

Positive & negative usages of addict label

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What's in a name does matter.

“Labels are for clothing not for people,” goes a popular saying. A more honest version would go like this: “Labels are for clothing and other people, but don't you dare try to label me!”

Most people hate to be labeled but love labeling others. As complex human beings, we resist being reduced to a neat little package. Our souls yearn to be free, unbridled and authentic, so we chafe at being boxed into the constraints of societal categories.

The core distinction between a positive use of labels and a negative one is: Labels are constructive when they provide clarity and help foster dialogue and understanding. But all too often people use labels for the exact opposite purpose – to write themselves or others off and shut down recovery possibilities and communication.

“By continuing to use the term “addict”, treatment providers are doing a disservice to their patients and potentially negating progress towards destigmatization and successful long-term treatment.”

~ *Brian Sherman, PhD, Center for Motivation and Change*

The known concept of "Once an addict, always an addict" is not AA *dogma*, but rather AA *suggestion* and this advice is only appropriate or honest when applied to addicts.

For many people, the term “addict” is a helpful way of identifying symptoms and issues, and finding a way to connect and bond with others in a healthy way that promotes change. However, when that term creates a prolonged sense of failure or guilt which ultimately may lead to relapse (negative emotions are one of the strongest predictors of relapse) or prevent someone from seeking help in the first place (because they don't want to accept the label, and the stigma that is associated with it), I question its utility.

People are people first, before they develop an addiction. Just as they are people before they develop heart disease, diabetes, or depression. The “addict” label suggests the whole person

is the problem, rather than the problem being the problem. A person with a substance abuse problem has a far better chance at recovery than a person who is the problem him or herself at their core.

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