Institutions of Identity: A Comparative Study of Child Socialization and Consciousness

Nishika Sundrani

Research scholar, student at Ramlal Anand College, University of Delhi, nishikasundrani@gmail.com

ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
	The foundations of an individual are the direct result of socialisation process that they receive in their childhood. It is the first step to learning and internalising behaviour, attitude, value systems and consciousness. The article discusses the results of a field based study in Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh, where children belonging to a private and a government school were surveyed. This research is based on both qualitative and quantitative methods. The study explores how various socializing agents like family, school, neighbourhood and peer groups influence individuality and community consciousness among children. As family and school are the first and second socialising agent, respectively, in a child's socialization process, they help him/her to develop sense of community belongingness like love towards his/her family, culture and religion, as well as enable a child to become self dependent and confident in order to make own decisions and aspire for their own good.

Introduction

Socialization is a central mechanism through which children internalise norms and values, and behavioral expectations of the society, thereby shaping both individual and collective consciousness (Durkheim, 1912; Vygotsky, 1978). Two major environments where such a process occurs are institutional and community settings, which have different developmental effects on psychological and social outcomes of children.

Community socialization involves the mechanisms by which the children learn of social norms and culture by engaging in family life, peer interactions and at school, and through cultural activities. Community settings offer a chance to engage in mutual interaction, role modelling, and symbolic communication as opposed to institutional environments (Vygotsky, 1978).

Children internalize social rules and moral expectations and collective identities through interaction with caregivers and peers (Bandura, 1986). They do this by taking part in common rituals, language usage and joint activities to encourage a sense of belonging and moral responsibility (Durkheim, 1912). The experiences help in the formation of prosocial behavior, empathy, and social competence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This is because children are taught to regulate emotions, solve conflicts, and infer social meaning in regular human interactions and thus develop prosocial behavior and civic orientation (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bandura, 1986).

Individual consciousness encompasses the in-built sense of self in the child, emotional control, and cognition of social relationships. Relational instability and emotional deprivation in institutional care are linked to defensive psychological adaptations of emotional withdrawal, passivity, indiscriminate friendliness, and stereotyped behaviors (Ruther et al., 2010; Julian et al., 2013). There is also neurodevelopmental evidence of abnormal systems of stress response and slow cognitive development in children who face a history of long-term institutional deprivation (Nelson et al., 2011; van Ijzendoorn et al., 2011).

However, children who are raised in stable and supportive child-rearing situations, both in families and in reformed institutions, have been shown to exhibit better self-control, societal awareness, and coherent self-concepts (Bowlby, 1969; Julian et al., 2019). The time and length of deprivation are important moderators: once children have been adopted at a certain age, their rate of long-term emotional and behavioral problems increases with the severity of the depriving institutions (Julian, 2013; Colvert et al., 2008).

Collective consciousness is defined as the common systems of beliefs and values according to which the social life is governed (Durkheim, 1912). The institutions are part of the socialising agent that unofficially passes norms about authority, dependency and interpersonal distance (Goffman, 1961). Institutional hierarchies that are strict and inflicted on the child may be internalized by the child as the idea of obedience and emotional restraint and distrust as the normative patterns of socialization (Rutter et al., 2010).

On the other hand, socialization at the community level builds up collective orientations that are based on reciprocity and cooperation as well as shared responsibility (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bandura, 1986). These interactions of the initial relations form the expectation of children about social life and lead to the repetition of the wider societal values in regard to care, belonging, and moral duty (Bourdieu, 1977).

METHODOLOGY

This is a field-based research article, which contains field survey using questionnaires as data collection methodology. It includes both qualitative and quantitative analysis. It is derived from both primary sources including field surveys, and statistical data of ministries, as well as secondary sources including articles, books, documented findings of civil society organisations, journals and newspapers.

