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Theory of Knowledge

Mr. Ferlazzo

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*“Labels are a necessity in the organization of knowledge, but they also constrain our understanding”. Discuss the statement with reference to two areas of knowledge.*

Labels are a social construct. Society constructed these ideas to categorize a certain group of people, individual, or objects with the help of constructed knowledge. From the beginning, labels are what categorize objects and even later on, it's what shapes a person’s identity. Knowledge is the information the person takes in while being educated and learning from experiences. The Areas of Knowledge that I would be utilizing to develop my writing are “The Natural Science” and “The Human Science” from Richard van de Lagemaat’s textbook called *Theory of Knowledge for the IB Diploma*. Labels are a necessity in the organization of knowledge since they let us identify ourselves and they make it easier for us to learn, but on the other hand labels create stereotypes and make us close minded which constrains our understanding.

To begin with, the use of labels helps us identify ourselves. If we understand different labels and the meanings, we are able to use it to describe and show who we are. In “The Natural Science'', Richard Feynman, an American theoretical physicist, once said, “the difference between knowing the name of something and knowing something”. As we gain knowledge, we know a lot of words and topics but we might not actually know the meanings of those things. We could see this happening during the Supreme Court’s confirmation hearing that took place on October 13, 2020, when Amy Coney Berrett, an American lawyer and jurist, used the term “sexual preference” when asked about the right to same-sex marriage and describing those in the LGBTQ+ community. Many in the community took this term as offensive because “sexual preference” states that your sexual orientation is a choice, which it's not. The next day, Berrett apologized and said, “I certainly didn't mean, and would never mean, to use a term that would cause any offense in the LGBTQ comminuty”. She used this term without actually knowing what it meant which resulted in labeling the LGBTQ community in a negative way. Labels are very important to people because they describe them and identify them. This is why it's important knowing the meaning of something because it organizes our knowledge.

Labels also make it easier for us to learn and understand others. This is supported by the concept “Holism” in the chapter “The Human Science” from Richard van de Lagemaat’s textbook called *Theory of Knowledge for the IB Diploma*. Holism is the theory where we make sense of things by looking at them as a whole instead as individually. As a kid, for some it might be hard to express and notice our emotions because we are still learning, but labels could help us with that. For example, it is very important for parents to teach their kids about labels and emotions and it'll help them to label their emotions. It is important for children to be taught to label their emotions so the parents can understand them. Sometimes parents want to try to inspect the child on their own and guess what is wrong, but it'll be much better to understand them as a whole if the children themselves express and label their emotions themselves. By using labels to express our emotions, we’re able to learn and understand each other making our knowledge organized.

On the other hand, there are times where labels could have a negative effect. Labels create stereotypes. Like mentioned in the concept “Expectation” in the chapter “The Natural Science” from the textbook called *Theory of Knowledge for the IB Diploma* by Richard van de Lagemaat, “expectations influence what we see”. Since at a very young age, we are taught about stuff with labels and depending how we learn it, it can influence our perception about the said label. We stick to those beliefs because we were taught that way and it's what we expect. For example, since the beginning of Donald Trump’s presidency, he has called Mexican immigrants “rapists”. With this, he has labeled all of Mexican immigrants with a very negative word. Donald Trump is the 45th president of the United States, he has the power to influence his audience with his beliefs. After he said this, Mexicans were stereotyped negatively and many of Trump’s supporters viewed them the same way. As of today, Mexicans and many other immigrants from Latin America are still viewed this way. In this case going back to the prompt, since stereotypes are false images/ ideas of a person or thing, it hinders our understanding because we don't know the truth about them.

Furthermore, labels could make us close-minded. This is supported by “The Human Science” because its concept “The problem of bias” and “confirmation bias” says, we only look for evidence that only supports our beliefs. Because we use labels to learn, we stick to those beliefs and do not want to learn new ideas as well as to be properly educated. For example, some Christian people use the bible as an excuse for their sins. Fredericak Douglass, an abolitionist and writer, wrote an autobiography called, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, after his escape from slavery. He wrote about his life as a slave and experiences in order to influence his audience about how dehumanizing slavery is. The main factor in his book is about the awful things Christian people did to them at the time. Like stated in his autobiography, in chapter 10 says, “After buying her, he hired a married man of Mr. Samuel Harrison, to live with him one year; and him he used to fasten up with her every night! The result was that, at the end of the year, the miserable woman gave birth to twins. At this result Mr. Covey seemed to be highly pleased, both with the man and the wretched woman. Such was his joy, and that of his wife, that nothing they could do for Caroline during her confinement was too good, or too hard, to be done. The children were regarded as being quite an addition to his wealth”. This slave owner committed adultery and even raped the women, which are sins. Frederick Douglass said that the many of the Christian masters claimed to be very religious but then carried on commiting sins and using the bible to excuse their actions. Just because they are labeled as Christians, they think it's okay to commit those actions because they still follow a religion. This shows how labels can hinder our search for knowledge because they are close minded, they do not want to gain new knowledge and understand.

In conclusion, the concepts in both “The Human Science” and “The Natural Science” shows labels are a necessity and how they hinder our search for knowledge. Labels let us identify ourselves and it's important to know the meanings of things to understand in order to organize our knowledge. A lot of people find their labels as their identity. It's also easier for us to learn and understand each other if we label our emotions and express them clearly. However,  labels create stereotypes because we are taught about things with labels and we expect those people or things to be a certain way which hinders our understanding. They also make us close minded since we are taught by labels we believe in them and we only want to look for evidence that supports our beliefs which constrains our understanding.

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