



Labeling: You Can't Tell a Book By It's Cover

OR A CAN BY IT'S CONSTRUCT

What would you do if someone said to you "Use this can to make dinner."



“Better yet, use these other cans to fill the menu when you make dinner”



With some of these cans you might judge in advance what they contain...maybe



This is a can of sardines right? Or at least I can assume it is a can of sardines right?

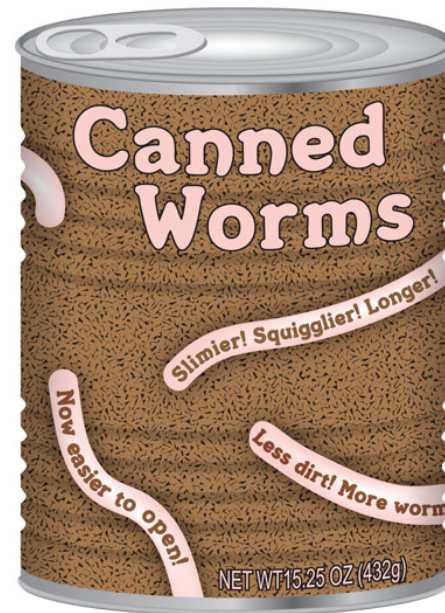


Whoops, that isn't a can of sardines.
It's a can of smoked oysters.



Sardines and oysters are similar in that they both come from the ocean. Would you use them the same way?

Back to our original can. Could be spinach, could be green beans.



Or it could be canned worms for fishing.

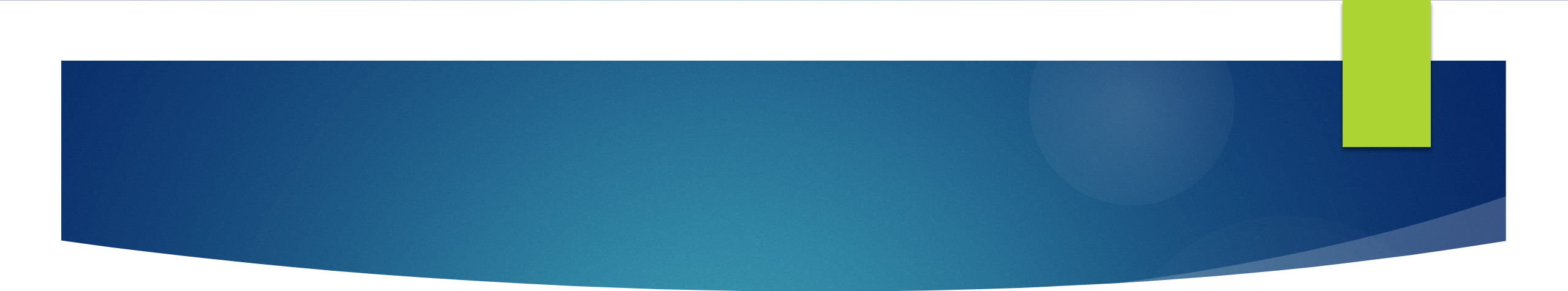
So, what is all this talk about cans?

- ▶ **If you see a can with a label that has green beans on it you will probably have a notion about how to prepare them. You might even put a lot of effort into gathering all the supplies you need to make a green bean casserole...**

until you open it and find all the green beans are French-cut or not as green as you like. My guess is you would probably use them anyway. In spite of the knowledge that these are not the green beans you expected, you might treat them the way you originally planned. At least they aren't a can of worms, right?

History of labels in psychology

- ▶ **Labeling theory** posits that **self-identity** and the behavior of individuals may be determined or influenced by the terms used to describe or classify them. It is associated with the concepts of self-fulfilling prophecy and stereotyping.
- ▶ **Stigma** is defined as a powerfully negative label that changes a person's self-concept and social-identity.

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- ▶ **You are complicated, we are all complicated and if you are being given cookie cutter treatment based on a labeling stereotype, then you need to be able to say so.** The best Doctors I have are the ones that don't treat me like I am stupid. However, I must be responsible for my own treatment as well. I need to check my thinking with others. I have a good friend who helps with that.

What is your self-identity?

