, 90 participants (11.52% of all participants included in analyses) responded “Yes” to the question about whether the experimenters had missed any other potential motivations for the actor's pronoun sharing behavior. No novel explanations for the sharer's behavior were provided, as determined by a manual coding of the responses (see Supporting Information Analysis 2.d for details).

### 3.2.3 | Aggregate analysis: Examining how sharer TGNB identity affects perceived motivations for pronoun sharing

We present a non-preregistered analysis of data aggregated over Studies 1 and 2 ( $N = 1553$ ) to reconcile differences in *reputation signaling* perceptions between Studies 1 and 2. We use a generalized structural equation model to fit a multivariate model to examine how TGNB identity influences perceptions of the sharer's motivations in the entire dataset across Studies 1 and 2 ( $N = 1553$ ). Perceptions of the sharer's motivations were defined using the five items loading onto each factor in the CFA above; a CFA conducted on data aggregated over Studies 1 and 2 produces a similarly well-fitted model (see Supporting Information Analysis 4.b for CFA results). We collapse across the gender-stereotypical name manipulation, that is, we combine and compare the two conditions in which the sharer is transgender (B and D) with the conditions in which the sharer is cisgender (A and C). We use a false discovery rate controlling



**FIGURE 6** Mean ratings and SE bars of the top two items loading on each factor in the three-factor CFA model in Study 2 by condition. Ratings are nonstandardized for ease of visualization (participants reported their responses on slider scales ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 100 (*certainly*). “Motive to gain status” and “Motive to gain power” loaded on the *reputation signaling* factor, “Motive to signal personal identity” and “Motive to share how one wants to be addressed” loaded on the *identity signaling* factor, and “Motive driven by belief in the value of a gender-inclusive workplace” and “Motive driven by belief in the importance of the action” loaded on the *norm support* factor.

procedure for multiplicity control (Cribbie, 2007). The directional effects of these analyses do not change when controlling for covariates such as participant age, race, gender, and education level (see Supporting Information Analysis 4.c). Consistent with our hypothesis and with the results of Studies 1 and 2, we find that the transgender sharers compared to the cisgender sharers are perceived as significantly more likely to be *identity signaling* (coeff = 0.53,  $z = 19.67$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and *norm supporting* (coeff = 0.14,  $z = 4.90$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Consistent with our hypothesis and with the results of Study 1 and Pilot Studies ii–iii, but inconsistent with the results of Study 2, we find that transgender sharers versus cisgender sharers are perceived as significantly less likely to be *reputation signaling* (coeff =  $-0.08$ ,  $z = -3.03$ ,  $p = .002$ ; see Figure 7).

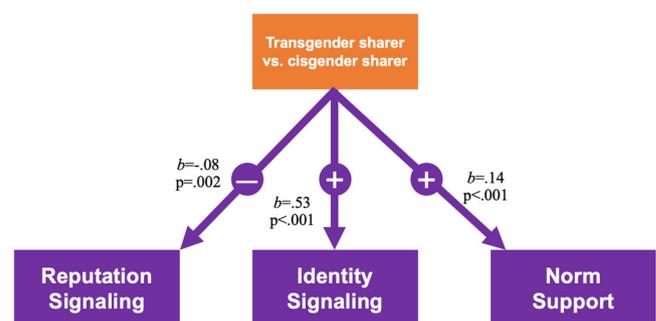
## 4 | STUDY 3

In this study, we attempt to replicate the factor structure for underlying perceived motivations for pronoun sharing found in Studies 1 and 2, and to measure how the descriptive normativity of pronoun sharing in a workplace influences perceived motivations for pronoun sharing.

