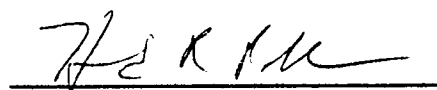


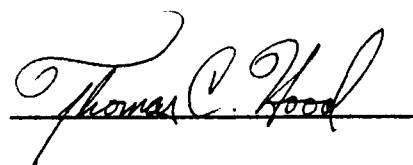
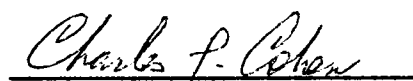
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Traci Lynn Clayton entitled "A Phenomenological Investigation of the Experience of Being Labeled." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Psychology.



Howard R. Pollio, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of The Graduate School

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF
THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING LABELED

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Traci Lynn Clayton

August, 1995

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the patients
with whom I will work during the many years of my career,
with the hope that my understanding of
the experience of being labeled
will guide me in offering them comfort, sensitivity,
and many possibilities for growth toward healthy living.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the participants of this study who graciously offered their time in order to help me better understand the experience of being labeled. I am also grateful for the help of my chairperson, Howard R. Pollio, and for the help of my other committee members and mentors: Charles P. Cohen, Robert G. Wahler, and Thomas R. Hood, each of whom has had a guiding hand in my development as a researcher and clinician. I wish to thank all the members of the Wednesday Evening Phenomenology Research group for helping me to discover the value of the phenomenological perspective and for offering a forum for the development of valuable friendships.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to develop a thematic description of what individuals are aware of during their experiences of being labeled. A phenomenological approach was used to analyze the transcribed interviews of twelve participants who discussed various situations in which they experienced being labeled. A thematic analysis of the data produced four focal themes: 1) Fit; 2) Limits and Possibilities; 3) Visible and/or Different; and 4) Accepted or Rejected by Others. The four themes appeared meaningful in a context of interpersonal relationships in which the person defines "Who I Am." This study greatly extends our understanding of the process of labeling beyond the previous assumptions of both the proponents and critics of the Labeling Theory Debate on Mental Illness. The Labeling Theory argument is reinterpreted in terms of the themes found in this study, and the implications for the discipline of psychology are discussed.

Preface

In the spring of 1991, a fellow graduate student and I were discussing the recently posted list of students expected to begin our clinical psychology program the next fall. As tradition would have it, each new student received a letter from an established student welcoming him or her to the program. My friend and I were chuckling over the name of the person she had been assigned to contact: someone named Rupert, from Idyllwild, California. Well, neither of us had ever heard of Idyllwild, California, and we had certainly never known anyone named Rupert before, so we were left to our imaginations as to what this person would be like. My friend and I both expected he would be "nerdy", which conjured up a further host of images: We surmised he would be a solitary type who despised sports and who would be an expert chess player. We also assumed he probably wore unfashionable clothes, and would prefer to discuss theoretical physics rather than to dance at a party. I was curious about meeting him, although I must admit that my interest in him as a spectacle overrode my interest in him as a potential colleague or friend. As it turns out, Rupert goes by his middle name, one much less suggestive of the "nerdy" images we envisioned. He is an avid sports fan, wears fashionable clothes, and although he does in fact like to discuss theoretical physics, he also likes to dance... things I never would have predicted given those few words used to label him so long ago: "Rupert, from Idyllwild, California."

Despite its anecdotal nature, this story describes a critical phenomenon of everyday human life: We constantly make assumptions about others based on the labels we use. Every day, we use language to label other people, a process that serves to define, delineate, and order the social world around us. Similarly, we also experience being labeled by others, and many of the labels we receive serve to define, delineate, and order the thoughts and expectations we have about ourselves.

Many disciplines have discussed the process and implications of labeling others. This paper reviews the various literatures on labeling and describes a phenomenological

investigation of the experience of being labeled. Chapter I is divided into three parts. Part One reviews several perspectives on labeling; namely, those of linguistics, sociology, and clinical and developmental psychology. Part Two discusses the fact that the social phenomenon of labeling is closely related to the psychological concept of self, which must be viewed in the context of a person's embedded relationships to and in the world of other people. Part Three discusses the phenomenon of how mental illness is labeled and critiques the 1970's sociological debate centered on the Labeling Theory of mental illness.

Chapter II details the methods used in the present study. This chapter discusses the limitations of a natural science methodology for psychology and alternatively proposes an existential-phenomenological approach to the phenomenon of labeling. Chapter II includes a review of the supporting literature concerning rationale, procedures, and reliability and validity.

Chapter III presents the results of the study. This chapter discusses the themes of the experience of being labeled and gives supporting examples from the data which illustrate each theme.

Chapter IV discusses the findings of the research with regard to psychological theory and implications for other disciplines. This chapter details the contribution of a phenomenological approach to the study of labeling and discusses the value of studying the direct experience of individuals.

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Chapter I: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The Phenomenon of Labeling: A Review of the Relevant Literature

The Linguistic Perspective

Linguistic theorists, especially psycholinguists, have discussed the interaction of thinking and language. Whorf's "linguistic-relativity" hypothesis proposes that language shapes our ideas rather than simply expresses them (Longabaugh, 1957). The Whorfian hypothesis is based on the idea that human thinking is highly dependent on our language, so that our perceptions, thinking, and views of the world depend on the particular language we speak. It also proposes that groups utilizing different linguistic systems will have fundamentally different world views (Whorf, 1956). The implication for the phenomenon of labeling is that the labels we give to others have a profound impact on the way we subsequently think about, relate to, and treat them. The anecdote discussed in the preface illustrates how easily a host of assumptions is made based simply on a name, and such events are common in everyday life. Although in that case the consequences were relatively benign, entire cultures have been powerfully stigmatized by labels given to them. A horrifying historical example is the Nazi government's exploitation of Jews, labeling them as a source of impurity in order to justify destroying them (Mueller, 1973). Clearly, the manipulation of language is considered a hallmark of power (Foucault, 1961/1965) and can have devastating social consequences.

Since the publication of the first edition of Korzybski's work: Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics (1933), the use of semantics for social correction was greatly extended. Korzybski set forth the idea that "General Semantics is concerned not only with words, grammar, and logic but with all kinds of symbolization and the essential part it has played ... in the lives of individuals and nations, and even in the welfare of humanity as a whole" (Longabaugh, 1957, p.v). He also noted that errors in Western linguistic systems (since Aristotle) were responsible for preventing a "general sanity" in human relations, and he assumed that applying the laws of General

Semantics would lead to revolutions in the fields of neurology, psychology, psychiatry, education, cultural anthropology, and many other disciplines. For example, Korzybski (1958) discussed the direct implication for psychology and psychiatry, stating that "meanings, and the meanings of meanings, with their inseparable effective components, give us ... means to achieve a host of desirable [psycho-logical manifestations], and to eliminate a large number of undesirable [ones]" (p. 24).

The impact of General Semantics has far reaching implications for the study of labeling. Another important figure in this field is S.I. Hayakawa, whose work : Language in Action (1939) was a great contribution to the study of linguistics. Language in Thought and Action is now in its fifth edition (1990), and rests on the fact that language is the indispensable mechanism of human life, life which is "molded, guided, enriched, and made possible" (p.8) by the fact that human beings are talking animals. Due to the human ability to define the world linguistically, we will always be labeling others and we will always be labeled by others. Most all the labels we use fit into one of three categories described by Hayakawa (1990) as: 1) reports, 2) inferences, or 3) judgments, which are described below.

People have many individual differences that can be described by others in terms of a label that Hayakawa (1990) would consider to be a "report", which is something verifiable. For example, if I tell you that my cousin has red hair, you can visit her to verify that the label of "red-haired cousin" is indeed a report. A great many of the labels that we use, however, are more accurately described as "inferences" or as "judgments", not reports. Hayakawa defines an inference as:

a statement about the unknown based on the known. On an elementary level, the difference between a report and an inference is demonstrated in the following statement: "He's afraid of women." This statement does not report; it draws an inference from some set of observable data: "He blushes and stammers whenever a woman speaks to him. He never speaks to women at parties." In any case, the common characteristic of inferences is

that they are statements about matters that are not directly known, made on the basis of what has been observed. (p.25)

Hayakawa further discusses another class of labels, called "judgments", which he defines as "expressions of the speaker's approval or disapproval of the occurrences, persons, or objects he is describing" (p. 25). For example, we can say: "That dirty scoundrel, Jack, lied to us", which Hayakawa defines as a judgment rather than a "fact". Ordinarily, there is first some type of report ("Jack said he didn't have the car keys, but later, when he pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket, the keys fell out" (p. 26)), then an inference (that Jack deliberately misstated the facts), and then the judgment (that we disapprove of what Jack did). Many of the labels that we use in everyday conversation are judgments.

A great deal of the sociological and psychological debate on the use of diagnostic labels relates to this issue. Some believe that the label "mentally ill" simply indicates the status of someone suffering from a certain set of symptoms which are treatable in a medical mode without negative consequence (e.g., Gove, 1980). These theorists would liken this use of the label "mentally ill" to a report. Others, however, would argue that the label of "mentally ill" is a stigmatizing way to characterize someone engaging in deviant and unwanted behavior, which has a profoundly negative effect (e.g., Scheff, 1974; Szasz 1974, 1978). These theorists can be said to be contesting the use of "mental illness" as a report, considering it instead to be a judgment, and therefore a means by which to remove such a person from society. Although this idea is introduced here as a point of illustration, it will be discussed in greater detail later.

The Sociological Perspective

A great deal of the sociological literature discusses labeling in terms of the phrase "mental illness". Many theorists have argued over the consequences of labeling others as mentally ill, and sociologists in particular have emphasized the negative impact of labeling someone in this way. Perhaps the most well-known contribution in this area has been made by

Erving Goffman (1961, 1963, 1971). Of particular relevance is his 1961 work: Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates. Goffman studied the "career" of the institutionalized mental patient, or the "regular sequence of changes ... in the person's self" (p. 128) due to institutionalization, proposing the view that "oneziness or 'sick behavior' claimed for the mental patient is by and large a product of the claimant's social distance from the situation that the patient is in, and is not primarily a product of mental illness" (p. 130).

The predominant sociological view of mental illness endorses Goffman's idea that medical symptoms and "mental" symptoms are two entirely different entities, with the latter being the result of the breaking of social norms which are "treated" politically by giving the "patient" formal sanctions (i.e. institutionalization) (Goffman, 1971). This view has a great deal of support from within sociology (e.g., Scheff, 1974) as well as from other disciplines (e.g., Szasz 1974, 1978). Thomas Scheff's major contribution to the labeling theory debate on mental illness will be discussed in great detail later in the paper. Briefly, however, his conclusion is that the use of diagnostic labels in mental illness is mostly negative (1974). Scheff gives much support for the sociological view that the diagnosis of "mental illness" is a means by which those in power control deviation from social norms.

Goffman's essay "The Medical Model and Mental Hospitalization" (1961) raises the issue that the "diagnosis" of mental illness is in fact a moral judgment about behavior. The following passage is illustrative:

In medicine it is possible to act as if there were no right or wrong streptococci, merely dangerous ones. In psychiatry there is a formal effort to act as if the issue is treatment, not moral judgment, but this is not consistently maintained. Ethical neutrality is indeed difficult to sustain in psychiatry, because the patient's disorder is intrinsically related to his acting in a way that causes offense to witnesses. Further, the standard way of dealing with such offenses in our society is to sanction the offended, negatively and correctively.

Our whole society operates on this assumption in every item and detail of life, and without some functional equivalent it is hard to see how we could maintain a social order without it. (p. 365)

Clearly, sociologists have argued that the wish to remove deviant behavior from society is one reason psychiatric care and the process of institutionalization continues to be supported. Beyond the aim of wanting to remove unwanted behavior, Goffman proposed that other political and social gains are made by those who support institutionalization (e.g., psychiatrists). His essay: "The Moral Career of a Mental Patient" (1961) discusses the way in which the "prepatient" becomes a "patient". Another essay: "The Insanity of Place" (1971) further illustrates the way in which families and psychiatric staff "collude" against the so-called patient to facilitate hospitalization. He states that "collusion is a normal and no doubt desirable part of social life" (p. 339) but can have very questionable consequences in psychiatric care. A frightening observation is that "the tacit betrayal of the third person is one of the main ways in which two persons express the specialness of their own relation to each other" (p.339) (Goffman, 1971). This observation illustrates the political and social gain that can be made at the expense of the mental patient, far beyond the removal of the unwanted individual who has committed social offenses by way of aberrant behavior.

In addition to discussing the negative consequences of labeling someone mentally ill, sociologists and social psychologists have discussed labeling in terms of the stigma and stereotypes associated with many labels. Stereotypes exist for a host of social "differences", such as attractiveness/unattractiveness, obesity, height, odor, and physical disability (Herman, Zanna, & Higgins, 1986). For example, we often stereotype obese people as being "jolly". The categorization and stigmatization of women has also been discussed (Schur, 1983; Deaux, 1984); for example, we stereotype successful business women as being "cold and heartless". Social psychologists have discussed the experience of stigmatized individuals, illustrating that "stigma often results in a special kind of downward mobility ... [because]

people who are stigmatized or acquire a stigma lose their place in the social hierarchy" (p. 214) (Ainlay, Becker, and Coleman, 1986). Jones, Farina, Hasdorff, Markus, Miller and Scott (1984) further note that "for an individual with a stigmatizing condition, the construction or maintenance of a stable and coherent self-concept may be a particularly difficult process" (p. 111).

Goffman's (1963) work on stigma also emphasizes how labels influence our identity as well as our perceptions of others. This idea is not new, and this theme is certainly no stranger to literary culture. For example, in Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter (1850/1986), Hester Prynne's entire existence is reduced to the consequences of one act, for which she is branded and shunned by the community. That experience in turn changed her perceptions of and relationships to others. Goffman also discusses the critical nature of context to our understanding of events, other people, and ourselves. The context in which others are known to us affects our attributions about their appearance or behavior, and it influences how we "label" them (Goffman, 1963). The time-less story of "The Ugly Duckling" illustrates the role of context in defining who we are, how we think about ourselves, and how we are treated by others. Among a nest of young ducks, the misfit swan is labeled the "ugly duckling" and is excluded, devalued, and ridiculed (even by his own mother) to the point that he begins to "accept" that miserable existence. He is amazingly transformed into a most beautiful creature when finally with his own kind, emphasizing the critical role of context in social perception. This issue of context will be discussed in great detail later in the paper.

Developmental and Clinical Psychology Perspective

Although the sociological debate has reinforced the idea that labeling other people can have a profound negative impact, educational and developmental psychologists have also shown some strikingly positive influences that labels can have. Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1966) classic study involved administering children a fictitious test and informing teachers that some children (actually chosen randomly) were on the verge of a dramatic developmental leap. It

appeared that the teachers responded to those children by giving more attention, setting higher goals, and being more supportive, leading to a result of significantly higher I.Q. scores within eight months. Clearly, this "self-fulfilling prophecy" effect shows the impact of expectancy in labeling. Such effects have also been noted to affect prognosis in psychotherapy, with both therapist and patient expectations playing an important role in the course, duration, and outcome of treatment (Goldstein, 1962).

Within the diagnostic labeling debate, some clinical psychologists and psychiatrists have argued that diagnostic labels can guide successful treatment positively. For example, in Warner, Taylor, Powers, and Hyman's (1989) study of psychotic patients they report that "a combination of acceptance of the diagnosis of mental illness and an internal locus of control will be associated with better outcome" (p. 406). These researchers established several ratings of patients' levels of functioning (including therapist reports and patient self-reports) relative to the degree of psychopathology, and found that those patients who accepted the label of a major mental illness and who had an internal locus of control demonstrated better functioning relative to the degree of psychopathology. Similarly, Weinstein's (1983) review of the literature shows that labeling theory underestimates "the degree to which patients think favorably about mental illness and post-hospital experiences" (p. 70). This author reviewed 35 studies dealing with hospitalized patients' attitudes toward mental illness and ex-patients' attitudes toward the stigma or effects of hospitalization. He concluded that the data from those studies did not support such labeling theory propositions that assumed patients' attitudes would become more unfavorable during hospitalization as well as after discharge. In fact, he found that studies supported the hypothesis that patients' attitudes did not change for the worse after hospitalization and that patients' attitudes often were more favorable toward the use of the term "mental illness" than non-patients' attitudes.

Many theorists have suggested that the labels we receive from others affect our perceptions of and reactions to the world. Few theorists have considered that the "self-

labeling" process --or the process of "labeling from within"-- is also clearly important. George Kelly's (1955) Personal Construct Theory emphasizes an individual's own constructions, or "rules", by which he or she creates his or her own personality and world-view. Kelly's Role Construct Repertory Test is based on the idea that people construct their world by labeling and defining themselves as well as other people in their lives. This test elicits self-description of important themes in a person's life, demonstrating the importance of self-labeling and individual contributions to the labeling process. Kelly believes that "man creates his own ways of seeing the world in which he lives; the world does not create them for him" (p. 12). Too often labeling theorists assume that we simply "passively receive" labels, without noting that we in fact do label ourselves, and often actively seek out others who will confirm those labels.

In contrast to Kelly's view that we label ourselves, developmental psychologists have noted that many labels that children receive are based on observable individual differences that may be present from the fetal stage of development, differences that are identified and labeled by other people. These labels are not fictitiously created nor the result of self-labeling, but often are descriptors based on infant behavior (reports, according to Hayakawa). Temperament research with infants and children demonstrates this process of labeling which reflects individual differences (i.e. reports of behavior). For example, it has been noted that about ten percent of infants can be identified in the earliest months of life as temperamentally difficult children (Chess, Thomas, & Birch 1968; Graham, Rutter, & George, 1973). In fact, "a much higher rate of behavior disorders is found in later life in children described by their mothers as difficult children" (Heatherington & Parke, 1986, p. 86), refuting the idea that these children are labeled with the "diagnoses" of behavior disorders based on observer-bias alone. Some studies do suggest that the child's behavioral tendency is the major influence in the diagnosis of conduct disorder (as opposed to simply "bad parenting", or "bad labeling")(e.g., Anderson, Lytton, & Romney, 1986). Similarly, Lytton (1990) argues for

the primacy of the child's individual contribution to the diagnosis (or label) of conduct disorder, although he does admit that this behavior occurs within the context of a reciprocal parent-child interactive system.