- ▶ **In examining myself I would say that most of my self-identity has to do with being military and being in the company of very fine Native Traditional people a good part of my life.**
- ▶ **Exercise: Quiet self-examination. What gives your life meaning?**
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VttZTYXMm6s>

The culture you are born into has a lot to do with your self-identity

- ▶ **For example: If you are a member of the dominant culture, there may be an expectation that someday you will spread your wings and fly from your family. An inability to do so might result in others accusing you of "failure to launch"**

However, in other cultures a "failure to launch" might mean you are showing respect for your family."

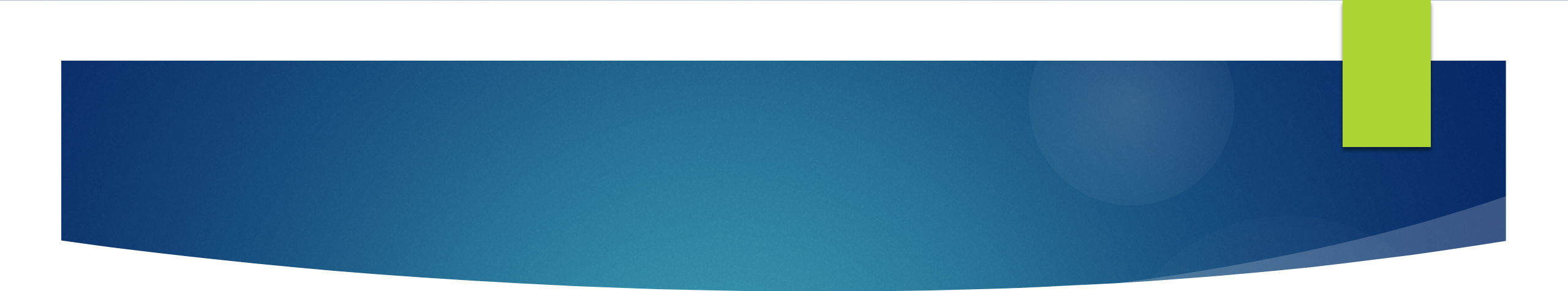
- ▶ **What is seen by others in a negative light might actually be seen as reinforcing your role in your family . What we have here is a case of mistaken identity. Not your mistake but the mistake of external observers.**

Labeling in Mental Health Treatment

- ▶ **Many treatments (especially medication) have proven to benefit individuals suffering from various forms of mental illness. However, labeling also produces stigma—when individuals labeled with mental illness are seen as possessing undesirable characteristics.**

Some of you have been labeled. Your medical record precedes you

- ▶ **Folks who have received substance abuse treatment have been dealing with labeling for a 100 years. They have been fending of stigma for a long time. Words like junkie, crack-head, hype, etc. Phrases such as, "he has a monkey on his back"; "she has a golden arm." "they have a drug habit".**
- ▶ **Words and phrases like these dehumanize and objectify.**

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- ▶ **When I was a child when I asked why my father was drunk all the time I was told it was because he was Indian. Was it true? Probably. But what it meant was that he was less-than because he was Indian, and even worse, he was a drunk. Or maybe it was said because people needed an excuse for him.**
 - ▶ **Thank God things are different now...aren't they?**

No one ever told me my dad had a disease.

- ▶ **Even now some people in this audience are saying to themselves. "Ron's dad had a choice. He didn't have to drink."**
- ▶ **Disease**

Disease:

- ▶ **Disease, any harmful deviation from the normal structural or functional state of an organism, generally associated with certain signs and symptoms and differing in nature from physical injury. A diseased organism commonly exhibits signs or symptoms indicative of its abnormal state.**
- ▶ **Like drinking too much.**

Mental Health Diagnostic Labels and Stigma

- ▶ **Schizophrenia:**
- ▶ **How often have you heard a public figure refer to something or somebody as Schizophrenic? They are usually referring to someone who is living on the street talking to themselves or someone who has committed a crime. Lots of people are homeless especially now. Many folks talk to themselves. I may when sorting issues out in my own mind or if I think you are listening to me. Does that mean I am schizophrenic or in Recovery language, that I have schizophrenia?**
- ▶ **What does this mean in terms of treatment?**

Some folks will say I am being extreme in my views.

- ▶ **Ok, I am extreme in my views. That is who I am. I am an advocate. Everything I have spoken about in this presentation is based in 68 years of life and a 40 year career in Psychology.**
- ▶ **If you are a CPRS you are an advocate. You are an advocate for self-determination; you are an advocate for Peer Support; you are an advocate for holistic treatment; you are an advocate for strengths-based treatment; you are an advocate for hope.**

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If you want to destroy hope, objectify
a person in your own mind.

