



The Influence of Identity Recognition with "I-Person/E-Person" Labels on Individuals' Social Behavior

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Abstract. This study examined how identity recognition with “I-person/E-person” labels relates to social avoidance among young people, and whether autonomy threat mediates this relationship. Data from 356 participants (aged 18–35) were analyzed using SPSS. Results showed that identity recognition positively correlated with social avoidance ($r = 0.18$, $p < 0.01$), and autonomy threat showed a stronger positive correlation with social avoidance ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$). Autonomy threat fully mediated the link between identity recognition and social avoidance. Compared to E-persons, I-persons scored significantly higher on autonomy threat (4.33 vs. 3.65) and social avoidance (3.73 vs. 2.65). Regression analyses revealed that autonomy threat predicted social avoidance ($R^2 = 0.638$) much more strongly than identity recognition did ($R^2 = 0.365$). These findings indicate that the effect of personality labels on social behavior is not direct but operates through perceived pressure to conform to label-based expectations—i.e., autonomy threat. The study uncovers a “label disciplining” mechanism among youth and provides empirical evidence for promoting rational use of personality labels without being trapped by them.

Keywords: Identity Recognition; Autonomy Threat; Social Avoidance

1 Introduction

"Are you an I-person or an E-person?" This kind of dialogue starter is often asked by young people nowadays.

Initially based on the MBTI personality questionnaire, "I-person" (introvert) and "E-person" (extrovert) have emerged beyond the context of measuring personalities and become commonly referenced social references.

Behind the surface-narrative-unclear-self-expression, there is in fact an inner psychology phenomenon: Can these designations assist people in understanding themselves or merely limit behavior?

Social Identity Theory is an essential theory of reference [1,2]. The theory posits that individuals categorize themselves into social groups to obtain self-identity [1,2]. When a person is given a label, they may develop stereotypic expectations associated with that label (such as "I-persons need to be calm and shy in public", "E-person needs to be proactive") as their inner standards. In other words, a label refers to an individual's identity and what they are required to do as well.

However, such prescriptive pressure may entail psychological costs. According to self-determination theory, there are three primary psychological needs; autonomy - that is, a person's subjective perception of voluntarily acting has positive effects on their mental state and intrinsic interests [3,4]. If the typical expectation labels are too prominent, people might feel under pressure to "perform as indicated by the label", which could undermine their sense of freedom. This expectation of "future freedom restrictions" may cause people to behave in accordance with the labels' stereotypical behavior, even if they do not want to, due to fear of being labelled as "not an ideal or genuine person/I-person/E-person".

Recent studies have begun to examine the influence of MBTI labels on young people's psychology. Wang et al. It was found that many undergraduate students use BTI to understand themselves and others socially; therefore, these expectations may be overly fixed [5]. Rao also regarded MBTI as a kind of "social currency" in the era of internet and that it becomes such when utilized through social media; therefore, becoming an individual's identity-performance [3]. The above views are also aligned with those expressed by Wu et al. in their study among 469 Chinese young individuals that employing MBTI labels per se has no causal relationship with social anxiety; only when other factors such as ego identity, the feeling of belongingness, and impression management show mediation effects do they exhibit distinct outcomes [6]. It indicates that there is an indirect impact; how people relate to labels can cause influences indirectly. Moreover, you have suggested that the excessive use of MBTI categorizations may result in a rigid self-perception or generalization [7]. Moreover, Zhou proposed the concept of "labeled identity", arguing that in the highly mediated digital age, identity construction has shifted from open-ended self-exploration to template-based labeled performances, particularly on social media platforms such as Xiaohong Shu [8]. Further studies of youth social interaction have shown that Labels such as "I-person" and "E-person" function both as self-referential expressions and devices for making others recognize them within a social category; they carry certain behavioral expectation norms [9].

There are still many unsolved problems currently. What is the mechanism by which "identification recognition" triggers "social behavior"? Why are some people who strongly attach to their labels more social avoidants, and why aren't they? Autonomy threat: How does this affect it? It is the central issue that helps individuals identify their own groups, thereby reducing their involvement with others within society? Is there a difference between i-persons and e- persons? As two types of personality differences, will they react differently in psychology and behavior towards being given the same label? The above problems have not been comprehensively studied.

