

Filipino Children's Social Construction of Socioeconomic Differences: Everyday Realities of Street Children and Private School Children

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Abstract

Starting with the author's encounter with a stone-throwing incident, which involved different socioeconomic groups of children—street children and private school children—at Katipunan Avenue, this article seeks to understand the processes by which these two groups of children come to know about socioeconomic differences in their everyday lives. It first describes the avenue as an interface situation where encounters between street children and private school children are likely to happen. It subsequently clarifies the modes and the contents of children's knowledge construction of the other at the interface situation.

Three findings are drawn from data gathered through key informant interviews and observations. One, children construct their common-sense knowledge of the other as they adjust to or reconcile with their own socioeconomic positions. Two, the ongoing process of knowledge construction involves the reinforcement of their understanding through actual encounters between the two groups and under the influence of other people and elements that are directly and indirectly related to interface encounters. Ultimately, the children themselves actively maintain social reality of socioeconomic differences.

Introduction

In any bustling street in urban areas of the Philippines, we would easily encounter the sight of poor children wandering around the street and begging for coins or food. This sight contrasts vividly with the affluence of those who can enjoy the prosperity of places surrounded by fancy shops and exclusive subdivisions.

Along Katipunan Avenue, the road in front of Ateneo de Manila University, we similarly see a variety of fast-food

restaurants, modern condominiums and buildings. Elegant cars, waiting in front of the shops or fetching students from the private schools, accumulate along this avenue and hinder pedestrians from walking smoothly and safely on the sidewalk. Some of these students stop in Starbucks, drinking expensive coffee and chatting with their friends while smoking cigarettes. Others look for their favorite stationeries and books needed in school at National Book Store.

A few feet away from these scenes, however, young adults sell cigarettes and

fishballs on makeshift stands on the street or drive tricycles. There are also groups of children selling sampaguita (garlands of flowers) or begging for coins from passers-by. The so-called street children wander around and wait for people and cars in front of shops such as McDonald's, Shakey's, National Book Store, and Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) to beg for little money. They mostly do this at nighttime, but also sometimes throughout the day.

Place after place, the security guards of the shops and schools keep the shabby street children away, while inside the glass doors, children from the private schools eat their meals or snacks and pay no attention to the street children outside. On their way to air-conditioned cars, these private school children are oblivious to the presence of the street children.

My observation of this dichotomy in the city began with one incident I encountered at Katipunan Avenue, which involved a group of school children from Kostka School of Quezon City, a private Catholic school located at Katipunan Avenue, and a group of street children wandering around to earn a living along the avenue. The students inside the gate of the school were making fun of the street children outside. I observed that the street children were getting mad or embarrassed by the insults aimed at them, so they retaliated against the private school children by throwing stones at them.

This shocking incident led me to the central question of a study, upon which this article is based: How do Filipino children (specifically of Katipunan Avenue), coming from two different socioeconomic backgrounds, come to know about socioeconomic differences in everyday lives?¹ To answer this central question, this study pursues the following specific questions:

- 1) How does each group of children come to know the socioeconomic differences between the other group and their own?
- 2) What do they commonly know or understand about the other group in relation to socioeconomic differences?

This article constructs an urban ethnography of two opposite socioeconomic groups of Filipino children—street children and private school children—around Katipunan Avenue. By describing the everyday realities of these two groups of children, this article arrives at an understanding of socioeconomic relations between the poor and the rich Filipino children.

Significance

This present article contributes theoretically and practically to the following fields: first, the area of child socialization, and second, social development studies particularly on the issue of social inequality in the Philippines.

First, the article specifically looks at the influence of socioeconomic positions on child development. Moreover, it aims to complement existing works on child socialization, which have dominantly maintained structural functionalist accounts of child socialization. Socialization of children is usually explained as a molding process of social roles succeeded to 'immature' children by adults (Elkin 1960, 1984, Isaacs 1974, Jocano 2002, Lagmay 1983, Shimizu 1993, Ventura 1991). This immaturity of children is also often assumed to be universal. Therefore, the existing studies on child socialization have ignored children as active participants of social worlds. Although some scholars (Kohn 1959 & 1963, Lewis 1966a, 1966b, Wright and Wright 1976) paid attention to differential socialization of children according to socioeconomic positions, their analyses still retained the conventional view of socialization as a molding process carried out by adults (e.g., the differences in parents' values and ways of child rearing between upper- and lower-class). Utilizing the perspective of the social construction of reality and the grounded theory approach in collecting the data, the present article gives more attention to the various processes of knowledge construction by different socioeconomic groups of children as the main social actors.

Second, the article looks in particular at children's subjective awareness of socioeconomic relations in their everyday lives. The works on poverty, particularly those

working on issues about street children, do not adequately address the issue of socioeconomic differences in society. In other words, existing studies give little attention to the awareness and behavior of the wealthier members of society including children, although Bautista (2002) clarifies the existence of a population of middle classes. A number of works regarding poverty issues, however, have primarily explained the characteristics of the poor in examining poverty (Kerbo 1991), not those of the rich. Moreover, the studies on social inequality rarely examine children's understanding of socioeconomic relations. Kerkvliet (1990), for example, studies the resistance of the poor in everyday politics by investigating socioeconomic relations of society in a rural area of the Philippines, stating how the poor (peasants and workers) understand the wealthier people (mainly capitalists), and vice versa. But his study does not particularly talk about children's understandings. If the perception of socioeconomic differences among children was examined, it was done with quantitative methods. In other studies, the ability to perceive social differences according to age, sex, and social status of parents (Johoda 1959), the timing and the manner by which children employ concepts of social inequality in their environment (Baldus and Tribe 1978) were statistically measured. This article, however, presents the children's subjective and interactive realities of socioeconomic relations according to their socioeconomic backgrounds using thick description.