This last point regarding context is a critical one. Many theorists discuss labeling without considering the critical role of context in determining the labels we give and receive, and the subsequent expectations of and reactions to the world that we have. For example, in contrast to Lytton's view, Dodge (1990) and Wahler (1990) advocate a contextual view, positing that the "reciprocal and recurrent interactions over time" (Wahler, 1990, p. 703) between the child and his environment are determinative of the behavior and, therefore, the label. Dodge (1990) notes that some proposed designs for studying conduct disorder fail to focus on the transactional nature of the parent-child relationship in the development of conduct disorder, and he notes that this developmental pattern can not be ignored. Wahler (1990) questions "who 'drives' the social exchanges that shape a particular disposition into an antisocial personality. Does the child push a parent into providing the shaping contingencies, or does a troubled parent follow some personal and pathological map? Undoubtedly, both arrangements can occur.." (p. 702). The issue of context in relation to labeling is certainly critical, and this will be examined in detail in this paper.

Notable Omissions in the Literature on Labeling

Although the issue of "labeling others" has been addressed in many different literatures, three important aspects have been overlooked in the labeling debates to date: First, psychologists have tended to ignore those aspect of labels which are self-constructed. Research to date is filled with the implicit assumption that labels are invariably imposed by others, and that they are "falsely assigned" for reasons of power, and most often have a negative impact. Kelly's Role Construct Theory demonstrates the phenomenon of "self-labeling" and the importance of an individual's own contributions to his/her view of him/herself (using both positive and negative labels). Further, developmental research shows that even many

"externally imposed" labels are not necessarily assigned falsely, but may in fact represent individual differences (observable on a behavioral level), although it can be argued that those labels can easily become stigmatizing (e.g., "the fat kid" may be both descriptive and stigmatizing).

A second omission concerns the fact that psychologists have not emphasized a phenomenological view in which labels are both (and always) a function of the person and the world. The literature does not typically clarify that it is not very useful to consider the individual as "separate" from the environment, since this is never the case. Phenomenologists would argue that so-called "objective observations" which we use to label others as well as "subjective observations" which we use to label ourselves do not exist apart from the social and cultural influences acting upon the "labeled" and the "labeler". Hermeneutic arguments (e.g., Gadamer, 1976) support the view that the text (here, the labels) and the context can not be thought of as autonomous entities -- Gestalt psychology long ago demonstrated that a figure does not exist without a ground. Likewise, phenomenological psychology informs us that an individual (and the labels given to and received by that individual) does not exist without the ground of the lived-in world (Heidegger, 1962; Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). This view has been underemphasized in the labeling literature to date.

A third omission concerns the fact that psychologists have erroneously assumed that they understand the experience of being labeled. Kelly (1955) warns us that "the psychologist should not necessarily infer that what one person thinks has to be like what another would think in the same circumstances, nor can he accurately infer what one person thinks from what is publicly believed to be true". Most of us would agree that various individuals' experiences of receiving the same label will differ. However, the literature is full of naive assumptions which imply that there is only either 'this' way or 'that' way to react to certain labels (see Korzybski, 1958, who notes that Aristotelian linguistic systems have too much "either-or" thinking). What has been markedly absent from this literature are studies which analyze

first-person descriptive data about an individual's experiences of being labeled: studies that would allow for individual variation and differing opinions about the labels received. Due to the paucity of such research, the actual process and structure of the experience of being labeled has remained elusive.

One way in which psychological theory has addressed the phenomenon of labeling has been in terms of the concept of the self; specifically how it is created or maintained by the labels we give to ourselves or the labels we receive from others. However, we are unable to clearly understand the concept of the self without simultaneously considering the context in which "that self" exists. The various perspectives reviewed above in Part One cumulatively have emphasized the importance of considering context in the social phenomenon of labeling. The perspectives reviewed in Part Two emphasize the importance of considering context in understanding the psychological concept of the self. This argument will make clear that the social phenomenon of labeling is closely related to the psychological concept of the self, both of which become figural against a ground of interpersonal relationships.

Part Two: The Role of Context in Understanding the Self

For years, psychologists have argued over the concept of the self, which has continued to be an elusive and ambiguous construct, and there are no universal definitions at present. Many theorists have proposed theories about "the self" (e.g., Sullivan 1953, Kohut, 1971), the development of which has been seen as the result of a range of processes, all the way from biological to societal determinants. For example, classical Freudian theorists view the self as biologically determined by a set of drives within a closed system of distributed psychological energy. Conversely, behaviorists, if they discuss the issue of self at all, tend to view it as a product of the action upon the person by the world. Although these views seem quite opposed, they both are deterministic in their view of the person. In the former theory, a person acts according to biology; in the latter, according to the demands of the world.

Deterministic views of the self are certainly limited. Alternatively, existential-phenomenological views posit that there is always a 'dialogical' relationship between people and their world. According to this perspective, person and world "co-constitute" one another, which means that there can be no person without a world and no world without a person. This view is informed by Gestalt psychology, which demonstrated that we can have no figure without a ground. Accordingly, Gestalt psychologists would define the self as a figure which constantly changes against the ground of the world and interpersonal relationships. This view is quite similar to the existential phenomenological one (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1989; Heidegger, 1962; Ihde, 1986) which states that it is senseless to talk about the self simply as a bundle of energy within a closed psychic system, and equally as senseless to talk about the self as a mechanical entity 'acted upon' by the world.

Erikson offered a definition of the self which is a refreshing alternative to such determinative definitions which view the self as a concrete, almost reified entity. Erikson (1950) characterizes the self as a reassuring sense of personal continuity in the face of change. Goffman illuminates this further. He states that the individual's behavior "is grounded or anchored in something in and beyond itself, so that the carry-over from the individual as a continuing self-same identity is really as much a function of the context as it is of the person" (Goffman, 1974, p. 298). The phenomenological view of the self is also compatible with a systems viewpoint, which accounts for many levels of 'impact' on the person and the world, without attempting to predetermine the direction or the magnitude of the influence.

Gestalt psychology notes that various aspects of our world can become figural as objects; unfortunately, too often we lose sight of the fact that these aspects are temporally and situationally co-constituted by the ground. The subsequent error is that as a result of focusing exclusively on the figures, we begin to reify them, believing them to be some type of "real" (or "true") entities independent of ground conditions. Unfortunately, such reification

inevitably obscures the dynamic nature of our relationship to the world and leads to our treating those constructs we label as independent things rather than as figures within a ground. In addition, it seems more natural for us to label our constructs with nouns instead of verbs, which further serves to "fix" our ideas about these "things" we have named. Pollio (personal communication, 1993) has pointed out that we might more appropriately communicate the active and varied nature of our constructs by using verbs instead of nouns. He states that more than likely we are doing something like "becoming" rather than showing a "self". The concept of "becoming" implies a contextually situated, varied array of behavior, whereas the concept of "the self" implies some fixed entity, seemingly regardless of the lived-in environment. Indeed gerunds sound less clear and finite to us, and they make us feel uncertain about exactly what the concepts are, even though gerund forms may more accurately portray the dynamic nature of the concepts applied to living beings. Despite the appropriateness of gerund forms, we are quite entrenched in a linguistic system which reifies our world with a plethora of nouns, potentially blinding us to the dynamic nature of the world and our "place" in it. Allport (1955) further comments on the concept of "self", noting "it is entirely conceivable that a concept of self useful to philosophy or theology may turn out to be merely an impediment in the path of psychological progress" (p. 36).

Many theorists reify concepts to fit the theories they create. Kuhn (1962) describes this activity as the "strenuous and devoted attempt [of research] to force nature into our conceptual boxes" (p. 5). Kuhn states that theories do indeed offer us ways to organize our world, but there are always "difficulties encountered in developing points of contact between a theory and nature" (p. 30). This difficulty does not, however, mean that our theories and our research are useless. On the contrary, our research informs us about what we see, which is an ever-changing truth. Theories are necessary since "nature is too complex and varied to be explored at random" (Kuhn, 1962, p. 109) and it is perfectly natural for our theories to evolve as well. Kelly (1955) was quite frank in his view that a theory should be considered

modifiable and, ultimately, expendable ... an eventual candidate for the trash can.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) similarly warn us that we must always be cognizant of the fact that our "institutional world is experienced as an objective reality" (p. 60) (my emphasis). They further state that "it is important to keep in mind that the objectivity of the institutional world, however massive it may appear to the individual, is a humanly produced, constructed objectivity" (p. 60). Similarly, it is important to realize that the seeming objectivity of the self is a "humanly produced and constructed objectivity" (p. 60). It is by way of the context in which socialization occurs that this self is humanly produced.

It seems natural for us to limit our chaotic sense of existence by reifying certain aspects of the world to make them relatively constant and stable. Hood (1984) asks:

"Why is there an emphasis on physical appearance - on a desirable set of facial features, on a fashionable set of attractive clothes, on color combinations that please the eye?" The answer is that character traits are intangible and easily changeable. Emotions and motives can shift from moment to moment. They are more easily changed than our physical appearance.... Our physical appearance and its relative stability provide the illusion that our social character is as permanent and as unchanging as our physiognomy. (p.7)

Therefore, the "stability of our physiognomy" provides the illusion that our social character is permanent and unchanging, which is valuable to our need for stability. Likewise, the reified definitions of "self" and "personality" provide the illusion that these are fixed entities, permanent and unchanging. Many theorists endorse the notion that individuals benefit most from having a rather stable and solid "sense of identity", and they note that such a stability is declining in "modern society" (Wheelis, 1958; Van den Berg, 1961; Gergen, 1991).

Gergen's recent book, The Saturated Self (1991), discusses this so-called "dissolution of the self" as a result of the technological change in the postmodern era where we are reaching a state of social saturation. The result is that our previous assumptions about

individual "stable" selves are being jeopardized, and new patterns of relationships have emerged, involving a multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages about the self as a result of social saturation. Therefore, we have a breakdown of a coherent idea of the self. The fully saturated self has become no self at all, and "the very concept of personal essences is thrown into doubt. Selves as possessors of real or identifiable characteristics -- such as rationality, emotion, inspiration, and will-- are dismantled" (Gergen, 1991, p.7).

Gergen (1991) further states that mental health professionals today have a language with which to label individuals in "mental deficit" terms, drawing attention primarily to incapacities in the individual. As a result, therapists are in the business of identifying various disorders of "the self" and of then trying to "fix" them. Since our identities are experienced as fragmented and we are left without a coherent sense of identity, it seems inevitable that every human being would be "diagnosable" in postmodern terms. Gergen illustrates that "social saturation brings about a general loss in our assumption of true and knowable selves. As we absorb multiple voices, we find that each 'truth' is relativized by our simultaneous consciousness of compelling alternatives. We come to be aware that each truth about ourselves is a construction of the moment, true for only a given time and within certain relationships".

Gergen further notes that one result of this state of affairs is that the self becomes a strategic manipulator, vanishing fully into a stage of relatedness. This idea follows the shift in psychodynamic thinking from drive theories to object-relational theories, which emphasize the relationship as the unit of study, rather than a particular individual's psyche as a closed system. An alternative, more positive, outcome is proposed by Smith (1994), who prefers the view of British sociologist Anthony Giddens rather than "the meaninglessness that Gergen's (1991) variety of postmodernism accepts as inevitable" (p. 410). The alternative view is that "life-political issues ... call for a remoralising of social life and they demand a new sensitivity to questions that the institutions of modernity systematically dissolve" (p. 410) (Giddens (1991), in Smith, 1994).

According to Gergen (1991), in the postmodern world there is no longer an individual essence to which one remains true or committed and individuals have been deprived of traditional markers of identity and sustained coherence. Although Gergen describes this as a recent phenomenon, Allen Wheelis spoke about it in 1958. Wheelis stated that the increasingly unstable values of society were contributing to an individual's lack of a coherent self. Both Gergen and Wheelis would agree that societal boundaries have become blurred, and there is now a multiplicity of selves. It should be noted that this view differs from that of James (1890). While James (1890) did speak about a man's self being "the sum total of all that he can call his" (p.291), he did note that

"physical nature *restricts our choice to but one* of many represented goods, and even so it is here. I am often confronted by the necessity of standing by one of my empirical selves and *relinquishing the rest*. Not that I would not, if I could, be both handsome and fat and well dressed, and a great athlete, and make a million a year, be a wit, a bon-vivant, and a lady-killer, as well as a philosopher, a philanthropist, statesman, warrior, and African explorer, as well as a 'tone-poet' and saint. *But the thing is simply impossible.* (p. 309, italics, my emphasis).

While James clearly accepts that it is impossible to "stand by" more than one empirical self, post-modern demands require that we do so. No longer is it considered "impossible" to accomplish such a feat; on the contrary, it is expected. These increasing demands, along with simultaneously opposing demands, lead to a break-down in self, much like what has been described by Pavlov (1957) as "experimental neurosis".

While the erosion of self (in Gergen's view) accounts for the loss of a traditional sense of identity, one possible positive result seems to be that as the essential self erodes, awareness expands as to the positive ways in which personal identity can be created and re-created in relationships. This is the position of the object-relational perspective in psychology, in which the self is no longer defined in and of itself, but always in relation to others. The self can be

considered to be constructed by each relationship in which an individual takes part and there is no longer a dependence on a solid confirmation of identity. Gergen describes how the individual becomes socially malleable and is praised for being a mutable self. There is a transformation of "you" and "I" to "us". This shift is also evident in current psychotherapy practices, which now "treat" the family, society, etc., rather than the individual. However, Zurcher (1977) sees the creation of a "mutable self" as the result of a painful process of accelerated social change "of such an order that it maintains, epidemically, conditions of psychological stress and self-concept disruption" (p. 211).

Gergen's discussion is quite relevant to "the experience of being labeled", which ultimately is a discussion of linguistically mediated identity. He concludes that who and what we are is not so much the result of our "personal essence" but of how we are constructed in various groups and relationships. This has enormous implications for psychology. On the positive side, self-coherence and contradiction of identity cease to matter as one takes pleasure in the expanded possibilities of being in a socially saturated world. Since the concept of an individual self is not intelligible, relationships define the concept of the self: we may appear to stand alone, but we are more accurately manifestations of relatedness.

Gergen's formulations are quite consistent with the phenomenological view that person and world co-create each other. The bed of relationships in which the so-called post-modern self lies buried is the ever-present "ground" against which our identities become figural. Phenomenologists would find Gergen's formulations familiar, but not necessarily new. Human beings have always been embedded in a web of relationships, and the context of these varying relationships has always been influential. The critical distinction about the influence of context on the self has to do with the fact that the context is influential, and not determinative. Existential-phenomenologists (e.g., Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1989) speak about the idea of "situated freedom", in which the freedom of making choices is limited by a given world situation. Others have referred to this as "soft determinism" (Sappington, 1990). However,

the varying choices made by an individual across different contexts do not necessarily "fragment" the self, as some have proposed. We are certainly able to recognize different behavior by the same person in various contexts as 'continuous' with the person, even though the specific behaviors may differ greatly from one situation to the next. For example, Linton (1945) notes that a store clerk can be at various times an employee, a husband, a father, etc.. Yet we know that this man is certainly able to be 'a father' should his child show up at his place of work where he happens to be in the role of 'employee'. His actions are mediated by the context, but are situationally relevant. More importantly, the fact that this man acts in contrasting ways does not mean that we can not make sense of his behavior or learn something about his experience in the various situations. Based on our shared definition of certain roles, we can understand something about him. Although this man's experience is varied, it is not senseless to us: it is context-relevant.

Part One described the importance of considering context in the social phenomenon of labeling. This discussion (Part Two) illustrated the importance of considering context in understanding the psychological concept of the self. Both the phenomenon of labeling and the concept of self (including our experience of having a self -- which is maintained by labels we give to ourselves and by those we receive from others) occur against the ground of social relationships. Clearly, the context in which labeling occurs offers various possibilities in regard to the conclusions drawn about the labeled individual and subsequently to his/her idea of self.

Debates about the impact of labeling others have not systematically studied the context in which such labeling occurs. The phenomenon of the labeling of mental illness in particular has been quite controversial in the fields of psychology and sociology, and the debates have not been explicit about the role of context. It can be argued that the context in which labeling (e.g., of mental illness) occurs may lead to very different conclusions about the labeled individual, and presumably about his/her experience of the label, including his/her idea of

self.

The popular 1970's labeling theory debate of mental illness will be reviewed in detail below. It will be shown that while both the proponents and critics of labeling theory had valid arguments, both failed to notice that they were discussing "labeling" in two very different contexts. This debate did much to shape the attitudes of mental health professionals and lay people alike during the '70's', and much of the impact was negative. The implicit assumptions made by theorists on each side of the argument will be reviewed, as will the resulting negative views about the fields of psychology and psychiatry. It will then seem quite sensible and even essential to reevaluate the argument from a phenomenological viewpoint which is designed to minimize the overpowering researcher bias that so heavily seems to have clouded the thinking of this issue in the 1970's.

Part Three: The Labeling Theory Debate of Mental Illness

Background

Issues of labeling and stigma in clinical psychology and sociology have been of interest to clinicians, researchers, theoreticians, and patients since the beginning of the discipline. In fact, the stigmatization of deviant behavior can be traced to ancient times. Although the explanations rendered over time and across cultures have ranged from supernatural or magical forces to specific neurochemical malfunctions in the brain, the predominant societal reaction to "deviant behavior" has been one of fear, mistrust, disgust, and even persecution (Barstow, 1994). Periodically, however, a humanitarian approach emerges led by a gathering of outspoken individuals who approach the topic of personal differences in behavior with sympathy, understanding, and interest. Unfortunately, the universal stigma associated with behaving differently has been more or less constant. It is clear that mental health professionals and patients in the 1990's are continually confronted with issues concerning the label of mental illness, and it is widely appreciated that a social stigma surrounds the term mental illness in contemporary society (Fabrega, 1990). Although some researchers note that

the public reaction to deviant behavior and mental illness has become somewhat more accepting (Lefley, 1989; Trachtenberg, 1986) and accurate (Greenley, 1984), it is clear that issues concerning the stigma of diagnostic labeling are far from being resolved.

Goffman(1963), who has discussed the concept of stigma at length, traces the history of the word "stigma" and notes changes in its meaning over time. The term stigma originated with the Greeks and was used to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual or bad about the moral status of the signifier and stigmatizing signs were often cut or burnt into the body to advertise the bearer as a blemished person (Goffman, 1963). Later the term referred more directly to bodily signs of holy grace or to bodily signs of physical disorder. Today, the term is used more in the original literal sense, but is applied more to the disgrace itself than to the bodily evidence of it (Goffman, 1963). Within this understanding, Goffman views stigma as more than just social undesirability: it is when the individual takes on a new degraded identity that produces mortification and negative social actions by others that one can confidently speak of social stigma (Goffman, in Fabrega, 1990).