1.1 Significance of the Study

Three aspects of theoretical contributions are as follows. Extend the explanation range of Social Identity Theory from the traditional level-of-granularity identity construction at a high abstraction (such as ethnicity, nation) to the current phenomenon of low-macroscale fluid social identification such as "I-person / E-person", etc. [1,4]. Secondly, there is an additional mediator of "autonomy threat". Autonomy threat,

according to Self-determination theory, is the perception of restriction on people's freedom by labels; It can be seen as an extra dimension in explaining how labelling discipline behaviour through psychology [5,10]. Thirdly, it offers empirical validation for the theoretical relationship among identity verification, autonomy threat and social behaviour to expand the understanding of social psychology under a digitalised environment.

Actually, as more young people identify themselves with these labels and sometimes use them to justify their social withdrawal, grasping the reasons behind this phenomenon can help guide adolescents to form a more rational attitude towards personality labels; This way, they will avoid becoming "trap" by those labels. Obtaining MBTI test results makes people believe in their own personalities too strongly and affect interactions with others [7,9]. Based on this research results, teachers, parents and young persons can gain some insights from it; therefore they will have a better sense of belonging to their group despite the danger of losing freedom and control over actions presented by labels.

1.2 Research Questions and Methods

Therefore, based on this, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the effect of the degree of identification with "I-person / E-person" label on Social behaviour through autonomy threat mediation. In short, this paper aims to explore whether identification is positively correlated with social anxiety; Whether there are differences between I-people and E-people in terms of their level of identification with others.

A questionnaire surveying method based on the Wenjuanxing platform. In total, 356 valid responses were obtained; among them, there were 174 I persons, 136 E persons and 46 unspecified individuals. Using SPSS 27.0 for data analysis, including descriptive statistics, reliability and validity tests, correlations, ANOVA, and regression analyses.

2 Literature Review

At present, the emphasis is on self-identification as an introverted or extroverted type; These personality types have some impact on one's own perception and interpersonal relationship management outside of school. These labels appearing frequently in daily life prompt researchers to investigate this phenomenon.

One relevant theoretical framework is Social Identity Theory, developed by Tajfel and Turner in 1979 [4]. Based on this view, individuals tend to organize themselves into social Groups and create an "us" against "Them" mentality. For instance, when people identify themselves as introverts, such as considering themselves part of the group and adjusting their behavior accordingly in line with an image of an introvert. At this time point, the label serves as an easy-to-understand after-the-fact justification of situation-based discomfort; other kinds of alternative explanations, like context-related reasons or transient emotion-based reasons, might be ignored. Nevertheless, Social Identity Theory is not well suited for understanding the psychological costs associated

with a tight-knit group identity; For example, restricting behavior by definition or creating internal contradictions—such gaps need to be filled in other theories [5].

Another helpful perspective is Self-Determination Theory, proposed by Deci and Ryan in 1985 [5]. It argues that humans have three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to the need to experience one's behavior as self-initiated and volitional, reflecting an intrinsic motivation to act in accordance with one's own values rather than in response to external pressure [10]. When people are given the label "intuitive" or "sensory", they might feel their freedom threatened by this categorization. Once classified, certain anticipations emerge from other people or oneself. For instance, if others view someone as an outgoing extrovert, that person may feel unable to behave quietly or prefer staying alone, as such actions would seem inconsistent with the label. Here, the label will limit behavior rather than merely express it; hence, people may feel uncomfortable or frustrated with such labels.

Wang et al. investigated how undergraduate students perceive and use MBTI labels, finding that such labels often serve as a basis for social comparison and identity performance [2]. Rao extended this line of inquiry by examining MBTI as "social currency" in the digital era, demonstrating that the sharing of personality types on platforms like Xiaohongshu transforms self-presentation into a form of identity management [3]. Wu et al. further explored how the MBTI label shifted from a personality test to a social label and how this shift affected social anxiety among Chinese youth [6]. Their findings indicated that the mere use of MBTI labels was not directly associated with social anxiety in isolation. However, when variables such as ego identity (i.e., how much a person sees the label as part of who they are), sense of belonging, and impression management were considered, a significant effect emerged. Therefore, if a person casually declares that they are an INFP, it is usually without any intention; However, if they become highly convinced and identify themselves as such to an extreme degree in their daily lives, resulting in heightened social anxiety. Because people start feeling the need for affiliation and have to maintain others' perceptions of themselves. Itself has no problem, but the extent that it takes on this role as an identification is problematic. Exactly like what was observed above; whether people apply these terms arbitrarily or hold some degree of autonomy over their own identity based on them?

