

# STUDENT RESEARCH WEEK

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## Reappropriation of mental disorder labels: Turning a hurtful term into a badge of pride

**Talk:** Ashlyn Munn

*Bachelor of Arts: Honors Psychology, MacEwan University*

**Faculty mentor:** Dr. Andrew J. Howell

*Arts & Sciences: Psychology, MacEwan University*

### Abstract

Past research at MacEwan has shown that endorsement of noun labels applied to those with mental disorders (e.g., "John is schizophrenic") is related to essentialist beliefs, stigmatizing attitudes, and feelings of low compassion, fear, and dangerousness (Howell & Woolgar, 2013; Howell, Ulan, & Powell, 2014). Recently, research has examined whether self-labeling ("reappropriating" the label) has different effects than being labeled by others. Label reappropriation is the reclaiming of a derogatory label previously used by wider society to stigmatize members of marginalized groups (Galinsky et al., 2013). Research exploring the reappropriation of slurs historically used to stigmatize such groups (e.g., LGBTQ, women, and racial minorities) suggests that label reappropriation increases the perceived power of self-labelers, and lowers the label's perceived negativity when compared to individuals labeled by others (Galinsky et al., 2013). Recently, research conducted at MacEwan has applied the theory of label reappropriation to mental disorder labels. Findings support Galinsky et al. (2013), such that individuals who self-label are viewed as more powerful, and their label as less negative, when compared to those labeled by others. The current study employs a 3x2 factorial design to examine whether an initial act of self-labeling can undermine the negative impact of subsequent labeling by another. The hypothesized results of this study would underscore the negative drawbacks of label application by others, while supporting potential benefits associated with the preemptive self-application of such labels.

The results of this program of research will be presented at MacEwan University's Psychology Honours Conference and are expected to be presented at the 2016 Canadian Psychological Association Conference. Additionally, the thesis manuscript of this research

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is expected to be published in an academic journal, such as the Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology.

## References

- Galinsky, A. D., Wang, C. S., Whitson, J. A., Anicich, E. M., Hugenberg, K., & Bodenhausen, G. V. (2013). The reappropriation of stigmatizing labels: The reciprocal relationship between power and self-labeling. *Psychological Science*. doi:10.1177/0956797613482943
- Howell, A. J., & Woolgar, S. R. (2013). Essentialism and compassion: Predicting preference for noun labels applied to people with mental disorders. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 54(1), 87-91.
- Howell, A. J., Ulan, J. A., & Powell, R. A. (2014). Essentialist beliefs, stigmatizing attitudes, and low empathy predict greater endorsement of noun labels applied to people with mental disorders. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 66, 33-38.