There has been considerable argument concerning the moral justification of classifying people into psychiatric categories and what these " labels" mean. The moral aspect of diagnostic classification lies in its potential utility as a means to the goal of relieving human suffering. Wilson and Plumly (1984) trace the argument this way: On one side of the debate are those who view diagnosis as a potentially useful instrument that is vulnerable to misuse (Wilson & Plumly, 1984). On the other side are those who feel that not only do nosological systems fail, but that the diagnostic process and associated social phenomena perpetuate, if not actually create, the suffering they were allegedly intended to alleviate. Rosenhan (1973) supports this latter view, stating that psychological categorization of mental illness has become useless at best and downright harmful, misleading, and pejorative at worst. In addition, Peck (1985) has noted that naming something gives us a certain amount of power over it, and such power can be abused.

Hatfield (1986) notes that even mental health professionals stigmatize mental patients and their families by their use of language. She further states that the technical and judgmental language used by professionals can show negative attitudes and beliefs, and such opinions of mental health professionals often come to be represented as fact. For example, "words like "dysfunctional", "pernicious", "pathological", and "disturbed" are emotionally toned labels and must surely make families feel rejected and disapproved. Language used in this way confers a certain prestige upon its users, erects barriers between professionals and families or patients, and may be used as a means of control. Words used in this manner judge rather than describe. Hatfield (1986) reiterates Korzybski's (1958) point that the English language is heavily biased toward "either-or-ness", which fails to take into account the amount or degree to which characterizations are variable. Since social science literature is heavily influenced by this kind of thinking, the initial intent to provide descriptive categories finally becomes a means to quickly label an individual as ill or healthy.

It is evident that the cultural milieu of any society becomes the ground against which deviant behavior is defined. The labeling theory approach proposes that societal reaction is a determinant of abnormal behavior and that mental illness has been the accepted mode of representing deviant, unwanted conduct since the decline of demonism (Sarbin, 1980). According to this perspective, the origins of abnormal behavior originate in society (Benedict, 1934), and are culturally variant, with those in power determining what behaviors are unacceptable and therefore labeled as "mental illness" (Szasz, 1960, 1974, 1975, 1978, 1987). This societal perspective --or labeling theory approach-- has gained momentum throughout the 1900's, with many arguments focused around this theory and with both proponents and critics in heated debate.

The 1970's witnessed a formal, at times acrimonious, debate among sociologists concerning the merits and applicability of the societal reaction to mental illness (Weinstein, 1983). In one camp, proponents of labeling theory noted that "mental illness" is simply a

label for those engaging in deviant behavior which then becomes a social role to which the patient is admonished to conform. This view states that diagnostic labels are harmful and destructive ways to characterize and remove unwanted behavior. Following from this point, they argue that the stigma associated with mental illness is painfully negative, and that the consequences of being labeled "a mental patient" are malevolent and/or immoral (Anderson, 1989; Bachrach, 1988; Farina, 1981; Hatfield, 1986; Link, 1987; Link, et al., 1987; Mansouri & Dowell, 1989; Piner & Kahle, 1984; Reiss & Benson, 1984; Rund, 1984; Scheff, 1974, 1975, 1979; Szasz, 1960, 1974, 1975, 1978, 1987; Tessler, et al., 1987; Wahl & Harman, 1989; Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988). In the opposing camp the critics of labeling theory emphasize that mental illness is a recognizable disorder with a definite etiology that is treatable in a medical mode. They argue that the stigma associated with being labeled as mental patient is minor and transitory and that attitudes of patients toward hospitalization and treatment are generally favorable (Asai, 1983; Gove, 1970, 1975, 1979, 1980; Warner, et al., 1989; Weinstein, 1983). The recent debate between the proponents and critics of labeling theory was fueled mainly by sociologists during the 1970's, in particular by Thomas Scheff (a proponent of labeling theory) and by Walter Gove (a critic). The 1970's sociological literature is full of rebuttals and counter-rebuttals by Gove and Scheff, and the debate was widened by partisans on both sides (Weinstein, 1983).

In considering these opposing views, one should note that the term 'proponent' usually denotes a favorable stance while the term 'critic' usually denotes opposition. In this case, however, the so-called 'proponents' of the labeling theory approach are in favor of the idea that labels have negative consequences, which actually makes them critics of the use of diagnostic labels. On the other hand, the so-called 'critics' of the labeling theory approach are against the idea that labels have negative consequences, which actually leaves them in favor of the use of labels. Throughout this paper, the terms may seem to contradict the text, but they are used in a way that is most consistent with the literature on the labeling theory debate.

Proponents of Labeling Theory

Scheff's 1974 review of the literature found that for the most part, the relevant studies were more consistent with labeling theory than with its competitor, the medical model. The major conclusion drawn from these studies was that diagnostic labels are often negative. Particularly relevant in this regard are the results of two famous studies: First, Temerlin (1968) demonstrated that the effects of suggestion in psychiatric diagnosis are highly influential, especially when the clinician was presuming illness. In this study, psychiatrists, psychologists, graduate students in clinical psychology, and control subjects diagnosed [unbeknownst to them] a mentally healthy individual as psychotic, neurotic, or mentally healthy. When a prestigious confederate suggested a particular diagnosis, it was almost unanimously confirmed, with psychiatrists being the most suggestible, followed by psychologists, graduate students, and control subjects. Second, Rosenhan's (1973) classic study involved eight "sane pseudo-patients" who gained secret admission to different hospitals complaining of hearing voices. All but one were immediately diagnosed as schizophrenic. Although every pseudo-patient ceased any abnormal behavior or complaints upon admission, all had enormous difficulty establishing that they were sane, and upon discharge (anywhere from 7 to 52 days later), their diagnoses of schizophrenia were never changed, but simply qualified as 'schizophrenia: in remission'. The major implication drawn by Rosenhan was that overwhelmingly negative consequences easily follow from diagnostic labels that flow so freely from mental health professionals.

The proponents of labeling theory note that we can categorize most psychiatric symptoms as instances of rule-breaking or deviance and that the violation of such rules leads to labeling someone as mentally ill. The argument of the labeling theorists is that people who have passed through the "degradation ceremony" (Goffman, 1961) of having been forced to become members of a deviant group have experienced a profound and frequently irreversible socialization process. Further, Lemert (1972) notes that the societal reaction to deviation can

have profound implications for the status and psychic structure of the person. Lemert defines this as "secondary deviation", which is

a special class of socially defined responses which people make to problems created by the societal reaction to their deviance. These problems are essentially moral problems which revolve around stigmatization, punishments, segregation, and social control They become central facts of existence for those experiencing them, altering psychic structure, producing specialized organization of social roles and self-regulating attitudes The secondary deviant, as opposed to his actions, is a person whose life and identity are organized around the facts of deviance. (p. 63)

The radical views of Thomas Szasz have also influenced the labeling theory debate since the early 1960's. Szasz (1973) has argued that there is no such unified thing as mental "disease", and that this term can only be metaphoric in meaning. Szasz argues that society has constructed the psychiatric community and afforded psychiatrists the power to "treat" mental disease, which is nothing more than a means of controlling unacceptable deviance from social norms. Similarly, Goffman is frequently cited in support of labeling theory. Goffman (1963) discusses labeling theory and the stigma associated with deviant behavior, and notes that the medical profession is likely to have the "special job" of informing the infirm who he is going to have to be.

Critics of Labeling Theory

A critique of the labeling theory of mental illness has largely been formulated by Walter Gove (1970). Gove criticizes three aspects of the theory. First, Gove points out that labeling theory can not account for primary deviance (the initial occurrence of behavior that might subsequently cause a person to be labeled as deviant). Instead, labeling theorists focus only on secondary deviance (the behavior produced by being placed in a deviant role), which is insufficient to explain the initial appearance of the behavior. Second, Gove notes that labeling theorists ignore psychological characteristics such as personality, and use the term mental

illness to refer to a social role rather than a state of personal distress or disorganization. Gove views the mental patient as someone who is suffering from an intrapersonal disorder, whose difficulties are due to a troubled situation or medical disorder rather than to societal expectations of others. This view accounts more easily for voluntary hospitalizations and the majority of psychiatric patients whose hospitalizations are relatively brief (Gove, 1970). Third, Gove notes that psychiatric hospitalization often serves in a positive way, and may initiate major restitutive processes. Although he allows for the possibility that the patient can be stigmatized by having been labeled mentally ill, he suggests that with the passage of time, the feelings of stigma disappear. For Gove, when stigma becomes a problem it is more directly related to the person's current psychiatric status, or general ineffectiveness, than to having been in a mental hospital (Gove, 1970).

Data on the attitudes of mental patients themselves were not one of the main points of contention in the 1970's labeling theory debate. Although patient attitude studies are sparse, they address an important issue in stigmatization: namely, how patients view mental illness and hospitalization. Studies in support of diagnostic labeling have found that former patients were satisfied with their treatment and that none of the propositions derived from labeling theory met the criteria for acceptance when examining patients' and ex-patients' reactions to labeling (Weinstein, 1983). Similarly, Eisen and Grob (in Greenley, 1984) found that former psychiatric patients reported high satisfaction with care. In summary, Gove states that "the available evidence on how people enter the mentally ill role indicates that the [labeling theory approach] ... is false. The evidence is that the vast majority of persons who become patients have a serious disturbance, and it is only when the situation becomes untenable that action [toward hospitalization] is taken" (Gove, 1970, p. 879).

Summary

It is widely accepted that labeled mental patients can experience stigma. It is also clear that patients may experience positive consequences from being 'diagnosed'. Labeling theorists

and their critics, however, continue to debate an “either-or” argument, without noticing the possibility that they are addressing two different issues. The basic premise of each view differs greatly, which inevitably affects the argument. It is important to consider that underlying the labeling theorists’ writings (particularly those of Szasz) is a strong opinion about the immorality of the institutionalization process (the involuntary hospitalization, or “commitment” process). Underlying the writings of the critics of labeling theory, however, is an equally strong opinion about the prevalence and meaning of voluntary hospitalizations and the growing body of medical evidence supporting the physiological etiology of various mental disorders.

It seems that each set of theorists makes valid contributions to the argument. It also may be the case that the seemingly opposing views are actually compatible, with each view simply outlining a different aspect of a multidimensional process. Interestingly enough, what has not been noticed is that theorists on both sides of the argument define the term ‘labeling’ in different ways. For example, both the proponents and critics of the labeling theory debate were discussing this topic called “Labeling”, but I contend that they were actually using the same language to refer to different phenomena. The difference is subtle, but critical. It is important to consider what “labeling” refers to and when it becomes an issue. Critics of labeling theory use the word “labeling” to refer to the descriptor that indicates something internal to the individual. “Being labeled” then refers to a ‘diagnosis’ that is expected to guide subsequent treatment, which is willingly sought out by the individual. Proponents of labeling theory use the word “labeling” to refer to a name that is attached to some deviant behavior which is devalued and ostracized by those in power. “Being labeled” refers to a means of ‘purging’ society of the deviants, often against their will, when no such ‘disease’ is present. For these theorists, labeling refers to the stigmatization by society resulting from judgments about unacceptable behavior.

Clearly, the labels we receive potentially affect us both positively and negatively. As a consequence of being humans who use language, we can not escape being labeled, and labels are always with us. Many assumptions, however, have been made about how labels are experienced without ever having directly asked people what their experience of being labeled is like. Classic studies on labeling have tended to look at this phenomenon from the clinician's point of view. For example, Temerlin's (1968) study of suggestion effects in psychiatric diagnoses examined the labeling phenomenon as it impacts other "labelers" but did not address the "experience" of receiving a diagnosis from the "patient's" point of view. Rosenhan's (1973) study was overtly concerned with the diagnosis of schizophrenia, focusing on how this label became a part of the pseudo-patients' permanent records, although this study did comment on some experiences of the participants. It is suggested that the "experiential" data from the participants in this study was more-or-less serendipitous rather than part of the formal research design due to the casual contact the researcher had with the participants after the project concluded. Both Gove (1970, 1975, 1979) and Scheff (1974, 1975, 1979, 1983) comment extensively on the phenomenon of labeling but neither undertook a formal research study to determine the experience of the labeled individual. Instead, both theorists made assumptions based on their intuitions as well as on data from studies focusing on the "labeler" rather than the person "labeled".

Alternatively, a phenomenological approach to gather descriptive, personal data from individuals is essential to fully understand the the experience of being labeled. Research which illuminates individuals' descriptions of their "lived" experiences could subsequently guide the formulation of new theories about labeling. The intent of the present study is to investigate the experience of being labeled which, hopefully will illuminate future analyses of the process.

Chapter II: METHOD AND PROCEDURES

Method

Limitations of the Natural Science Method for Psychology

It has been argued that one of the problems of the traditional "science" of psychology is that researchers try to demarcate what units they themselves find meaningful, without considering what units the person might consider meaningful (Barker, 1964; Capra, 1982). Romanyshyn and Whalen (1989) note that traditional psychology "as the study of behavior, is a discipline that infers behavior's meaning. In other words... meaning is brought into behavior from the outside" (p. 31). This so-called "objectivity" of science results in a psychology of the third person (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, in press), which essentially ignores human experience.

Historically, psychology has attempted to define itself as a natural science in which experimental methods are seen as the only valid way to study psychological phenomena. Many have argued, however, that the nature of such scientific methods prevents them from being able to study human experience fully (Polkinghorne, 1989; Colaizzi, 1978; Romanyshyn & Whalen, 1989). Alternatively, existential-phenomenology is a contextually based, holistic approach to psychology "that views human beings in non-dualistic terms and seeks to attain a first-person description of experience" (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989, p. 133). It offers an alternative perspective for, or "attitude" toward, the study of psychological phenomena, with rigorous methods which are both reliable and valid (Kvale, 1983; Wertz, 1986; Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989; Polkinghorne, 1989; Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, in press).

Existential-Phenomenology as a Base for Psychological Research

Existential-phenomenological psychology incorporates the views of two interrelated perspectives, existentialism and phenomenology. While existentialism can be traced to the philosophy of Kierkegaard who emphasized the importance of elucidating the fundamental

themes with which human beings invariably struggle, phenomenology can be traced to the philosophical contributions of Husserl for whom the study of phenomenology meant "the rigorous and unbiased study of things *as they appear* so that one might come to an essential understanding of human consciousness and experience" (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989, p. 6). Heidegger is credited with bringing together existential concerns with the method of phenomenology to study the events of human existence, and these methods have been applied to the study of human psychological phenomena, resulting in existential-phenomenological psychology. Valle, King, and Halling (1989) explain one of the foundational concepts in existential-phenomenology:

The major (and perhaps most critical) issue is that people are not viewed as just objects in nature. Rather, the existential-phenomenologist speaks of the total, indissoluble unity or interrelationship of the individual and his or her world. The existential man or woman is more than simply natural man or natural woman. In the truest sense, the person is viewed as having no existence apart from the world and the world as having no existence apart from persons. Each individual and his or her world are said to *coconstitute* one another. In traditional psychology, people and their environment are seen, in effect, as two separate and distinct things or poles. This traditional conception is rejected by the existential-phenomenological psychologist, in favor of the previously mentioned unity (p. 7).

Clearly, existential-phenomenology subscribes to a contextualist world view where the study is of the totality of human existence. For Heidegger (1962), existence always implies that being is always, and already, "being-in-the-world", a concept which demonstrates the indissoluble unity of the individual and his or her world.

The task, then, of the existential-phenomenological psychologist is to reveal the structure of human experience through descriptive techniques, seeking to understand phenomena in their perceived immediacy, rather than seeking to predict or control them

(Giorgi, 1983; Valle, King, & Halling, 1989; Polkinghorne, 1989; Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, in press). In traditional experimental psychology, researchers pose hypotheses to be "tested", purportedly to elucidate "why" phenomena occur. Such methods are based on an underlying causal view of the world, which is rejected by existential-phenomenologists, who view only those "data" which are revealed or disclosed as pure phenomena as being worthy of attention (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). Therefore, existential-phenomenological researchers ask the question "What?" rather than "Why?" in order to understand the direct experience of the individual.

Goffman (1974) notes how participants in social interactions are capable of producing clear, precise descriptions of their experienced meanings which "are anchored in the surrounding, ongoing world" (p. 500). Lyman and Scott (1989) describe Goffman's argument that "it is only from the theatre of daily life that human beings ... can derive and uncover another mental life" (p. 65), a life which becomes evident by the way in which participants describe their experienced meanings. The task of phenomenological research is to elucidate such meanings by eliciting descriptions of experiences in everyday life.

The Purpose of Existential-Phenomenological Research: Human Experience as Lived

The purpose of phenomenological research is to produce clear, precise, and systematic descriptions of participants' experienced meanings of a particular phenomenon (Polkinghorne, 1989) which are based on dialogic interviews (and sometimes on written descriptions of experience). The phenomenological method seeks to describe a thematic structure of the experience, taken from one perspective: the verbal description of experience. This method allows "the richness and profundity of human reality [to be seen] as closely related to the structures of natural language" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 45). Through language, a phenomenological interview creates a shared understanding of what is significant about an experience. In fact, since the social world is maintained by shared understandings, the phenomenological method is certainly the most appropriate method for viewing the social

world. Interestingly in this case, the method parallels the topic being studied: that is, the qualitative analysis of language is being used to study the phenomenon of naming things with language.

Given the tendency of science to reify concepts and to search for the "hard cold truth", many so-called scientists reject such a "subjective" method. An astute individual will note that we can never truly take the stance of the "objective observer". Gestalt psychology and phenomenological psychology demonstrate that there must simultaneously be a ground and a figure, since neither is possible without the other. Therefore, there is never a place outside the system that we can stand (although some philosophers have tried). We are inextricably tied to the system, and any attempt to deny this in the name of "objective science" is simply naive. No science is ever truly "objective". Existential-phenomenology "seeks to be a descriptive science that focuses on the life-world of the individual [describing] human experience as it is lived" (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989, p. 136). Kelly (1955) notes that the outlook of the individual is itself a real phenomenon. He also states that "if we examine a person's philosophy closely, we find ourselves staring at the person himself. If we reach an understanding of how a person behaves, we discover it in the manner in which he represents his circumstances to himself" (Kelly, 1955, p. 16).