Some recent studies of young people's behavior indicate that there is an issue similar to "social stuttering", where they experience anxiety, impatience and so on in social interactions. The idea is consistent with the Application Scenario of Personality Tags. Do individuals with a stronger identification as introverts feel more socially hesitant than others? Will it produce more uneasiness among those who are already uneasy to make them feel anxious even more strongly? The ambiguities of the above-mentioned Relationships will be addressed by this paper.

Therefore, based on these considerations, the following three major research questions were set up to explore the relationship among students' identification with introvert/extrovert labels, its impact on observed behavior, including frequency of social isolation, initiative in initiating social interaction and self-reported level of anxiety in group activities; whether perceived autonomy threat is an intervening variable between personality label identification and social behavioral outcomes;

Whether there are differences in the way individuals perceive different labels within and outside their identity domains.

Therefore, this study is significant as personality tags have been widely prevalent among young people's casual conversations. No longer just a component of the personality assessment, they now serve as a means to convey oneself and others through introductions among acquaintances. Nevertheless, relatively fewer individuals consider the possible outcomes from frequently using such terms. Several researchers suggest that the division should be relaxed to avoid being overly harsh on others or restricting multiple ways in which people grow up socially [7,9]. Through exploration of the psychological mechanism of label application, it is expected that those involved will have a deeper understanding of how they are affected by labels and use them reasonably. Labels are not to describe all aspects of a person but just some traits.

In summary, this study explores a highly realistic and widespread social phenomenon. While lacking a new idea in terms of the core, it is very close to teenagers' lives and feeling in reality. Although it may be easier for people to distinguish between individuals' personalities as either generally outgoing (outgoing) or inward-looking (introverted), there are many complexities among human emotions and behavior that do not align with such categorizations.

3 Methods

3.1 Subjects

To examine how individuals are influenced by their identification with I/E labels in social behaviour using a randomised questionnaires method. Optimise usage of Time and resources to carry out an Online Survey in some different Cities. Excluding responses under 60 seconds and those with unclear contents, a total of 356 questionnaires were finally obtained. All participants provided informed consent and voluntarily completed questionnaires meeting statistical analysis requirements.

3.2 Measurement

Online Questionnaire Survey Method This Study Employed The questionnaire was divided into four parts: I-person/E-person categorization, identification, perceived autonomous threat, and social behavioral tendency.

Identity Recognition Scale. The Identity Recognition Scale measures individuals' identification with the “I-person/E-person” label. Comprising six items, this scale was adapted from social identity theory research [1,4] and contextualized for this study. A 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) is used, with higher scores indicating stronger identification. Representative items include: “I often identify as an I-person/E-person.” The scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency reliability, with a Cronbach's α coefficient of 0.836.

Autonomy Threat Scale. The Autonomy Threat Scale measures the pressure of restricted autonomy experienced by individuals due to identification with “I-person/E-person” labels, specifically the perceived sense of being compelled to conform to these labels. The scale comprises five items based on Self-Determination Theory [5,10], incorporating label contextualization. A 7-point scoring system is used (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree), with higher scores indicating greater perceived threat to autonomy. Representative items include: “I feel most tasks are performed under compulsion rather than voluntary choice.” In this study, the scale demonstrated excellent reliability with a Cronbach’s α coefficient of 0.928.

Social Behavior Tendency Scale. The Social Behavior Tendency Scale is designed to measure individuals’ avoidance or anxiety tendencies in social contexts, reflecting their behavioral performance during authentic social interactions. The scale comprises six items, referencing research on social anxiety and youth social behavior [11]. A 5-point scoring system is used (0 = completely disagree, 4 = completely agree), with higher scores indicating greater levels of social avoidance or anxiety. Representative items include: “I feel nervous when conversing with authority figures (e.g., teachers, bosses)”, “I experience nervousness when interacting with unfamiliar individuals”, and “I struggle to enjoy myself in social settings”. In this study, the scale demonstrated good reliability with a Cronbach’s α coefficient of 0.873.

