

Labels Exercise

Some people ask, why insist on a label? Why must we describe, pigeonhole, and pin down our sexuality? Why not just love?

We're going to do an exercise that will help us look at the power of labels.

(Ask participants to stand up and get into a circle.)

I'm going to read some labels. If you are willing to publicly identify yourself by that label, please move to the center of the circle. If not, stay where you are. If you privately identify with a label but don't want to share that information here, then you don't have to. Do whatever feels safe and comfortable to you.

(Read labels one by one. Allow 15-30 seconds for each.)

woman
man
feminist
Christian
Jew
atheist
nerd
chocolate lover
person with a disability
member of an ethnic group
educator
person of color
lesbian
gay man
bisexual person
heterosexual
ally or supporter of bisexual people

With group still standing, discuss:

- What was it like to embrace some of the more neutral or self-evident labels (man, woman, chocolate lover)?
- What was it like to identify with some of the more loaded labels (gay, lesbian, bi, etc.)
- Were there any labels that you felt a need to explain or clarify where you stood? What was it like not being able to--to just have to stand there and let people draw their own conclusions from that one word?
- *(if anyone did)* Can you tell us why you chose to identify with all of the labels?
- Does anyone want to talk about not wanting to publicly identify themselves with a label they privately identify with? (you don't have to say which one)

- What was it like being outside the circle when other people were inside?
- What was it like being inside the circle when there were just a few people there?

(Have them sit) Labels have a lot of power. They influence us in ways we may not be aware of and in situations where we might deny that they matter. Even people who steadfastly refuse to allow themselves to be labeled are affected by how people respond to their *lack* of a label.

Does anyone have any last questions or comments? Did anyone get any new ideas or insights from this exercise that they'd like to share?