The experience of being labeled has remained elusive because of the lack of research that attempts to describe this human experience as it is lived. The present study will investigate "the experience of being labeled" using the existential-phenomenological method, in order to gain a first-hand descriptive understanding of this experience.

Reliability and Validity in Existential-Phenomenological Research

Phenomenological research has been criticized by natural science researchers who believe it to be unreliable and invalid. They further characterize phenomenological methods as vague and unavailable to the scholarly community for scrutiny. There is considerable evidence that phenomenological research methods are reliable and valid, and the methods have been made

available for scrutiny (Wertz, 1986; Kvale, 1983; Thompson, Locander, & Pollio; Polkinghorne, 1989; Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, in press). Although the qualitative data, analyses, and results of phenomenological research differ from those of natural science research, phenomenological psychologists do strive for rigor, precision, and systematic analyses (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). Although phenomenological researchers do not employ statistical analyses, alternate criteria for judging reliability and validity have been established and are available to the scholarly community for review. These criteria are reviewed below.

Reliability

Reliability in phenomenological research has been characterized as an understanding of the perspective of the researcher rather than the establishment of consensus among researchers (Wertz, 1986). Giorgi (1975) proposed that the key criterion of qualitative research be "whether a reader, adopting the same viewpoint as articulated by the researcher, can also see what the researcher saw, whether or not he agrees with it" (p. 96). Fischer (1989) details one meaning of reliability in phenomenological approaches, stating that "specification of [one's] biographical presence to an empirical event [i.e., explaining how you "got to" the results given the data] allows other observers to either adopt a similar approach and arrive at a similar understanding or to specify differing approaches through which they see somewhat differing profiles" (p. 165). In other words, if a second researcher assumes the perspective of the primary researcher, he or she should be able to perceive and understand the same meanings (Giorgi, 1975).

Since the raw data of phenomenological research can not be repeated, the question of reliability also concerns whether or not the thematic structure is capable of being replicated (Wertz, 1986). Although replication of a phenomenological study would not necessarily produce identical descriptions of the thematic structure (i.e., word for word descriptions), it is expected that the two sets of themes would be similar enough to be understood as

encompassing the same meanings. This can be compared to the criteria used to judge reliability in natural science methods. For example, a study may report a result of : $r = .49, p < .005$. Another researcher replicating the study may subsequently report the result of : $r = .47, p < .05$. Even though the exact result has not been repeated, these results can be considered equivalent. Similarly, if the phenomenological analyses have been conducted properly according to the rigorous and systematic phenomenological method, the meanings derived in replicated studies are not likely to change, although the various ways in which the phenomena appear may, and probably will, vary (Giorgi, 1975; Kvale, 1983; Wertz, 1986).

Validity

While validity in natural science has been characterized by confidence that the instruments used are measuring what they claim to, validity in phenomenological research is characterized by "a conclusion that inspires confidence because the argument in support of it has been persuasive" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 57). Validity of phenomenological research is judged by a persuasive argument which Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (in press) characterize as containing four elements, two of which are methodological concerns: 1) rigorous methods; 2) methods which are appropriate to the topic of study; and two of which are experiential concerns: 1) plausible results; 2) illuminating results. Polkinghorne (1989) also details the test of validity for phenomenological research:

Researchers must persuade readers (including the community of scholars) that the two types of inferences that they have made in reaching their findings are powerfully supported: (a) the transformation of the raw data into phenomenological, informed psychological expressions and (b) the synthesis of the transformed meaning units into a general structural description. The reader must be able to follow the thought processes that have led to the conclusions and to accept them as valid.... The validity of phenomenological research concerns the question, "Does the general structural description provide an accurate portrait of the common features and structural

connections that are manifest in the examples collected?" (p.57).

In addition to evaluating the overall validity of a study, various checks on validity are conducted at several points throughout the analysis. For example, the thematic structure produced is re-checked against the original interview data and subsequently re-checked by asking the participants directly if the results are indeed a reflection of their experience. The former check is a validation of the results against the data, whereas the latter is a validation of the results against the participants themselves. If at any point there is disagreement about whether the results accurately reflect the experiences described by the participants, the thematic structure is amended until agreement exists, while still maintaining accuracy with regard to the text. Since the goal of phenomenological research is to produce a description of a particular experience the validity can be evidenced by the faithful description of the experience under investigation.

There is ample evidence to suggest that phenomenological methods are indeed rigorous, critical, and systematic and that they may be more appropriate than natural science methods for questions that lend naturally to investigation by qualitative methods (e.g., "What is a person's 'lived' experience?"). Further, the methods of analysis and interpretation are specifiable, are carried out in a manner that minimizes researcher bias, and are open to public scrutiny (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). Although variations on the phenomenological method exist (Polkinghorne, 1989), the particular method used in this study is one that is basically dialogical in nature -- the phenomenological interview.

The Phenomenological Interview

The goal of the phenomenological interview is to attain the participant's description of a particular experience (Kvale, 1983). Thompson, Locander, and Pollio (1989) note that the interview is intended to yield a conversation, not a question and answer session. Therefore, the interview is generally unstructured except for the opening question, and the task is to have participants describe (in as much detail as possible) what a particular experience was like for

them, what they were aware of during the experience and/or what was particularly salient to them during the experience. After the opening question, the interviewer's comments and questions are limited to clarifications of participant responses or to requests for clarification upon them. As was noted earlier, phenomenological researchers avoid asking "why" questions which tend to elicit abstract discussions. They focus instead on asking "what" questions which elicit fuller and more detailed descriptions of experience. Kvale (1983) outlines the "mode of understanding" in the qualitative research interview as follows, containing 12 main aspects:

It is 1) centered on the interviewee's life-world; 2) seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomena in his life-world; it is 3) qualitative, 4) descriptive, and 5) specific; it is 6) presuppositionless; it is 7) focused on certain themes; it is open for 8) ambiguities, and 9) changes; it depends upon the 10) sensitivity of the interviewer; it takes place in 11) an interpersonal interaction, and it may be 12) a positive experience. (p. 174)

Formulating the Opening Question

Once the topic of study is selected, the researcher carefully crafts an opening question, choosing the best possible words to begin the interview which will elicit detailed descriptions of reflected experiences. In the University of Tennessee Phenomenological Research Group, the topic is presented to the group and the opening question is formulated within the group. The wording of the opening question is carefully constructed by the research group members, who accept the final version of the question if, and only if, it readily elicits discussion by members of the research group who have relevant experience with the phenomenon.

Bracketing Interview

Phenomenological psychologists attempt to minimize researcher "bias" by attempting to suspend their preconceptions and presuppositions about the experience in question. This attempt to put one's biases in abeyance is referred to as "bracketing" (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). During a bracketing interview, the researcher is interviewed by another member of the research group. The previously defined opening question is posed to the researcher, who

discusses his/her own experiences of the phenomenon. The purpose of the bracketing interview is to help the researcher to make explicit his/her assumptions or "personal hypotheses" about the phenomenon so that these attitudes and presuppositions can more easily be seen and held in abeyance (bracketed). The bracketing interview enables the researcher to become keenly aware of his/her personal biases so that he/she may attempt to avoid imposing them on participants when conducting the interviews.

Merleau-Ponty (1962/1989) has noted that the researcher can never fully eliminate his/her biases. Hermeneutic arguments illustrate that any interpreter brings a host of social and cultural "biases" to the text (Gadamer, 1976) which may be more illustrative than cumbersome (Kvale, 1983). The University of Tennessee Phenomenological Research Group customarily analyzes the transcribed bracketing interview of the researcher with special attention paid to illuminating the personal hypotheses of the researcher. In this way, the research group is also privy to the researcher's presuppositions so that any member may question the influence of such attitudes on the interpretations made.

The Interpretive Group

The University of Tennessee Phenomenological Research Group is composed of researchers familiar with existential-phenomenological research approaches (although this familiarity is not a requirement). Thompson, Locander, and Pollio (1989) note:

The major requirements are that the group members are willing to commit the time and effort to interpret a series of interviews.... The interpretive group facilitates bracketing by conscientiously questioning the assumptions each member employs. If one member is unaware that he or she has failed to bracket a preconception, other members of the group are in a position to see this failure. Members of a group have available to them the interview transcript and whatever interpretation is proposed. Each interpretation is always evaluated by referring back to the transcript. (pp. 140-141).

The interpretive group strives to verify the interpretations given by showing in the transcript

where the participant's own words support the interpretation (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). The group is beneficial in providing multiple perspectives for approaching the data and helps to reduce a potential single-mindedness that might otherwise be employed by a researcher working entirely alone.

In the University of Tennessee Phenomenological Research Group, the researcher typically brings several interview protocols to the group for the interpretive task. Once themes begin to emerge from the data which are verified by the group and clearly supported in the text, the researcher is better able to interpret the remaining interviews when working alone. The final thematic structure, however, must reflect the experiences of each and every participant, which is then evaluated by asking participants themselves to verify the results.

Interpretation of the Interviews

The overall purpose of phenomenological inquiry is to derive from the protocols a description of the essential features of some experience. The finding of a phenomenological study is a description of the essential structure of the experience being investigated (Polkinghorne, 1989), much the same as a thematic analysis might be made of a literary text, except that the phenomenological description must reflect the experience of the participants "as it is lived". The thematization of the protocols involves several interpretive steps which have been conceived of in various ways (Giorgi, 1975; Colaizzi, 1978; Polkinghorne, 1989).

One feature of the interpretive process involves the hermeneutical part-to-whole process described by Bleicher (1980). The first phase involves the idiographic (individual) analysis of each transcript, relating separate passages within the transcript to the content of the transcript as a whole (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989; Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, in press). The second phase involves the nomothetic analysis, a part-to-whole process in which separate interviews are related to each other and to common patterns (themes) are identified (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989; Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, in press). As previously mentioned, the researcher attempts to use words and phrases found in individual

transcripts for the global themes, so as to avoid rendering them in abstract terms. By insuring that themes reflect specific passages in the transcripts, the experience-near quality of the thematic structure is maintained.

The University of Tennessee Phenomenological Research Group typically analyzes one interview protocol during one to two 2-hour research group meetings. A copy of the transcribed interview is provided for each member with all identifying information removed. The transcript is read aloud with the researcher reading the part of the participant so as to closer approximate the original pace, tone, and inflection of the interview. Reading is stopped whenever it is judged that a particular idea has been expressed or when a transition in subject matter or meaning is perceived. These "meaning units" are then summarized by the research group and are kept in mind as the beginning of an emerging theme. The group attempts to describe the meaning of the unit, which must be supported by the text. At the end of each protocol, these meaning unit summaries -- or theme statements -- are collected. It is from these statements that the more global themes are derived, continuing the back-and forth, part-to-whole hermeneutic approach to interpretation, always validating each theme statement against the original texts. Several interview protocols undergo this thematization process in the group while the remaining protocols are thematized by the researcher working alone.

Validation and Reporting of the Findings

Once the thematization process has been completed, the researcher presents the resulting themes to the research group with specific examples from each interview. The group evaluates the various themes based on the supporting text and collaborates with the researcher to name the themes appropriately using terms reflecting the "lived" experience of participants. Once a final thematic structure is completed it is presented to the participants along with a copy of their interview transcript. At this time, the participants are asked to evaluate these findings by reporting whether or not the thematic structure seems to reflect their experience. If participants disagree, the researcher invites their revisions of the

structure and then goes back to the text to attain the necessary support. Such a process is continued until all participants agree with the findings.

The results of a phenomenological study are generally presented to the participants in diagrammatic form with an expanded textual description of the meaning of the themes. This description is typically one to two paragraphs long and explains the themes in greater detail, expanding upon the single words or phrases used in the diagram.

Procedures Used in the Present Study

Participants

There were twelve participants in the present study, all of whom were recruited by word-of-mouth from the community surrounding The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (nine participants) or from the community surrounding Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio (three participants). Criteria for inclusion were 1) self-reported experiences of "being labeled"; 2) willingness to reflect upon their experiences and communicate them to the researcher through dialogue; and 3) sufficient interest in participation to volunteer between two and three hours for the initial interview and for a possible follow-up interview. No payment or incentive was offered for participation during the initial recruitment, although four participants were recruited from an evening school introductory psychology class at the University of Tennessee and were offered extra credit for their participation in the study. Participants were informed that the risk involved in participating was minimal and also that there would be a possible benefit to them of an increased awareness and understanding of their personal experiences of being labeled.

Six women and six men were interviewed. Eleven were Caucasian and one was African-American. Five participants had completed or were completing graduate degrees; one had completed a bachelor's degree, and six had at least some college education. Ages ranged between 21 and 48. Totals for each age range are listed below.

Females

Age 20-24	1
Age 25-29	1
Age 30-34	1
Age 35-39	0
Age 40-44	2
Age 45-49	1

Males

Age 20-24	1
Age 25-29	2
Age 30-34	1
Age 35-39	1
Age 40-44	1
Age 45-49	0

Forms

The participants signed two consent forms. The Information and Consent Form (Appendix A) was the initial agreement to participate in the study, including permission to be audiotaped. This form explained that minimal risk was involved, but it also informed participants that they were free to discontinue participation or withdraw from the study at any time.

The Information and Consent Form II (Appendix B) was mailed to participants at a later date when they were sent a copy of their interview transcript. This form asked participants for their explicit permission to use excerpts and/or the verbatim transcript in the dissertation and/or future publications.

Briefing the Participants

Those who expressed interest in participating in the study contacted the researcher to schedule an interview. At that time the researcher briefly explained the study and prompted participants to be prepared to talk about specific instances of being labeled. They were informed of the opening question at that time.

The Opening Question

In the present study, the following opening question was used: "Would you describe in as much detail as possible some specific situations in which you experienced being labeled?". This question allowed participants to conceptualize the phenomenon in whatever way they chose and to describe any situations which came to mind for them. The question asked for description of those experiences, which prompted participants to begin discussing the "lived" experience

rather than some reflected abstraction of it.

Interviews with the Participants

The interviews were conducted in accordance with the phenomenological research methods detailed above. Each interview took from forty-five minutes to one and one-half hours to complete. All interviews were audiotaped with the explicit permission of the participants. All interviews were transcribed by the researcher from the audiotapes. Identifying information such as names and specific places were deleted, helping to insure that the transcripts would conceal the identity of the participants. Participants were asked to review their transcripts for accuracy and were permitted to delete any part of the interview from use in the study or future publications.

Analysis of the Transcripts

Each interview was analyzed in accordance with the phenomenological methods described above. The initial bracketing interview and four of the twelve participant interviews were analyzed by the University of Tennessee Phenomenology Research Group. The remaining eight interviews were analyzed independently by the researcher. Four themes were identified by the group and the researcher and these themes were supported by specific passages in each and every interview. The resulting thematic structure was presented both to the research group and the participants in diagrammatic form with a one-half page textual description which expounded upon the themes.

Follow-Up Interviews

After completion of the preliminary thematic structure, each participant was mailed a copy of his or her interview transcript, a one-half page description of the results, a copy of the thematic structure, two copies of the Information and Consent Form II (Appendix B) asking for permission to publish the transcripts, and a letter from the researcher (Appendix C). The letter asked participants to review the transcript for accuracy and to make corrections as necessary (e.g., typographical errors; deleting any identifying information that had been

mistakenly left in the transcript, etc.). They also were invited to delete any part of the transcript that they wished not to be used in the study or in future publications. The Information and Consent Form II stated that if for any reason the participant preferred not to have the transcript published that he/she was free to refuse the option of signing that form. In this study, none of the participants made corrections or restricted any part their transcript from being used in the study or in future publications. All participants readily signed the Information and Consent Form II.

At the time participants were asked to review their transcripts, they also were asked to determine if the thematic structure was "accurate in describing their experiences". If not, they were invited to make suggestions or changes or to contact the researcher for a follow-up interview. Participants were presented with the expanded textual description (Appendix E) and the diagram of the themes (Figure 1). In this study, all participants agreed during the first reporting that the results were accurate in describing their experiences and no participant stated that any revisions to the structure were necessary. No participant requested a follow-up interview.

Eight participants returned the materials (Information and Consent Form II, transcripts, indication of their agreement with the results) within a timely manner. The four participants who did not respond by the end of six weeks were sent a second letter (Appendix D), requesting their prompt response to the findings. At this time two additional copies of the Information and Consent Form II were sent, with an explicit statement that signing that form was entirely optional. This statement was included in case the participants' tardiness was the result of undue pressure from the researcher to give permission to publish the transcripts. Each of these four participants signed the form and returned their materials quickly. It is assumed that they were not hesitant about the findings or about giving publication consent, because their materials came back with apologetic notes (e.g., "Sorry I was so late in getting this back to you... the holidays have been busy.", etc.).

Chapter III: RESULTS OF THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Results

The twelve participants interviewed described a total of 40 different experiences with each participant describing either three or four experiences of being labeled. No two labels were identical, except for two male participants who described different experiences concerning the label of "father" and two female participants who described different experiences with the label of "female/woman". A summary of the situations in which participants experienced being labeled is listed in Table 1. The situations discussed can be categorized into various groups. The most frequently described situation concerned labels based on various personality traits (e.g., pushy, flaky, weird, wise, charming, etc.). The next most frequently discussed category concerned labels based on career or educational status (e.g., a photography student, a musician, a gifted student, illiterate, etc.). Other situations discussed include labels based on: religion (e.g., Catholic, Christian, a minister, etc.); origin/nationality (e.g., Polack, a southerner); family (e.g., mother, father, the principal's son); physical appearance (e.g., "four-eyes", "chubby cheeks"); and gender (e.g., woman, female).

Four focal themes were identified in the study of "The Experience of Being Labeled":

1) Fit; 2) Limits and Possibilities; 3) Visible and/or Different; and 4) Accepted or Rejected by Others. All four themes may be described as "emerging" against the ground of "Who I am". These themes can be summarized in the following paragraph from the point of view of the person being labeled:

The experience of being labeled occurs against the ground of who I am, and I am concerned about whether the label fits or doesn't fit, whether it limits or allows me possibilities, whether it makes me feel visible and/or different, and whether others will accept me or reject me because of the label.

This thematic structure can also be represented in diagrammatic form, which is shown in Figure 1.