Family Dynamics and Socialization

A child raised in a family that encourages open discussions and connections with people of diverse races, religions, and ethnicities grows to see multiculturalism as a vital strength in society. In contrast, a child brought up in an environment that promotes favoritism toward their own racial or religious group learns to view multiculturalism as something to avoid. [Rothschild's 'Introduction to Sociology', 2018]

Family socialization strategies are shaped by several key factors. Belsky (1984) suggested broadly that parenting is influenced by – characteristics of the child, the wider context of stress and support surrounding the family and the personal resources of the parents. These domains work together to explain why parents differ in how they raise and interact with their children.

While conducting field survey in schools of Sagar (M.P.), it was observed that the children were mostly influenced by their parents, grandparents and siblings, who helped them in deciding their aspirations, helping them to make important decisions and supported them in every way.

On surveying a 15 year old child from a downtrodden section, it was noticed that his mother was highly vocal in answering questions on behalf of her kid. She answered questions related to his future plans, academic decisions and his interests. This shows that a child's identity, decisions and preferences are deeply embedded within his /her family structure.

School Socialization and the Formation of Individual and Community Consciousness

The school is one of the major institutional settings where socialization is systematically arranged and passed. Although the school is the most powerful secondary agent, family is the primary agent of

socialization since it establishes rules, values, and behavioral patterns that make a person a part of the social world (Mitrova and Koceva, 2024; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Schooling does not only equips children with academic skills, but also with social skills in the form of discipline, cooperation, obedience to authority and role performance (Parsons, 1951; Handel et al., 2007).

Education is not only a cognitive process but also a social process, which is aimed at equipping individuals with social integration as well as the ability to take socially acceptable roles (Durkheim, 1956; Mitrova and Koceva, 2024). Schools are how cultural models prevail and how the continuity of social life is maintained as collective values are instituted through one generation to another (Mannheim, 1952). This transmission is the foundation of personal consciousness (self-knowledge, self-identification, ambitions) as well as group consciousness (group norms, morality, belonging to a larger community).

School Socialization and Individual Consciousness.

The socialization in school is a determinant of self-concept and moral orientation in children. Children learn of expectations of success, failure, authority, and responsibility through their daily interactions with teachers and peers (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1986). The interactions help in achieving the academic identity and social self-evaluation (Erikson, 1950; Perez-Felkner et al., 2012).

Mitrova and Koceva (2024) stress that education fosters an individual to comprehend their identity and place in the society, which allows them to build personal identity by engaging in social interactions. The school experience is closely connected to the cognitive and moral developments as children get to know about socially accepted norms of right and wrong (Piaget, 2000; Kohlberg, 2012). The institutional feedback also has the effect of making children feel competent or marginal and affects their future aspirations and views of the world in the long run (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bourdieu, 1984).

Additionally, there is school socialization, which entails individuation as well as conformity. Although schools convey the hegemonic values, a person can be creative and critical and grow to have their own sense of self-sufficiency and agency (Mitrova and Koceva, 2024; Rogoff, 2003). Therefore, personal consciousness is the result of the conflict between social adaptation and self-construction.

School Socialization and Community (Collective) Consciousness

Schools at the collective level also help develop community consciousness through developing shared meanings, civic norms, and continuity of culture (Parsons, 1951; Durkheim, 1956). Children learn to

interpret the world using a shared framework of meaning, which facilitates social unity through practices, rituals, and curricula (Mitrova & Koceva, 2024).

Nevertheless, social stratification is also manifested in school socialization. The success of schooling and the reproduction of the class-based inequalities in question depend on the cultural capital and languages learned at an early age (Bernstein, 1971; Bourdieu, 1984). The social meanings further become mediated through peer groups that form subcultures that potentially endorse or challenge the mainstream norms (Willis, 1977; Hall and Jefferson, 1976).

According to Mitrova and Koceva (2024), socialization encompasses cultural assimilation and social identity formation, which connects the development of a personality with the identification with a group. As children grow to understand the rules of behavior in institutions, they also become conscious of their status in the social stratification (Young, 1971). Through this, schooling does not only influence individual paths but also collective understanding of merit, authority and legitimacy (Bowles and Gintis, 1976).

Empirical Evidence from Field Study in Sagar District (Madhya Pradesh)

Empirical findings of a field study run in two schools in the Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh one government school and one private one support the theoretical propositions of school socialization. The study clarifies the impacts of institutional practices, and socio-cultural milieus on shaping individual and collective cognitions in children differently.

