

LEARNING EMPOWERMENT SELF-IDENTIFICATION



OVERVIEW

In this lesson, participants will explore how self-identification can be empowering, and have discussions about what it means to be proud of the labels and identities that we all hold. They will also explore the damage that can be done when someone applies labels to another person without that person's permission (consent).



OBJECTIVES

Participants will learn the power of self-identified labels and identities they would like to be called.

Participants will discuss the impact of labels, and the idea of consent as applied to labels. Participants will generate examples of positive labels.



AGE/EXPERIENCE LEVEL

Grades 9-12.



THINGS TO PREP & TOOLS NEEDED

[Slurs and Stereotypes video](#), Copies of the Example Case Studies, [GLSEN's I Am Signage](#) handout, computers, speakers, Internet access, projector, screen, markers, paper, pencils.



TIME

60 minutes.

ALL ABOUT THE ACTIVITY

1. Introduction and Opening Question: (10 minutes) Welcome members and explain to everyone that today we will focus on talking about the impact of labels. Then ask them the opening question, "What are labels?"

Example: "Hello, everyone. Today we're going to learn about labels. First, what are labels?"

Once a few participants share their definitions. "Labels are things other folks call us. Labels can be identities and adjectives. When folks use labels on us, they can be empowering or hurtful. Self-identification helps us claim what labels we want folks to use with us. Respecting people's self-identified labels can build bonds and friendships. Labels used in harmful ways, such as using stereotypes and reinforcing that by calling someone a derogatory label, such as "sissy" or "tranny" can be extremely hurtful. Stereotypes are based off of assumptions, or generalizations about someone

based off of the labels you think they hold. Name calling is when someone uses words to invoke harm or make someone feel bad about themselves. To avoid stereotyping or name calling folks should check in with a person if they want any label used with them before using it. This activity will discuss how we can work towards calling people what they would like to be called.”

2. (5 minutes) Opening: Show the video, “[Slurs and Stereotypes](#)”.
3. (10 minutes) Lead the group in discussion about the video by asking some of these questions. To save on time have only 1-3 people answer each question:
 - What were examples of labels that you saw in the video?
 - What do you think the impact of the different labels that were put on the students versus what they chose for themselves?
 - How have you seen the impact of labels in this school?
 - How does it feel when you are not allowed to identify with labels that you would like to be called?
 - How does it feel when people use the labels that you do identify with?
 - What’s happened when you’ve seen someone use a label they don’t identify with or want to be called?
 - What is the difference between a self-identified label and a stereotype?

Discussion Questions:

- How did the person self-identify in your story?
- In your example, how did the use of labels might have impacted the person in your story?
- How did the person’s peers around them validate their identity?
- How is the use of self-identifying labels empowering for the main person in your story?
- What did consent look/sound like in your story? How did consent matter in the story?

Whole-group Discussion: Ask each group to share the answer to one of their questions.

- What were highlights from your group discussions?

4. (10 minutes) Pass out [GLSEN’s “I Am” signage](#) handout to the participants. Remind participants that they are in charge of the labels that feel good to them, that labels should not be enforced by stereotypes or used without their permission. Ask participants to fill in the signs with identifiers, adjectives, or other words that feel good to them and that can tell others about who they are. Let students know these signs will be posted up on a bulletin board.
 - Ask a few participants to share their signs or to name some of the labels they have chosen with the group. Collect the signs to create a bulletin board collage in the classroom.

5. (5 minutes) Closing Reflection.

Note: The closing reflection and extension questions can also be assigned as a follow-up or homework assignment.

Tell the participants, “Today we talked about labels and names that people want to be called. It’s empowering to be in control and claim what labels feel right to you, which is why it can be so hurtful when people use labels one doesn’t identify with without their consent.”

Extension Reflection Questions:

- What are steps you can take to make sure that the people around you, your friends and classmates, are being called what they want to be called?
- What could you do if you notice someone is being called a label that doesn’t feel good to them?
- What should you do if you use a label for someone without their consent?”

