

Matt L. Drabek

Classify and Label: The Unintended Marginalization of Social Groups

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Abigail Klassen (York University/University of Nevada, Las Vegas)

Abigail Klassen is a PhD candidate in philosophy at York University in Toronto and a philosophy instructor at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Her main areas of interest lie in social metaphysics and feminist philosophy. She is the author of "Beauvoir, the Scandal of Science, and Skepticism as Method" in *Hypatia* (2013) and has also published on Galen Strawson's phenomenological account of the self in *Appraisal: The Journal of the British Personalist Forum* (2015).

abigail.klassen@gmail.com or abigail.klassen@unlv.edu

Classify and Label explores some social effects of the classification of practices and people through labeling in the contexts of the social sciences and everyday life. The book's overall argument is that there exist two key features of the classificatory process. Matt Drabek's first main claim is that classifications interact with classified persons and activities in a two-way process. Expanding on Ian Hacking's notion of the "looping effect," Drabek argues that labeling has the capacity to engender changes in the behavior and self-understanding of those categorized: changes that can serve to modify the category itself. His second main claim is that people are sometimes marginalized by classificatory processes. The book, in his words, propounds "an analysis of interlocking systems of oppression" in both the social sciences and the everyday world (xiii). Though marginalization is typically oppressive, it can also be affirmative or neutral.

In chapter 1, Drabek offers a model of labeling that illustrates the process by which activities become full-blown *social practices*. Drabek characterizes social practices as closely akin to Wittgenstein's notion of *Spiele* or "plays." He sees this understanding as relativizing practices to the material and social environments in which they are carried out without also attributing normative authority to those environments. What he names "descriptive practice-relativism" is intended to capture the porousness of practices, helping to avoid their reification and sedimentation. He argues that a rich analysis of social practices is essential to understanding labeling because, first, the labeling of activities often precedes the labeling of people and second, because social practices are importantly connected to how people self-identify and are labeled by others (xiii). The first chapter also advances a three-part model that delineates interactions between social practices and background activities, between different embodied background activities, and between different social practices. The model is intended to capture the ways in which the three types of interaction operate differently, albeit sometimes simultaneously (for example, some interactions involve explicit thought whereas others do not) (8-9). This interaction underscores the complexity of marginalization, demonstrating that it is "intersectional and cumulative along many different dimensions" (9).

Drabek also analyzes how the classification of activities can marginalize the same activities either by altering others' understandings of them or by casting them as unacceptable or intolerable. This process brings with it constraints that are often distressing to the person labeled, though typically invisible to and unintentional on the part of the labeler (5). Importantly, Drabek's examples highlight how expectations of a person's behavior are relativized to a person's situation: The same label or the same marker category membership--"positive, identity-expressive activities"--can confer different constraints (and sometimes enablements) upon a person across situations (7). In this respect, his analysis comes very close to Ásta Sveinsdóttir's conferralist account of social properties introduced in "The Social Construction of Human Kinds" (Sveinsdóttir 2013).

Chapters 2 and 3 examine the interactions between *people* and classifications. Chapter 2 focuses on the marginalization of people through social-scientific labeling and feedback bias in the social sciences. Feedback bias refers to how classification can marginalize people as they go about their day-to-day lives in a social world where social norms and public responses to kinds of people are altered by classifications (40). Drabek's model of feedback bias explicates three kinds of interaction between social-scientific classification and the public: between the classificatory system and the people classified, between classifications and social norms, and between classificatory systems. One classification, for instance, can give rise to the grounds for another, the existence of which is parasitic on the former. The first kind affects classified persons' self-understanding: they might reject the classification or accept it. In the latter case, the classification alters people in the sense that they become, to use Hacking's language, a new "kind of person." The second kind of feedback bias can change or constitute social norms either by explicitly articulating norms or by shaping the social and material forces that constrain what counts as normal and acceptable. A particularly interesting element of chapter 2 is Drabek's understanding of feedback bias, as (not only) the result of cognitive, but sometimes of structural bias. Though the former variety influences scientific and folk classifications alike, it does not exhaust the explanation of marginalization that occurs in scientific and everyday marginalization. Structural/cultural/political bias creates another condition of possibility of marginalization.