Table 1. Situations Described by Participants in Which They Experienced Being Labeled

Participant	Situation and/or Label Described
Female age 24	An environmental activist; a "nature head" One of the best photography students [my photography teacher] ever had "Smiley"; always laughing and in a good mood; "never gets mad at people"
Female age 25	I'm always labeled weird... it's weird-different, not weird-bad I've been called demanding I've been called naive-slash-innocent I've constantly been called a cradle-robber
Female age 32	I was kind of labeled the white girl that "won out" They looked at us like we were white trash for coming here with a black woman My husband labels me conservative I'm a working mother
Female age 43	I've had many experiences being labeled as a black person It's difficult to tell if I was being labeled merely as female or as a black female I've been labeled based on religion because of my relationship with Jesus Christ
Female age 43	A Polack Everybody called me "four-eyes" She said "I sure hope you don't stay a Catholic" My boss calls me the "office flake"
Female age 48	A good example of the "Jewishness" in the family; she said "you're so pushy" They said "You're a woman, so we don't want you here" A label I have is I talk too much; "generally speaking, she's generally speaking"
Male age 21	He said, "Well, it sounds to me like you could be co-dependent" I was rejected from one gifted program, and later accepted as "a gifted student" "Chubby cheeks"; or "fat"
Male age 24	I was often labeled a troublemaker; "the bad kid" I was thought of as snobbish She said "You're so charming"
Male age 28	She said that I was wise I graduated "summa cum laude" I did like being thought of as a southerner

Table 1 (continued)

Participant	Situation and/or Label Described
Male age 32	All the way through grade school I was "the principal's son" I'm a musician; "long hair"; "use drugs"; "stay out and party all night" A re-entry student A Christian who still smokes and who is also a musician in a band
Male age 38	Reverend; Minister Because of my accent I'm labeled I'm a father and a husband
Male age 41	In 7th grade I couldn't read and I was called illiterate; "Mr. Illiterate"; Dumb I guess I consider myself to be a recovering alcoholic The label of father from my own children and my step-children is different

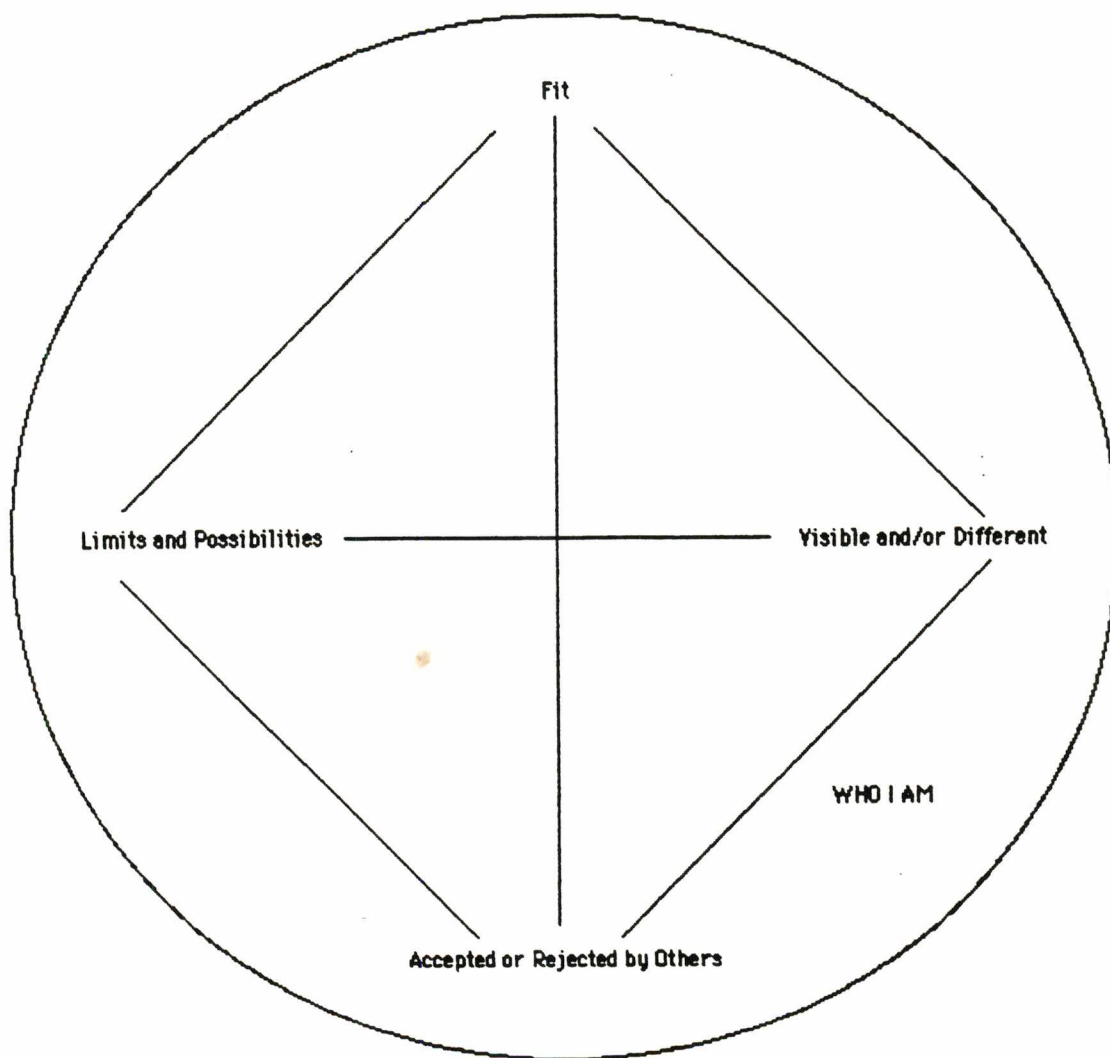


Figure 1. Diagram of the Themes

Each of the four themes was found in almost all interviews, with participants often using similar words to describe the various aspects of the experience of being labeled. Each of the themes is reviewed in detail below, with supporting examples from the relevant transcribed interviews.

The Theme of Fit

This theme was the most prominent theme in each interview. All participants discussed at least one experience of being labeled in terms of whether or not they felt the label fit. For example, some participants described experiences of being labeled in which the label was congruent with the way they labeled themselves. For example, one participant recalls being frequently called "a Polack", a label which she said "aptly fits" because her father is full-blooded Polish. Other participants, however, described labels which they felt did not fit at all. One participant was labeled as "co-dependent" by a psychotherapist and reacted very negatively to the label, stating "finally I said 'it just doesn't fit!' ". Interestingly, several participants described experiences in which a certain label fit according to one definition, but not according another. For example, one participant was called an "environmentalist" which had a very radical and negative connotation when it was used to label her. While she did acknowledge herself as an "environmentalist" according to a technical definition, she did not agree that the label fit her when it was used with a negative connotation. Another participant was described as "pushy", a label which was based on behavior that she herself labeled as "assertive".

Ten of the twelve participants used the word "fit" in some way when describing their experience of being labeled. For example, "It's a real struggle as to how this fits"; "It just doesn't seem to fit"; "There are people who fit that role... but most of them don't"; "that was an experience of fitting into..."; "on the one hand... it did fit me as a label"; etc.. The other two participants did not use the word "fit" per se, but described an experience in which they contemplated the fit of a label given to them (e.g., "I'd argue with him for saying that, because

I didn't think it was true"; "at the time... I would have considered it to be an accurate label").

A particularly illustrative passage from one of the interviews follows. The participant was a 41 year old male. His words are shown in plain text while the researcher's words are in bold text:

I have three step-children and two children of my own, and the label of father from my own children and the label from step-children... may be the same name, but they're different to me, and I'm working on.. how I interpret that. But, uh... we go to family counseling every Monday night and it seems like I'm the one with the greatest difficulty of that label.

[Researcher]: You mean being called 'father'?

Yeah. I mean, with my own natural biological parents, or children, it seems to fit, but for my step-kids, I'm a little.. I'm uneasy with that. I don't feel that..... I struggle with that... that label.

[Researcher]: Is it when you call yourself a father for those children, or when those children call you father?

When those children call me father.

[Researcher]: It feels unnatural?

Right. And I think there is a lot of responsibility that comes with that, you know. Sometimes I think I'd rather just stand off on the side and say "Well, those are [my wife's] children, and whatever they do is okay", rather than to be involved in the situation and be responsible, and, and uh... to be the father. Uh, they have their own father but he's... doesn't call very often, doesn't come to see them, and... as I would say... not very attentive to them. Uh... but I.. I kind of felt that I didn't want to take his place, which I know I can not take his place, but I've not wanted to... be more involved than..... than..... on a limited basis, but I find that that doesn't work either.

[Researcher]: So, even in this case too, it's almost as if the label is

accurate in one way... that for all intents and purposes you are their father... but in another way, you're not their biological father, so you're in a conflict over that.

Right. And I think they struggle with it too because sometimes they want me to be their father, sometimes they don't. *So it's a real struggle as to how this fits*

This participant described a label which was not readily assigned as "fitting" or not. The label of "father" for this participant was felt as fitting him better according to one definition (the one of father to his biological children) but not so comfortably according to another (the label of father from his step-children).

The Theme of Limits and Possibilities

Participants seemed to be keenly aware of the ways in which certain labels limited them and sometimes of the ways in which labels allowed them more possibilities in the world. Most often participants described the powerfully limiting nature of labels, noting how certain labels limited their ideas of themselves and of their capabilities. For example, one participant stated that her husband has always described her as conservative which she felt prevented her from expressing her differences. She notes that "it kept me from doing a lot of things that I would have liked to have done". Similarly, another participant said "I always took what other people said in front of what I thought". Some participants described limits placed upon them by certain labels, limits which were not so much "in their own heads" but were publicly imposed by others. For example, the southern town where one black participant grew up prevented black people from using the municipal swimming pool, and the water fountains in the town were clearly labeled "for whites only", etc. This participant also described an experience in which she was denied service in a store because she was black, noting how that label limited her choices because of where she was permitted to go.

Participants also described labels that limited them because the label seemed to "stick" with them throughout life (e.g., "once you're hooked with being an alcoholic you're

always an alcoholic"). Participants also talked about the limits on freedom that certain labels impose. One participant is a minister, who states "I don't think you have the same freedom that other people have". An illustrative example about the theme of limits is found in the passage below from the interview of a male, age 24, who discussed always being labeled a troublemaker. He described a situation in high school in which his girlfriend began a physical fight with him at school, but the teacher who sent them to the principal's office only saw the participant defending himself (but not the girlfriend's initial attack). He states:

... in the principal's office as we sat and talked about it, it became evident that I was going to be guilty in this case, and I remember him saying something like "Why should I listen to your side of the story when I know that you're always causing trouble?". And I remember thinking how unfair that was, you know. And how, uh, frustrating and... how frustrating that was and how it took any chance of expressing myself away, you know. It was evident at that point that anything I said he was going to hear as, you know, bullshit, basically. Uh, and so I felt like I was convicted before, you know, before the trial, you know. And I just remember thinking how... I don't know, I just wanted to explode, you know. I mean... how it was so frustrating that he wasn't going to hear anything I had to say about anything... just wasn't going to hear it, you know... refused to. And it was all apparently because, like he said, he knew I had a reputation for causing trouble. And even in that, I mean I didn't even think that was true, you know. I had never thought that was true.

This participant further stated:

I mean, I guess, because that label is particularly negative, you know, that only bad things are going to happen with that label, you know. And, uh, and also I remember thinking, at that time, that any future interaction that I might have with him will be characterized by his thinking of me that way, you know. And therefore, as a principal, you know, of a school, he was not going to be an educator for me, you know. He was not

going to be a principal for me, he was going to be a disciplinarian, you know. And I mean, *that begins to eliminate certain degrees of freedom*, you know. If I have a problem, he's not going to be an advocate. And it would, it would happen that way. Certainly this participant felt that the possibility of being responded to as anything other than "the bad kid" was limited by that label which he had previously received.

Two participants did volunteer experiences of being labeled in which a certain label seemed to open rather than close possibilities for them. In college, one participant overheard her photography teacher telling someone that she was "one of the best students [he] ever had", which she notes made her think "Well, maybe I should be a photographer". She commented that this new label made her consider her future career and imagine all the possibilities associated with that. Another participant described an experience of a label which limited her for many years, but which in a different context opened possibilities for her to succeed in a career: "all my life I've been picked at and criticized for [being pushy]... as if it's a negative, [but when] I went back to school in business... I began to realize that this is a real asset". Overall, the experience of being labeled which led to the opening of possibilities was rare. Less than 5% of the experiences described by participants concerned the opening of possibilities, while about 95% of the experiences concerned the limits associated with being labeled.

The Theme of Visible and/or Different

All participants discussed directly the experience of feeling more visible and/or obviously different from others as a result of having been labeled. Sometimes this difference was welcome (e.g., "That's what I want... I don't want to be the same as everybody else"; "I have always wanted to stand out in my own little way"), but every participant detailed at least one experience in which being visible or feeling different was unwelcome. Several participants described a feeling of being alone (e.g., "I felt alone and isolated"; "It made me feel like... the outcast"; "It can be alienating"). Some participants struggled with wanting to be visible although they found that this became uncomfortable for them.

An illustrative passage of the Visible and/or Different theme is found in the interview of a 24 year old female participant who was labeled an "environmentalist" and a "nature-head" when she became the representative for her college. She stated:

That was the first time I'd ever become so visible to other people Like all the people in the School of Natural Resources started to know, like, you know "That's the Earth Day girl" and that kind of thing, and I mean, I knew what my personal views were before I had started in all this organizing and stuff like that. I mean I have my own personal views, but part of the reason I got that label was because I became more vocal with my views.. I guess maybe that has something to do with it.. and as far as, not just vocal, but as far as actually doing something, and organizing, planning, acting upon my views, and my environmental morals, and all that kind of stuff. So uhm.. so, with getting that label, and just in general at that time I started to realize that *people really were kind of seeing me in that light*, as being a person who was kind of an environmentalist.. the people who didn't know me really well, wouldn't know whether I was some kind of radical environmentalist or an environmentalist of my definition, or whatever. So, at that time I think it really did make me think about, about how.. how.. how far I was willing to go with my activism, in terms of the radicalness and stuff like that, it made me think of.. it made me really apply myself to that label, like in how much I really fit into it, in terms of like the more mainstream or radical, that kind of thing. So it did, that whole time, not just with [him] labeling me, but, but me kind of realizing the label of.. on myself. You know, I mean I kind of started seeing myself that way, and just realizing *all those other people starting to kind of see me like that*, that really did kind of make me think about like who I was, and you know, what I was doing with my life because at that time that was all a really really big big part of my life. I'd never done anything quite so big before, of that magnitude or anything like that, so I guess it was, it was a pretty big.. it wasn't just one little label, it was, it was like almost who I was at

that time.

In this passage, the Visible and/or Different theme is clear, as are the two aforementioned themes of 1) Fit (e.g., the participant states her visibility made her think about how much she "fit into" that label) and 2) Limits and Possibilities (e.g., she questions how far she was willing to go with her activism). Certainly, the ground of "Who I am" against which these themes take their form is also evident in the passage (e.g., the participant questioned who she was, stating the label was "almost like who I was at that time"). It should be noted that the presence of several themes within one passage in the interviews was a common occurrence, illustrating the interrelationship among all the themes.

The Theme of Accepted or Rejected by Others

The fourth theme concerns whether or not a person feels accepted or rejected by others on the basis of how they are labeled. Rarely did participants talk about experiences of being labeled that led them to be accepted readily by others. Even in the instances where being labeled led to an acceptance by others, more often than not the participants would focus on a group that rejected them rather than on the group that accepted them. All participants talked about the possibility of being rejected because of having a certain label. One participant, a minister, stated "You are at times excluded from conversations that they don't want to repeat in front of ministers". Another participant described being very anxious about being evaluated for admittance to a gifted program as a grade-school student. He states he was not aware of a "label" per se, except that "an awareness of labeling at the time was more of a feeling of being accepted or not accepted".

One participant, a 32 year old female detailed her experience of always going along with what her friends wished to do, even when she knew she had interests in other activities as well. She explained her hesitation about trying out new activities because of a concern that she might not be accepted by a new peer group:

... my two friends outside of my family were people that didn't want to be involved in

anything at school, you know, any of the clubs, any of the afternoon after-school activities, they didn't want to have any part of that. And, uh, I **wanted** to be a part of that. In fact, I joined the band in 11th grade and was on the drill team, and I loved it! I loved it very much.. and.. they.. that was really kind of a radical move among the little group that was.. you know, my friends. And I remember in 12th grade, you know, the different things that seniors got involved in at school, like making the senior float for homecoming, and then you know our home town had a big Christmas parade, and you could do things for.. make floats for.. and I always wanted to go and do that kind of stuff, and be a part of those groups, and I know that.. that so much of it had to do with self-esteem for not being involved... for not breaking from my friends. If I had maybe felt more... not... independent is not the word, but.. it's like if I had felt more assured.. or more sure of who I was that I could have broken away from this group that didn't want to be involved, and knowing that I did, and maybe I could have gone in. I think that so much of it has to do with my self-esteem, and I'm 32 years old now and I'm realizing, finally realizing, and thank goodness for it, but... I don't have to be afraid to jump in the middle of things that I want to do. Part of me... I was... part of me.. and I remember this from high school that I didn't jump in because *I felt like I wouldn't be accepted by this unknown group*. Uhm, and I guess that's all linked to the negative things that I thought about myself, that *I wouldn't be accepted among them*. And then my fear of leaving this safe group was part of it too. So, it kept me from doing a lot of things that I would have liked to have done.

This passage also presents several themes. In addition to the theme of being accepted or rejected by others, the themes of 2) Limits and Possibilities (e.g., the participant longed for the possibility of joining in new activities but felt limited by her friends' opinions and 3) Visible and/or Different (e.g., the participant had difficulty expressing her differences from her friends) are also present, as is the ground of "Who I am" (e.g., she notes that her

experience in that situation was linked to the negative way in which she saw herself). The presence of several themes in this passage further illustrates the interrelationships among the themes.

The Ground of "Who I Am" Against Which the Themes Occur

Each theme seemed to be figural against a ground of relationships that were important in determining how participants viewed themselves. Some participants described experiences in which the labels they received appeared to "define" who they were. The participant who was labeled co-dependent by a therapist stated that the label he received had "the effect of making you doubt your own experience and you're more likely to define yourself according to the labels that were placed upon you". He further stated, "labeling can have a tremendous impact on the way you see yourself". The "environmentalist" talked about becoming so involved in her activities in college, that the label of environmentalist "wasn't just one little label, it was, it was like almost who I was at that time".