TERMS TO KNOW

1. Asexual: Someone who does not experience sexual attraction. (Defined by [AVEN](#))
2. Gender: A set of cultural identities, expressions and roles – codified as feminine or masculine – that are assigned to people based upon the interpretation of their bodies, and more specifically, their sexual and reproductive anatomy. Since gender is a social construction, it is possible to reject or modify the gender one is assigned at birth, and to develop, live and express a gender that feels truer and just to oneself.
3. Gender Binary: A socially constructed system of viewing gender as consisting solely of two categories, “male” and “female,” in which no other possibilities for gender are believed to exist. The gender binary is a restrictive and inaccurate way to view gender because it does not take into account the diversity of gender identities and gender expressions among all people. The gender binary is oppressive to anyone that does not conform to dominant societal gender norms.
4. Gender Expression: The multiple ways (e.g., behaviors, dress) in which a person may choose to communicate gender to oneself and/or to others.
5. Gender Nonconforming: A descriptive term and/or identity of a person who has a gender identity and/or expression that does not conform to the traditional expectations of the gender they were assigned at birth. People who identify as “gender nonconforming” or “gender variant” may or may not also identify as “transgender.”
6. [Femme](#): Full range of folks who identify with feminine expression.
7. Latinx: Latinx is the gender-neutral term for Latino, Latina, and Latin@. In Spanish, much of the vocabulary has the ending “O” or “A,” with “O” being masculine and “A” being feminine.
8. Pansexual: Pansexuality is a sexual identity used to describe those who could be potentially attracted to all people, regardless of gender.

9. Pronouns: The pronoun or set of pronouns that a person identifies with and would like to be called when their proper name is not being used. Examples include “she/her/hers,” “he/him/his,” ze/hir/hirs,” “ze/zir/zirs” and “they/them/theirs.” Some people prefer no pronouns at all.

DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN THIS ACTIVITY? TELL US HOW IT WENT AND WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN BETTER!
EMAIL US AT **STUDENTS@GLSEN.ORG** OR **EDUCATORS@GLSEN.ORG**.

CASE STUDIES

1. Farzana identifies as a queer femme, Muslim, and uses they/them/theirs pronouns. Farzana has recently come out to their friends as gender nonconforming. They have asked their friends to remind people to use the right pronouns and that they identify as genderqueer. They also told their friends that they would like to remind people that they can be queer and Muslim at the same time. Someone in the class makes the statement, “Farzana can’t be queer, she’s Muslim,” one of Farzana’s friends corrects the student by saying “Farzana is Muslim but they are also queer. Although they present femme they are gender nonconforming, and use they/them pronouns.”
2. Becky/Trevor identifies as a genderfluid, white, low-income, asexual, panromantic, and uses zi/zir/zirs pronouns. Zie changes zirs name on the daily, depending on zir presentation for the day. Becky/Trevor has told zir counselor that zi want people to recognize zir identities by using zir pronouns, zirs right name on any given day, and zi hates being called “white trash.” Becky/Trevor also has spoken to the school during assemblies to educate others on asexuality. In the hallway, someone in passing calls zir “Confused white sex-less trash.”
3. Simone identifies as a fat, male, Black, disabled, and uses he/him/his pronouns. He is really proud of his identities and speaks to the school about his rights surrounding what he accessibility needs and body positivity. He has spoken to the teachers about interrupting bullying that he experiences in class. He sometimes wears dresses on days that restrictive clothing is painful, which has resulted in other students asking the teacher if Simone is a boy or a girl and also stating if he’s trying to be a boy that he shouldn’t be wearing dresses that show off his curves. His teacher states “Yes Simone is proud of being fat, he identifies as a boy, and he can wear whatever he feels good in.”
4. Ricardo is white-passing, but identifies as Indigenous Mexican, and uses he/him/his pronouns and as someone with a visual disability He also has a hard time seeing the board, he decides to sit at the front of class in science so that he can see well. He loves science but it really bothers him when people call him a nerd. Some of his classmates come in to the class and start poking fun at the fact that he chose to sit up front and the fact that he wears glasses, calling him “white boy nerd” and “four-eyes.”
5. Haruki identifies as a female, Korean, bisexual, and uses she/her/hers pronouns. She has told others that she likes to present her gender expression as masculine. She has told her friends that she struggles with people validating her Korean and female identities, when she presents masculine. At lunch some of the boys sitting next to her start making fun of the Kimchi that she brought for lunch. They say that she needs to move her “confused butch Chinese self” away from them because her food smells weird.