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Socialization Pathways to Dropout : Looking Glass selves Among Kathmandu Youth.

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Abstract: This case study examines the divergent socialization trajectories of two lower-middle-class boys, Utsav and Abinash Tamang, from a remote Nepali village, admitted to a Kathmandu government school in grade 6. Through the lens of socialization theory and personality development, it explores how peer groups, family responses, and self-perception influenced Abinash's dropout at grade 10 and migration to Malaysia as a laborer at age 17, versus Utsav's persistence in schooling. Drawing on Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934), the study highlights anticipatory socialization into deviant subcultures versus reintegrative family socialization, underscoring class and urban-rural dynamics in Nepal's educational context.

Keywords: *Socialization, personality development, anticipatory socialization, integrative, School dropout; Looking-Glass Self; Peer groups; Migration; Deviance.*

1. Introduction

Socialization shapes personality by internalizing societal norms, as George Herbert Mead (1934) describes through "Role-taking," where individuals adopt others' perspectives to form a "generalized other." Charles Horton Cooley's (1902) "Looking-Glass Self" further posits that self-concept emerges from perceived appraisals by significant others like peers and family. In adolescent personality development, Erik Erikson (1968) identifies the identity vs. role confusion stage, where youth navigate conflicting influences amid economic pressures. Sociological research has emphasized that dropout is not a single event but a cumulative process shaped by family, school, and peer contexts (Sharma, 2014).

In Nepal, school dropout rates exceed 20% in urban government schools, often linked to poverty, migration, and substance use among lower-middle-class rural migrants (Ministry of Education, Nepal, 2023). This study analyzes Utsav and Abinash Tamang, best

friends from the same village, with fathers abroad and mothers in informal work (Utsav's marketing textiles; Abinash's brokering property) to illustrate divergent socialization forms: deviant peer-driven vs. resilient family-mediated paths. The zero punishment and child rights sometimes deviates the children beyond the interest of parents to drive them in the formal education. Somewhere parents forget their responsibilities of role taking, same as the children did.

In peer-dominated adolescent cultures, behaviors such as smoking or experimentation with drugs become markers of acceptance and status (Mehta, 2011). They got the same type of companionship as per their choice. Later this choice becomes compulsion for the children as per their habits.

2. Methodology

This qualitative case study relies on a narrative interview excerpt from Utsav Tamang about his friend Abinash, collected in Kathmandu (2026). Thematic analysis applies

socialization theory, with direct quotes as primary data. Ethical considerations include anonymity and consent implied in the biographical sharing.

The study employs a qualitative case study method, drawing on a narrative interview with Utsav Tamang regarding his and Abinash Tamang's educational trajectories from Grade 6 to Grade 10 in Kathmandu. Case study methodology is appropriate for understanding subjective meanings, identity construction, and day to day life socialization processes in dropout pathways (Patel, 2010). The analysis is interpretive and sociological, focusing on social contexts rather than individual pathology (Singh, 2012).

3. Case Narration → Pathway of Socialization

3.1 *Shared Primary Socialization and Deviant Peer Influence*

Both boys, relocated to Kathmandu for grade 6, underwent anticipatory socialization into a deviant peer subculture. Utsav noted: "They were habituated of smoking after grade 7 when they used to be with their government school students. At the beginning of grade 8, they experienced with the weeds (opium) with their school colleagues." This aligns with Differential Association Theory (Sutherland, 1947), where peers transmit delinquent norms. Substance escalation—"the journey of smoking to weeds consuming grew vigorously with the colleagues"—introduced unknown powders mixed with drinks, costing over 1,000 NPR, beyond their financial reach. Such peer-mediated experimentation reflects Mead's (1934) play stage extending into adolescence, fostering a "generalized other" of rebellion over academic roles.