Validity. Structural validity of the scale was assessed using exploratory factor analysis. Results demonstrated a KMO value of 0.858 and a significant Bartlett’s test of sphericity ($\chi^2 = 1413.347$, $df = 136$, $p < 0.001$), indicating suitability for factor analysis. Three principal components with eigenvalues greater than 1 were identified, accounting for 65.63% of total variance. Item loadings above 0.6 across all factors confirmed strong structural validity, enabling effective measurement of three distinct constructs: identity, autonomy threat, and social behavioral tendencies.

3.3 Analytical Methods

This study employed descriptive statistical analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis to process the data. The collected sample data comprised 356 observations, which were subsequently analyzed using SPSS 27.0 software after processing.

4 Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

I-persons accounted for 48.88% ($n = 174$), E-persons 38.20% ($n = 136$), and the uncertain group 12.92% ($n = 46$). Identity recognition: E-persons showed the highest level of identification with their self-labeling, followed by I-persons, while the

uncertain group exhibited the lowest recognition. Perceived autonomy threat: I-persons perceived the highest level of autonomy threat, while E-persons perceived the lowest. Social avoidance: I-persons exhibited significantly higher levels of avoidance or anxiety in various social situations compared to E-persons.

Overall scores across Dimensions of Identity Recognition. Measure identity based on the following aspects: "frequent occurrence of identity thoughts", "an important part of oneself's self-awareness", "sense of gratification in having an identity", "positive sense of identity", "strong ties among similar people", "emotionally resonant relationships" with peers; Item scores ranged between 4.22 and 4.79 (highly correlated), showing general high level results. The highest score ("I frequently identify as an I-person/E-person", 4.79 ± 1.66), reflecting the consistency in recognizing this self-identification among participants. The least positive (4.22 ± 1.78) was "I am quite close to other I-personals/ E-personals", indicating weak empirical contact among people like oneself in reality compared with how one perceived themselves.

Inter-group differences in identity recognition (one-way ANOVA). Use I-person, E-person and uncertain group as grouping variables; perform a one-way ANOVA on each item of the recognitions of identification. The results demonstrated statistically significant differences in scores across all dimensions of identity recognition among the three groups ($p < 0.05$), specifically manifested as follows:

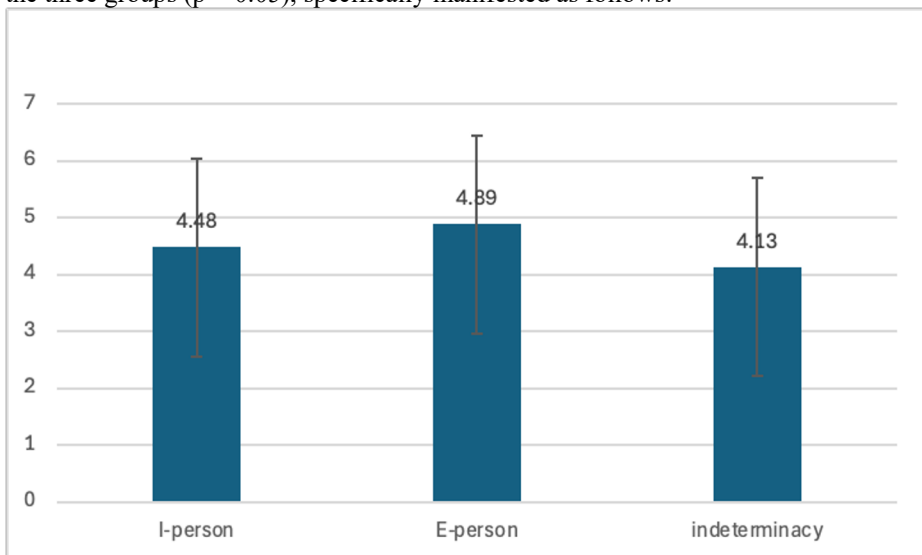


Fig. 1. Identity recognition scores (Picture credit: Original).

Overall, in comparison with the I-type personality traits, E-type personalities were rated highly significant scores for satisfaction (gratification), sense of well-being, and bond with others; Uncertain Groups received very low ratings for every single item measured, suggesting considerable uncertainty among them (see Fig. 1).

