On Being an Adult and Dealing with Identity (ft. Ashley Mardell!)

Guest Hosts
https://youtube.com/watch?v=b8vUlLkyrGo
https://nerdfighteria.info/v/b8vUlLkyrGo

Hi there, How to Adult. My name is Ashley Mardell and one of my favorite things to talk about and something my audience and I are constantly exploring on my channel is the concept of identity. One of the reasons I am so enamored with identity is because it is mindblowingly complex! There are literally an infinite amount of qualifiers a person can choose to identify with.

My labels of choice include bi, pan, queer, a woman, sister, daughter, girlfriend, INFJ, a student of life, an activist, an optimist, a hopeless romantic and, as of recently, an adult? Besides its insane complexity, another aspect of identity I am fascinated with is that it isn't fixed. As we learn, grow and change so does the way we identify and that's what I want to talk about today: How to navigate a fluid identity as we enter adulthood.

So if you've ever found yourself struggling with the age old question: "Who am I?" then sit back and relax 'cause I have some tips for you.

Understand that only you have power over your identity. As we trudge through life we are going to encounter an endless amount of different labels, and that can both be scary, and exciting! Some labels or identifiers will be like gifts. For example, in high school I was labeled a "creative" which was fantastic because as I ping-ponged from theater to speech to photography I never knew what to call myself. An actor? Maybe some days. A photographer? Perhaps others. But once my AP language teacher deemed my artistically fluid self "a creative" I was finally at peace. It really helped me understand why I was so drawn to a variety of mediums and I've clung to that qualifier since.

Now, not all labels will be gifts, however. For me, "bisexual" was a word that others used to label me as when I first came out as being attracted to more than one gender. That word never felt quite right to me, though. It just didn't click. And I later learned that that's because it didn't capture the nuance of the way I viewed gender. Fast forward a few years, and I stumbled across the word, "pansexual" and it was much more fitting. However, being labeled and forced to try on the word "bisexual" is actually what helped me initially explore and enter the LGBT community. And because of that, I will always have a connection to the word.

But what's awesome is in the end, *you* get to pick which words stick. And you even get to decide what those words mean! My bi, or pan, might be different than yours! And that's okay. You're also allowed to alter your definition as you gain life experience. It's your identity, and you have the power.

Tip 2: Stay curious. One of my favorite ways to learn about my identity is to learn about others' identities. In high school I did this my simply showing up and being exposed to the array of individuals who also happened to be there. Jocks, dancers, academics, et cetera. In college exploring my identity and moving forward in my personal journey was even easier because I was surrounded by people who were doing the same thing. I was also immersed in several social justice and women studies classes that constantly introduced me to new identities and ways of viewing the world.

Once I left, however, things got a little trickier. Post-undergrad I began to develop a routine: I went to work, I came home and I was surrounded by the same people everyday who were decently older and usually settled and stable in their identities. Unlike them, however, I didn't feel like I was done changing. I had to learn how to keep growing even though I already had a degree and a job, my own apartment and was considered by many already grownup.

I did this in a variety of ways. I took to the internet, I devoured TED talks, I became an active creator and consumer in feminist blogging circles, I volunteered at queer organizations I thought could teach me more about diversity, and I attended local workshops and talks about gender and race. I joined book clubs, went to therapy to learn about ways I could be more mentally healthy and ultimately learned that massive amounts of knowledge was out there for me if I only had the bravery and took the time to look for it. Just 'cause college was over didn't mean my education had to be.

Tip three: Explore. Different parts of your identity will come out in different situations so try lots of things. This could be immersing yourself in new clubs, activities, sports, wearing different clothes or even trying out certain mindsets. If you think something could potentially be an interesting outlook or lifestyle dive into it, if even just for a week to test it out.

I tried being vegetarian. It lasted three years and although it wasn't ultimately for me it did teach me how important it is to be a socially conscious and responsible consumer. And those are lessons I take with me to the grocery store every week. They can be even simpler than going veggie for three years though. One afternoon shopping out of curiosity I wandered into the mens' section of a department store. I found a comfy shirt I liked, later a style I liked and even later a word to describe that style: androgynous.

Then later I learned that there were many other words to describe people who didn't fit into gender norms. Quickly I became an ally and activist for anyone else who felt this way and my YouTube channel morphed into a space which campaigns for equal rights and visibility for minorities and since then has attracted over 140,000 community members all because one day I tried something new and put on a shirt from the guys section.

And finally, tip four: Be at peace with the fact that there is no such thing as being fully grown up. Sometimes I feel like the hardest part of being an adult is figuring out what it means to be an adult. And just because you have a job or a house or a routine doesn't mean you're done growing or changing.

Stay curious and continue to explore any and every identity you desire. And don't ever worry if you ever feel overwhelmed with all these labels and qualifiers because remember, only you have power over your identity. You pick your label, you decide its definition and I promise it's a fun and thrilling journey doing so.

Thanks for listening and good luck growing up. OK, bye.