Other participants did not seem to question their identity because of the labels they received. For example, one participant described experiences of discrimination which she attributed to being black and female, although she stated "I was fortunate that I was the age and of... of a certain level of maturity such that I did not allow those things to make me question who I am or what I am and wish that I was something else". Another woman discussed being called "a Polack", which she stated "to me that was kind of a confirmation of who I was" because she grew up with a strong sense of her heritage instilled in her by her Polish relatives. One participant talked about being teased by a friend in front of her classmates for being sexually "innocent", and noted that "for any of them who actually knew me, they'd know he was telling the truth, and not care. And, the ones who didn't know me, either it, you know, it wouldn't make a difference to me what they were thinking or not, or that they wouldn't even catch on to what he was implying". Another participant, a musician, notes that people always assume he does drugs simply because he is a musician, and he has been hassled by the police on several

occasions because they also assume that. However, he states "it's never really bothered me... I've never really been offended by any of it".

Although these four participants did not seem to be bothered by the labels they received, most participants did talk about very troubling experiences of questioning their identity following an experience of being labeled. The following passage is from the 21 year old male participant who was labeled as co-dependent. In it he describes how this label made him question his identity and makes very clear the way in which labels received can become "recipes" for living. After receiving the label, he said that he sought out a book which reviewed the characteristics of co-dependency:

Once I was given a label, *it was like a prescription or something*, you know, instead of a simple description of it.. and maybe that's just the way I had dealt with the label.

[Researcher]: Can you talk more about that.. what it was like as a prescription?

Well, like I said before, when you read these different traits [of co-dependency], and you, and you.. some of them resonate on a superficial level with you, and you.. you sort of.. my, my reaction was sort of.. *I started redefining myself according to those traits*, you know. Uhm, and... believing that that's the way I had been. And so in that, in that process there's a certain conformity to the label itself. You know, that you conform to it and then you seek to get rid of it, or something, you know. But, I don't know that I really... that it was an appropriate label. It was like an effort to conform to it in a way.

[Researcher]: So you did actually get the label and then you read the book, and.. you say one of the characteristics was that these people who are co-dependent are not spontaneous... (Right.) So did you try to look at yourself and say "Yes, I'm not spontaneous"?

It wasn't an effort really.. it was like I read this, and uhm, and I just thought, briefly, you know, of certain circumstances in which I felt restrained or constrained, you know.

And at the time that pretty much demonstrated to me that I wasn't a spontaneous kind of person which is ironic because I'm an incredibly spontaneous person! But at the time, like I said, I was in such a state of disorder or chaos that, I guess, you know, I was grasping for whatever I could find.

[Researcher]: So you took it on even more after being labeled.

Oh, yeah!! Absolutely, absolutely. That the label had the effect of, molding, you know, and *a redefining of self*, you know.

Clearly this participant detailed the feeling of being defined by a label which he initially accepted as more accurate than his own definition of himself. The label was so influential that he redefined himself according to that label, and did not question it for several years.

Summary

The phenomenological investigation of "The Experience of Being Labeled: revealed four interrelated themes: 1) Fit; 2) Limits and Possibilities; 3) Visible and/or Different; and 4) Accepted or Rejected by Others, which are described as occurring against the ground of "Who I am". These themes were clearly visible in the text of the interviews, and are described in the participants' own words. This experience-near quality of the results of the study is important for understanding the first-person perspective of the experience of being labeled.

Chapter IV: DISCUSSION AND REVIEW OF ADDITIONAL LITERATURE

Discussion

The Contributions of a Phenomenological Approach to Labeling

Although the issue of "labeling" has been addressed in many different literatures, three important aspects seem to have been overlooked in the labeling debates to date; first, psychologists have tended to ignore those aspects of labels which are self-constructed; second, psychologists have not emphasized a phenomenological view in which labels depend both on the person and the world; finally, that psychologists have erroneously assumed that they understand the experience of being labeled. This study used an interview approach to gather first-person descriptive data from individuals about the experience of being labeled without positing hypotheses about what that experience was like for them. Four themes emerged from the study, which describe the participants' experiences as they are lived. The themes of 1) Fit; 2) Limits and Possibilities; 3) Visible and/or Different; and 4) Accepted or Rejected by Others were present in the descriptions of all participants. These themes were figural against the ground of personal relationships in which the person defines "Who I am".

The Self-Construction of Labels

The literature on labeling has underemphasized the role of "self-labeling" and the role of labels as deriving from the person, especially the individual's contribution to "maintaining" a label. Research to date has assumed that labels are invariably imposed by others without noting the ways in which individuals contribute to the process. This study highlighted some of the ways in which individuals "maintain" the labels they receive and documented the extent to which individuals can construct elaborate personal meanings for such labels. Although each participant in the present study cited examples of times that they were labeled first by others, each participant also described an aspect of the self-labeling process by the ways in which they "maintained" a label (often times for decades beyond the initial situation) by their meticulous and perseverating thoughts about the label received. The study

also highlighted a self-fulfilling prophecy effect (Rosenthal & Jacobsen, 1969) in the way that labels given (by others) are maintained (by individuals), even when such labels may not be continually maintained by others. These results suggest a need for psychologists to return to Kelly's (1955) theory of self-labeling, especially as it relates to theories of personality, since theories of an individual's contribution to the labeling process have been markedly absent from current teachings in psychology.

A few researchers have attempted to document some of the nuances involved in the self-labeling process. Poole, Regoli, and Pogrebin (1986) illustrate the interpersonal mechanics involved in the self-labeling process whereby individuals are not passive recipients of negative labels but actively manage or cope with these labels. This theory suggests that individuals rehearse how others will react if their "negative status" is uncovered (Goffman, 1959; Goffman, 1971). Poole, Regoli, and Pogrebin (1986) note "this concern with altered interactional patterns brought about by actors' reactions to the negative status leads directly to a concomitant concern with how others will respond to actors' new presentation of self" (p. 347). This "series of actions and reactions of actors and others create 'deviation amplifying mutual feedback' " (Wender, in Poole, Regoli, and Pogrebin, 1986, p. 347). One finding of these authors was "that actors reacted to their labels in ways that exacerbated the interactive situation regardless of others' awareness of actors' negative status" (Poole, Regoli, and Pogrebin, 1986, p. 345). Such a finding reiterates the way in which self-labeling may serve to maintain labels initially given by others.

Results of the present study of "the experience of being labeled" illuminated the ways in which individuals might have "exacerbated the interactive situation" by their constant internal questions such as: "Does this label really fit me?", "How will I respond to these limits placed on me?", "How will I react to being so visible to others when this is uncomfortable for me?", and "How will I gain acceptance to this group which I perceive has rejected me?". These results may be interpreted to suggest that an extensive internal dialogue

occurs, with participants often experiencing a struggle about the meaning of a label for years after receiving it. Such an interpretation further confirms the strong contribution by individuals in the maintenance of labels.

The Aspect of Labels as a Function of Both the Person and the World

Phenomenological psychology informs us that an individual (and the labels given to and received by that individual) does not exist without the ground of the lived-in-world (Heidegger, 1962). Psychologists have not emphasized this aspect of labeling, but tend to ignore the contextual aspects of the process. This study approached the experience of being labeled from a first-person standpoint which is sensitive to the fact that the context in which an event occurs is never separate from the event itself (Gadamer, 1976). The personal experiences elicited in this study were rich with contextual descriptions of the situations in which the labels occurred. The descriptive quality of the interviews illuminated the subtle (and not so subtle) ways in which both person and world are mutually influential in determining the meaning of the label.

In addition, the themes of this study appeared to emerge against a ground of relationships in which an individual defines "Who I am". This ground of relationships, "the context", was critical in understanding the experience of being labeled. This finding further emphasizes the existential view in which events are only meaningful when examined simultaneously with the context in which they occur. Each theme in the study of "the experience of being labeled" related in some way to the individuals' ideas of "Who I am" in reference to the world of relationships. The web of relationships is "ever present" in each theme discussed, and seemed to be the context in which the meaning of "being labeled" became figural.

The Value of Studying the Direct Experience of Individuals

It has been noted that labeling researchers (e.g., Gove, 1970; and Scheff, 1974) have made the assumption that they understand the experience of being labeled. Such theories tend to

hypothesize or imply a dichotomy about the way that they expect individuals to "react" to a label. This approach, however, does not allow for individual variation and differing opinions about the labels received. The present study gathered first-person descriptive data about "the experience of being labeled" which allowed several (not just two) themes to emerge from the data. These themes, of 1) Fit; 2) Limits and Possibilities; 3) Visible and/or Different; and 4) Accepted or Rejected by Others, are much more informative about the experience of being labeled than the previously assumed dichotomous "negative or positive" reaction to a label. Taken in conclusion, these themes articulated various aspects of the experience of being labeled, which collectively contribute to the many ways in which a label can be experienced and understood by an individual.

The phenomenological approach to the experience of being labeled used in this study has enriched and extended our understanding of the way in which labels are understood. Most of the research to date on labeling appears "inconclusive" or "incompatible" at first glance due to the assumptions of dichotomy about the way in which individuals react to a label. In contrast, the present study did not posit prior hypotheses, but took care to evaluate the elaborate and experience-near ways in which individuals describe situations in which they are or were labeled. The results of the study reveal that a reaction to being labeled depends upon four themes (factors) which had not previously been emphasized.

How Labels Affect Us

Clearly labels are a function of both the person and the world. Research on the effects of labeling have been largely "inconclusive" to date (Schuster & Butler, 1986), and numerous studies can be found which support either the negative or the positive impact of labels. Yukor (1987) notes that several factors affect "whether or not applying a label to a person is helpful, hurtful, or has no effect" (p. 17). The answer to the question of "How do labels affect us?" is (not quite so) simply: it depends. The impact that labels have clearly does "depend" on the conditions explicated in the themes. This study illuminated four themes (and the ground

against which these occur) which affect the way labels are received, how they are maintained, and whether or not they might have a negative, positive, neutral, or mixed effect. Based on present results, it seems possible to conclude that labels are experienced as having more positive effects when: the individual who is labeled believes the label fits; the label allows possibilities for the individual; the status of being different from or more visible to others is valued by the individual; the label results in an individual being accepted by, or at least not rejected from, a particular group; and the label confirms or strengthens an individual's sense of self. On the other hand, labels are experienced as having more negative effects when: the individual who is labeled does not believe the label fits or begins to seriously doubt his or her own judgment of whether the label fits; the label limits the individual; the status of being different from or more visible to others is uncomfortable for the individual; the label results in an individual being rejected from a particular group; and the label disconfirms or weakens an individual's sense of self.

It should be noted that each and every condition is not necessary for a particular label to be experienced positively or negatively. Several conditions may exist, however, that lend to a particular label having a mostly positive or mostly negative effect. In fact, in this study, several participants described labels which had a relatively neutral value for them. Labels might be expected to have a neutral effect when, for example, the label is perceived by the individual as fitting them, the label neither limits nor opens possibilities for the individual, the label leads to a status of being different which is neither uncomfortable for nor necessarily sought out by the individual, the label leads to acceptance by a certain group or to rejection by another group to which the individual has no interest in belonging, and the label may have no relevance to an individual's sense of self.

This study thus extends our understanding of the nuances of the labeling process. By investigating the direct experience of being labeled, new aspects have been illuminated which were previously unknown or not emphasized. A great deal of controversy in the "Labeling

Theory Debate" can be resolved once those arguments are reinterpreted in terms of the themes described here. It can subsequently be seen that both critics and proponents of Labeling Theory make valuable contributions to a multidimensional and more holistic understanding of the experience of being labeled.

For example: proponents of Labeling Theory were noted to have a strong opinion about the immorality of involuntary institutionalization, and believe those in power "label" unwanted deviant behavior as a means to "purge" society of those individuals. If we interpret this argument in terms of the themes found in this study, we observe that these theorists: do not see the label of mental illness as fitting properly; see the label as severely limiting freedom, especially if the labeled individuals are hospitalized against their will; consider the visible/different status as stigmatizing; view the label of mental illness as a way for those in power to reject the labeled individual; and believe that the mental illness label comes to be a lifetime definition of "Who" an individual is.

It also was noted that the critics of Labeling Theory have expressed strong opinions about the positive meaning of voluntary hospitalization and tend to view the label of "mental illness" as describing a disorder with a definite etiology, that is expected to guide willingly-sought-treatment. If we interpret this argument in terms of the themes found in this study, we observe that these theorists: see the label of mental illness as fitting properly; see the label as opening up positive possibilities for successful treatment; consider the stigma that can be associated with being visible/different as minor and /or transitory; view the label as a way that caring professionals accept an individual and subsequently offer treatment; and believe that the label of mental illness is only one short-lived aspect of "Who" a person is.

Results of this study thus offer a new way to view the process of labeling. The themes found to describe the varied situations in which an individual was labeled are helpful for integrating the seemingly opposing views of the proponents and critics of Labeling Theory. If the themes found in this study are carefully applied to arguments on labeling, it will be seen

that both processes -- of labeling others and of being labeled by others -- can be viewed as part of a larger process that is much more meaningful than each theory taken separately. It is important to note that this expanded view of "labeling" was uncovered by abandoning prior hypotheses/theories in favor of directly asking participants to describe personal experiences of being labeled.

Psychological Concepts and Their Relationships to the Various Themes

The fact that the social phenomenon of labeling is closely related to the psychological concept of self was discussed in Chapter I. It was noted that "natural science psychologists" tend to prefer deterministic definitions that view "the self" as a concrete, almost reified, entity. Such theories do not account for the contributions of gestalt psychology and phenomenology which demonstrate that we are unable to understand "the self" (or rather, the person) without simultaneously considering the context in which the person exists; that is, the context of a person's embedded interpersonal relationships to and in the world of other people. The noun form of the term itself is misleading. The phrase "Who I am" is preferable to suggest that "the self" is an individual's changing perception of "Who I am", made figural in various ways against the context of interpersonal relationships. Erikson's (1950) definition of self, a reassuring sense of personal identity in the face of change, offers a perspective that accounts both for the contribution of the person and the lived-in-world. It has been noted that labels given and received can have an impact that is better understood when both the person and the world of interpersonal relationships are considered. The themes of the present study are discussed below in relation to various psychological theories and concepts. It is important to keep in mind that the present discussion seeks to revise the previously defined definitions of "self" in favor of a more phenomenological view of "the person in the lived-in-world".

The Experience of Being Labeled and the Theme of Fit

Psychologists have discussed various ways in which we use schemes or schemas to categorize and organize our world (Piaget, 1952; Miller, Galanter, and Pribram, 1960;

Neisser, 1976). Schemas also exist for the ways in which we categorize various attributes about ourselves and have been referred to as "self-schemas" (Markus, 1977). These clusters of attributes become generalizations one makes about his or her "self", which become extremely important for establishing and maintaining a sense of identity. Here, too, the terms "self-concept" and "self-schema" are defined by nouns, suggesting these are fixed entities. In accordance with a phenomenological view, it is more useful to represent the dynamic process of ideas an individual has about his/herself by using the phrase "ideas about 'Who I am' ", which is not fixed in form or in time.

Rogers (1947) defines the self as consisting of only those attributes that an individual recognizes and accepts, and further notes that a person may deny experiences or feelings that are incompatible with the self-concept (i.e., the self-schema, or ideas about "Who I am"). He further states that occasionally acquired attributes which don't fit neatly into an existing category are often discarded in favor of maintaining a "coherent" identity (Rogers, 1947).

The theme of Fit revealed in the present investigation may be seen as describing the extent to which an individual feels a certain label fit into his or her current "self-schema" (i.e., ideas about "Who I am"). Certain participants received a label and had an immediate confirming experience of the label as fitting them aptly. It can be argued that these individuals possessed a prior schema into which the label readily fit, so that the label was quickly and neatly integrated into an existing cluster of "this certain aspect of myself". Other participants had a disconfirming experience when being labeled, receiving a label and knowing immediately that "this does not fit". It can be argued that these individuals had no prior schema into which the label fit, and such labels were easily discarded as "not me".

The majority of participants, however, described experiences of being labeled in which they received a label that did not readily fit into a prior schema of "Who I am", although they were not able to easily discard the label. Instead, they began to question whether or not a certain label might "actually be true". It can be argued that, for these individuals, such labels

offered sufficient grounds for establishing a new "self-schema" and would seem to illustrate the ongoing process in which ideas of "self" are malleable in relation to the world of interpersonal relationships. This process of establishing a new "self-schema" often began with an agonizing internal debate about whether or not the person who labeled them was more "correct" in his or her perception of the participant than the participant was of him/herself. Still other participants had the experience of receiving a label and feeling that it fit "in a certain way" -- according to one definition -- but not according to another definition (usually the one implied by the labeler, which often had a more negative connotation). Participants reported struggling to fit the more positive connotation of the label into an existing "self-schema" while attempting to discard the more negative connotation; unfortunately, there often were moments of acceptance of the negatively connotative label as "more accurate" than their own more positively toned self-label.

Both critics and proponents of the "Labeling Theory Debate" made assumptions about how individuals experience being labeled but did not verify those assumptions by asking individuals directly about their experience. In contrast, the present study gathered first-person descriptions of the experience of being labeled without making assumptions about what that experience would be like. Results of this study were much more informative about the experience of being labeled due to the elaborate personal descriptions that were elicited. The theme of Fit might not have been uncovered using a natural science approach to labeling. The phenomenological approach used here has not been emphasized in the literature in labeling, although a few studies have used this method.

For example, another phenomenological study in which the concept of Fit was described was Beier and Pollio's (1994) investigation of "the experience of being in a role". In this study, participants were asked to list situations in which they were aware of being in a role and then to describe one in detail. One theme elicited in the description of that experience, the theme of Fit, was described in terms of three different domains: the physical fit of the role to

the person's body, the social fit of the role to the present situation, and the personal fit of the role to the individual's sense of "Who I am". The domains of the theme of Fit described in that study are quite similar to the themes of the present study. In "the experience of being labeled", participants were also concerned about how the label fit physical body, the social situation, and ideas of "Who I am". Beier and Pollio's (1994) study elicited detailed information about the theme of Fit, which was uncovered by abandoning prior hypotheses in favor of a descriptive approach to that phenomenon.

The Experience of Being Labeled and the Theme of Limits and Possibilities

The present investigation of the experience of being labeled describes the perception of the overwhelmingly negative effects of particular limits that were associated with certain labels, both in society at large and in the labeled person's ideas of "Who I am". Many theorists have previously noted that the stigma associated with negative labels can severely limit an individual in the social world (e.g., Goffman, 1963; Lemert, 1972). Szasz (1974) also notes that an individual may further stigmatize and therefore limit his or her own capabilities because of self-fulfilling prophesy effects; for example, an individual may change his or her behavior to be more consistent with a label received. On the other hand, the present study also illuminated the strikingly positive effects that may be associated with certain labels. Some participants discussed the opening of several possibilities that were associated with a certain label received. This view, however, has not been emphasized in the literature.

