FACTORS OF LEGAL SOCIALIZATION OF ADOLESCENTS

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The thesis surveys the current state of the field of legal socialization. Two underlying themes govern the selection and exposition of materials: understanding the meaning and importance of specific research findings about legal socialization and linking these findings to classical theoretical and empirical research on legal socialization and socialization processes in general.

Legal socialization is the process through which, individuals acquire attitudes and beliefs about the law, legal authorities and legal institutions. This occurs through individual‘s interactions, both personal and vicarious, with police, courts and other legal actors. To date, most of what is known about legal socialization comes from studies of individual differences among adults in their perceived legitimacy of law and legal institutions and in their cynicism about the law and its underlying norms, adult‘s attitudes about the legitimacy of law are directly tied to individual‘s compliance with the law and cooperation with legal authorities.[1]

Legal socialization consists of an individual's attitudes toward the legal system (referred to as legitimacy), the law (legal cynicism) and moral codes that guide behaviour (moral disengagement).

Theories of **legal socialization** can be classified as either content or process models. Although process models are important, the present paper suggests they suffer from two major misconceptions: (1) a lack of interest in the behavioral consequences of legal judgments and (2) the assumption that judgments are the cause of actions. An alternative model for understanding the processes underlying legal socialization is presented. The model suggests that man is a rule-following animal and these tendencies reflect human biology and promote human survival.

Within the framework of this model we present an analysis of the sociopsychological conditions that enable law to be used as an instrument of social reform. This analysis raises serious questions concerning the possibility of using the law for these purposes.

Research on children and the law has recently renewed its focus on the development of children's ties to law and legal actors. We identify the developmental process through which these relations develop as *legal socialization*, a process that unfolds during childhood and adolescence as part of a vector of developmental capital that promotes compliance with the law and cooperation with legal actors. In this paper, we show that ties to the law and perceptions of law and legal actors among children and adolescents change over time and age. We show that neighborhood contexts and experiences with legal actors shape the outcomes of legal socialization. Children report lower ratings of legitimacy of the law and greater legal cynicism when they view interactions with legal actors as unfair and harsh. We show that perceived legitimacy of law and legal authorities shapes compliance with the law and that these effects covary with social contexts including neighborhood. We identify neighborhood differences in this relationship that reflect differential experiences of children with criminal justice authorities and other social control agents. The results suggest that legal actors may play a role in socialization processes that lead to compliance with or rejection of legal and social norms.