No study focuses comprehensively on the process in which children from different socioeconomic groups come to understand socioeconomic differences and behave accordingly. Therefore, the study, upon which this article is based, is important because it deals more with how children themselves develop their knowledge (understanding, thinking and feeling) and behavior towards socioeconomic differences in the larger society. It also offers insights on the way wealthier children perceive street children and their own status, and behave accordingly while interacting with them. It is quite important for us to look at how children in higher socioeconomic positions in this country develop their awareness and sense of accountability towards other members of society. This question leads us to consider the extent of the elite's awareness of social inequality in this country and the manner in which their understanding of these issues are carried over to the next generation in constructing future socioeconomic relations.

A Framework for Understanding Encounters Between Children from Different Socioeconomic Groups

Children are active social actors who continuously construct knowledge in their everyday lives. As a theoretical anchor for this argument, two relevant concepts are utilized in this article: social construction of

reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966) and interface situations (Long 1992).

Social Construction of Common-sense Knowledge

Berger and Luckmann (1966) analyze the reality of everyday life. To understand the world of everyday life, they clarify the foundations of knowledge that are taken for granted as common sense by ordinary members of society as they conduct their everyday lives.

The reality of everyday life presents itself as an intersubjective world, a world that the individual shares with others. This intersubjective common-sense world is constructed through objectifications of subjective processes such as an ongoing correspondence between the individual's and others' meanings in face-to-face encounters in everyday life. Thus, common-sense knowledge is knowledge about the reality that is experienced by the wide-awake or conscious individual, which one shares with others in the normal, self-evident routines of everyday life.

Berger and Luckman (1966) propose social interactions in the face-to-face setting as the most important forms in which to experience and interpret others' subjectivity. The knowledge of others as a result of such social encounters becomes typified into routines or patterns in everyday life. The reality of everyday life

thus contains such typifications, which in turn determine one's understanding and actions toward others when he or she deals with them in face-to-face encounters. Common-sense knowledge is constructed by entering into ongoing negotiation (modification and reinforcement) in these face-to-face situations until it becomes objective.

Interface Situations

Long (1992) elaborates on Berger and Luckmann's ideas of the social construction of knowledge. He develops an actor-oriented approach, which builds upon theoretical work aimed at reconciling structure and actor. The actor-oriented approach is thus to understand experiences and understandings of various kinds of people in their everyday life.

From an actor-oriented perspective, Long proposes the concept of interface situations where the different life-worlds or domains interact and interpenetrate one another based on social discontinuities of interests, values, knowledge and practices. It brings about an understanding of the processes by which knowledge is actively constructed, negotiated and jointly created through various types of social encounters among specific actors.

Research Design

The study, which forms the basis of this article, applies the grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 1998) in gathering and analyzing data. Grounded theory is a strategy of developing a theory which is derived from data systematically gathered and analyzed throughout the whole research process. Once the researcher goes out to the field for data gathering based on the initial concepts derived from experience and literature, she identifies concepts that emerge from analyzing empirical data and adjusts her interviewing and observing to focus on the most relevant relationship. All procedures of 'theoretical sampling' (Corbin and Strauss 1998) are repetitions of such steps, aimed at identifying, developing and relating concepts during the research process. This methodology enables the researcher not only to build a theory derived from data, but also to ground that theory in the everyday life of people.

Data Collection Methods

The initial concepts based on the researcher's experience of observing the actual encounter between the two groups of children and literature review determined the kinds of data to be gathered and the methods of collecting the data.



The researcher conducted field research mainly in Katipunan Avenue, in squatter areas, at Kotska school and child key informants homes for five months, from the middle of November 2002 to the middle of April 2003. Four sets of data were gathered and analyzed simultaneously during the research period, namely, 1) physical and socioeconomic characteristics of Katipunan Avenue, 2) socioeconomic positions of the two groups of children, 3) children's knowledge of socioeconomic differences between the other and their own, and 4) modes of children's knowledge construction with regard to socioeconomic differences at an interface situation. The data-collection methods used for the study are: participant observations, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and secondary data collection.

There were five phases in conducting the study. In the first phase, secondary data collection, observation and mapping of the site, and in-depth interviews with key informants were carried out. In the next phase, the researcher familiarized herself with the areas where the two groups of children conduct their everyday activities and identified the subject children. In the third phase, selection of specific key informants from each group of children, in-depth interviews (semi-structured) and focus group discussions (only for street children) were undertaken. In the fourth phase, in-depth interviews (semi-

structured) with parents of the children and observation of their home dynamics were made. And in the final phase, data that were insufficient were completed. Throughout the whole research process, theoretical sampling was conducted, which was the iterative identifying key concepts from empirical data and adjusting research methods and processes to real situations reflected in the empirical data.

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework uses the concept of social interfaces to highlight children as active agents who participate in constructing their own social lives, specifically in constructing their common-sense knowledge with regard to socioeconomic differences. Socioeconomic differences give a different context to each group of children in conducting their everyday life. Two groups of children—street children and private school children—who have different socioeconomic backgrounds, meet and interact with one another at the interface situation. Through these actual interactions between the two groups, they actively construct their knowledge of the other.² The understanding of the other, in turn, influences their attitudes at the interface situation. Objective organizations such as rules on the streets and moral education are also described as important elements that affect children in constructing their knowledge of the other.