The implication for clinical practice seems important. Some psychologists have the attitude that diagnosing patients can negatively affect them by emphasizing the "deficit" qualities (or limits) of that individual. Accordingly, they do not use diagnostic labels, but emphasize the possibilities implied in the act of seeking treatment. For example, humanistic psychologists such as Rogers (1946) have taken an approach to psychotherapy that emphasizes the "growth-potential" of an individual. Such theorists tend to embrace a view that allows possibilities in the world rather than to focus on "symptoms" which imply limitations. This

view emphasizes the "fully-functioning human being" (Seeman, 1983; Rogers, 1947) rather than "patient 'x' with diagnosis 'y'".

Levy (1992) notes the seemingly "automatic" tendency of psychotherapists to characterize and diagnose patients under the belief that they have then "explained" something. He proposes (tongue-in-cheek) a new diagnostic category in his response to a diagnostic process which focuses on the deficit (limiting) qualities of individuals:

409.00 PERVASIVE LABELING DISORDER

Essential features: The essential features of this mental disorder are (1) an uncontrollable impulse, drive, or temptation to invent labels and to apply them to other people; (2) a repetitive pattern of trying to fit people into preconceived categories; (3) an increasing sense of fear or inadequacy before committing the act; (4) an experience of overwhelming triumph or relief at the time of committing the act.

Manifestations of the disorder appear in many situations but are especially likely to occur when the person with Pervasive Labeling Disorder (PLD) feels uncomfortable around other people. The person then spontaneously assigns a label to others, thus viewing them as "types" rather than as human beings. Because the disorder serves to control other people and to keep them at a distance, it provides the person with the temporary illusion of both superiority and safety. (Levy, 1992, p. 122)

Needless to say, many psychologists would be annoyed at being "labeled" as suffering from "Pervasive Labeling Disorder", although these individuals would do well to pay attention to their own reaction as a way of understanding the feelings of those whom they label.

Moore (1992) discusses the overwhelming tendency of psychotherapists to characterize and label "symptoms" as things which need to be removed in the aim of health, like the way in which a surgeon would remove a tumor from the body. He notes that this gives a message to the public that the very "stuff" of life (i.e., "depression", "anxiety", "doubt", "burning passion for love", etc.) is something to be seen as negative and unwanted. In Care of

the Soul, Moore (1992) offers an alternative view, which he characterizes nicely in the title of his first chapter: "Honoring Symptoms as a Voice of the Soul". Moore speaks of a way for psychotherapists to transform the cut-it-out-and-throw-it-away quality of many existing psychotherapies into discovering what important aspect of the soul (or "the person") is being expressed. The task is then to teach people to embrace that aspect in a more healthy and adaptive way rather than to maintain the maladaptive aspect or to rid themselves of it.

The Experience of Being Labeled and the Theme of Visible and/or Different

Although a few participants in this study did describe experiences of being labeled in which being more visible or feeling different was a welcome experience, all participants described at least one experience in which being more visible or feeling different was an unwelcome or extremely uncomfortable experience. Prior research in psychology reflects this proportional split, with little research having been done on the desirability of being different and with much research being concerned with the topic of conformity.

Previous research has shown that certain factors in the social field have a strong effect on conformity and/or adherence to a norm (e.g., see Asch, 1951; Sherif, 1936). The pressure to conform to societal norms can even be so strong that individuals are willing to cause pain to others in obedience to authority (Milgram, 1963). Schachter (1968) discusses the ways in which an individual can deviate from a group and the ways in which such behavior is treated by the members of the group. Schachter's (1968) study was based on the theory that "within any social group, pressures operate toward uniformity of attitude" (p.165), and revealed that the impact of deviant behavior depends on such factors as the cohesiveness of the group and the degree of deviance of the individual, but that the overall trend was toward conformity. Using Bowlby's theory of attachment (1969), it can be shown that the act of conforming is a way in which we try to decrease or manage anxiety (see also Ainsworth, 1973). Horney (1950) had earlier proposed that social and environmental factors are critical in understanding anxiety. She explains that "basic anxiety" develops (in the child) because the child feels isolated and

helpless. She further explains that such anxiety may become manageable by having parents who provide a warm, loving, and safe environment but may be exacerbated by parents who do not. Taken together, both Bowlby's and Horney's theories suggest that social anxiety is based on insecure personal relationships. Therefore, it is posited that the anxiety produced by being more visible to, or different from, others may stem from basic insecure attachments, that lead to a heightened fear of rejection (certainly perceived as more likely if one's "different" status is exposed).

If we view adults in the world as having basic feelings of isolation and helplessness similar to the child's, such anxiety can be exacerbated by a society that does not provide a similar warm, loving, and safe environment. In contrast, those who feel fully connected to a social group with sufficient support and security do not experience such overwhelming anxiety. These individuals may even feel secure enough to seek out a position of visibility/difference, finding that individuality is valued and supported by the social group. The theme of Visible and/or Different raises several questions about social anxiety and conformity. It is suggested that those who are more secure in their interpersonal attachments are less concerned about being more visible or different. These individuals are less likely to experience pressure to conform, value individuality more highly, and may have healthier personal relationships.

The theme of Visible and/or Different clearly relates to the theme of Accepted or Rejected by Others (discussed below), and in some instances may be indistinguishable from it. The difference is subtle in some cases; in others, participants clearly experienced one theme as more focal than the other. The two themes are clearly interrelated, as are all the themes found to describe the experience of being labeled, although these two themes appear to be more similar to each other than any other two.

The Experience of Being Labeled and the Theme of Accepted or Rejected by Others

Social psychologists have noted that social identity is based on the extent to which one feels accepted or rejected from particular groups and that individuals maintain a favorable

social identity by categorization of themselves into ingroups (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel, 1981) and by evaluating themselves relative to other groups (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel, 1981; Festinger, 1954/1989). Tajfel (1981) notes that people strive for a positive "self-concept" and derive a sense of self-esteem (positive feelings about "Who I am") from their social identity as a member of some ingroup. This study highlighted instances of low self-esteem when participants were labeled in such a way as to produce a sense of rejection from or by a group. In fact, participants appeared to be distressed at the thought that they might be explicitly excluded from any group, even though common sense would suggest that we can not be included in every social group. Some participants did mention instances of being labeled which would exclude them from a particular group, but did not appear to be concerned about that. In this situation they seem to have perceived a certain group as excluding them, but that group was not one to which they had any desire to belong.

The theme of Accepted or Rejected by others seems to highlight previous findings that point to the importance of belonging to social groups for the maintenance of self-esteem. It appears that the extent to which individuals emphasize feelings of being rejected in the experience of being labeled depends on issues of self-esteem, with those individuals having high self-esteem being less concerned with being rejected from a particular group because of a label. Tajfel (1981) notes that one prediction of Social Identity Theory is that ingroup favoritism should be greater when our self-esteem is low or threatened. In the present study, when participants did report experiences of low self-esteem and feelings of rejection associated with being labeled, they felt it was desperately important to belong to at least some group and attempted to emphasize the favorable characteristics associated with their own ingroup, confirming Tajfel's (1981) theory.

The Experience of Being Labeled and the Ground of "Who I am"

The issue of identity was discussed by participants as central to their experiences of being labeled. This issue was not a circumscribed theme, but appeared to be the ground against

which all of the other themes became figural and seems best conveyed by the phrase "Who I am". Participants in the present study discussed experiences of questioning their identity following an experience of being labeled, which always included others in the social situation and/or interpersonal relationships between the participant and the labeler. This ground of relationships can also be understood to be the society or the culture which sets limits on "Who I am." Stouffer (1962) discusses the way in which reference groups impact how a person defines "Who I am" and how that person understands the limits placed on "Who I am." For example, Stouffer (1962) discusses the concept of "relative deprivation", noting how a study of military promotion opportunities revealed that higher ranking personnel were surprisingly more dissatisfied than lower ranking personnel, which he explains in terms of "relative deprivation", meaning that the comparison group is often influential in how a person understands "Who I am." Clearly, the social group and the culture within which the person lives will become part of the definition of "Who I am."

Participants in this study often reified the label they received, discussing the way in which an instance of being labeled defined who they were as if the label were a fixed, concrete definition of "self" without any possibility of change. This reification of "self" on an individual basis thus parallels the tendency in the literature to reify the concept of self.

Mead (1934) long ago talked about identity, discussing it mainly in terms of self-awareness. Although Mead used the term "self", his definition is compatible with a phenomenological perspective which views "the self" as embedded in a context of interpersonal relationships, ever-changing in relation to others. Mead (1934) noted that it is through relationships that our ideas of "self" emerge, since self-awareness can not occur apart from relationships with others. Both Rogers (1947) and Kelly (1955) note that a person's perceptions and feelings about "Who I am" are based on how they believe they are "viewed" by others. Sullivan (1953) also discusses the "self", although his seemingly reified use of the term is misleading, since he talks about the "self" as a "self-system", noting that the origin

of the self-system derives from society (i.e., from other people). Sullivan (1953) further explains how this process occurs, stating that the self-system is a product of "educative" experience, with others offering definitions for "self" which are accepted by the individual. This process of "taking in" another's description of one's own personality, which then defines a part of "Who I am", has been described by psychoanalytic theorists as incorporation (Klein, 1935) or introjection (Winnicott, 1958; Schafer, 1968).

It has been noted that Rogers (1947) defines the self as consisting of only those attributes that the individual recognizes and accepts, and he further notes that a person may deny experiences or feelings that are incompatible with the self-concept:

It would appear that when all of the ways in which the individual perceives himself - all perceptions of the qualities, abilities, impulses, and attitudes of the person, and all perceptions of himself in relation to others - are accepted into the organized conscious concept of the self, then this achievement is accompanied by feelings of comfort and freedom from tension which are experienced as psychological adjustment.

This hypothesis would seem to account for the observed fact that the comfortable perception of self which is achieved is sometimes more positive than before, sometimes more negative. When the individual permits all his perceptions of himself to be organized into one pattern, the picture is sometimes more flattering than he has held in the past, sometimes less flattering. It is always more comfortable. (p. 364)

While a particular experience of being labeled might lead a person to have a more negative perception of "Who I am", Rogers (1947) feels that this experience is not necessarily uncomfortable. If an individual has an undesirable attribute that is labeled by another, it is still possible for the label to "fit". By accepting the (negative) label of a particular undesirable attribute, the individual is then free to choose to change the behavior if that is desired. Rogers' (1947) view gives a certain freedom to the individual, allowing more possibilities for living, which is one theme associated with a more positive (or more

"comfortable") experience of being labeled. Certainly we might benefit from examining the comfort versus discomfort of "the perception of 'Who I am' " rather than simply the positive or negative reaction to a label. In any case, the concept of "healthy living" has been linked to the acceptance of all aspects of the "Who I am".

Suggestions for Future Research

Several suggestions are made for future research. First, it is suggested that an overwhelming percentage of the content of psychotherapy sessions is concerned with the themes explicated in this study. It seems plausible to assume -- hypothesize-- that a large proportion of individual therapy sessions, regardless of therapy orientation, would be concerned with themes of: Fit; Limits or Possibilities; Visible and/or Different; Accepted or Rejected by Others; or the ground of "Who I am". A simple content analysis of transcribed psychotherapy sessions could then reveal the extent to which this hypothesis would be confirmed. I have yet to come across any individual who cannot readily give an example of being labeled, and most people will cite examples of being labeled which they feel had a profound impact on their lives. Clearly the pervasiveness of this experience warrants additional attention. Further research into the process can illuminate the content of psychotherapy, which would help therapists more clearly and directly address these issues. It would also further illuminate sociological and psychological theory about identity and personality.

Second, it was noted that many participants began an intense internal dialogue with themselves -- about themselves -- after being given a certain label, which appeared to "maintain" that label for some substantial period of time. It might prove useful to investigate the types of internal dialogues that people have about the labels they receive, which could then reveal one aspect of the self-labeling process previously mentioned. It might also prove useful to study the experience of self-labeling exclusively, to determine the extent to which that process differs from the experience of "being labeled", since this study is only able to

comment on the self-labeling process insofar as it served to maintain labels initially given by others. Since participants might be likely to give instances of labeling themselves based on labels they also could have received by others, future research might explicitly ask the participant to provide different examples of times when they labeled themselves without having been first labeled by others.

Third, it would be interesting to interview clinicians about their experience of labeling other people (i.e., their patients) so as to illuminate this process from that perspective. The present study clarified the perspective of the labeled individual, but is unable to comment on the perspective of the labeler. Much of the psychological and sociological debate has centered around the moral justification for either using or eliminating diagnostic labels. It would be profitable to study the perspective of those who label patients with diagnoses (and the perspective of those who refrain from doing so), so as to provide a more complete picture of the experience of "labeling" and "being labeled". Similarly, it would be interesting to study the impact of the relationship of the labeler to the person labeled in any domain, not just the clinical one. This study illuminated instances in which, for example, the labeled person understood a different meaning for a label when that label came from a family member versus an acquaintance. It would be interesting to study the experience of the labeler, taking into account the relationship of that person to the labeled person. Since all labeling occurs in the world of personal relationships, it would be interesting to study the meaning of a label from both perspectives.

Fourth, this study illuminated instances in which participants allowed labels to define them more strongly than usual, especially when they were feeling disorganized or confused at the time they were labeled. It would be interesting to study the extent to which people seek out labels to help them feel more grounded when they are experiencing a certain amount of chaos (either internal or external). It could be that such individuals seek therapy or counseling, hoping to get a "diagnosis" which, although stigmatizing, may help to confine their sense of

chaos.

Fifth, it is proposed that, before a psychologist or psychiatrist labels an individual in any way in therapy, it would be beneficial to understand that patient's experience of being labeled. If part of the initial interview process could be devoted to understanding the individual's experience based on the four themes mentioned in this study, the therapist might then be in a much better position to decide if labeling that individual would be beneficial or harmful.

Lastly, it has been noted that a "fully functioning person" (Rogers, 1947) is able to accept all the many aspects of the self, including those that are uncomfortable.

Psychotherapists might find that people with negative experiences of being labeled maintain those labels as comments on their "entire being". A therapist might be able to help that person integrate even negative aspects into the realm of "all the parts of myself" in the interest of putting things in their proper perspective. A study of the therapeutic process in this regard might also prove useful.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Information and Consent Form

I am a graduate student in clinical psychology, presently engaged in collecting data for my doctoral dissertation research. I would like to ask you to participate by sharing with me some of your experiences of being labeled. I believe that this is a common experience that occurs in many different ways and under many different circumstances. Most people can think of many different times that they have been "labeled". I am interested in hearing about your unique personal experiences with this phenomenon in order to understand what the experience was like for you and what you were aware of during the experience. This in turn will help me understand the general characteristics of the phenomenon of "being labeled" and the meanings that it has for individuals. I hope that the results of this study will contribute to psychological theory and practices in assessment and psychotherapy that have to do with being labeled.

Your participation in this study, if you choose to volunteer, will involve an audiotaped interview of one to two hours in length, and a briefer follow-up interview. The original interview will be transcribed from the audiotape, and at the follow-up interview, you will be asked to review your transcript to check for accuracy and see if there is anything that you wish to add. You will also be presented with the preliminary findings at this time, and asked whether they capture the essence of your experience. If not, I will encourage your comments and suggestions.

All material obtained will be held in the strictest confidence. Audiotapes and transcripts will be coded by number, and will be identifiable only through a master list which will be kept locked up, along with other materials collected. I am the only person who will have access to this master list. I will also be the only one to transcribe the audiotapes. Any potentially identifying information in the interview will be edited out of the transcript, and the audiotapes will be erased as soon as the project is completed. The master list will be destroyed

upon completion of the project.

The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. You will choose the experiences that you wish to talk about. You are free to discontinue your participation or withdraw from the study at any time without questions or penalty. Many people find that exploring their experiences with another person is satisfying and beneficial, and I hope that this will be the case for you.

If you have any questions at this time, or at any point later in the study, please do not hesitate to ask. You will be given a copy of this form to keep, and I would encourage you to contact me at any time that you have questions or concerns about this research project. Thank you for your interest and participation.

Traci Clayton
401E Austin Peay Building
Knoxville, TN 37996
974-6060 (office)

I have read the above information and consent form and agree to participate in this project.

Signature: _____
Date: _____
Name (printed): _____
Address: _____
City and Zip Code: _____
Telephone #: _____

Appendix B
Information and Consent Form II

At the time of our interview, we discussed the possibility of my using all or part of the interview in my dissertation. I now want to ask your permission to print excerpts from the interview and/or the verbatim transcript. I plan to use excerpts in the body of the text as specific examples of the way people describe their experiences of "being labeled". The purpose of including a verbatim transcript is to illustrate how the interviews were conducted and the steps involved in the analysis of the interview material.

I have provided you a copy of your interview transcript. You will notice that I have deleted all names, dates, places, and any other potentially identifying information. I would like you to carefully check over the transcript to make sure that it is an accurate account of your experience and of our conversation, and that it does not leave out any important point you wished to make. Please feel free to make any changes (typographical errors, etc.), to mark out sections that you do not want me to include in my dissertation and publications, or to add further comments. We can discuss these as well as any questions you might have.

I would like to remind you that neither your name nor any identifying information will be presented along with the material. I will not publish any part of the transcript without your explicit permission on this consent form. If you do consent, I will include only what you have approved for publication. If you decide for any reason that you prefer not to have your transcript published, please do not hesitate to refuse this option.

If you feel comfortable with my publishing the transcript as it is, or your corrections of it, please sign this consent form in the space below. A copy of this form will be provided for you to keep. Please contact me at the address or phone number listed below if any additional questions or concerns arise.

Again, thank you for your participation in my research. Your assistance has been

greatly appreciated.

Traci Clayton

401 E Austin Peay Building

Knoxville, TN 37996

974-6060 (office)

I have read the above Information and Consent Form II, and approve the reproduction of the verbatim transcript and/or excerpts from the transcript of my interview with Ms. Clayton on the experience of being labeled in the form that we have agreed upon.

