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When I first decided to go back to school at the ripe age of 33, I had no idea what I wanted to study. I had recently closed my Pedorthic business and needed a change. Due to my fulltime job and five children, I decided taking online courses would fit into my hectic schedule. In High School I enjoyed taking Sociology and Psychology so I figured those two classes would be fun and interesting to start with. Not only have I enjoyed this class, I have decided to major in Sociology. Taking this class awakened the interest and excitement that I had back in High School. I am looking forward to continuing down this path. While I enjoyed the entire course, I specifically enjoyed chapter 8, Global Inequality. I have always been empathetic to the less fortunate, and reading and studying about the inequalities only reiterated the fact that the gap between the rich and the poor is getting worse. What I didn't realize was how many children in the world were being forced to work. 250 million boys and girls between the ages of five and fourteen are working in developing countries. That is one out of every four children. That is heartbreaking.

It made me realize that some of the shoes and socks I was providing to my patients were most likely made by a child! I felt that child labor was only touched on briefly in this chapter and I wanted to know more. So I did more research on my own. Child labor has recently become a very touchy subject throughout the world. Well known corporations and clothing and sporting goods distributors that have for decades been taking advantage of cheap labor in third world countries are seeing their names and images tarnished by allegations of child labor practices and obscene working conditions. Child labor is nothing new to the world. It has been a part of almost every society

in recorded history. From ancient times, children have been a part of the economic survival of their families, particularly in industries like the farming and crafting industries. What remains confusing is the exact definition that separates child labor from just children doing work. Child labor is meant to define unfair, abusive work whereas work is an important part of the sculpting of most children. There is no question in society that some forms of labor are acceptable and some are not. Children may work without being abused and in many countries and even some American cultures; it is both necessary and integral that children perform some laborious duties.

The line between work and child labor is most commonly drawn where normal tasks are replaced with exploitative tasks and children are expected to do things that go well beyond the borders of inhumane. They are forced to turn to labor at frighteningly young ages most often because of economic and social conditions. In many third world countries, manufacturers are allowed to exploit the extreme poverty and high unemployment levels of citizens by granting insanely low wages to the workers. A low wage rate for adults has often been the catalyst that sends children into the workplace. During the industrial revolution, the adults could not, by themselves, support the incredible demand for labor. Recognizing this, manufacturers paid them poorly enough to where they could not support a family without forcing every member of their family works. Thus child labor in abusive levels became the norm. The manufacturers got what they desired in more workers, petite workers, capable of many things that full-grown adults could not do and families were then able to at least eat most days. Child labor has been an extremely touchy subject since the earliest days of the Industrial

revolution when it became publicly acceptable to seek something better for children.

Society has long sought to find a definite difference between what is natural and what is too harsh for children. There are obvious cases of abuse and improper treatment of child laborers as there have been for years, and it is obvious that it is in no way beneficial to the children to work as they do. There then comes a question of whether or not something should be done and if so then what. Child labor is an issue rooted in the very idea that sometimes, the members of society have a responsibility to the rest of society to work for the good of those people who cannot work for themselves. The children involved never have and do not now possess the capability to seek change. This ability lies solely in the rest of society. The issue then becomes a question of how people respond to social responsibility. It is easy to separate oneself from social responsibilities as many people in the countries of global power, like the United States, do not have a real or serious problem of child labor. They are really above the problems of modern child labor as the only real contact that they have with it is when the major companies therein are accused of contributing to the hiring of unfairly compensated and over-worked child employees. Child labor stands as a strong example of how some changes must be brought upon by people outside of the circle.

Of those in the Industrial Revolution who were most affected by child labor, very few had any chance whatsoever of doing anything to change the practice as they were part of the immense lower class and had no power. As a result, change had to have been caused by others. Though the form child

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labor takes has changed since the industrial revolutions, it still exists and is as cruel as ever. A United Nations report provides several examples of the abuse that goes on. One example is in Malaysia, children can work on rubber plantations, exposed to snake and insect bites for up to 17 hours a day.

Child labor is without question a part of society today just as it has been for thousands of years. For the first time though, it is gaining international attention as American journalism brings the horrid lives of child laborers into the spotlight. With every purchase, heightened questions are arising as to the moral justification behind buying products manufactured by tortured and mistreated young children. Each of these questions must then prompt an inspection into one's responsibility not only society but to each overburdened child. There are things you can do to help prevent child labor. Check the label. Look for labels that say "Sweatshop free." Avoid buying products made in countries known abuse such as Burma. Also join groups or start an anti-sweatshop campaign. A list of groups can be found at www.sweatfree.org/.

Works Cited

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