Chapter 3 explores the changes in classification of sexual sadism, sexual masochism, and gender dysphoria across editions of the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. In agreement with another reviewer of *Classify and Label* (Ayala 2015), I too see Drabek's analysis of endogenous versus exogenous distress in the context of psychological/psychiatric classification as the most fascinating component of this chapter and perhaps of the entire book. According to (at least some) practicing mental health specialists, whereas the former kind of distress is caused by a patient's attitudes alone and is the kind of distress minimally required for diagnosis, the latter is caused by others, perhaps even by society in general. To remedy distress caused by exogenous factors, what requires treatment is the larger social context in which a patient finds her or himself. But as Drabek points out, the distinction between endogenous and exogenous distress may be too hazy to determine whether a medical diagnosis is appropriate.

Chapter 4 attends to classification and marginalization in the context of everyday life. Importantly, it also gestures toward how we might fight marginalization. Drabek focuses on debates concerning subordination in the context of pornography and the use of gender concepts.

Much attention is given to the anti-porn feminism led by Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon (see especially MacKinnon 1982 and 1987), which was brought to many analytic philosophers' attention by Rae Langton (see Langton 1993). This camp sees pornography as *constituting* the subordination of women, deriving its authority from the power it possesses over its mostly white, male, heterosexual, and cisgender audience. This account is contrasted with another anti-porn position, namely that pornography *causes* the subordination of women. Drabek makes much of Langton's view that pornography is an embodied practice: it is something enacted within a particular environment and is meaningful in virtue of contextual features. Drabek takes Langton's understanding of the complexity of pornography's operation over systems of thought and practice to illuminate and illustrate the frameworks developed over the first three chapters of *Classify and Label*.

Despite its weaknesses (for example, causal critiques focus too narrowly on the content of individual instances of pornography), Drabek favors the nonconstitutive account of pornography's harm, since there is not, he argues, an exceptionless link between inegalitarian pornography and gender subordination and between egalitarian pornography and gender neutrality or affirmation. Relatively "banal" pornography teaches boys that, for example, women should not have pubic, leg, or armpit hair (110). The website TeXXXans contains seemingly harmless pictures of nude women, but this relatively "egalitarian" content is nonetheless subordinating in its context: Most images are posted by ex-boyfriends or short-term partners as "revenge porn" in order to "slut shame" a woman in her community (113). Simultaneously, what most would conceive of as "nonegalitarian" sex, for example, BDSM practices, may not be, given closer analysis, gender-subordinating on account of the BDSM community's emphasis on consent (111). The lesson, thus, is that the social context in which pornography is produced and consumed affects how pornographic material operates. Drabek sees MacKinnon's view of pornography as alienating many feminists who participate in the pornography industry in order to *combat* gender subordination. The most promising way to change what most pornography *does*, he suggests, is to engage in consciousness-raising that is dedicated to the "continuous exploration and criticism of gender norms" and their manifestation in porn (115). Pornography that presents more realistic and positive depictions of female and transgender bodies can work to disrupt dominant (subordinating) representations. This is one way to use classification (for example, new conceptions of eroticized bodies as including unshaven female bodies, large female bodies) to combat gender subordination.