Signature:

Name (printed):

Address:

City and Zip:

Telephone #:

Appendix C

November 20, 1993

Dear Interview Participant ,

First of all, I want to thank all of you who participated in my study. The results are now analyzed, and I would like to share the findings with you. Enclosed is your transcript which you may review. I have also enclosed a copy of the "structure" (a graphic representation of the results), along with a paragraph explaining the results of "the experience of being labeled". If you don't agree that the results characterize your experiences, please feel free to contact me. However, if you all feel that this description of the experience is accurate, then these results will be reported in my dissertation.

I have also enclosed two copies of the second information and consent form. This form states that you have reviewed your transcript and that you will allow me to use it in my dissertation or in future publications. You will notice that all identifying information has already been edited from the transcript, and you may continue to edit any part of the transcript that you do not wish to appear in the dissertation or future publications. The consent form fully explains these details. Please sign and complete one copy and return it to me along with any changes in the transcript. The other copy is for you to keep. If you would like to keep the transcript, please make a copy of it which contains your editing or changes, or you may simply make a note of the changes on a separate piece of paper.

I have very much enjoyed my work on this project. I found your interviews to be enriching, and my discussions with you helped me to understand something very important about human nature that I will continue to use in my daily practice as a clinical psychologist. As a note, please don't feel embarrassed when you read your transcript which is most likely filled with many "Uhms", "you knows", and several other fillers. I know these words sounds

awkward when you read a verbatim transcript of everyday conversation, but it is perfectly normal, and rest assured that you are not the only one who talks like this!

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me at school (615) 974-6060 or at home (615) 584-5912. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Traci Clayton

Appendix D

January 4, 1994

Dear Interview Participant,

Thank you again for volunteering to participate in my research on "The Experience of Being Labeled". On November 20th, I mailed each of you a copy of the transcript from our interview, along with a brief description of the findings. I hope you received the packet I sent. Also included were two copies of the second Information and Consent Form. I did not receive the consent form back from you, which is why I am writing again. Please be aware that the second consent form IS ENTIRELY OPTIONAL, but if you do not wish to sign it, please let me know of that decision as well. By signing the form, you are stating that you reviewed your transcript and have approved the appearance of it in my dissertation or in future publications. All identifying information has been deleted from the transcript, and you are free to edit the transcript if you wish to do so before you allow it to be used. If you do not wish to give permission for me to use your transcript, that is acceptable, but I would appreciate an indication either way. That way, I will be able to proceed with writing my dissertation.

I would certainly like to use every interview in my dissertation, since I think each interview contributed in part to the final results. If you have any questions, or would like to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact me at home or at school. I would be happy to talk to you. Most importantly, I need to hear from each person I interviewed, so that I can proceed with my writing. I have enclosed two additional copies of the consent form: one for you to keep, and one to return to me. If you need for me to send another copy of the transcript and the findings, I will be happy to do so. If you still have the copy, and you have had a chance to review it, I would appreciate your input if you have any changes to make in terms of the findings. Lastly, thank you for taking the time to consider this, and thank you for

participating in my research.

Sincerely,

Traci Clayton
3014 Willow Oak Drive
Knoxville, TN 37909
(615) 584-5912

Appendix E

A Phenomenological Investigation of the Experience of Being Labeled

The following paragraph is a summary of the "core" results of this study. As you read the paragraph, I expect that it will "resonate" with you and with the experiences that you talked about in the interview. The transcript of every interview highlighted (in one way or another) the four aspects the diagram that are the "themes" of the experience of being labeled. I analyzed your interviews much the same as one would analyze the text of a novel for literary themes. The resulting themes represent your experiences as reported in the interview.

The experience of being labeled occurs against the ground of who I am, and I am concerned about whether the label fits or doesn't fit, whether it limits me or allows possibilities, whether it makes me feel visible or different, and whether others will accept or reject me because of the label.

Several of you talked about labels that bothered you, and you discussed these four aspects in detail. I expect that the four themes will resonate more closely with you. Several others of you talked about labels that did not concern you, and so your discussion of these themes was more limited. However, even in this latter case, your discussion highlighted the same themes, although you were not in a "turmoil" about it. So I feel certain that each person's experience can be discussed in terms of the themes presented. Please let me know what you think. Keep in mind that this is a very brief description of the results, and the dissertation will discuss these ideas in great detail. Thank you.

Appendix F

Example of A Phenomenological Interview

The participant's responses are in plain text, the interviewer's are in bold text. This participant was a male, age 41.

Would you describe in as much detail as possible some specific situations in which you experienced being labeled?

I think the earliest, uh, recall of being labeled was in the 7th grade when I couldn't read and I was called illiterate. That label of not being able to read, and, and... took on the connotation of being dumb. And I think there is a difference being unable to read and being dumb. Uhm, but I was made to feel that I was a dumb person, and, uh... that label even today bothers me, you know, so... from the 7th grade to today that's tough. Uh, I did go learn to how to read, and found out that I could read, but still struggled that people were smarter than I was, and always took what other people said in front of what, what I thought. In other words, their opinion must carry more weight than my opinion, because they're smarter than I. I don't think that's true today, but I think sometimes I give away some of my power by listening to what somebody else says and being swayed by that, still thinking that they may be right more than I am right on something. So that would be a pretty powerful label that was put on me.

Can you think of a situation in which someone actually called you that... a specific instance?

Yeah, uh... I failed a test, and my so-called friends saw that I failed the test and said "Well, you must be dumb and you must be..." and so they pinned this name "Mr. Illiterate" on me. And uh,

it was after I had taken a test and failed it... when we got the test back, and they had gotten A's and I had gotten an F and they couldn't understand how anybody could not do well on that test since it was so simple. And that was... that was at the [name of school], uh... the classroom was on the third floor, and there were probably 22 kids in the class.

Did they know you very well before, to know that you wouldn't be able to read at that point... or is that something that they just found out?

No one knew at that point that I... I mean, I'd been passed from class to class and it was a new school. Uhm, I don't even think at that point that my teacher knew that I couldn't read. Uh, it took her half-way through the school year before she came up with the fact I really just couldn't read. Because I remember her calling my parents when she discovered that I really could not read, saying that she couldn't believe that I was in the 7th grade, yet was unable to read at the first grade level. And I was sent to a tutor... they didn't fail me... I don't know why, but they made an agreement that I had to go to a tutor every day. And I was tutored with books from the 1st grade. So that just started from there.

Did your parents know at that point?

Uhm... I think they were pretty much in denial. I think they just thought I was a bad student. Uhm, they couldn't believe that... we had moved a lot, and no one had ever said "You know, he can't read", until it came to this teacher who... you know, I think it was tough for her to... no one really wanted to deal with it, because they didn't really know what to do with someone who couldn't read. Do you send them back to the 1st grade when they're in the 7th grade? This was in a school that was predominantly all college preparatory kids. I mean, everyone in the school was being prepared for college. So I think it was a difficult call for her. I have a feeling that

the teacher knew about it farther before she called. Uhm, I think my parents just kind of denied it... just felt I was dumb.

Well, what was it like when your friends were calling you "Mr. Illiterate"?

Well, it was.. it was kind of like taking needles and sticking them in your eyes every time somebody would call you that... it was a very painful experience. Uhm, it was uh... it was... I guess the best way to describe it was I felt alone and isolated, you know, I didn't want anyone to know... I quickly withdrew from those people. And it was like, the more I withdrew from them, the more they would seek me out to... to pick on me. Uhm, I'd ride my bike over to the tutor's and they'd stop me and get the books out and toss them back and forth to each other and read a section of them, you know, "Dear Jane, see Spot, Spot...". So it wasn't a real positive experience.

Sounds like they were pretty cruel.

Yeah, they were cruel.

Well, you know, when they were calling you that and your teacher was starting to become aware of this, and your parents became aware of it, and then they sent you to the tutor, what was it like when you were beginning to learn to read?

Well, I had a really great tutor. She was uh... a phenomenal woman who... said "It's okay not to be able to read, but it's not okay not to do something about it". So, she was real positive and reinforcing me to go ahead and try, and my parents were real positive. So between the tutor

and my parents, uhm... my father... you know, my brother got all A's in school. My dad thought that was really great. But if I got a C on a test, like... he had this party for me. You know, it was like he was, you know, it was like... you would have thought that we won the world championship, when I was realistically able to get a C. Uhm, my brother, my older brother was always confused, he said "I get an A and it's no big deal... he gets a C and you think this is great". So... but he was supportive also, so I guess it was a supportive situation between the tutor and my parents and... once they... once my parents decided that this was a problem that could be... you know, that something could be done about...

You know, you mentioned that it was real difficult then when they were calling you that, and you said even to this day that it still bothers you... what is it like now when you think about how it bothers you?

Well, I think what bothers me is when somebody even today says that "You're stupid", or that I'm dumb, or that "You ought to know better than that", or... you know "Why do you think that?"... "Why do you think that?", you know, like they have a different opinion and they know more than I do. Uhm, we have a business with 300 employees, and I'm always having somebody second guess something that we do. Whether it be an employee or a customer, or whatever it is, there's always people who think they know. And I think a lot of times you have to go with your own instinct to survive, and we've been in business 22 years, and a lot of that is having good instinct. I forget what the percentages are of small business that fail, but it's pretty high. So to be able to step ahead and be successful... it's been a real... opportunity.

But there are still times that it bothers you... when you think about it now.

Absolutely. If I'm in a meeting and someone says that I don't know what I'm doing, or that I'm

stupid, or something like that, then those feelings kind of come back about being inadequate or, uh, being... or that they know more than I, better than I do. Uhm, I don't have to have all the answers, but it's uh, it's tough to deal with that feeling that kind of brews back up that maybe I'm.. I'm dumb. I think I.. I battle with that, you know, that I.. that I'm not very smart.

Well, I may think of more questions about this experience as we go on in the interview, but... if you want to talk about another one you can do that too.

Okay. I'd say, uh, my next one is of 'alcoholic'. Uh, I've been sober 13 years, and uh, uh, I guess I consider myself a recovering alcoholic, but still an alcoholic. Uhm... I have people who call me alcoholic in a derogatory sense. Uhm... I was in court one day and they said "Well, he's an alcoholic", you know, and the fact that I've been sober for 13 years didn't really matter. It was that once you're hooked with being an alcoholic, you're always an alcoholic... and it was a real negative term. And I don't mind the term if the person who's using it knows what it means, but it's someone who uh... my wife and I were at a mediation and they were bringing up that I was.. that I'm an alcoholic, you know. And it was like I'm this bad person because I'm an alcoholic even though I haven't had a drink for 13 years, that.. that, well, that doesn't really matter... he's.. he's an alcoholic so... you can't trust him.

So in some sense it's like they were using the word... and that it was partially accurate... but making a different implication about that for now.

Right. Right.

Which is kind of the same way with the kids who were making fun of you because you couldn't read, and that was accurate, but it was name-calling, in a

very derogatory way.

Right. Right.

Well, can you think of other situations that people might have used that word where it had a different meaning for you?

Well, I don't know if this ties in to this, but my mother being **unable** to say the word kind of bothers me. In other words, saying that I shouldn't drink and I need to go to 'those meetings', meaning the meetings of AA, but that uhm.. that I'm not an alcoholic. I mean, she couldn't say "Yes, you are an alcoholic", she could say everything else, because she felt if I was an alcoholic then she'd feel guilty and that she had done something wrong... therefore that's why I was an alcoholic, which I don't believe to be the case at all. I don't think it was her responsibility whether I'm an alcoholic or not. But that her **inability** to be able to say it, uh... bothers me. You know, that denial.

That's kind of interesting because it's because that she can't label you, that you are bothered by that.. (Right) ..in some way. (Right) Rather than, you know, the other labels that you may have had that bother you when someone does call you something. (Right) That's interesting, too.

I find that competitors, or.. sometimes will use that label of 'alcoholic' against me when they'll tell someone "Well, he's an alcoholic", implying that he can't trust me. You know, that I'm dishonest, or that, you know, "He might be sober today, but tomorrow... look out... he won't be".

Well, it sounds like fairly many people know about this, and they use it against you... is that right?

In the beginning I was real guarded about that I didn't want anybody to know, but once I'd been sober for a while, and I knew quite a number of people and had helped a lot of people get sober, uhm, and I wasn't really concerned about it. But most people who know me, I mean it's not an issue. But it's.. it still bothers me that people would try and use that against me, you know. When I was using drugs and alcohol, it seemed like, I wasn't concerned about who knew or whatever, but it's like, being sober and straight... it seems odd that people would now try and use that against me, you know. So... I think that label... I mean a lot of people have that label, and they don't really understand what it means, what does 'alcoholic' and 'recovering' and those things mean. Uhm, you can't put it down on your insurance form because once you do then... they're real... they don't want you. So if you're honest about it, then that label sticks with you and then they don't want to insure you. But while you were drinking, it was okay. But if you labeled yourself as an alcoholic and you've stopped, then they can... they don't want you. And when you go to the doctor, you... have to tell them that you can't take any drugs. I had some eye surgery and I had to tell them that I couldn't take any codeine or anything afterwards. So they said "Well, let us write that on your form". "No, I don't want that anywhere in writing, that I have that label".

So even though you're not actively drinking or doing drugs or anything like that, it's almost like the label still sticks with you even though it doesn't really fit in another way.

Right. Right.

I mean it fits that you may have been that way in the past, but they use it now as if it's an active sort of thing. (Right). And that's the part that bothers you. (Right). Kind of like, with the first situation where people might second guess you or say "What are you doing?" and it makes you think that they are referring to something in the past where someone called you 'dumb'... (Right) ...or something like that. Those two are kind of similar in that way.

Right.

Do you have another one?

Uhm..... I think those are the two main ones that come to mind for me..... I guess father could be a label. I have two.. I have three step-children and two children of my own, and the label of father from my own children and the label from step-children... may be the same name, but they're different to me, and I'm working on.. how I interpret that. But, uh... we go to family counseling every Monday night and it seems like I'm the one with the greatest difficulty of that label.

You mean being called 'father'?

Yeah. I mean, with my own natural biological parents, or children, it seems to fit, but for my step-kids, I'm a little.. I'm uneasy with that. I don't feel that..... I struggle with that... that label.

Is it when you call yourself a father for those children, or when those children call you father?

When those children call me father.

It feels unnatural?

Right. And I think there is a lot of responsibility that comes with that, you know. Sometimes I think I'd rather just stand off on the side and say "Well, those are [my wife's] children, and whatever they do is okay", rather than to be involved in the situation and be responsible, and, and uh... to be the father. Uh, they have their own father but he's... doesn't call very often, doesn't come to see them, and... as I would say... not very attentive to them. Uh... but I.. I kind of felt that I didn't want to take his place, which I know I can not take his place, but I've not wanted to... be more involved than..... than..... on a limited basis, but I find that that doesn't work either.

So, even in this case too, it's almost as if the label is accurate in one way... that for all intents and purposes you are their father... but in another way, you're not their biological father, so you're in a conflict over that.

Right. And I think they struggle with it too because sometimes they want me to be their father, sometimes they don't. So it's a real struggle as to how this fits.

Well, do you let the kids, in a way, second guess your role as the father?

I guess, that the thing about being a father is that... with my own kids I seem to have... to be able to love them unconditionally. No matter what they do, or what happens, or what goes on, you know, I... I have this unconditional love for them. With [my wife's] children, it's more like a

conditional love. You know, the problem is... is with me. It's like "I'll love you if you behave... if you don't cause a lot of waves and if you do what you're supposed to then... I'll love you". Well, that doesn't work! You know, I mean, that does not... that doesn't work. It's either "You're the father or you're not the father". You know, and "you love them unconditionally whether they're biological or not, or... it's... it takes a toll on everyone".

Well it sounds to me like you're saying that your idea of what a father is and how you experience it is that you love your kids unconditionally. And that happens naturally for you with your own kids. But then, when you notice it doesn't happen with [your wife's] kids, you think "Well, if I can't do that, how can I be called a father"... (Right)... because you don't think of that label in that way.

And I used to think "Well, it was their problem", you know, if they did this differently or that differently, then, you know, then I would be able to love them and accept them. And what I see is that it doesn't really have anything to do with them, it has to do with me. And... I just notice more with my own kids... if they did exactly the same thing, then I would handle it differently, a lot of times. And that's kind of scary is to... how you let that happen, why I would let that happen.

Well, do your kids notice that, or is that something that you notice?

I think that's... I think I notice it and then I talk to [my wife] about it in counseling. And the counselor and her seem to feel that... that's pretty true.... that's a pretty good analogy of how I handle these things.

Well, how do they... do they label you in some way... in the counseling?

Well, they label me as not wanting to be their father. You know, I want to be my own biological kids' father. It's like I take that responsibility on full time, and want to do this part-time, only when it's convenient. If everything's going smooth, then.. okay, I'll be the father. But if it gets shaky, well... count me out.. I'll be over... I'll be over here.

Does that feel sort of like an accusation to you when they say that?

Well, since we've been talking and I look at these three situations, there is certainly some correlation for me... of how being called illiterate, and how being called and alcoholic, and this issue of being a father, they certainly seem to me that... that in my mind they are tied together on how I deal with being labeled on things, you know.

Yeah, because it seems in all three cases they're pretty negative... (Yeah)... you know... and make a value judgment about you as a person and not only your behavior in a certain situation. (Right). Like saying that you couldn't read, that's the behavior in one situation, but when they call you "Mr. Illiterate", that kind of obliterates... (Right) ...your whole validity, or whatever. (Right). And the same way with being called an alcoholic, that might refer to your behavior as drinking, but they're also making it like a character statement... (Right) ... about you. And the same way with this thing of being a father, when you don't want to handle maybe the discipline and the difficult situations... (Right)... that ends up making a statement about you as a person. So that, it looks like in your experiences that it's pretty pervasive, the labels... and what those mean. (Right). That's interesting.

Now, will you be sending me a bill for this!

No, this is all free!!

Oh, you know, I'm not sure I really wanted to know all these things!! This is... we're going so deep here...I'm not sure I.... I thought this would be kind of like a surface style!

Oh, I didn't realize I wasn't keeping it that way!

That's fine, it's... no, I'm sorry.

No, that's okay. I think I don't have any more questions.

Good, I'm really glad!

VITA

Traci Clayton was born in Cincinnati, Ohio on November 29, 1968. She lived in Perry, Florida from 1976 until 1979 and then returned to Cincinnati where she graduated from Wyoming High School. She entered Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio in September, 1986 and graduated in August, 1990 with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, including honors in the liberal arts and distinction in psychology. She then entered the Doctorate program in Clinical Psychology at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, also in August, 1990. She began her clinical internship in September, 1994 at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee and completed it in August, 1995. She officially received the Doctor of Philosophy degree in August, 1995.