The two schools exhibited a visible stance in enhancing the interest of students in extracurricular and growth activities, which underscored the fact that schools are organized agents of socialization, other than academic teaching. In the private school, teachers said that they established systematic career-guidance programs among the 10th standard students. These programs included professional counselling sessions, conducted by outside professionals, parent. student teacher conferences, whose focus was on career planning, and use of psychometric assessment tools. These practices are examples of how schools shape the views of the students towards the future in the form of self-concepts and goals, through institutionalisation of decision-making processes.

The government school, on the contrary, did not include official career-guidance programmes. However, informal career counselling among teachers was offered in the normal interaction with pupils. This effect exemplifies that informal education and day-to-day pedagogical interaction in the socialisation process occur, especially in resource-limited contexts. The observed differences between the private and

government schools highlight the importance of institutional capacity as a mediator of exposure of children to systematic guidance which determine their education paths and perceived life opportunities.

A particularly significant observation emerged from interviews with a government school teacher regarding the socio-economic and cultural barriers faced by female students. The teacher highlighted the persistence of deep-seated gender bias within families, describing an "old thinker" parental mindset that devalues girls' education and reinforces traditional gender roles. Parents were reported to discourage girls' schooling with statements such as "you are a girl, what will you do?", reflecting the internalization of patriarchal norms within household socialization.

The teacher also reported apprehension of females being left alone by parents through complaints that education might make girls independent and that they may run away. This fear shows the perception of education as a threat to power relations and gender hierarchies that have been in place and thus the community consciousness that shape the right behaviour of females. In addition, inequality was witnessed in the family system where sons would normally attend private school as daughters would either attend government schools or be trapped in domestic labour at home. These customs strengthen the stratification based on gender in educational opportunities and the unequal social statuses by the means of schooling.

Although these limitations existed, the educator focused on the strength and untapped potential of the students, assuming that they were a "blank slate" or "kora kagaz" that could be positively affected and changed. The observation fits the views of symbolic interactionists who view children as agents of meaning-making that can rebuild identity via social interaction. It also confirms that school socialisation can serve as a corrective process against constraining family norms by providing alternative value systems and possibilities of the future.

Socialization Through Neighbourhood Contexts

Socialisation in neighbourhood is a key aspect of child development, as it influences the consciousness of individuals as well as identities that have community orientations. Based on the extensive overview of Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000), neighbourhoods are not just physical environments but organised social settings that convey norms, regulate behaviour as well as allocate resources, and thus have an impact on the cognitive, emotional, and social performance of children. The authors place the neighbourhood effects in a larger historical and theoretical path, relating the early social disorganisation theory (Shaw and McKay, 1942) with the current developmental theories. The social disorganisation

theory proposes that poverty, residential instability, single parent household, and ethnic heterogeneity are structural features that deter local social organisation, and as a result, reduce informal social control and collective regulation of juvenile behaviour (Sampson, 1992; Sampson and Groves, 1989). As a result, neighbourhood socialisation is also based on the ability or inability of communities to sustain order and common norms hence has a direct impact on the development of children behaviour and their moral conscience.

The preceding theoretical work by Jencks and Mayer (1990) is further elaborated by Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000) who combine the neighbourhood influence into three main directions, i.e. institutional resources, relationships and norms/ collective efficacy. Institutional resources are the quality and availability of schools, libraries, parks, community centres and policing resources. The higher the socioeconomic status (SES) of neighbourhoods, the greater the enriched learning environment and organized social opportunities in neighbourhoods, which lead to cognitive competence and academic performance among children. Empirical evidence that has been consulted in the article shows that high-SES neighbourhoods are positively related to the IQ scores of children, to verbal and reading success, and to educational attainment despite family-level characteristics (Brooks-Gunn et al.). These results imply that neighbourhood prosperity makes people more conscious through the promotion of aspirations, academic motivation, self-efficacy, and increasing perceived life opportunities in children.