### 4.1 | Method

#### 4.1.1 | Hypotheses

Our hypotheses, which are based on findings from Studies 1 and 2, and Pilot Study iii (see Supporting Information Section J), and can be



**FIGURE 7** SEM visualization of perceptions of *reputation signaling*, *identity signaling*, and *norm support* in the sharer TGNB identity manipulation for data aggregated over Studies 1 and 2. Edge labels indicate standardized parameter estimates and  $p$  values. Edges with “+” signs represent positive relationships and edges with “-” signs represent negative relationships. Dotted edges indicate insignificant effects and solid edges indicate significant effects.

found in the preregistration for Study 3 ([https://aspredicted.org/6JJ\\_FGK](https://aspredicted.org/6JJ_FGK)), were as follows:

#### 4.1.1.1 | Establishing underlying perceived motivations for pronoun sharing

H1: We hypothesize that a three-factor structure of perceived motivations for signaling behavior will emerge, such that people perceive pronoun sharing as *reputation signaling* (to make oneself look morally good), *identity signaling* (to signal personal/gender identity) or *norm supporting* (e.g., to signal community values and conform to an existing norm).

**TABLE 5** Full text of vignettes used in Study 3.

Condition	Vignette
Non-normative	Nico attends a workplace team meeting. Because there are a few new employees at the meeting, the team decides to start the meeting with a round of introductions. At this workplace, it is not common to include your personal pronouns when you introduce yourself. When it is Nico's turn, Nico says, "Hi everyone! My name is Nico and I'm a research analyst. I use he/him pronouns."
Normative	Nico attends a workplace team meeting. Because there are a few new employees at the meeting, the team decides to start the meeting with a round of introductions. At this workplace, it is common to include your personal pronouns when you introduce yourself. When it is Nico's turn, Nico says, "Hi everyone! My name is Nico and I'm a research analyst. I use he/him pronouns."

#### 4.1.1.2 | Examining how descriptive normativity of pronoun sharing affects perceived motivations for pronoun sharing

H2: When sharing pronouns is already normative versus non-normative, participants will perceive the sharer as more likely to be norm supporting. We do not predict a difference between the two conditions in perceptions of reputation signaling or identity signaling.

#### 4.1.2 | Participants

A nationally representative sample of 866 US participants was recruited on Prolific in response to an ad for a "Psychology study (8–10 min)." As per our preregistration, we exited 57 participants who failed the pre-task attention check (7.04% of total participants) from the study, and the remaining 809 participants (400 women, 374 men, 9 nonbinary, 26 unknown; mean age = 45.78, SD = 16.01) completed the study and were compensated \$1.60. All participants filled out an online survey designed on Qualtrics. We excluded 21 participants who completed the survey in less than half of the median time (2.59% of total participants), resulting in a total of 788 participants retained for analysis.

#### 4.1.3 | Design and procedure

The study design and procedure were the same as in Studies 1 and 2. After consenting to participate in the study, participants were given a pretask attention check (see Supporting Information Section B) and then given a brief introduction to the phenomenon of people sharing their personal pronouns in different situations (adapted from <https://www.mypronouns.org/>, see Supporting Information Section A for full text and complete experimental instructions). Next, they were assigned to one of two conditions in which we manipulated the descriptive normativity of pronoun sharing in the workplace of the person who shared their personal pronouns (see Materials below).

Participants then responded to a set of questions which measured their perceived motivations for the sharing of pronouns, their own reported likelihood of pronoun sharing, perceptions of normativity of pronoun sharing, and so forth (see Materials in Studies 1 and 2). Finally, participants were also asked to report on a number of demographic measures (see Supporting Information Section B for a description of these measures). They were then debriefed at the end of the survey.

#### 4.1.4 | Materials

##### 4.1.4.1 | Stimuli

In each of the two between-subjects conditions, participants read a vignette: a person attends a workplace meeting in which the team decides to start the meeting with a round of introductions because there are some new colleagues at the meeting. When it is the person's turn (note that in all conditions, we keep the person's place in the order of introductions ambiguous), they introduce themselves with their name, role, and personal pronouns (e.g., "I'm Nico, I'm the research analyst and I use he/him pronouns). We manipulated whether participants were told that pronoun sharing in the sharer's workplace was common or not (see Table 5 for full text of vignettes).

##### 4.1.4.2 | Dependent variables

The materials used for dependent variables were the same as in Studies 1 and 2. All continuous dependent variables were z-score standardized across participants.

#### 4.2 | RESULTS

All statistical analyses were conducted using R[1.3.1056] software.