Katipunan Avenue as an Interface Situation

The dynamics around Katipunan Avenue can be viewed as an interface situation where encounters between street children and private school children are likely to happen. This interface situation includes other social actors who are directly or indirectly related to their interactions (i.e., barangay officials, NGO workers, and security guards).

Katipunan Avenue has a certain physical and socioeconomic structure that creates the interface situation especially in the stretch from Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) to McDonald's—where commercial prosperity and elite private education exist together with poverty and disadvantage.³

The avenue is a center of commercial activities in Barangay Loyola Heights.⁴ There is a series of business establishments concentrated along this avenue. The intense congestion of these establishments signifies the commercial prosperity in Katipunan Avenue, especially along the 500-meter stretch from KFC to McDonald's. There are at least 25 restaurants, twelve stores (e.g., cosmetics shop, bookstores, travel agencies, Internet services or photocopy services), seven banks and four condominiums in this stretch.

Katipunan Avenue is, at the same time, surrounded by prestigious private academic institutions, namely, Ateneo de Manila University, Miriam College and Kostka School. There is no public school in the area. However, the University of the Philippines (UP), an elite state university, is located near Katipunan Avenue. Other private schools nearby are St. Bridget School, Philippine School of Business Administration (PSBA) in Aurora Boulevard, and the various Montessori schools in Loyola Heights.

The combination of commercial and educational structures in the avenue attracts various kinds of people to it. Especially in the stretch from KFC to McDonald's, there are three major spots thronged with people: KFC, the overpass area, and McDonald's. These spots are also conveniently located in terms of transportation facilities people commonly avail, such as tricycles, jeepneys and private cars.⁵ Students from Ateneo, UP, Miriam College or Kostka School, residents from nearby residential areas, and visitors often converge in these areas, shopping some goods needed, having meals or chatting with their friends over a cup of coffee or softdrink.

Commercial prosperity and elite private education in Katipunan Avenue co-exist with poverty and disadvantage. Street children, street vendors and parking attendants from

nearby depressed areas seek earnings to survive everyday life and struggle to protect their interests by sharing space with others on the street. Their daily life starts with the opening of the restaurants and stores in Katipunan Avenue in the morning. They are usually congregated in the same flourishing spots as the wealthier people are.

Around KFC, some street children persistently follow passers-by or approach cars stopped by traffic signals to beg for coins and food. A street child hails taxis for customers of KFC, while younger ones sell sampaguita to persons walking by the area. A middle-aged male parking assistant in charge of directing cars at the parking area of KFC receives a few coins for his service. A vending shop sells hotdogs and orange juice right beside the tricycle station, where street workers such as tricycle drivers, parking attendants and street children take a rest to have some cheap merienda (snacks).

At the overpass area, some younger street children sell sampaguita to customers of National Bookstore and Jollibee. At the same time, they play, dance and sing with their peers by the entrances of these establishments to catch customers' attention. Depending on the concentration of customers, these children move to the nearby parking area of Starbucks and Shakey's. Some persistently follow passers-by until they are given something, but they are usually ignored.

In the parking space of Jollibee and National Bookstore, a middle-aged woman attends to cars parking in National Bookstore, while another middle-aged male parking attendant takes charge of the Jollibee parking space. They do this all day, but for a little money. Under the stairs of the overpass, two vendors with small portable stands sell candies, small packs of snacks and cigarettes to passers-by. Near the tricycle station at the overpass, a young adult male deep-fries fishballs on a makeshift stand while people gather around it to skewer and eat them.

Compared to other spots, McDonald's has the largest number of street children in the stretch. They play energetically with their peers at the exterior walkway of McDonald's, doing cartwheels and headstands or chasing each other. At the same time, they beg for coins or meals from the customers coming out of or entering McDonald's. Here, young adult males work as parking attendants for customers of McDonald's. A female vendor sells newspaper, candies and cigarettes at a corner of the parking area of McDonald's. This has become a gathering place for street children, young adult parking attendants and other street workers like tricycle drivers.

When restaurants and shops close and the number of customers decrease, those working on the street also start withdrawing from the avenue. Many restaurants are closed around nine or ten o'clock at night.

After ten o'clock, only a few vendors and parking attendants stay on the street. However, some street children who are still eager to earn by begging or selling sampaguita transfer to McDonald's, which is open and still bustling with customers until midnight.

Around the closing time of Pizza Hut also at midnight, the street children start gathering around the restaurant to collect leftover foods that Pizza Hut gives them. The children are able to eat to their stomachs' content. After midnight, Starbucks is the only café that is open until early in the morning (usually 1:00 AM, but also 3:00 AM on Fridays and Saturdays). A few street children still beg around Starbucks or sleep in the sidewalks and parking lots of the restaurants, but most of them go home to depressed areas nearby. At this time, Katipunan Avenue becomes empty and silent.

Shared Realities of Streetchildren and Private School Children

As described above, diverse groups of people concentrate along the stretch of Katipunan Avenue. The place is characterized by the energetic interaction of different socioeconomic groups whose activities and worldviews reflect differing interests and needs in the street. The privileged who can enjoy commercial prosperity and elite private education exist

alongside the disadvantaged who barely survive their everyday life in poverty and try to receive blessings of the privileged.

Because of its socioeconomic characteristics, face-to-face encounters specifically between street children and private school children frequently happen in the stretch. Well-off students from the surrounding elite private schools have meals while chatting with their friends in those fast-foods restaurants along Katipunan Avenue. On the other hand, street children beg them for coins and food or sell sampaguita to them in the streets outside. Some students give street children coins or leftovers and buy sampaguita from them, while others are oblivious to the presence of street children. There are also students who are intolerant of street children. They try to avoid street children or show disgust and disdain for them. Corresponding to these negative reactions, some street children quickly give up and withdraw their asking. However, there are also other street children who try to counterattack the students verbally or physically.