- ▶ **When we turn a person into a label we are reducing their humanity by turning them into a single word and all the weakness that goes along with it.**
- ▶ **Yes, we are complex creatures and in our totality bigger than any one word used to describe us.**
- ▶ **When you label me as bi-polar you are communicating that my label is the most important thing about me. Remember, I probably have a family, a pet dog and I like an occasional hotdog with mustard, mayo and onions (bun is always optional. You don't need a bun if you have chili and cheese)**

Internalization of a Construct

- ▶ **This is a process that occurs unconsciously as a result of external imperatives. External imperatives are those that require you to change for the sake of someone else or a societal construct. For this discussion we are talking about external imperatives that are part of a system of care.**
- ▶ **The system requires that you have a diagnostic label to be a part of systems of services. A diagnostic label is not about what is right, it is about what is wrong.**
- ▶ **The unconscious mind understands that survival hinges on meeting the external imperative so the construct is internalized**

Internalization of a construct

- ▶ **Now we are going to get into some things that are more theoretical.**
- ▶ **In psychology and sociology, internalization involves the integration of attitudes, values, standards and the opinions of others into one's own identity or sense of **self**. In psychoanalytic theory, internalization is a process involving the formation of the super ego.**



In the beginning I needed PTSD as a construct.

- ▶ **Suddenly I had a word or group of words that explained what I was. I was a traumatized veteran.**
- ▶ **I needed that label in order to gain access to services that helped me turn my life around. It made a tremendous difference in how I was treated and how I treated myself.**
- ▶ **Over time I began to understand that I was more than a diagnostic label.**

Construct

- ▶ **Construct, also called hypothetical construct or psychological construct, in psychology, a tool used to facilitate understanding of human behaviour. ... Likewise, the behavioral sciences use constructs such as conscientiousness, intelligence, political power, self-esteem, and group culture.**

My Construct

- ▶ **My Construct or diagnostic label is PTSD. To qualify for this label I must have certain characteristics that are deemed by the construct to be necessary. These are what we may call symptoms, assessments of functioning and others.**
- ▶ **Here is the controversial part. We may not start out with a high degree of familiarity with our internalized construct but as we become more educated on the construct, we may internalize symptoms or more serious symptoms in order to unconsciously decrease cognitive dissonance.**
(Story) Essentially, we might be more comfortable with a more extreme form of illness because the construct rewards that conformity with services.

Recovery is about Changing the Internalized Construct

- ▶ **As we become more mature in Recovery we begin to learn that we no longer have to be the disease which is why we insist on Recovery language. We remind ourselves and others that we are no longer subject to the whims of the construct we internalized in order to survive.**
- ▶ **I am not PTSD. I have some symptoms that are related in some ways to PTSD but to other labels as well. So, the construct is not necessarily even accurately descriptive of my ill self. My sense of **my self** is based on the construct I have chosen to internalize because it fits my view of my world.**

So we change. That isn't news

- ▶ **1. We are subject to the construct; 2. We become aware of the construct; 3. We change our construct to the one that dovetails with our view of the world.**
- ▶ **The good news is that we can change the construct that is problematic along the way. When we hear or see something that reinforces the negativity of a construct, we can speak up and we can speak personally. In this way we can require that we all constantly acknowledge the complexity of human beings**
- ▶ **Some of you will disagree with what I have said. That is ok. My internalized construct does not require that you agree with it.**

You/we are the future.

- ▶ **No one is going to tell us how or who we need to be. We are capable of doing that thinking ourselves. I believe each one of us should ask at least one question of the movement. Something along the line of: What are we? Where are we going? Who is doing our thinking for us? What could we be doing differently? What should we not be doing? If we combine our minds and tap our creativity we can make the movement what we want it to be...**
- ▶ **Or**
- ▶ **We can let somebody else do it for us**

In the meantime:

- ▶ **Watch the way that people are treated and speak up if you need to.**
- ▶ **Don't be afraid to have an opinion. Your **self** belongs to you**
- ▶ **Don't use labels that you can avoid or fix.**
- ▶ **Don't let other people use labels they can avoid using or fix.**