

Are Labels Useful?

Theory & Personal Reflections



by Jade Lambeth

Labels weave themselves seamlessly into our everyday lives: our interactions, perceptions and views are all somewhat influenced by labels. The language that we use holds immense power and can have an impact on our mental well-being.

Drawing on sociological theories, it has been said that positive labels bolster self-esteem whilst negative ones can trigger self-doubt and anxiety. All of this perpetuates a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Reflecting on my own encounters, I've experienced both the uplifting and disheartening effects of labels. It's intriguing to observe how societal norms shape these labels. For instance, during my school years, I often received the label 'manly' from peers because I chose not to conform to traditional beauty standards by wearing makeup. This label felt restrictive and imposed gender stereotypes. Conversely, being recognised as 'strong' in sports was empowering, although it too was tied to societal expectations of masculinity.

Moreover, beyond these explicit labels, there are subtle expectations based on my background, gender and sexuality that shape how others perceive me. These unspoken labels also influence my experiences and interactions, highlighting the complexity of identity and societal perceptions.

Labels often serve to segregate and can fuel stigmatisation, yet they also foster group belonging and awareness. While they aid in organising information, their impact on well-being is profound, necessitating recognition of their nuanced effects on self-perception.

Navigating labels in everyday life requires a delicate balance between self-awareness and empathy. As we engage with language it is important to consider the impact of this. Ultimately, it is through conscious language and purposeful, compassionate interactions that we can cultivate a more inclusive and supportive society.

Look out for our upcoming podcast:
Sections of Intersectionality,
where we discuss the impact of labels, perceptions and societal expectations in more detail (and more)...