Street children and private school children thus have different shared realities, which are subject to their socioeconomic conditions. With this shared everyday reality, each group of children interacts with the other group and comes to know or understand the socioeconomic differences between the other and their own at the interface situation.

Who are the Street Children?

The street children in this article are those children who earn money and obtain food by working for customers of commercial establishments (selling sampaguita, assisting drivers with parking and picking up taxis for passengers, etc.) or by begging from passers-by along Katipunan Avenue. They go to the streets to earn money for their baon (school allowance) or for helping their family.

From the three categories of street children defined in the literature (Banaag 1997), street children on Katipunan Avenue can be classified as 'children on the streets' or those 'children working on the streets but maintain regular contact with their families'. Although some of them have stopped schooling altogether and work full-time in the streets, many still go to school and work long hours before or after their classes.

Almost all of the street children on Katipunan Avenue maintain regular contact with their families and have homes to go back to. They come from large extended families (having many siblings and relatives living with them) with an average household size of almost eight persons.⁶ However, there are several cases where a parent has left, died, separated from his/her spouse, or rarely comes home. Family members also work as parking attendants, street vendors or tricycle drivers in the same vicinity as their children.

Moreover, most of these street children go to school, whether consistently or sporadically, and only hang out in the street after their classes until the restaurants close or until late at night so they can earn money. They attend nearby public elementary schools such as Batino School, Quirino School and Balara Academy. A few children have stopped going to school and are working full-time on the street because of financial considerations or some other family reasons such as having a broken family. Some appear in the street everyday while others only show up on weekends or on days when they feel like going to Katipunan Avenue.

From observation, there were around 40 to 45 street children at Katipunan Avenue during the research period. The characteristics of street children in the Philippines, which are mentioned in the 1991 PSSC study, are almost similar to those of street children on Katipunan Avenue. Their ages range from early childhood to young adolescence—around five to 15 years old (six to 18 years old in the PSSC study), but the majority of street children in Katipunan Avenue fall into the age range of ten to thirteen years old (nine to thirteen years old in the PSSC study). There are more male street children than female street children who eagerly hang out in the street. They tend to cluster and move together with their peers.

They are usually poorly dressed, for example, garbed in worn-out clothes and old sooty rubber slippers or no footwear at all, seemingly rarely changing their clothes. Their built is underdeveloped relative to their peers from private schools along Katipunan Avenue. For example, Kotska School children from second to fourth grade (eight to ten years old) are even much taller and well-built compared to street children of around eleven to twelve years of age.

Most children come from squatter areas and depressed communities near Katipunan Avenue, particularly Marytown and Ronas Garden in Barangay Loyola Heights, and Kaingin 1 in Balara. There are also some children who used to live in Ronas Garden but resettled to Antipolo when MIESCOR (Meralco Industrial Engineering Services Corporation), which owns the land of Ronas Garden, paid some households in Ronas Garden to make them leave in 1997 and 1998. They still return to seek income and food in Katipunan Avenue, especially on weekends because weekdays are generally spent in Antipolo, where the households resettled, for studying. However, they sometimes do not go home even on weekdays and sleep on the street or stay at a relative's or friend's house in Ronas Garden.

Interestingly, where street children live is related to which part of the street they usually congregate in. It is understandable

that the children gather at the geographically closest spot. For example, those children residing in Marytown usually go only to KFC, while those from Ronas Garden have a tendency to hang around McDonald's and Shakey's. On the other hand, the children from Kaingin 1 usually gather at the overpass area because their parents are also working as parking attendants around the overpass. Moreover, children traveling from Antipolo are more prone to move around the full stretch of Katipunan.

Who are the Private School Children?

Meanwhile, the private school children in this article are the grade school students who enroll in Kostka School of Quezon City. This school is an exclusive private Catholic school for children whose parents can afford to pay the school's expensive tuition fees.⁷ The total annual tuition fee of Kostka School for a student at the grade school level is Php 35,600 (in 2003).⁸ The price is quite expensive in comparison with public schools which do not charge any tuition fees. Other private Catholic schools in Barangay Loyola Heights similarly collect expensive rates. For example, the annual tuition fee of Ateneo Grade School in 2003 ranges from Php 54,053 to Php 60,504 while that of Miriam Grade School is Php 46,209 to Php 49,085. The grade school coordinator of Kostka School characterized Kostka students as better-off like other

private school children by mentioning that, 'their parents mostly have high status jobs, such as doctor, lawyer, politician, business consultant and the like'.

It is interesting to note that Kostka School is located right next to McDonald's along Katipunan Avenue where a lot of street children hang around. After the dismissal of students in the afternoon, many Kostka elementary students wait to be fetched by their guardians at McDonald's, or inside the school property, the boundary of which is marked by a gate at the entrance of the building. Thus, Kostka School students have more chances to encounter street children due to the school's location.

Similar to other elementary schools, the elementary level at Kostka consists of six years of schooling (Grade One to Grade Six). The ages of the students range between six and 13 years old. However, the ages of the Kostka key informants range from ten to 13 years old (Grade Five and Six). Total population of Grades Five and Six is 111 (50 students for Grade Five and 61 students for Grade Six). The gender ratio is almost equal since the school is coeducational. But the proportion of female to male in the group of fifteen students included in the study is two to three (six females to nine males). Students are decently dressed in a school uniform—for males, white shirt and light brown trousers and for females, white shirt with red ribbon and blue-checked skirt. In general, the students are healthy and

well developed as compared to the street children described above.

