

## **LABELING**

**Chalice:** Whenever we hear of someone labeling another person, we need to ask *for what purpose* they are making that judgment. Are they trying to help the person they are labeling, or are they trying to show they are different from, and better than, that person?

“They Say You're Crazy: How the World's Most Powerful Psychiatrists Decide Who's Normal”  
by *Paula J. Caplan*

### **Check-in:**

**Reading:** My son Ben had been labeled as needing 'special educational services'. As I reflect back on Ben's experience, what lingers in my mind is the 'staying power' of labels. Ben certainly needed assistance, but this was not the whole problem. One major difficulty was teacher expectation. That is, prior to meeting Ben his teachers often had a preconceived notion of his abilities. They focused on his labeled weaknesses, excluding other aspects of his personality. By tacitly relying on the label these teachers often underestimated his capabilities in class; some of them found it difficult to 'see' Ben as a whole child ... Damaged self-esteem - wounding of the spirit - can accompany a child in the process of living out other people's labels.

*Glenn M. Hudak* in "Labeling: Pedagogy and Politics" (2001)

**Quotes from the Common Bowl: see attached**

### **Life Questions:**

1. Have you ever been labeled by others?
2. How do you feel your self-identity has been shaped by the labels applied to you?
3. What is the purpose of labeling?
- 4a. What is the relationship between labeling and stereotyping?
- 4b. Think of a label you used recently to refer to someone. What were some of the associated behaviors you attributed to that person based on the label you applied?
5. What are the negative outcomes of labeling?
6. What are the benefits of being labeled (or labeling others)?

**Closing ritual:** May the light around us guide our footsteps, and hold us fast to the best and most righteous that we seek. May the darkness around us nurture our dreams, and give us rest so that we may give ourselves to the work of our world. Let us seek to remember the wholeness of our lives, the

weaving of light and shadow in this great and astonishing dance in which we move.

- *Kathleen McTigue*

### **Check-out:**

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## **QUOTES - Labeling**

There is no such "condition" as "schizophrenia," but the label is a social fact and the social fact a political event.

- *R. D. Laing*

I came to live in a country I love; some people label me a defector. I have loved men and women in my life; I've been labeled "the bisexual defector" in print. Want to know another secret? I'm even ambidextrous. I don't like labels. Just call me Martina.

- *Martina Navratilova*

We love labels. We really do--as a society, I mean. It's so much easier to understand the world around us if we name it, tie it down, and distance ourselves from the parts we don't like.

- *Unknown*

Once you are labeled 'the best' you want to stay up there, and you can't do it by loafing around. If I don't keep changing, I'm history.

- *Larry Bird*

Once you label me you negate me.

- *Soren Kierkegaard*

Instead of being presented with stereotypes by age, sex, color, class, or religion, children must have the opportunity to learn that within each range, some people are loathsome and some are delightful.

- *Margaret Mead*

Since the world is so full of a number of things, we must categorize and simplify in order to comprehend. But the reduction of complexity entails a great danger, since the line between enlightening epitome and vulgarized distortion is so fine.

- *Stephen Jay Gould*

I used to think I was poor. Then they told me I wasn't poor; I was *needy*. Then they said it was self-defeating to think of myself as needy, that I was *culturally deprived*. Then they told me deprived was a bad image, that I was *underprivileged*. Then they told me that underprivileged was overused, that I was *disadvantaged*. I still don't have a dime--but I have a great vocabulary!

- Cited by *Lewis Allen* in "Unkind Words: Ethnic Labeling from Redskin to Wasp."

Compared to labeling by others, self-labeling may provide a more powerful source of influence for identity acquisition, confirmation, and modification.

- *Victor N. Shaw* in "Substance Use and Abuse: Sociological Perspectives."

Labeling and labels are in many respects similar to stereotyping and stereotypes ... Negative labels rarely stereotype only behavior; more often they transform and magnify it into a character failing.

- *Herbert J. Gans* in "The War against the Poor: The Underclass and Antipoverty Policy."