On the other hand, neighbourhoods with high rates of poverty and residential instability are also likely to expose children to pathophysiological processes that are cumulative and increase their susceptibility to behavioural and emotional disturbances (Rutter, 1989; Sameroff et al., 1993). The low-SES neighbourhoods have often been linked to poorer institutional capacity and lack of collective monitoring to aid in externalising behaviours and lower academic outcomes. The nature of economic segregation of urban poor population as observed by Wilson (1987) in his analysis emphasizes the fact that social isolation increases the lack of exposure to a variety of role models and mainstream job options among children. Massey and Denton (1993) also suggest that the spatial inequalities that are deeply entrenched have been perpetuated by the housing policies and racial segregation which has had a disproportionate effect on the children of the minorities. Neighbourhood socialisation under deprivation conditions can therefore entrench constrained goals, defensive readjustments or resistant identities hence developing both personal and collective consciousness restrictively.

The relational aspect of influence of neighbourhood highlights the role of adult role models, peer networks, and informal supervision. Collective socialization models underline that the behavioural

standards are internalized by children as they interact with responsible adults who control youth activities and behaviors and direct them (Jencks and Mayer, 1990). In neighbourhood based studies, surveys and systematic social observations of communities show that, more collective efficacy is related to strong informal social control and low rates of youth problem behaviours. The neighbourhoods through these mechanisms influence the knowledge of children on social responsibility, cooperation and civic obligation which are elemental aspects of community consciousness.

The ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1989) makes the developmental explanation of neighbourhood effects even more powerful, by placing children in the context of layers of influence. Working within the mesosystem and exosystem are neighbourhoods which interact with family, school, and peer systems. Significantly, Leventhal and Brooks -Gunn (2000) point out that neighbourhood processes operate within numerous levels, including individual, family, peer, school, and community, which defines that the socialization is both direct and mediated. As an example, neighbourhood disadvantage can have an impact on parental stress and monitoring, which subsequently impact on behavioural outcomes of children. On the same note, peer contagion models indicate that exposure to deviant peers has the potential of normalizing deviant behaviours, which strengthens behavioural patterns in a collective manner (Jencks and Mayer, 1990). So, socialization in the neighbourhood is dynamic and mutually active as it entails person context interactions and not one directional influence.

The field study conducted in Sagar district strengthens the theoretical framework proposed by Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000), particularly regarding neighbourhood socialization through relationships and norms. Children from government schools frequently referred to successful neighbours as role models, such as a police officer—"Paas waale uncle, jo police me hain, unki tarah ban na hai." This reflects the collective socialization model (Jencks & Mayer, 1990), where visible adult achievements shape children's aspirations and future orientation. Such role models function as agents of informal guidance, reinforcing socially valued goals and contributing to children's civic and occupational consciousness. The influence of an elder sister cited by one child further illustrates Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological perspective, where family and neighbourhood contexts interact to shape moral and personal development.

The variations in the conception of "community sense" among children demonstrate opposing identity constructions among children based on socioeconomic status. The elite children focused on individualistic identities, in terms of gender, caste, or regional affiliation, which implied a self–differentiation consciousness that was conditioned by comparatively safe surroundings. Lower socioeconomic children on the other hand showed collective identities like "Bharat ki rehne waali hu",

which means nationalistic sense of belonging. This can be viewed in relation to the concept that those neighbourhoods that are underprivileged can provide collective unity and identity (Sampson, 1992; Sampson et al., 1997).

Altogether, neighbourhood socialisation works in terms of structural, relational and normative process which impacts on individual growth and community orientation. Neighbourhoods which are well-endowed, united and integrated facilitate academic competence, social responsibility and future aspirations, intensifying individual efficacy and community membership. Structurally disadvantaged neighbourhoods, typified by focussed poverty, instability and compromised social organisation, can obstruct cognitive development and lead to behavioural maladjustment, contributing to increasingly constrained or discontinuous sense of community, in contrast.