##### 4.2.1 | Establishing underlying perceived motivations for pronoun sharing

H1: We hypothesized that an underlying factor structure of perceived motivations for signaling behavior would emerge, such that people perceive pronoun sharing as *reputation signaling* (to make oneself look morally good), *identity signaling* (to signal personal/gender identity) or *norm supporting* (e.g., to signal community values and conform to an existing norm). We conduct a CFA using the top five items that loaded onto each of the three factors in the EFA in Study 2. In this CFA model ( $\chi^2(87) = 489.57$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.08, SRMR = 0.05), we defined three factors: *reputation signaling*, *identity signaling*, and *norm support* (see Table 6). The incremental fit indices of CFI and TLI, and the absolute fit index of SRMR indicate good model fit; the absolute fit index of RMSEA indicates acceptable model fit (Kline, 2015). The same factor structure holds across the

**TABLE 6** Perceived motivation factor loadings in CFA model in Study 3.

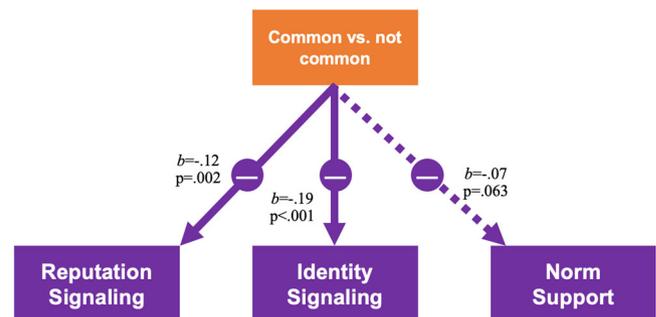
Item	Reputation signaling	Norm support	Identity signaling
MotivePower: Motive to gain power	0.86		
MotiveInfluencePower: Motive to have power to influence others	0.86		
MotiveStatus: Motive to gain status	0.80		
MotiveAttention: Motive to attract attention	0.80		
MotiveReputation: Motive to enhance reputation	0.68		
MotiveBelief: Motive driven by belief in the value of gender-inclusive workplace		0.91	
MotiveImportance: Motive driven by belief in importance of action		0.90	
MotiveOther: Motive to benefit TGNC people		0.83	
MotiveRight: Motive to do the right thing		0.71	
MotiveSamePage: Motive driven by belief that colleagues are on the same page about gender inclusivity		0.48	
MotivePersonalID: Motive to signal personal identity			0.87
MotiveGenderID: Motive to signal gender identity			0.86
MotiveShare: Motive to share how one wants to be addressed			0.83
MotiveSocialID: Motive to signal social identity			0.79
MotiveMisgender: Motive to avoid being misgendered			0.71

Note: Standardized factor loadings based on a confirmatory factor analysis with 32 items testing perceptions of the sharer's motivations ( $N = 788$ ). Items in this table are explanatory labels for original DVs; see Supporting Information Table 3 for the wording of these items that participants saw. Factor loadings  $<0.4$  are suppressed.

manipulation of the descriptive normativity of pronoun sharing (see Supporting Information Analysis 3.a for details). See Supporting Information Figure 8 for mean ratings of all 32 "perceived motivation" items collapsed across conditions.