Drabek attends more generally to the notion that people can use gender classification to fight marginalization in the second part of the chapter. He focuses on Sally Haslanger's work to emphasize the need to provide *ameliorative* gender concepts: "the concept we should be employing to do the work of ending gender oppression" (119). For illustration, though many do not have the following as manifest content for their concept "woman," Haslanger defines "woman" as: "S is a woman if S is systematically subordinated along some dimension . . . and S is 'marked' as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction" (Haslanger 2003, 6-7). Haslanger sees this definition as capturing the descriptive power of everyday conceptions of "woman" by connecting "woman" to the body and reproduction. This conception of "woman" is well-suited to *identify* gender marginalization. Another way to use classification and feedback looping to change current conditions or gender concepts is to introduce new terms, for example, *transgender* and

cisgender to name people who cross or reject gender norms. In the case of both pornography and gender-concept analysis, Drabek emphasizes the importance of "creativity, spontaneity, and collective action" both in identifying and in working to combat gender subordination (123). As Lorraine Code reminds us, "ethical-political and epistemological questions are inextricably intertwined . . . ethical-political action is dependent on the quality of the epistemic activity that informs it . . . and epistemological questions invoke ethical requirements" (Code 1995, xiii).

The book's conclusion should, I think, serve as a fifth chapter in light of its introduction of novel issues. Here, Drabek intends to show how models of marginalization introduced in his first and second chapters undergird debate over contentious issues where labeling plays a large role in explaining the ill effects encountered by some social group (in this case, same-sex couples) and in countering those ill effects as well. Although same-sex marriage (SSM) is often defended on the grounds that there should be equality in rights across social communities, some go further and argue that SSM will "help gay people put into practice and receive public recognition for . . . the lifelong, monogamous family structures taken as the norm for heterosexuals" (126; see also Calhoun 2007). In turn, some argue that SSM will cause gay relationships to exhibit undesirable and oppressive practices enabled by the institution of heterosexual marriage, thus causing "homonormativity" as gay people internalize heterosexual norms (127-28; see also Card 2007). SSM may also curtail space for creating alternative relationships and communities based on free association/sexuality (129).

Drabek draws upon the resources of a wide range of subfields of philosophy, including the philosophy of social science, feminist philosophy, and philosophy of race, gender, and sexuality, which each contributes "in its own way to a unified study of classification through labeling" (xi). However, despite this broad approach, the book has its limits. The case studies are Western, and much attention is focused on gender and sexuality, whereas little is placed on race and class (a shortcoming that Drabek acknowledges) (xiii). Although examples and case studies within the book touch upon issues that are of interest within various subdisciplines of philosophy, and though Drabek regards his analysis as consistent with the spirit of such diverse and rich traditions as the phenomenological, anarcho-feminist, Foucauldian, and sociological traditions, the book could be enhanced by a more rigorous engagement with such traditions' commitments and methods, or at minimum, some additional flagging for the reader curious as to which examples and case studies are particularly salient to which disciplines and traditions and for what reasons.

Some of the book's arguments also fall short. For instance, in chapter 3, Drabek claims that endogenous distress is, at least according to how (some? all?) mental health specialists use the notion, present just in case a patient's main cause of distress is the patient's personal attitudes about their purported ailment. However, although Drabek admits that difficulty in delineating between endogenous and exogenous distress makes medical diagnosis difficult, he fails to acknowledge the complexity of the larger issue: that to some degree and in many a case, a patient's endogenous distress is parasitic on their having internalized, consciously or not, social (exogenous) norms. Hence, disentangling the two kinds and causes of distress is no simple task, and remedying the social attitudes that cause endogenous distress especially seems much easier said than done. The upshot of a social world composed of such a network of relations--between individual and social structures, which are often mutually constituting--is that an adequate

epistemological and metaphysical account of individuals' attitudes and the social world must pay attention both to social structures and to the individuals or groups who sustain them. Nonetheless, Drabek is to be applauded for raising this thorny area of inquiry.

Despite these issues, readers interested in social metaphysics, feminist philosophy, and antiracist philosophy alike will be impressed by Drabek's eminently clear analyses of real-world cases of marginalization that follow from the classification of people and activities in relation to his particular model of feedback bias. Further, like Drabek himself, I too suspect that his model of feedback bias and his discussion of endogenous versus exogenous causes will prove especially useful beyond the book's already impressive scope of examples and case studies.

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