We Label Ourselves

Errors of Assumption

Before You Label

We Choose What to See

The Mechanism of Stereotypes

The Effect of Generalization

For instance, if you strive to become better at public speaking, one small incident during a single speech can lead you to strongly negative, unrealistic conclusions, such as “I am a terrible public speaker.” The simple truth, which you are probably well aware of, is that no person is represented by a single role, occupation, or interest. You can, therefore, perceive this person, with whom we have not interacted before, as reliable, outgoing, artistic, intelligent, etc. However, we are also inclined to use stigmatizing labels, such as hipster, nerd, fashionista, jerk, etc. As you can probably see, whatever categorizations may come to mind, the key point is that we are likely to choose to label this person only with one of his or her traits, we neglect all the others. What is more, on a subconscious level, we tend to attribute to that person all the characteristics we believe they should have, regardless of whether or not that is the reality. As you might have seen, disregarding vital information about this person, to cram them into an effortless perception, is why generalizations can be time savers, but at a high price.

Just as we are inclined to apply a label to the person we are talking about, we also have a tendency to form assumptions about an entire group of people, based on a single trait of one or few of its members. This phenomenon is well illustrated by stereotypes—when we make assumptions about an entire group of people, based on a single trait of one or few of its members.

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Self-Fulfilling Prophecy of Labels

When we meet someone for the first time, we deduce certain things about them, based on the available information. You have probably guessed by now, that thinking in labels is detrimental not only for your relationship to that person, but also for your mental health. Judging others or ourselves by labels is a self-fulfilling prophecy. It means that we will believe we are that, and therefore act accordingly, thus creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

If we remove the word “loser” from the example and look at these traits and behaviors more carefully, we will probably see that the person we are talking about is someone unhappy, who doesn’t see their life as a success and is always striving to improve it. According to past experiences, they don’t strive to become better. Instead, they deeply believe in their inferiority to others. They will constantly compare themselves to the others and feel bad about themselves, which will increase their stress and anxiety. If you have ever been born with a clear birthmark or scar, you probably had at least one person call you names and point that out. People may also have, at some point in their lives, believed they should have, regardless of whether or not that is the reality. As you might have seen, disregarding vital information about this person, to cram them into an effortless perception, is why generalizations can be time savers, but at a high price.