#### 4.2.2 | Examining how descriptive normativity of pronoun sharing affects perceived motivations for pronoun sharing

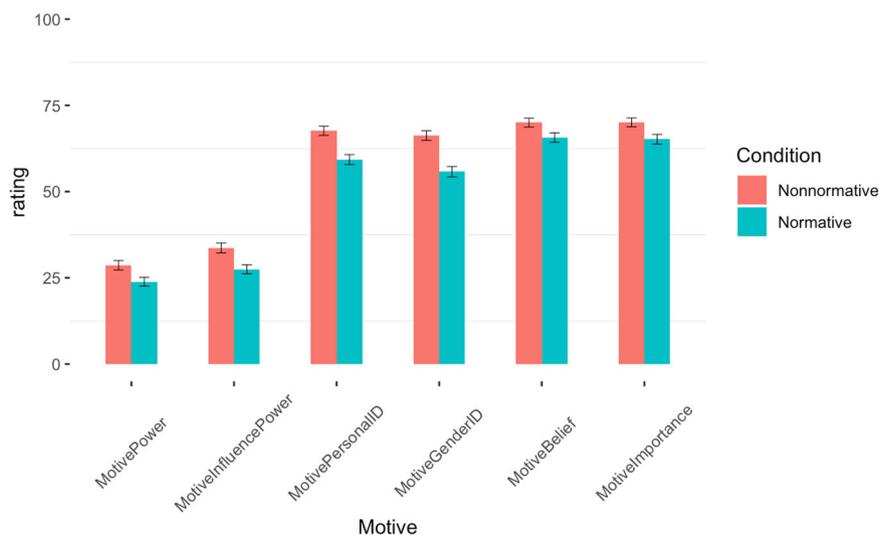
We use a generalized structural equation model to fit a multivariate model to examine how the descriptive normativity of pronoun sharing influences perceptions of the sharer's motivations (defined using the five items loading onto each factor in the CFA in Study 3). We use a false discovery rate controlling procedure for multiplicity control (Cribbie, 2007). The directional effects of these analyses do not change when controlling for covariates such as participant age, race, gender, and education level (see Supporting Information Analysis 3.b). Inconsistent with our hypothesis (see Figure 8), we find that when pronoun sharing is common in the sharer's workplace versus when it is not common, the sharer is perceived as significantly less likely to be *reputation signaling* (coeff =  $-0.12$ ,  $z = -3.08$ ,  $p = .002$ ) and *identity signaling* (coeff =  $-0.19$ ,  $z = -5.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but we find an unpredicted null effect of descriptive normativity of pronoun sharing on perceptions of *norm supporting* (coeff =  $-0.07$ ,  $z = -1.86$ ,  $p = .063$ ). See Figure 9 and Supporting Information



**FIGURE 8** SEM visualization of perceptions of *reputation signaling*, *identity signaling*, and *norm support* in the descriptive normativity manipulation in Study 3. Edge labels indicate standardized parameter estimates and  $p$  values. Edges with "+" signs represent positive relationships and edges with "-" signs represent negative relationships. Dotted edges indicate insignificant effects and solid edges indicate significant effects.

Table 16 for mean ratings of the top two items loading on each factor by condition.

Finally, 91 participants (11.55% of all participants included in analyses) responded "Yes" to the question about whether the experimenters had missed any other potential motivations for the actor's pronoun sharing behavior. No novel explanations for the sharer's behavior were provided, as determined by a manual coding of the responses (see Supporting Information Analysis 3.d for details).



**FIGURE 9** Mean ratings and SE bars of the top two items loading on each factor in the three-factor CFA model in Study 3 by condition. Ratings are nonstandardized for ease of visualization (participants reported their responses on slider scales ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 100 (*certainly*). “Motive to gain power” and “Motive to have the power to influence others” loaded on the *reputation signaling* factor, “Motive to signal personal identity” and “Motive to signal gender identity” loaded on the *identity signaling* factor, and “Motive driven by belief in the value of a gender-inclusive workplace” and “Motive driven by belief in the importance of the action” loaded on the *norm support* factor.

## 5 | DISCUSSION

Across three experimental studies ( $N = 2641$ ) conducted on a nationally representative US sample, we consistently found three factors capturing participants' perceptions of the motivations underlying an actor's pronoun-sharing behavior: *reputation signaling*, *identity signaling*, and *norm support*. We thus present a novel characterization of social perceptions of transinclusive behavior, as well as a method that may be used to test the replication of this pattern in other cases of socially mindful behaviors with ambiguous norm status (e.g., support for social justice movements, proenvironmental behaviors, etc.). We also find that perceptions of *identity signaling* and *norm support* are significantly higher, and perceptions of *reputation signaling* are significantly lower, when the sharer is transgender versus cisgender.

The latent factors that emerge in our analyses suggest a range of possible perceived motivations for pronoun sharing. Items that load on the *identity signaling* factor indicate a straightforward desire to communicate one's personal, social, and gender identity, and to share how one would like to be addressed so that one is not misgendered. The *reputation signaling* factor is also “self-oriented,” but unlike the *identity signaling* factor, is strategic in that it emphasizes self-promotion and status gain. Items that load on the *reputation signaling* factor include motives to enhance one's reputation, to gain status and power, and to attract attention. In contrast, the *norm support* factor appears to be more “collective-oriented.” This factor includes motives to share one's pronouns to benefit others with marginalized gender identities and to do the right thing, driven both by a belief in the value and importance of the action, as well as by a belief that one's colleagues are on the same page about gender inclusivity. We therefore suggest that the *norm support* factor represents

perceptions of sincerity and a motive for collective benefit through normalized pronoun sharing.

