

This and discuss  
social  
constructionism as a  
theoretical



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

This essay will discuss what it means to state that childhood is a 'social construction'. A social construction is used to describe something that is created by society Dictionary. com (2014). It differs from place to place, culture to culture and time to time.

Childhood is seen as a social construction as there is no 'fixed' experience of childhood, what kind of childhood a child in the UK goes through will be drastically different to the kind a child in Kenya, or middle age UK went through. It will present a clear understanding about what a social construction is and the different constructions of childhood. The essay will outline the constructions of the family and how it has influenced the understandings of childhood, the essay will also outline and discuss social constructionism as a theoretical perspective and how powerful discourses influence understandings of childhood. To begin, childhood is a status that is documented worldwide and throughout history, which sometimes sees the child as innocent, vulnerable, a consumer, a worker alongside other household earner, a threat to society and it is a construction that changes over time and place (Prout, 2005). Historians of childhood have argued over the meaning, such as Aries (1965) stated the concept of 'childhood' didn't exist before the seventeenth century; therefore, children were mini adults with the same rights, duties and skills. However, Aries says that after industrialisation, children became different to adults because children had to go the school from the age of 5 to 11 therefore children become financially dependent on their parents until the age of 11. In medieval England wealthy children were permitted to carry swords and those who were poorer carried sticks for protection.

This shows in the present day they believed giving children weapons for protection would be careless and that they would surely come to harm. This proves childhood to be a social construction as certain restrictions have been made to ensure their safety. A way to clearly see how childhood can change so vastly due to social construction is to compare this interpretation by Aries to what we think of childhood in contemporary society. In society it is now seen as a protected and special time, where childhood is a separate status to adulthood.

People within society now protect children, nurture them and give them education. In Aries' view of medieval childhood, this was not around. Why is this? There are many factors for this change. For example, there is now compulsory education for children alongside the illegality of children in full-time labour. Therefore, childhood has to be different as this is not allowed, children won't be working but instead they'll be in school. Today it is a different society where it is expected that children will spend a considerable amount of their time in the social institution of education. Society has shaped it in that way and so in this sense, childhood has become a different social construction.

Looking at childhood in society today, it can be suggested that childhood has become socially constructed in a way that makes society child-centred. The construction of childhood now involves the idea that children are special, society now spends a lot of time giving children things through money or financial means. This suggests that society has now changed childhood from being economic assets to economic liabilities. Shorter (1975) argued that parental attitudes were very different in the middle ages as mortality rates <https://assignbuster.com/this-and-discuss-social-constructionism-as-a-theoretical/>

were high amongst children which led to indifference and neglect.

The mortality rates suggested that it was not uncommon for people to forget how many children they had as parents did not become too attached to their children. Within this time period, children had to work and provide for the family which made children become economic assets.

However, in today's society children do not work, it is not needed and instead having less children and having them survive means that more time and money is spent into children. This makes a great deal of society revolve around the child, such as in the forms of media advertisements aimed at children. Therefore, the UK's social construction of childhood may have been influenced by children surviving. There is a clear contrast not just with the past, but cross-cultural too. In third world countries where mortality rates are high, the society is not child centred, it is constructed in a different way. This is just one of the ways that childhood can be said to be socially constructed. The family has been constructed in different ways which has influenced the construction of childhood. Within today's society the concepts of the family has become private whereas it was public, as the family has become private it acts an 'incubator' for the public state.

The privatization of the family has also meant the privatization of childhood, this means that children are protected from the public state which has reinforced parental obligation to undertake 'appropriate' child care in order to protect their children. However, with this privatization of the family and childhood it means that a child are protected from the public state as there are dominant assumptions that children are able to be a child within the family but outside the family their childhood is threatened and are at <https://assignbuster.com/this-and-discuss-social-constructionism-as-a-theoretical/>

risk, this is due to the social construction of childhood, as children are now seen as in danger rather than dangerous therefore the family has to protect the child but can that been seen as protecting the child too much therefore the family is damaging a child's childhood? As childhood is becoming more privatised it means that they are not in involved in politics which gives a divide between as child and an adult as they are not given different rights compared to an adult, children are not the only ones that have been privatised women have also as they were seen as only a housewife but due to the social construction of the family this has changed. This suggests that when the family is socially constructed it constructs childhood. However, childhood can be seen to be socially constructed in a negative way. While Aries, and other sociologists who claim that childhood has got better due to social construction, there is also the conflict views. One conflict view suggests that we ignore the negative aspects that society have constructed.

One example would be Gittin's (2015) idea of age patriarchy. In today's society has now constructed childhood so that adults control every aspect of it, from clothing in what children wear to leisure time in what children can do and where they can go for example. This is because there is now a social construction of childhood where the position is inferior to adults as it is seen that children as incapable to look after themselves. It is believed that children need protection and yet society takes this to a new level by bringing control over their lives. This can be due to powerful ideas that circulate about how to respond to and treat children and there is often motives contained other than children's best interests. With powerful

ideas that circulate it changes how people in society 'see' children which affects how we treat children therefore it impacts their experience of childhood. Overall, there are a wide range of suggestions as to why childhood can be socially constructed.

If a society needs children to perform labour, then childhood will be constructed so that this is okay. Or, if society changes in a way that means families spend more time with children, then childhood is reconstructed to suit this. The social construction of childhood can be influenced by powerful ideas as it changes people's views on children and childhood but also the changing construction of the family can influence childhood. The overall essay shows that childhood had been socially constructed over time compared to middle ages where childhood was seen differently. Reference List Dictionary.

com (2014) Social Construct available at [http://www. dictionar.com/browse/social-construct](http://www.dictionar.com/browse/social-construct) Assessed: 10/01/18

PROUT, A, 2005, *The future of Childhood* New York; RoutledgeFalmer GITTINS, D., 2015. *The Historical Construction of Childhood*. In: M.

J. KEHILY, ed. *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*. 3rd Ed. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

ARIES, P. 1965. *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family*

*Life*. London: Random House. SHORTER, E, 1975 *The Making of the Modern Family*; Collins

<https://assignbuster.com/this-and-discuss-social-constructionism-as-a-theoretical/>