

Is the Word “Shrink” a Put Down or a Term of Endearment?



The word "shrink" has long been a common way of referring to psychotherapists, including both psychiatrists and psychologists. However, the origin of this slang term springs from a completely different treatment of the human head. Shrink derives from "headshrinker," a word that was initially popularized by reports of the distinctive headhunting practice of the Amazonian Jivaro people.

I think the bottom line is this: There are enough negative connotations to the word, "shrink," that make it a turn off to many psychologists, and it seems to be particularly inapplicable (and perhaps offensive), but as with many nicknames, it could actually be used as a way of making an informal connection - a sort of term of endearment.

Of course other professions have negative slang terms (physicians have been called "sawbones" or "leech" referring to rather ancient practices; lawyers are called "sharks"), so creating professional nicknames seems to be common.

What are your thoughts? Is "shrink" a put down or a term of endearment?