In addition, we tested the impact of the sharer's TGNB identity (Studies 1 and 2) and the descriptive normativity of pronoun sharing (Study 3) on these perceived motivations. Consistent with our hypotheses, we found a robust effect of the sharer's gender identity, such that perceptions of *identity signaling* and *norm support* are significantly higher when the sharer is transgender versus cisgender. In Study 1 and in analyses of aggregated data from both Studies 1 and 2, perceptions of *reputation signaling* are lower when the sharer is transgender versus cisgender. Although the transgender person used the gender-neutral pronouns “they/them” in both studies, we also observe this result in Pilot Study iii ( $N = 4405$ ) in which the sharer is a transgender man who uses “he/him” pronouns (see Supporting Information Analysis iii.b). Thus, it is not only gender-neutral pronouns and possibly inferred nonbinary identity driving these results. Our results suggest that participants view the transgender sharer as less focused than the cisgender sharer on self-promotion or status maintenance (*reputation signaling*) and more sincerely motivated to benefit themselves (*identity signaling*) as well as the collective (*norm support*). This may be because of the inference that transgender people have more of a personal stake in normalizing pronoun sharing. However, future research might also investigate why a personally motivated action, in the case of a transgender person sharing their pronouns, does not result in perceptions of entirely self-preserving motivation. In the manipulation of descriptive normativity of pronoun sharing, we find that when pronoun sharing is common versus uncommon, the sharer is perceived as significantly less likely to be *reputation signaling* and *identity signaling*, but we find no significant difference in perceptions of *norm support*. However, these results were unpredicted and differ from pilot results (see Supporting Information Analyses i.b and iii.b) which find significant

differences in perceptions of *norm signaling* but not *reputation signaling*. Therefore, we suggest further research to replicate these results and explore the mechanisms driving them. For instance, it may be that when pronoun sharing is common, it is not perceived as costly enough of a behavior to be helpful in enhancing one's reputation.

Finally, across the three studies, we also find that mean ratings of the top items loading on the *reputation signaling* factor are lower than the midpoint on the scale of 0 (*not at all*) to 100 (*certainly*) for participants in all conditions, whereas mean ratings of the top items loading on the *identity signaling* and *norm support* factors are above the midpoint for participants in all conditions. This suggests that regardless of the identity of the sharer or the descriptive normativity of pronoun sharing in a given context, people more commonly infer straightforward and collective-oriented motives such as *norm support* and *identity signaling*, rather than believing that those who share their pronouns are attempting to enhance their own reputation. The implication of this finding for people's likelihood of pronoun sharing is that people of all genders may feel more comfortable sharing their personal pronouns when introducing themselves if they know they are less likely to be perceived as *reputation signaling*.

Relatedly, these results are an important first step in understanding whether different perceptions of signaling behavior are associated with different behavioral outcomes and norm perceptions. Perceptions of the behavior as *reputation signaling* might influence people to either discount the behavior, or to adopt it because the signaler sees it as having value for their own reputation. For instance, because people discount prosocial behavior when they view it as *reputation signaling* (Barclay & Willer, 2007; Kraft-Todd et al., 2020), so too might people discount pronoun sharing and therefore fail to adopt the behavior themselves when they believe the signaler does not genuinely believe in the value of the behavior. In other words, people may perceive *reputation signaling* as inauthentic, not only because it reflects choices inconsistent with one's internal beliefs (Beverland et al., 2008; Carroll & Wheaton, 2009; Newman, 2019), but also because it involves an element of deception—perceivers may believe that the signaler is disguising their true (self-promotional) intent as actually prosocial (Jordan et al., 2017). This mismatch between perceived selfish intent and prosocial behavior may lead perceivers not to engage in the same behavior. However, an alternative hypothesis is that, despite its perceived inauthenticity, people who perceive pronoun sharing as *reputation signaling* may simultaneously infer that the signaled behavior is becoming more normative and decide to start sharing their pronouns themselves (Sparkman & Walton, 2017). Perceptions of *norm support* might also influence behavior in different ways. On the one hand, when people perceive pronoun sharing as *norm supporting*, they may view the action more generously as an authentic choice consistent with the sharer's internal beliefs (Beverland et al., 2008; Carroll & Wheaton, 2009; Newman, 2019). This may make them more likely to engage in the behavior and perceive it as normative. On the other hand, people who perceive pronoun sharing as indicating *norm support* may also hesitate to adopt the behavior because they resist persuasion (even if implicit) from someone who is trying to be “morally superior”

