

# Examine the view that childhood is socially constructed

[Life](#), [Childhood](#)



Examine the view that childhood is socially constructed Some sociologists argue that childhood is socially constructed whereas other sociologists argue it is a natural biological stage in life that everyone goes through. Childhood being socially constructed means that it is not natural and has adapted to the surroundings depending on the background they are from. Philippe Aries (1962) argues that childhood has changed since industrialisation, certain views that modern society have now, they did not have during the medieval times. Examples of this key study would be chronological age which didn't exactly matter before as children had to work as soon as they were physically able to. However Aries study was criticised by other sociologists such as Jane Pilcher (1953) who argues that Aries's study isn't exactly valid as it was based on a French painting of a family from the 19th century. According to Shorter (1975), parental attitudes towards children were very different, e. g. high child death rates encouraged indifference and neglect especially towards infants. Benedict (1943) argues that children from a simpler (non-industrial) society are treated differently due to the cross-cultural differences. For example they have less value and more responsibility and their sexual behaviour is different. This reflects that your class, gender and ethnicity can have an effect on your childhood such as families from a lower class who aren't as wealthy; children tend to have to work from young especially males e. g. in Asian families. In contrast in the modern western notion of childhood, children are seen as special and fundamentally different from adults. Pilcher (1995) argues that the key feature of childhood is separateness where childhood is a distinct life stage as in children have a separate status to adults. Aries, Shorter and others

argue that the 20th century was mainly the “ Century of the Child” and that family and society have now become more “ Child-Centred”. This is because of the growing population which explains the several laws which have been put in place to protect children for example the banning of child labour. This links into the March of Progress view where the position of children has changed and children have more rights then they would have had before and children are better cared for. Marxist and Feminist argue that the March of progress view is over generalized as it ignores the different conflicts that are happening amongst children. For example the different inequalities that are taking place, gender differences where girls are expected to do more housework. There are ethnic differences such as Asian parents tend to be stricter towards daughters then sons. However this ignores how adults may use their power to benefit children. With the disappearance of childhood as Postman (1994) would argue, unlike Pilcher he states that instead of children having their own status they are becoming more like adults in the ways of gaining similar rights and acting in a similar way this could be through clothing, leisure even crime. During the emergence of childhood in the 19th century, Postman argued with the replacement of print culture with television culture more children have access to the “ Adult world”. In print culture children lacked literacy skills which meant that adults could keep certain knowledge away from children about sex, money and others. However television culture makes information available to both children and adults who make them very much alike as the boundary is broken down and the adult authority is weakened. However the television cultures it blurred the distinction between childhood and adulthood by destroying the

information hierarchy. However Postman has been criticised for over emphasising a single factor, while ignoring others such as rising living standards and legal changes. In conclusion there are many explanations as to whether childhood is socially constructed because it is difficult to generalise childhood. There have been several changes in which show that childhood isn't socially constructed in the 21st century as it mostly depends on your gender, background and some ways your class/ wealth. This then determines and impacts your childhood structure of how and what you adapt to.