The Kostka students come from smaller families than street children. The average household size of the respondents is four persons (not including stay-in helper, *yaya* or driver). They live with their immediate or nuclear families (parents and several siblings), but sometimes they also live together with close relatives. Cases of single parenthood are seldom among Kostka students' households.

Their residential areas are usually exclusive villages, subdivisions, or condominiums. The students who were selected based on their residence in Barangay Loyola Heights or in other areas close to Katipunan Avenue come specifically from the following areas: Xavierville subdivisions, Loyola Heights subdivision (Varsity Hills), La Vista subdivision, Loyola Grand Villas and Esteban Abada Street or roads close to Katipunan Avenue.

Interfaces in the Social Construction of Knowledge

The range of encounters shapes the children's common-sense knowledge of the other and themselves in relation to socioeconomic differences. The modes of knowledge construction of the two groups of children are discussed as follows.

Street children, on one hand, construct their common-sense knowledge of the other through: 1) everyday encounters with private school children, 2) everyday companionship with street peers, 3) everyday exposure to the rules on the street, and 4) parental influence.

Street children mainly acquire knowledge in their everyday encounters (both actual interaction and plain observation) with private school children at the interface situation. The encounters are both positive (to be given alms) and negative (to be ignored or insulted), which accordingly affect their favorable and unfavorable understanding of the other. In particular, their common negative understanding in turn appears in their defiant actions toward the private school children, which strengthen the hostility between the two groups. Here, the most symbolic negative interaction is stone-throwing, which I encountered at the very beginning and became my motivation to do this research.

Their knowledge about the differences between the two groups is at the same time reinforced by their everyday companionship with street peers. Street children place high importance on the companionship of street peers because the street children in peer groups always help each other when problems or difficulties arise in the streets. In this way, they develop a sense of solidarity and

similarity within their peer group, which takes the form of a *barkada* (an intimate company or group of friends) or fraternity which sometimes develops into a gang. Recognizing street peers as a similar kind, however, street children reinforce their understanding of private school children as a different kind in the context of socioeconomic differences.

While conducting their street life, on the other hand, they encounter rules that regulate their social behavior in the interface situation—such as policies of business establishments, barangay office, NGO, and DSWD. These regulations are based on the general notion that street children are problematic elements of society. First, they are exposed to the business policy of the establishments along Katipunan Avenue that does not allow them to enter. Secondly, the local government and other organizations aim to solve ‘the street children problem’ by regulating the presence of street children on the streets. These become the very factors that make street children recognize their own disadvantaged position as different from the other.

Parents seem to have less influence on street children after they have gained independence and autonomy in the streets. However, parental influence is actually significant because street children conduct their everyday life based on normative values that they acquired

from their parents—that they should be independent and helpful to their families by earning in the streets. Moreover, they also develop the knowledge of socioeconomic differences through their parent's teaching—that they should accept their position and be industrious and finish their studies if they want to be better off.

Private school children, in contrast, have a different manner of constructing their common-sense knowledge of street children. That is through: 1) everyday encounters with street children, 2) parental influence, and 3) exposure to moral education in the school and mass media.

Just like street children, private school children construct their knowledge mainly through their everyday encounters (both direct interaction and plain observation) with street children at the interface situation. There occurs both positive (acts of charity) and negative encounters (to be annoyed when not giving), which consequently draw their sympathy or other sets of unfavorable understandings toward the street children (i.e., undisciplined, ill-behaved, delinquent). Their unfavorable feelings register in their negative behavior at the interface situation, which brings about antagonism between the two groups. In common with street children,

this is represented in conflicts like stone-throwing.

In the case of private school children, parents play a great role in the process of their knowledge construction of the other because they are more submissive to their parents in conducting their everyday life. In understanding the disparity between the other group and theirs, private school children develop a basic ideology of appreciating their own privileged status while being generous and helpful to the poor street children based on their parental teachings. Furthermore, the parents of private school children often educate their own children by telling them to not imitate negative behaviors of street children such as lack of discipline, laziness and delinquency.

Additionally, private school children's exposure to moral education in school and mass media is one important factor that influences them in constructing their knowledge. They become aware of street children's disadvantaged life that is different from their own through social studies or value classes such as Christian Life Education in school. In these classes, they are usually taught about street children as objects of social assistance and also as one of most serious social issues to be solved in the Philippines. They also get information from mass

media such as newspaper columns and TV programs addressing poverty issues and the street children problem such as Bantay Bata (a project aiming to protect kids by surveillance and increased awareness about kids).

Common-sense Knowledge of Socioeconomic Differences⁹

Through a series of encounters and exposures at the interface situation, both street children and private school children generally become aware of the inequalities in education, wealth, property, and other resources in society.

In simplest terms, they commonly categorize people into 'the rich' (*mga mayayaman*) and 'the poor' (*mgamahihirap*). They also distinguish their own group from the other group of children: street children are the poor, while private school children are the rich. For example, street children usually say, 'We are poor, they are rich'. (*Mahirap kami, mayaman sila*), when talking about how different they are from private school children. Likewise, private school children recognize the differences between them as, 'We are rich, they are poor' (*Mayaman kami, mahirap sila*).

Based on the awareness of their contrasting positions in the socioeconomic hierarchy, street children commonly understand private school children with

the following concepts: 1) privilege, 2) generosity, 3) arrogance, and 4) dependence.

