

The Psychology of Genre

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The New York Times:

When we see a rainbow, note the psychologists James Beale and Frank Keil, we see it as distinct bands of colors, rather than the “gradual continuum we know it to be.” Even though two colors may be the same distance apart in terms of wavelength, we can distinguish them more easily when they cross a color category.

This “categorical perception,” as it’s called, is not an innocent process: What we think we’re looking at can alter what we actually see. More broadly, when we put things into a category, research has found, they actually become more alike in our minds.

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As the psychology professor Debra Zellner has found, people who put drinks like coffee or beer into particular categories actually liked the everyday beverages more than the people who simply labeled everything as undifferentiated “beer” or “coffee.” Thus one online reviewer at the site BeerAdvocate described a brew as a “perfect lawn mower beer.” Is it the best beer ever? No. Is it good enough on a hot day after sweaty yardwork? Absolutely.

Read the whole story: [*The New York Times*](#)