Socialisation through Peer Groups

Peer group socialisation is one of the most important areas where the child learns to be morally reasonable, emotionally controlled, identify with a group and work as a member of a collective consciousness. Although classroom dialogues research like that by Asta Cekaite can be understood in the way the teacher mediates the interaction between the peers, a more comprehensive perspective needs the sociological, developmental, and cultural approaches.

In his argument, sociologist William A. Corsaro holds that children do not passively receive the culture of adults but rather that they produce what he refers to as "interpretive reproduction". It is during peer interaction that children adopt the norms as used by adults but reinterpret them in their own culture by the peers. Within this paradigm, peer groups are semi-autonomous social systems in which: Shared rules are created, Power hierarchies are created, Inclusion practices and exclusion practices are negotiated, Joint meanings are produced. Peer socialisation therefore does not involve adult moral correction but is a collaborative meaning-making that brings about the community consciousness among the children.

Developmental psychology, Jean Piaget and subsequently Lawrence Kohlberg stressed on peer interaction as the key element of moral development. In contrast to the adult adult child relations that are mostly hierarchical, peer relations are characterised by relative equality. The result of this equality includes: Negotiation of rules, Perspective-taking, Cooperative problem-solving and Development of moral reciprocity. Piaget had maintained that peer disagreement encourages cognitive decentering, the faculty of viewing things through the eyes of another, which is core to moral thinking that is community responsive.

Expanding on the idea of interactional sociology, Erving Goffman makes emphases on social identity and accountability negotiation in our daily interactions. Face-work, Blame management, and Moral positioning are all practices used in peer disputes by children. The findings made by Cekaite concur with this tradition except that the application of Goffman enhances the theoretical richness by putting peer conflict within the context of the public display of moral identity.

Equally, in her ethnography of children playgrounds, Barrie Thorne shows how peer groups in playgrounds create and challenge social groupings in terms of gender, power and belonging. Children acquire early social knowledge of hierarchy and group integrity through the daily peer communication.

Allison James and Alan Prout have conducted research in the Sociology of Childhood and found that peer groups are arenas of power negotiation. The practices of inclusion and exclusion influence: the self esteem of the individual, the unity of the group, and the control of norms.

The results of the Sagar field investigation also support this point of view: the majority of students, boys of higher standards in particular, tended to study in groups instead of an individual one and this proves the significance of collaboration in groups and academic activity. They also indicated that they preferred to hold parties and trips with friends and this means that peer relations have spilled over to the recreational and identity-forming areas. Nonetheless, these interactions were kept in check by parents by restricting time and focusing on academic concentration, which underscored the bargain between peer culture and the family authority. Boys and girls were noticed to be treated differently in that boys were free to play with peers but they were compelled to get home earlier and especially within private schools being expected to perform academically and be successful in life and how peer involvement is influenced by gender based norms.

Therefore, peer socialisation not only helps in the development of an individual but also the replication of social structures at the micro-levels.

Comparative Analysis of Elite and Slum Children's Socialization

The mechanisms of socialisation between children in elite and slum backgrounds vary significantly in their form, vigor, control and prospect whereas the two are subject to the impact of schools, neighbourhood settings and peer group cultures. Socioculturally speaking, children do internalize norms and identities during their participation in the quotidian social practices (Vygotsky; Rogoff). However, these practices have different manifestations depending on the socioeconomic background and produce different types of individual and community consciousness.

Schools serve as extremely disciplined institutional environments in elite settings which focus on academic excellence, discipline and achievement-oriented identities. The atmosphere of private schooling often cultivates the dreams of social and professional achievement, and competition, especially through the expectation of girls to become great in life. These environments are compatible with institutional moral regulation where the interactions between peers are regulated and focused on productive cooperation, including group study and structured extra-curricular activities (Cekaite; Wortham). Elite children peer groups generally orbit around academic collaboration, scheduled leisure (parties, trips) and organized social networking, thus creating a group identity based on success and desire. The peer interactions are, however, closely controlled by the parents, who impose time limits and focus more on academics thus creating socialization which balances peer cohesion with parental authority and create a community consciousness that balances autonomy with performance based responsibility (Mead).