Street children take for granted the privilege of private school children in contrast to their own disadvantaged conditions in respect to family background, education, activities they are engaged in, consumption level, material possessions, appearance, food, living condition, and security, among others.¹⁰ The following represents street children's common understanding of the differences between the other and themselves.

'They [Kostka school students] have large allowances, while I am already contented with 5 pesos. I also want to become like them because they can buy anything they want... they are fetched by their mommy and with their own private cars, while we only make it with tricycles. Some high school students already have their own cars. They also have money to pay for school bus service. What's more, I am only studying in a public school while they are in that expensive school.'

— Niño, street child around McDonald's, 22 February 2003

For street children, having to work is a major activity that distinguishes them from private school children. One street child expressed this: 'They (private school children) have a life of pleasure. They don't have to work, while we still have to work to be better'. Another child also said: 'I think it's more pleasurable to study (*mas masarap*

mag-aral). They can only study, as they are supported financially by their parents’.

Because private school children are ‘born to be rich’, they do not need to work and they can concentrate on their studies in those expensive private schools, which altogether seems to street children as a happy and leisurely life. In comparison, street children think of themselves as having a difficult life because they are born in the poor families. Consequently, they have to earn by themselves on the street before they can eat and even get small things, while at the same time fully or partially going to public schools, or without going to school at all.

In recognizing these disparities, in fact, they feel envious and inferior to the private school children. To their understanding, private school children can get ‘whatever they want’. At the same time, street children recognize they are usually viewed as *pulubi* (beggars) by others and also thought of themselves as ‘dirty’.

‘We usually don’t go together with those from Kostka. It would just be us, the *barkada* [a very close peer group]. Will the rich go together with the beggars? Look at how we look, *Ate*.’

(Di kami sasama sa Kostkans. Kami lang, barkada. Ang mga mayayaman sásama sa mga pulubi? Tingnan mo mga itsura namin, Ate.)

—Toto, street child around McDonald’s,
7 March 2003

Regardless of these feelings, a lot of street children ultimately accept their disadvantaged reality in contrast with the privileged reality of the other as their way of living. Several street children express reconciliation to their situations as follows:

‘We are not envious of them. This is where we have lived so we must accept it.’ (*Di kami naiingit sa kanila. Dito na kami nabuhay eh, kailangan tanggapin namin iyon.*)

—Egay, street child around KFC, 26
February 2003

While accepting this reality, street children commonly feel justified when given alms by the private school children because of the latter’s affluence. When their expectation is satisfied, they understand private school children as kind or generous, and therefore, as their friends. Some street children even hope to make friends with ‘rich friends’ from private schools so that they can benefit from these wealthier children.

Toto: ‘It’s nice to be friends with the rich kids. It’s good to have rich friends who will let us eat at their house. You will have lots of food (*magsasawa ka sa pagkain*). Sometimes they also treat us at McDo.’

Isko: ‘When you are really lucky to meet rich individuals who are kind, I just don’t know [how much you will be given] (*pag ma-chambahan mo talaga ang mayaman na mabait, ewan ko lang*).’

—A group of street children around
McDonald’s, 7 March 2003

But in cases where private school children do not give anything despite their wealth, they usually criticize the private school children as 'selfish or greedy' (*suwapang*) or 'stingy' (*kuripot*). In relation to this, street children further describe them as '*mukhang-pera*' (literally, money-face) which connotes greediness as they were always concerned only about money. In yet worse situations where they are treated with contempt because of their underprivileged conditions or annoyed with the insulting words like 'poor' and 'beggar', they judge private school children as 'arrogant or insulting' (many words used here such as: *mayabang*, *masungit*, *maangus*, *nanglalait*, *nang-aasar*, *matapang*, etc). The following quote is an example of the use of these words:

'I feel they [private school children] are arrogant. They don't acknowledge the equalities of human beings. They tease us, they look down on us just because they are rich and we are poor. Well, just let them be. They don't care about us anyway.' (*Feeling ko mayabang sila. Di nila tinatrato ang pagkakatantay-pantay ng tao. Tinutukso nila kami, minamaliit lang porke't mayaman sila, kami mahirap. Pabayaang niyo na sila. Wala naman pakialamanan sa amin.*)

—Egay, street child around KFC, 26 February 2003

These negative images and experiences with private school children arouse feelings among street children that they themselves do not wish to be like 'arrogant rich people'.

Street children's other typical understanding of private school children is their dependence. To street children, private school children are 'only supported (sustentado) by their parents' for their everyday needs such as food, money, clothes, and even tidiness. What is more, their not being helpful to their own family is totally different from street children's independent way of living.

'I don't want to be like them [private school children]. I don't want to just ask my parents to provide my needs. At least, I'm being helpful to my parents. The private school children depend on their parents and are just asking money from them unlike me.'

—Jena, street child around Shakey's, 28 February 2003

Because street children have their normative value that children also need to be helpful to their own family, they actually place high importance on their independence and self-sufficiency. Thus, street children take pride in their independence and justify their being street children in a way criticizing the dependence of the private school children.

Meanwhile, private school children use the following types to characterize street children: 1) disadvantage, 2) pity, 3) lack of discipline, and 4) delinquency, which also reflect their basic understanding of socioeconomic differences.

Almost in the same way as street children, private school children commonly understand street children as disadvantaged in comparison to their own privileged conditions in terms of parents' ability (to fulfill their parental obligations), education, activities they are engaged in, food, consumption level, material possessions, appearance, living conditions, opportunity and security, among others. For example, a student showed her idea as follows:

'They [street children] are unfortunate unlike me. Unfortunate because they have no parents to guide them. They are not studying and are not learning anything. They do not have enough food to eat for a day. They are not comfortable with their lives, and also do not feel stable in life because they are working. They can't do anything about it. They might be playing but they don't learn anything.'