Perceived Coercion (Autonomy Threat). The perceived coercion dimension was measured through five items: “being forced to perform tasks,” “imposed demands,” “forced compliance with arrangements,” “ideas not being respected,” and “lack of freedom to express thoughts.” The average scores across these items ranged from 3.92 to 4.09, indicating a generally moderate level. Among these, “I feel subjected to excessive demands” scored the highest at 4.09 ± 1.85 , while “I feel my authentic thoughts are not respected” and “I feel unable to freely express my true ideas” both averaged 3.92. These findings suggest that respondents commonly experience external constraints in social and daily life, with relatively limited autonomy in self-expression and decision-making (see Fig. 2)

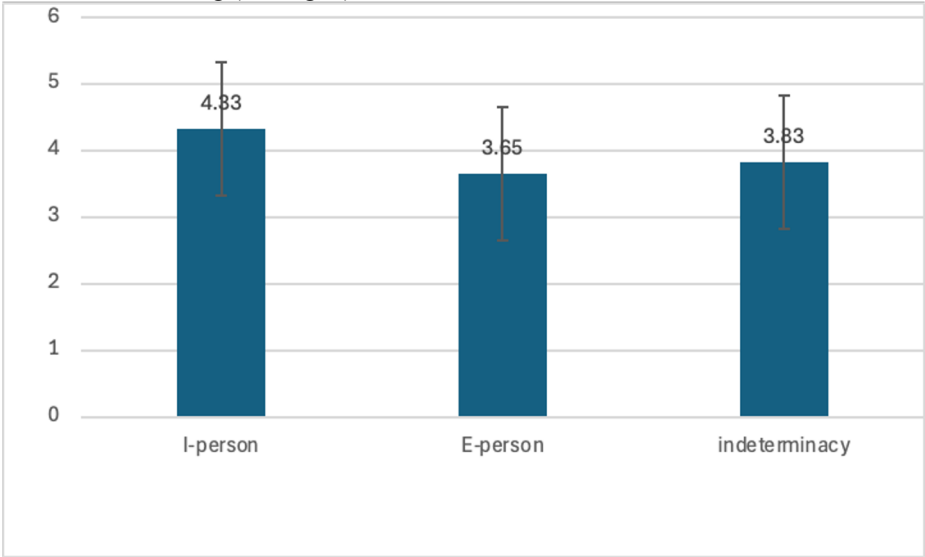


Fig. 2. Autonomy threat scores (Picture credit: Original).

The univariate analysis of variance revealed statistically significant differences ($p < 0.01$) in perceived coercion scores across all dimensions among the three groups, with Group I showing significantly higher average scores than Group E, while the uncertain group exhibited intermediate scores. Specifically:

These results indicate that introverted groups perceive significantly higher levels of external constraints and coercion in social and daily life compared to extroverted groups, with poorer subjective experiences regarding autonomous expression and decision-making.

Social Anxiety (Social Avoidance). The social anxiety dimension was measured through six items: “tension when conversing with authority figures,” “difficulty maintaining eye contact with attractive individuals,” “tension during conversations with strangers,” “discomfort in social settings,” “challenge in casual conversations,” and “worry about social expression.” The average scores across these items ranged from 2.65 to 3.51, indicating an overall moderate-to-low level of anxiety, though

significant internal variations exist within the dimension. Notably, “tension when interacting with authoritative figures” showed the highest average score (3.51 ± 1.23), while “difficulty engaging in casual conversations with colleagues/classmates” registered the lowest score (2.65 ± 1.32). These findings suggest that respondents experience heightened anxiety in authoritative social contexts compared to everyday casual interactions (see Fig. 3).

Inter-group differences in social anxiety (one-way ANOVA). One-way ANOVA on univariate data showed that there were significant inter-group differences in social anxiety scores at multiple time points ($p < 0.001$). The I-type individuals had the highest overall average score compared with that of E-type; The uncertain type was in a range between these two types. The main dimensions' Differences are listed below :

