



## popcult: Discard the labels

By Crissy Lauterbach

The smell of Sharpie markers wafted through the air at the Miami University Freshman Mixer in Oxford, Ohio.

“Your goal is to meet as many people as you can in the next 30 minutes. Introduce yourself, and have them sign your T-shirt,” yelled the sweaty-faced resident assistant.

The bell rang, and I hopped up and stuck out my hand to the nearest boy.

“I’m Crissy,” I blurted.

“I’m David Whitehouse, but my friends call me Whitey,” he said, while writing his name in large letters across my shoulder blades. Before I could say good-bye, a bright-eyed girl ran in between us with her Sharpie, poised to attack.

“I’m Allison, but I prefer Al, not Allie,” she said. “That’s too girly for me.”

At that moment, I realized that in college, I could redefine myself and be anyone I wanted to be. My new friends had no idea that my dad calls me Brown Bear because I get so tan in the summer or that my debate opponents often called me Lauterbach because of my fierce arguments. In college, I could leave behind the personas other people had placed upon me and take with me the ones that truly

defined who I believed Crissy Lauterbach could be.

We all have nicknames and labels that our families, friends, teachers, and coaches have placed upon us. We get labeled as a jock, emo, chav, cholo, drama queen, or nerd because of the music we listen to, the clothes we wear, the vocabulary we use, and the people we choose to hang around. I bet

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you even formed a vision of each of these labels in your mind’s eye when you read the stereotype.

Unfortunately, once the label is placed upon us, we often begin the self-fulfilling prophecy of living up to it. Some of these emotional labels stem from poor decisions or mistakes we have made in our lives. They continue to rear their heads because the people around us cannot forgive or forget our actions.

Yet when you leave high school, the world does not always know your past unless you share it. If you were labeled as a jock,

you can take your athleticism with you but lose the arrogance. If people called you a chav, keep the tracksuit and lose the intimidation mojo.

Seek out a college that can help you become the best version of yourself. Look for one that has a mission statement or philosophy that matches not only your professional goals but your personal goals as well. Are there opportunities for you to step out of your comfort zone, to explore new cultures, to gain real life experiences that push you not only academically but also challenge your emotional intelligence?

Celebrities reinvent themselves all the time. If Katheryn Elizabeth Hudson can emerge as Katy Perry or Carlos Ray can become Chuck Norris, we can all transform into stronger and more positive versions of ourselves.

As a future educator, be careful of the labels you write on your students’ emotional backpacks because they may follow your students for years. Sharpie does come out, but it takes a lot of scrubbing and hard work. **GO**

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CRISSY LAUTERBACH is a Teacher Academy instructor and FEA advisor at Lakota East High School in the Butler Tech School District in Liberty Township, Ohio.