—Fatima, Grade 5,
17 March 2003

According to their understanding, street children have a difficult time or feel uncomfortable with their own lives because their life conditions are impoverished due to the poverty of their family, and thus, have to work on the streets without studying at school. To them, the disadvantaged conditions of street children are largely attributed to the culpable negligence of their parents. In contrast, private school children think of themselves as fortunate because they live a comfortable life in which they have

full parental attention for their needs and can study in fine schools without caring about their everyday livelihood. Although they sometimes become conscious of social inequality (as a student asserts, 'every child should be able to go to school and his or her needs should be fulfilled'), they strongly believe that the situations of street children would never happen to them and that they would attain a successful and brilliant future that street children would never be able to. Hence, they eventually think that these differences are the natural order of their everyday reality. The following statement is well exemplified this:

'I don't want to be like them because I want to do well in my life. I don't want to get into bad things. I want to be protected... a good future.'

(Ayoko maging katulad nila. Kasi gusto ko mapaganda buhay ko. Ayokong mapasama. Gusto ko protektado ako... magandang future.)

—Fatima, Grade 5,
17 March 2003

While taking the disparities for granted, private school children believe that better-off people like themselves should have mercy toward the 'pitiful' (they often use the word *awa* or *kawawa*) street children. In addition, private school children usually know the existence of some organizations such as orphanages and the Department of Social Welfare Development (DSWD) that would help street children out of

the disadvantaged situations. A student refers to this: 'DSWD should take a role to improve the situations of street children'. To their understanding, street children should be the objects of social aid by these organizations.

only beg in the streets without studying as lazy and not making own efforts:

'They [street children] are only begging, not working. They are not studying. They just beg and beg (*hingi lang nang hingi*). That's not work. They will not be able to improve their lives.'

—Lea, Grade 5,
17 March 2003

Despite their ideology of being merciful toward unfortunate people, private school children negatively understand the street children as 'undisciplined' and 'badly behaved'. They believe that street children are undisciplined because of their persistence and naughtiness in asking for asalms. They also think of street children as badly behaved through their experiences with street children always saying bad words to people, which they feel 'rude' (*bastos*) or 'persistent' (*makulit*). A private school child says:

Likewise, they hold a similar image of street children's parents: They earn a living by 'working like beggars' and are 'not enough to make their lives better'.

At the same time, they usually decide that they should not go near the street children because of delinquency of the street children, getting involved in 'bad things' such as smoking, gambling, and taking drugs. They understand that street children are more exposed to or related to bad surroundings of the streets. In contrast, private school children think of themselves as behaving properly in better environments where they get proper education at a fine school and appropriate guidance from their parents.

'They [street children] don't have manners. *Bastos* (rude). They don't study and are not educated. They are always cursing.'

—Bong, Grade 6,
4 March 2003

In comparison with street children, however, private school children usually reflect on themselves as being more disciplined and better behaved. Therefore, they settle with the idea of not minding the street children anymore because they think the street children are not well educated. Moreover, they deem street children who

'They [street children] are *napapasama* (getting into bad things that are beyond their control) because they are getting used to it there (in the streets). They are affected by drugs and by what they see in people [passers-by].'

—Fatima, Grade 5,
17 March 2003

Private school children are also scared of getting close to the delinquent street children characterized as 'siga' (punk or someone having a strong street personality) such that they usually try to keep their distance from the street children when walking in the streets.

Analysis

Both street children and private school children shape their common-sense knowledge of the other in the form of adjusting to or reconciling with their own socioeconomic positions.

First, there are certain patterns of thinking among street children when they construct their common-sense knowledge of private school children in the context of socioeconomic differences.

- a) Because the privileged private school children are generous, it is acceptable to be poor because they will share their wealth with street children.
- b) Because the privileged private school children are arrogant, street children do not want to be like them.
- c) Because the privileged private school children are dependent, street children are actually better off than they are.

These perspectives suggest how the distinctions are maintained in street children's heads. Their positive feelings about the private school children (generosity) allow them to passively accept their condition, while their negative feelings about the private school children (arrogant and dependent) give them reasons to actively swallow their condition and justify being street children (although they sometimes question the reality of disparities, which therefore arouses a feeling of antipathy toward the private school children). Both give them some meaning in their everyday lives. In these ways, street children reconcile their own position in the process of negotiating their knowledge of the other.

Second, private school children develop their point of view in cultivating their common-sense knowledge of street children in relation to socioeconomic differences:

- a) Because the disadvantaged street children are pitiful, privileged people like private school children should have mercy on them.
- b) Because the disadvantaged street children are undisciplined and badly behaved, private school children do not want to be like them.
- c) Because the disadvantaged street children are delinquent, private school

children should avoid the street children and not imitate their vices.

Their logic shows how private school children gain a sense of superiority or how they boost their awareness that they are different and much better than street children in terms of socioeconomic position. Their sympathy toward the street children (as pitiful) makes them conscious of social inequality and question street children's disadvantaged socioeconomic position. However, their bad/negative feelings about the street children (undisciplined, badly behaved and delinquent) allow them to actively disregard the street children and maintain their superior position. Thus, private school children eventually adapt themselves to their own position when conducting their everyday lives.

Both street children and private school children actively construct their common-sense knowledge of the other through everyday encounters with various kinds of social actors in the interface situation. However, the modes of knowledge construction appear to be slightly different.