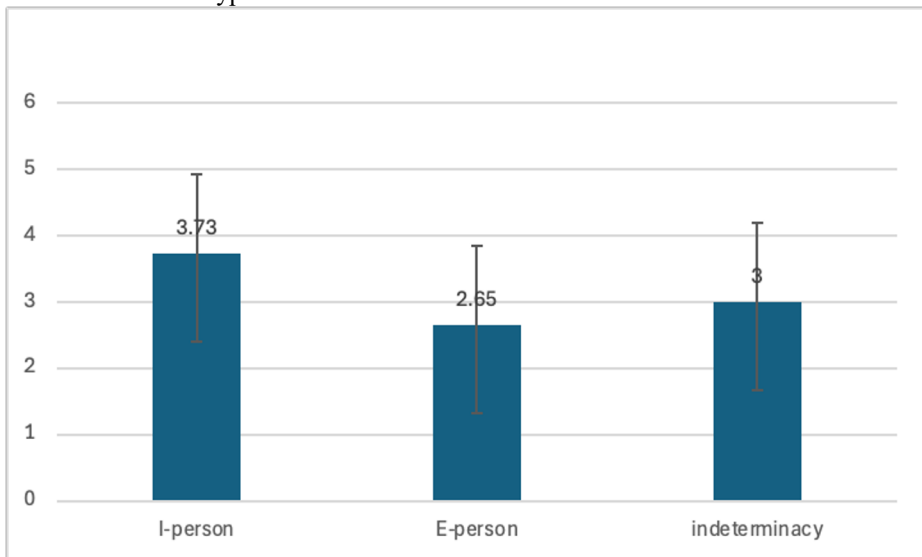


Fig. 3. Social avoidance scores (Picture credit:Original).

In terms of variation size, there was a significant difference between inter-groups for three aspects: "Consciousness of Social Expression", "Nervousness in Conversations With Strangers" and "Difficulty Enjoying Social Situations"; On average, the score of I-type people was significantly higher compared to that of E-type people; It is evident from this that social anxiety among introverted groups mainly appears under unknown contexts, worries about performing socially, and perceiving their entire experience of society.

5 Discussion

5.1 Comparison with Previous Research

The present study found a significant positive correlation between identity recognition with “I-person/E-person” labels and social avoidance ($r = 0.18$, $p < 0.01$), with autonomy threat acting as a key mediator. This finding is consistent with the results of Wu et al who surveyed 469 Chinese youth [6]. Researchers found that MBTI labels were not directly related to social anxiety; However, after introducing ego identity, sense of belonging, and impression management as mediators, there was still a significant effect. The current study further identifies “autonomy threat” as another mediator, which validates the same mechanism: the impact of labels does not act directly but acts through an intermediate psychological process, such as whether through ego identity or autonomy threat, both ultimately refer to the same central problem - that is, the “disciplining” effect of labels arises due to the intermediary interference rather than by the direct impact of the label itself (see Figure 3).

This study also echoes the warnings raised by You and Zhao and by the analysis of social interaction patterns among youth [2,3,7,9]. Under the collective mind-set of “all can be MBTI”, young people tend to become immersed in it excessively, thereby bringing risks such as rigid personal perceptions and overgeneralization. Based on the Quantity Analysis results in this study, those individuals who perceive that “I-person/E-person” labels have become an indispensable part of their self-perception tend to display socially appropriate behavior according to stereotypes-based expectation norms. However, it was not until the present research revealed that e-persons scored significantly higher (4.89) on identification than i-persons (4.48; $p=0.030$), suggesting a tendency for introversion towards more inflexible self-stereotyping based on previous expectations. A possible explanation is that in contemporary social culture, extroverted behaviors are widely recognized and encouraged; E-persons receive more positive feedback from the label (e.g., higher scores on “I am grateful to be an E-person”), making them more willing to identify with it. I persons might feel uncomfortable due to their labels and societal expectations; therefore, they tend to be less proactive about accepting these identities. This distinction suggests that their disciplinary effect differences are as follows: Different kinds of labels, those related to mainstream culture will generally be more easily tolerated; Conversely, such labeling may increase people's sense of stress.

Furthermore, the predictive power of autonomy threat for social avoidance ($R^2 = 0.638$) was much higher than that of identity recognition ($R^2 = 0.365$). This finding aligns with Self-Determination Theory which posits that the satisfaction of autonomy needs is critical for mental health and intrinsic motivation [5,10]. When autonomy is threatened, individuals not only experience discomfort but also adopt specific behavioral strategies to regain a sense of control. In this study, social avoidance may be such a strategy—it conforms to the label's stereotype (e.g., “I-persons should avoid social situations”) while helping individuals avoid further threats to their autonomy. This deepens the understanding of the mechanism behind “label disciplining”: Labels

do not affect behavior by means of passive reception; rather, it is active perception of "acting in accordance with the label leads to a sense of pressure."