In elite contexts, the impact of neighbourhood is more or less selective and restricted. The social processes take place in structured areas- clubs, tuition centers, residential complexes where the exposure to danger is reduced. Consequently, school and family often have their moral practices reinforced in a consistent fashion which results in a consistent value system that is centred on achievement, respectability, and future orientation (Bourdieu). Such contexts are then community conscious based on collective aspirations and continuing socioeconomic dynamism.

Conversely, neighbourhoods and peer culture have a more intensively socialising influence on children in slum environments because institutions are less tightly regulated, and their exposure to informal processes is increased. Schools can offer ethical and academic structures but the impact of the school is competing against the realities of crowded neighbourhoods where peer interaction is extensive and unplanned and less controlled. In slummish settings, peer groups often make up the main areas of belonging, protection, and identity formation, which at times replace the lack of institutional support. The peer group of slum children can be based on their experience in surviving, playing on the streets, informally, and mutually supporting each other, unlike elite children, whose interactions with peers are organized around academic cooperation.

The neighbourhood conditions in the slums have great impact on behaviour standards, language, resilience, and authority view. Economic difficulty and social exposure can speed up maturity and group solidarity, but can also subject children to strife and danger, as well as to other sets of moral rules adopted due to neediness and not institutional discipline (James and Prout). In such contextual settings,

community consciousness is frequently based on collective struggle and reliance, and not competition and success.

Gender regulation does not come in the same way too. Girls in both elite and slum contexts have more mobility limits imposed upon them, but elite girls are also facing more high academic demands and organized pathways to success, and slum girls might be facing more restrictions related to their safety issues and conventional gender roles (Thorne). In turn, the identities of both groups undergo gendered socialisation, but the ambition and institutional aspiration shape the identity of elite girls, and the protection-oriented social control could be more important to slum girls.

In general, the socialisation of elite children is institutionally mediated, long-term, achievement-oriented and associated with peer groups which strengthen the academic teamwork regulated by parents. The socialisation of slum children, in their turn, is more neighbourhood-oriented, peer-based and influenced by direct socioeconomic reality, and results in high group cohesion but less institutional control. As in the two instances, peer groups continue to play a key role in identity formation and community awareness, but what kind of consciousness that is: competitive and aspirational or solidaristic and survival-oriented, is a measure of some greater structural imbalances inherent in social ecologies.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, institutional and community socialisation are closely related processes in which children attain moral values, social identities, emotional regulation, and community consciousness. Schools are formal organizations which convey the norms, discipline, achievement orientations, and expectations of responsible citizenship in a systematic manner (Vygotsky; Bourdieu). Children learn to cooperate, be accountable and respecting of those rules of the group through interaction in the classroom, evaluation and structured activities. Meanwhile, neighbourhood places offer informal yet powerful contexts of learning, in which day to day lives present children with shared cultural practices, local moral, and social behavioural patterns that define belonging and identity (James and Prout).

However, since socialisation is operated by socialeconomic differences and the diverse institutional capacities, there is a need to act with purposeful policies so as to bring out balanced developmental prospects. The first one is the introduction of formal socio-emotional learning (SEL) programmes in schools, which affirmatively impart skills of empathy, conflict management and teamwork, thus enhancing positive peer cultures in different environments. Second, neighbourhood-based programmes like safe neighbourhood playgrounds, youth clubs and after-school programmes must be instituted to

offer supervised and constructive peer interaction especially where resources are under-resourced. Third, parent-school partnership programmes must be strengthened to equalize the institutional and family expectations so that the academic ambitions should be held in proportion to the healthy social growth. Fourth, the mobility and unequal expectation should be tackled in the gender-sensitive policy whereby both boys and girls should have a chance to engage in peer and community activities in safe and equal ways. Fifth, inclusive education policies should be aimed at ensuring that the socioeconomic gap is narrowed through investing in effective school facilities, trained counsellors, and mentorship systems within the marginalised communities.

Therefore, although schools, neighbourhoods and peer groups constitute a natural way of influencing the socialisation of children, deliberate policy structures can increase positive socialisation, reduce inequality and create a coherent, empathetic and socially responsible future citizen.

Acknowledgments

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