

Concept of youth so difficult to define sociology essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The concept of youth could be seen as difficult to define, as it covers such a diverse area, Pierre Bourdieu (1978)(In Jones 2010) suggested that " youth is just a word" and that it " has been an evolving concept" which has developed over the century's into a social construction. Youth could also be defined by some, especially in western societies as the" life stages between childhood and adulthood" and becoming independent from dependent (Kehily 2007). Some favour biological markers, in which youth is the period between puberty and parenthood, while others define youth in terms of cultural markers " a distinct social status with specific roles, rituals, and relationships" (USAID/CMM 2005). Definitions of youth by age vary drastically across different institutions; the UN has defined youth as person from 15 to 24 years of age, whereas the National Youth Policy of Nepal defines youth as persons from 16 to 40 years of age. Therefore in understanding the difficulties in defining youth, it is important to look at the many different ways , as to why age from the earliest of ages, industrialisation, cultures and the biological concept, to identify some of the key issues as to why the concept of youth is so difficult to define as it has such a diverse range of ideas and notions.

The term youth is defined by sociologists as a transition between ' childhood and adulthood' (Roche et al 2004) the alternative is the term ' adolescence' which is often:

' Used within psychology to describe the common biological, psychological, emotional and sexual maturation phases associated with the onset of puberty and the teenage years'

From this notion it appears that some perceive youth as a “ sociological category rather than a biological one” (Frith 2005, in Kehily 2007) in that youth is a social construct rather than a biological and psychological concept as G Hall (1904) (In Kehily 2007p. 57) noted that the biological side changes can have an effect on different people at different times in their life’s through “ hormonal and psychological changes” from which they are not in control over and can have effect over their “ feeling and behaviour”.

However the sociologist Margret Mead 1972 disregarded Hall’s concept that adolescence was brought on by biological changes which Hall suggests occurs during puberty, from her own study concluded that this period in a young person’s life was the effect of “ sexual repression in society and of society’s handling of young people” (Kehily 2007). However as these studies by Hall and Mead were carried out in a specific area of Samoa, this study maybe relevant to this area but it cannot be generalised to the rest of the world.

Social anthropologists on the other hand try and understand the concept of youth from a cultural perspective for instance rather than seeing it from biological view, they study their behaviour, cultural beliefs, family lives, social, political organisations and their relationships with each other (Kehily 2007, p. 47) although it must be noted that most cultural studies are “ based upon non-western and traditional societies” (Kehily 2007). Van Gennep 1960 (in Kehily 2007 p. 62) studies the rites of passage, and states there are three stages: the leaving behind of the familiar, living away from the community and thirdly reintegration, he backs this up with the study of Nelson Mandela’s initiation of becoming a man, Gennep 1960 re-enforces this idea

with the ritual of circumcision as some countries carry out rituals in order to publicly show “ the transition from one stage of a life to another” (kehily 2007, p. 63). although rites of passage can be observed in western countries it can be interpreted in different ways, for instance, celebrating a birthday, leaving school, going on to university and getting married can be seen as an initiation process into either the passage to youth or the transition into adulthood as Gennep notes “ rites of passage were similar in structure and function wherever they occurred in the world”.

Aries (1962) (In kassem et al 2010) suggested that the concept of youth did not exist in the middle ages and that it has been socially constructed over the centuries, as Aries states, ‘ in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist’, and that from the age of 7 a child would be classed as an adult, as Heywood (2001 p. 11) noted that the transition into adulthood took place when a child no longer needed their mother and could survive without them, which was somewhere between the ages of 5 and 7, he states ‘ they were launched into the great community of men’, although some would argue with this concept, as kassem et al (2010) suggests that Aries work is only ‘ based upon the ideas of childhood and not children themselves’. Pollock (1983) (In kassem et al 2010) also criticises Aries and suggests that from studying ‘ first hand accounts’ from diaries and autobiographies that this was not the case and that families in the 1500’s did acknowledge childhood as kassem (2010) notes that Pollock “ quotes numerous examples of grief at infant death, from mothers and fathers” and that Aries work in only based upon ‘ secondary sources’ rather than ‘ actual accounts’. Although some researches would agree with Aries that the term childhood has only arisen from the

1700's due to it being "something which has been constructed" (Kassem et al 2010, p. 3) from the growth of the middle class and the Industrial Revolution (Stone 1977 in Kassem et al 2010) as this constructivism could be seen as to arise after the era of industrialisation, for instance from the early age of around 6 years old children were working, which was reported by the Royal Commission on the Employment of children (1843) that children began work at around the age of 6 (Heywood 2001, p. 130). By the late eighteenth century it was emerging that children needed a childhood as it was noted by Hendrick (in Heywood 2001 p. 142) that it was emerging that the young was in need of a childhood and that we needed to start taking note of this, as Hendrick noted that children were now being seen as "innocent, ignorant, dependent, and vulnerable".

However some may only define youth, especially by age as they can be seen to have a vested interest for their own personal gain, their motivations may be different as the media for instance may have an interest to inform, whereas connection service see youth at the age of as they have an interest in improving the lives of youth by ways of empowering them into looking for work or improving their educational needs to enable them to work, whereas the high street stores such as New Look, Topshop/Topman aim their establishments at youth as for private gain in making money from them.

In conclusion as to why youth is so difficult to define, as it is quite diverse and complex and there are numerous reasons behind the concept of youth from nature v nurture to cultural and sociological explanations it also varies globally as their values and beliefs differ from others therefore as Jones notes <https://assignbuster.com/concept-of-youth-so-difficult-to-define-sociology-essay/>

(2010) 'when youth is taken to mean age, then it really is just a word'.

Therefore the concept of youth will always be difficult to define as there is no neutral definition and we all define the concept of youth in many different ways.

Word count: References

Social and Human Sciences

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/youth/>

the concept of youth

<http://www.allenandunwin.com/publicsociology/files/ch6RETHINK.pdf>

Heywood, C. (2001) A history of childhood, Cambridge: polity press.

Kehily M. J. (2007) Understanding Youth: Perspectives, Identities and Practices. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Roche, J, et al. (2004) youth in society, 2nd ed, London: sage publications.

Kessem, D, et al (2010) Key issues in childhood and youth studies. Oxon: Routledge.

Jones, G. (2009) Key concepts: youth. Cambridge: polity press.