Facilitating Positive Reactions to Psychological Labels

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Receiving a psychological label is often a life-changing experience. Some people feel relieved and hopeful upon discovering a name for their problem, while others become scared and depressed about the implications of receiving such a label (Proudfoot et al., 2009). This study attempts to identify factors that may affect whether a client has a positive or negative reaction to psychological labeling. Specifically, three factors were examined: use of language, client personality, and type of diagnosis. Each participant was randomly assigned to read one of four short narratives in which they imagined themselves in the depicted situation. All narratives portrayed someone receiving a psychological label from a doctor for the first time, but there were four different types of narratives overall that varied depending on whether the doctor's diagnosis was clinical depression or schizophrenia and whether the doctor used labeling or benign language. Examples of labeling language included terms like "mental disorder," "mental illness," and "psychosis," while narratives with benign language used none of the above terms and excluded the name of the diagnosis. Participants also took the NEO personality inventory. Results will be analyzed using regression and/or correlation methods, with conclusions forthcoming.

Information about the Author:
Stephanie Kuipers is a senior psychology major with minors in biology and philosophy. In the mental health field, one of the biggest issues is the stigma that people still face when they receive a psychological diagnosis. Thus, she started this project because she is interested in examining what practitioners can do to decrease the problem, since they are the ones who reveal these diagnoses for the first time.

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