Street children's common-sense knowledge of private school children is constructed mainly through their actual encounters with a variety of social actors at face-to-face situations (private school children, street peers, and other social actors in the street). Parental influence on

their way of living and thinking also gives clues to the street children in absorbing their knowledge about the other. However, they are rather actively independent in acquiring their common-sense knowledge because they are in a circumstance in which they are extensively exposed to the streets while earning and enjoying their autonomy almost without parental supervision. The understandings that street children develop by experience in the streets determine their actions toward the private school children in face-to-face encounters. These face-to-face encounters accordingly confirm or modify their common-sense knowledge of the other. Through a repeated process of negotiating knowledge (i.e., continuously organizing, confirming or modifying their understanding) in the interface situation, they reinforce their common-sense knowledge of the private school children.

Similarly, private school children's common-sense knowledge of street children is constructed mainly through their actual encounters with the street children at the interface situation. However, parental influence is also quite significant for private school children in learning about socioeconomic differences between the other group and their own. Moreover, private school children's exposure to moral education in school and mass media is also identifiable as their way of acquiring knowledge, which is not a mode of social construction among street children. These two latter modes accordingly affect their

ways of interacting with street children at the interface situation. Thus, private school children are active participants in the social construction of their common-sense knowledge. Like street children's ways of knowledge construction, they continue to negotiate and reinforce their common-sense knowledge of the other through repeated typification, confirmation or modification of their understanding while interrelating with the street children. However, the knowledge construction of private school children is more subject to adults' concern of the reproduction of the social order because they are more obedient and dependent on adult guidance (i.e., parental teaching, moral education at school and in mass media) while conducting their everyday life.

Conclusion

Both street children and private school children actively develop common-sense knowledge of the other in the context of their socioeconomic positions. They also share knowledge of each other's socioeconomic differences. In the process of constructing knowledge, they adjust themselves to their own position, although they sometimes question the way that this reality is taken for granted. The ongoing process of knowledge construction involves any of the following: typification and accumulation, confirmation or modification of their understanding. This

happens through actual encounters between the two groups at the interface situation and under the influence of other people and elements that are directly and indirectly related to their interface encounters. Thus, the children themselves actively maintain social reality of socioeconomic differences. At the same time, other social actors such as security guards, barangay officials, DSWD, and NGO workers at the interface situation systematically maintain this social reality.

Following Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Long (1992), the article regards childhood as a part of constructing reality unlike those existing works which use the socialization approach and see childhood as an apprentice period of social roles in 'adult' society. This article, at the same time, recognizes that under certain circumstances, especially in the case of street children, the everyday life of children does not allow them much control over their difficult life conditions and therefore, children do not have other choices to 'actively reconcile' themselves to their own socioeconomic position. And this is true enough for the key informants described in this article. Yet, findings highlight children as active knowing actors: that children themselves actively come to know socioeconomic differences and behave accordingly, while fully taking into account society's determinations over their everyday lives.

The grounded theory approach thus has been quite useful in examining the process of children's social construction at the interface situation from an actor-oriented approach. By shedding light on the children as active participants in their social life, this article shows that children take an active part in socially constructing the everyday realities of socioeconomic differences in context of their socioeconomic conditions at the interface situation. At the same time, other social actors in the interface situation systematically reinforce their everyday realities. In this regard, this article advocates the necessity of fostering involvement of both the wealthier children and the poor children in addressing social inequality in Philippine society as they grow up, and not merely addressing the issue of structural deficiencies of the poor. It is only by understanding their own encounters at the interface that street children and private school children in particular, and various socioeconomic groups in society in general, get to question the taken-for-granted realities of socioeconomic differences.

Endnotes

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¹This work limits the concept of 'other' for Katipunan street children and Kostka school children as mutually referring to each other. It should be noted that the 'other' for street children may include not just the Kostka children but all children that are not part of their immediate peer group. Similarly, the 'other' of Kostka children may include schoolchildren of wealthier schools.

²The theme of children as active actors in the social world has been a topic of previous studies (e.g., Calago, 2002, Illo 2003, Torres 1996).

³The socioeconomic structure of Katipunan Avenue is observed as of February 2003. It may be different now because of recent changes and developments in the avenue.

⁴*Barangay* is a Tagalog word for the smallest political unit and community of Philippine society.

⁵Tricycle and jeepney are both public utility vehicles popularly used by Filipino people. The tricycle is a motorcycle with a sidecar for passengers, whereas the jeepney is a share-ride vehicle popular for short journeys. The jeepney originates from

reconstructed Jeeps left behind by the US army after the Second World War.

⁶Some households overlap. Thus, because of kinship, several street children are somewhat related.

⁷The school provides scholarships only for its honor students (1st to 3rd honors) at the fourth to sixth grade levels, but not for less fortunate children. Most Kotska students enroll from Grade 1. The school usually does not accept transfer students.

⁸The total tuition fee means the sum of tuition fees and basic fees, and excludes costs of books and other miscellaneous fees. While public school students enjoy free tuition, they still have to pay miscellaneous fees.

⁹To clarify the concepts of stratification is somewhat problematic in the social

sciences because of the difference between Marxist concept of class and Weberian concept of status. In this study, the expression of 'the differences in socioeconomic conditions' is used to designate different socioeconomic groups which the children subjectively judge they belong to or not in terms of appearance, material possessions, food, education, behavior, and activities they are engaged in.

¹⁰This enumeration of socioeconomic differences is derived from categorizing empirical data, which were collected in semi-structured interviews with the children. The questions were open-ended, such as: 'How different are you from street children or Kotska School children?' and 'How do (did) you know the differences?'

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