Labeling theory

Labeling theory is linked to the idea that the behavior and self-concepts of an individual is determined by the labels given to him/her by the society. According to the labeling hypothesis, minorities and persons who are viewed as deviating from conventional cultural norms are more likely to be negatively labeled by the majority than acts themselves are intrinsically deviant. This labeling may ultimately shape the behavior and self-concept of the victims through internalization. Most of the time this labeling theory is effective on personal levels.

In my experience, the label of being an "introvert" did not bother me at all. I was a reserved person who always found solitude and felt more comfortable alone in my personal space rather than in spaces with large crowds. However, over time as people kept on talking about me and labeled me as “reserved” or “shy”, these descriptions began to affect my self-concept. These labels gradually began shaping the idea of my self-concept and strengthened the idea that I was naturally introverted. As a result, I saw that I was adhering more strictly to the stereotypes of introversion, such as avoiding social settings and being in my comfort zone.

The same process applies is the same when people label me as extroverted when I behave in an extroverted way. I feel a little discomfort every time I hear this description since it does not align with my introverted nature. However, instead of denying the label, though, I saw that I was progressively becoming more outgoing to live up to the standards that other people had set. My self-concept's introversion vs extroversion split was further reinforced by perceiving and owning these labels.

This personal experience illustrates how societies assign labels to individuals which eventually affect their behavior and self-concept. My self-perception, whether introverted or extroverted affects my behavior around certain individuals on different occasions. Societal labels have the power to shape the self-perception and behavior of an individual. Labeling may lead to social withdrawal due to the feeling of not being wanted or deserving, especially in societies that have high levels of social cohesion.