

LABELS & LANGUAGE

Exercises

LINES & LABELS

Draw a line across the page and imagine that it's a rough timeline. Below the line write down the words and labels that people have given or called you (could be about your gender or beyond). Above the line write down the words and labels that you used for yourself at those times and now.

Notice the differences, absences, contrasts, and similarities, notice any changes over time. What does this say about your evolution? What does this say about language? Notice which labels and language feel roomy, and hopeful. Do any give you a sense of home, of belonging? Circle or highlight any that mean a great deal to you now. Can you explain how they fit or create the right space for you?

If you wish fold the paper down the line and tear off the section that records what you have been called by others. Throw it in the bin or destroy it in some way.

Language and labels are yours for the taking, making and living into...

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

For many of us, gender doesn't exist on its own. What else are you besides being trans? How do these experiences and identities intersect and intermingle with your gender?

Language is changing all the time, what language have you moved through or discarded already. What do you wish there was a word for that there possibly isn't yet?

LABELS THAT SAY YES (AND NO AND MAYBE)

Settle yourself in a quiet space, close your eyes for a bit (if that feels comfy for you, if not relax your gaze a bit), take a couple of deep breaths and let yourself feel calm. Relax your shoulders, soften your face, quiet your mind as much as you can. You are invited to ask yourself some questions about language and labels and then use your senses to help you figure out if the answer is a yes, no or maybe.

First of all, ask yourself a couple of questions that you know are a firm yes for you. You can do this with your inner voice or by speaking out loud.

Am I breathing? Do I like (favourite food)?

After asking the question say YES (this can be out loud or not). When you answer YES notice what your senses do. How does your body respond? What does the yes feel like? Is it in a particular place in the body? Does it have a sensation?

Now repeat but this time ask yourself questions that you already know are a NO for you.

Do I like (least favourite food) ? Am I 102? (Apologies to any 102 year olds doing this exercise!)

After asking the questions and responding no, again check in with your body. What do you notice about how the NO shows up for you? What does your NO feel like? Where does it land? Does it have a particular sensation?

Now, ask yourself a couple of questions that you know are BIG NO's for you and follow them up with a YES (that you know is not true for you).

Now what does it feel like when you answer in a way that isn't true for you? How does this show up in your body? What senses show you that this isn't true for you? what's the feeling of saying something you don't agree with? Or is outside of what you wish for?

You can use this information to try out some language and labels for yourself. Experiment and play with words, labels and identities by asking yourself questions and noticing how your body responds. Does it feel like a yes, a no or perhaps somewhere in between, a maybe or a might be space.

I am a trans person?
I am non binary?
I enjoy being masculine?
I enjoy being feminine?
I am ...

NB: this is not a definitive way figure out what labels work for you, and the way we respond to these questions can change day to day and moment to moment. What can be useful is to get more of a sense of what yes and no feel like for you so you can use your senses to guide you.