5.2 2. Practical Recommendations

Based on the results, the following practical recommendations are offered for different groups:

For I-person: Reduce mandatory contact, and increase the option to choose freely.

Based on the results of this study, I-people scored significantly higher than E-people on Autonomy Threat (4.33 versus 3.65; $t = 3.22$, $P < 0.001$); therefore, there is a significant pressure among introverted people due to "imposed demands" and "forced compliance", etc., so it would be inappropriate to force an I-person into social situations, but rather give them some freedom of choice. Respect people's autonomous needs so that they can feel it is a voluntary act rather than being compelled by others; reduce the sense of autonomy threat, which decreases one's motivation for social withdrawal.

For E-person: They should be aware off the "performance pressure" of the label.

Although E-persons in this study reported lower autonomy threat and social avoidance, this does not mean they are unaffected by the label. In fact, E-persons had the highest identity recognition scores (4.89), and the proportion of "I am grateful to be an E-person" was much higher than that for I-persons. It can be inferred from this that E-people may also feel additional stress; they need to maintain their outward appearance in public situations continuously but do not necessarily have to be lively all the time internally. Thus, support for E-people needs to focus on giving them "alone times" where they are allowed some solitude rather than treating it as an expression duty.

For individuals in the uncertain group, it is advisable to facilitate exploration rather than impose categorical classifications. The uncertain group accounted for 12.92% of the sample. They scored lowest on identity recognition (3.74) but fell between I-persons and E-persons on social avoidance. This indicates that identity ambiguity itself may be a source of stress—people who are uncertain about "which type they belong to" may feel more anxious in social situations. Therefore, assistance for this group should not aim to "determine whether they are I or E," but rather to help them accept that uncertainty is normal and encourage them to adapt their behavior flexibly according to the situation, rather than being constrained by a single label.

5.3 Limitations and Future Directions

Sample Representativeness. The method of this study was online snowball sampling through WeChat and QQ. Although this approach enabled quick gathering of data, there is a possibility that individuals with interest in the topic of MBTI or those who are more socially anxious might have been inclined towards participating. In the future, a more balanced Sampling method may be used (for example, stratified sampling, Multi-stage

sampling), or university and enterprise cooperation can also help increase Sample representativeness.

Small Sample Size of the Uncertain Group. The uncertain group accounted for just 46 people (12.92%); therefore, it is not possible to examine in detail their specific features and internal differences at present. Future studies may employ various research techniques, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, to understand how people with an unknown I/E classification view their status; What obstacles have they encountered when going out? Have they received any form of assistance up to now?

Culture Context. All the participants came from China; therefore, this study's generalizable results have yet to be verified in other cultures. Culture varies in its evaluation of behavior; The standardization criteria vary across the world, with some being biased towards introversion/deference or over-emphasize self-expression/emotion extraversion, and so on. Research in the future will also focus on whether cultural background is related to this result at home.

6 Conclusion

Based on Social Identity Theory and Self-Determination Theory, this study explored the influence of identity recognition with "I-person/E-person" labels on social behavior and examined the mediating role of autonomy threat. Through a questionnaire survey of 356 young people aged 18–35, the following findings emerged:

1. Identity recognition was highly positively correlated with social avoidance; autonomy threat showed a high positive correlation with social avoidance; Identity recognition had a significant negative relationship with autonomy threats.

2. The I- persons scored significantly higher than the E- persons in autonomy threat and social avoidance; therefore, extroverted people tend to feel under pressure from being labelled and stay away from social situations.

3. The predictive power of autonomy threat for social avoidance ($R^2 = 0.638$) was much greater than that of identity recognition ($R^2 = 0.365$), suggesting that the impact of labels on social behavior operates mainly through the psychological mechanism of autonomy threat.

In light of this, the aim of this article is to uncover the psychological basis for "label discipline": After incorporating the 'I-person/E-person' label into one's own idea system and associating fixed standards thereon; when such expectation constraints weaken the person's sense of autonomy, it will motivate them with a behavior-oriented desire towards conformity. The above studies provide some new ideas for exploring the identity construction and social behavior of adolescents in today's society based on social media; they warn others to help teenagers form a rational attitude towards personality labels, avoiding their self-categorization under such labels.

The Sampling Method restricts its Representativeness; The Uncertain Group Sample Size is Small. In the future, using biased-sampling techniques can carry out cross-cultural trials.

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