(Bonetto et al., 2019; Brehm, 1966; Monin, 2007; Sparkman & Attari, 2020). Interestingly, in our supplementary analyses (see Supporting Information Analyses 1.d, 2.c, and 3.c), we found that *norm support* was positively correlated with participants' own behavioral predictions and norm perceptions. That is, when participants saw sharers as *norm supporting*, they were more likely to report that they themselves would share their pronouns, and they predicted that others would too. Participants were also more likely to understand pronoun sharing as descriptively and injunctively normative in these cases. Meanwhile, *reputation signaling* perceptions were negatively correlated with these behavioral predictions and norm perceptions. This suggests that perceptions of sincere, collective-oriented motivations are associated with a greater likelihood that the behavior in question will become normative, whereas perceptions of deceptive self-promotion motivations are associated with predictions that the behavior will not catch on. It is for future work to test whether perceptions of *reputation signaling* and *norm support* could causally impact people's likelihood of engaging with the signaled behavior.

## 5.1 | Limitations and future directions

Although our factor structure of perceived motivations for pronoun sharing consistently produced the three factors of *reputation signaling*, *identity signaling*, and *norm support* across the three studies, these may not be the only possible motivations that one may perceive, or indeed the only motivations someone could have for sharing their pronouns. The existence of additional motivations for pronoun sharing may be one reason the exploratory factor analyses in Studies 1 and 2 explain <60% of the variance in the data. Although we offered participants the opportunity to share other possible motivations they could think of for the sharer's behavior and incorporated responses from Pilot Studies i–iii ( $N = 8,219$ ; see Supporting Information Sections H–J) into our items in Studies 1–3, participants may have been primed to think primarily about the possible motivations outlined in the explicitly available items. Other types of motivational inferences may not have been salient to participants in our studies. Therefore, future studies might collect free response data from participants about possible motivations for the sharer's behavior before presenting the sharer perceived motivation items, to allow researchers to access alternative explanations and explore variance not captured by the models in the present work. In addition, although items such as *motive to influence others' behavior* and *motive to signal the right thing to do* loaded on the *norm support* factor, they did not load as highly as other items that were used for the confirmatory factor analyses in Studies 2 and 3. Thus, our current model does not cover the extent to which people perceive that others share their pronouns with the explicit aim of changing norms in one's community. This aim likely varies across persons and contexts, and requires further study.

In these studies, we relied exclusively on hypothetical scenarios and decisions, where participants may not behave the way they