3.2 *Family Responses and Divergent Secondary Socialization*

Family reactions diverged, shaping "looking-glass self" reflections. Utsav recalled: "First time when parents of both knew about their this habit, Utsav was bitten hardly, where as Abinash was just given counseled." Utsav's harsh discipline reinforced negative self-

appraisal but spurred change, while Abinash's lenient counseling failed: "both the idea to them didn't work." Subsequent "true counseling" lasted "hardly for 24hrs," leading to school irregularity—Abinash's attendance "more worst then Utsav." Parents withheld pocket money, prioritizing "regularity in formal school education till school level [class 12]."

Abinash internalized a dropout identity via casual labor (party palace bar boy at 800 NPR/day; hard labor at 1,000 NPR/day; brief plantation work), embodying role confusion (Erikson, 1968). Utsav reflected: "Utsav realized that by this sort of work, it will be harder and is only good enough for the addition. He planned to quiet with very strong determination." Utsav persisted, smoking privately in "loneliness only," and joined a new school in grade 10. Abinash briefly mimicked this—parents bought him a mobile phone—but ultimately dropped out mid-grade 10, sent to Malaysia as a laborer amid parental "care and screaming."

4. Personality Development Outcomes

Utsav's path exemplifies resocialization: concealing habits with "chewing gum and some scented green grasses," seeking shelters during binges, and transitioning to a "student" identity, delighting his parents. Abinash's trajectory reflects entrenched deviant socialization, culminating in labor migration. These forms highlight class constraints—lower-middle-class rural migrants face urban peer temptations without robust support, per Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital deficits.

5. Discussion

Both adolescents belonged to lower-middle-class families with fathers working abroad, leading to limited everyday supervision. Research shows that transnational labor migration weakens parental monitoring and increases adolescents' vulnerability to peer influence (Sharma, 2014). The economic precarity of mothers' informal employment further constrained consistent discipline and emotional support (Kumar, 2015).

Entry into government schools in Kathmandu exposed both youths to peer cultures where smoking and experimentation with substances were normalized. Through the Looking-Glass Self, Abinash and Utsav began to see themselves as “modern” and socially accepted within peer groups when engaging in such behaviors (Mehta, 2011). Peer approval reinforced deviant conduct, while parental punishment failed to reshape self-concepts, demonstrating the dominance of peer-based secondary socialization (Rao, 2016).

Gradual absenteeism and declining academic commitment marked the early stages of dropout, especially in Abinash’s case. Sociological studies show that repeated irregularity produces alienation from school culture, making dropout a rationalized choice rather than a sudden decision (Khan, 2018). Engagement in casual labor further displaced schooling as youths encountered alternative, albeit precarious, economic roles (Patil, 2013).

Utsav’s eventual reintegration into schooling reflects the role of reflexive agency a re-evaluation of life chances after experiencing the harshness of informal labor. In contrast, Abinash’s transition into migrant labor in Malaysia illustrates structural constraints that channel marginalized youth into transnational labor markets (Singh, 2012). These divergent pathways highlight how agency operates within unequal social structures rather than independently of them (Patel, 2010).

The cases reveal socialization as bidirectional: peers accelerated deviance, but family agency (discipline vs. leniency) determined divergence. Utsav's "strong determination" mirrors Cooley's (1902) selective self-perception, rejecting labor's looking-glass of failure. Abinash's path underscores structural traps in Kathmandu's schools, where 17-year-old dropouts enter global labor markets (ILO, 2024). Policy implications include peer-intervention programs and family counseling to bolster secondary socialization.

6. Conclusion

The case study demonstrates that school

dropout among Kathmandu youth is a socially constructed process shaped by peer socialization, transnational family arrangements, and fragile school attachment. The Looking-Glass Self operates as a micro-level mechanism through which peer recognition becomes more salient than institutional norms. Effective policy interventions must therefore move beyond punitive discipline and address peer cultures, family–school linkages, and youth identity formation (Kumar, 2015; Rao, 2016).

This study demonstrates how socialization theory illuminates dropout dynamics: deviant peers foster role confusion, while familial reintegration builds identity coherence. Utsav's success versus Abinash's migration calls for targeted interventions in Nepal's urban schools.

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