would in real life (FeldmanHall et al., 2012). Because of the limited nature of our stimuli, the results of these studies cannot be generalized to other contexts beyond workplace settings where employees share their pronouns. Additionally, these findings cannot be generalized to cultural contexts outside the United States, because of cultural differences in person perception (Freeman et al., 2009) as well as different understandings of and practices related to gender nonconformity (Hossain, 2017; Zamfira et al., 2018). These cultural differences extend to differences in (or the absence of) gendered pronouns in many languages other than English. Future work might investigate participants' responses and behavior in multiple cultural contexts across a wider range of real-life scenarios, within groups that participants are members of, as opposed to contexts where participants are third-party observers. We suggest a few directions for such research that extends beyond our vignette-based approach: Future studies might test whether perceptions of *reputation signaling*, *identity signaling* or *norm support* can be influenced by features of the perceiver's own personality, political values, and past behavior. For instance, if the perceiver of the action feels threatened because they had not previously participated in the action, they might be motivated to interpret the signal less generously than someone who does not feel any such threat to their self-integrity. Past work on "do-gooder derogation" shows that people are sometimes motivated by threats to self-integrity to derogate moral exemplars (Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin et al., 2008). In addition, future studies might explore a wider range of stimuli in naturalistic contexts in which people share their pronouns, such as in an email signature or a Twitter bio. Although the manipulation of features of social context such as leadership status, audience size, and descriptive normativity of pronoun sharing produced inconclusive results in our pilot studies (see Supporting Information Sections H–J), future studies might test the influence of these features on perceptions of pronoun sharing in other contexts and further explore the role of social context in these perceptions. It may also be interesting to explore how social evaluations differ as a function of sharing versus not sharing pronouns at all. Finally, the methods used in the present research can be extended to study whether the same perceptions of *reputation signaling*, *identity signaling*, and *norm support* emerge in a range of contexts in which someone might signal their commitment to a prosocial cause (e.g., Indigenous land acknowledgments or donating to a social justice organization).

In addition, our manipulation of gender identity was not comprehensive—in real life, people are not often told whether someone is transgender or not. We are gendered by ourselves, and by other people and institutions in many ways (Butler, 1990; Dembroff, 2019). People make inferences about gender identity based on visual appearance, names, the sound of one's voice, choice of dress, and many other cues. How would these cues influence people's perceptions of someone who shares their pronouns when they aren't sure of the person's gender identity? Future research might include visual and/or audio stimuli that show people who vary in these features as well (e.g., Atwood & Axt, 2021). Finally, future

work might also study perceptions of those who use neopronouns (e.g., "ze/zir," "xe/xem," etc.), since such pronouns are far less frequently used and may be perceived differently as a result.

It is also of interest to study how attitudes towards the act of pronoun sharing itself influence perceived motivations for pronoun sharing. In the case of prosocial behavior, perceptions of ulterior motives can lead to good deeds being treated with suspicion and accusations of virtue signaling (Berman & Silver, 2022; Raihani & Power, 2021). However, not all people will view pronoun sharing as prosocial or "good." How might this additional dimension influence perceived motivations for pronoun sharing? In a post hoc secondary analysis (see Supporting Information Analysis 4.a), we find that participants who report higher support for pronoun sharing and gender inclusivity are also significantly more likely to perceive the sharer as *norm supporting* and *identity signaling*, and significantly less likely to perceive them as *reputation signaling*, suggesting that support for pronoun sharing is associated with more generous interpretations of pronoun sharing behavior. Further study is necessary to establish the relationship between perceived prosociality of pronoun sharing and perceived motivations of someone who shares their pronouns.

This study also leaves open the question of what aspects of social context and identity other than TGNB identity might signal to a perceiver that someone who shares their pronouns is doing so with the intent to *support pronoun sharing as a norm* rather than to *signal reputational status*. In our studies, we find that when someone shares their pronouns publicly in situations such as a workplace meeting, there is a higher likelihood that they will be perceived as having an authentic belief in the value of pronoun sharing, as well as a motive to benefit others as well as oneself, if they are transgender. For someone who does not occupy a minority position due to the markedness of their gender identity, what kind of commitment to the values behind pronoun sharing is it necessary to display to be perceived as authentically *norm supporting*?

Finally, it is important to note that the results of this study do not support a prescriptive argument for normalizing the sharing of pronouns, per se. While it is often beneficial for everyone to know what pronouns to use to refer to each other, not all people are comfortable with sharing their pronouns, and some do not use pronouns at all. Someone may not want to be out as transgender, or someone may still be figuring out what pronouns they want to use (McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2018). The purpose of this paper is to illuminate the ways in which people in the United States currently perceive the act of sharing one's pronouns and how their perceptions are influenced by the sharer's gender identity. It is encouraging that the primary perceived motivations for pronoun sharing found in these studies are not exclusively moralized (as in the case of selfish *reputation signaling* or more altruistic *norm support*), but also include a straightforward desire to be referred to by the correct pronouns (*identity signaling*).

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in OSF at <https://osf.io/4qyzs/>.

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