

Has the position of children changed?
Or
Has the nature of Childhood changed?

Childhood is a social construction not a biological stage. The idea of childhood is different in different societies. If childhood was natural then it would be the same experience in every society, but this is not true.

Aries says the childhood did not exist until recently, he says that before industrialisation children were regarded as mini-adults and from early age they worked alongside adults and dressed like adults. Aries says that the idea of childhood started for the majority of people after industrialisation in the 19th century when factory acts made it illegal for children to work in factories and education acts made school compulsory. Children were seen as separate from adults and had their own laws. However Aries can be criticised because people under 12 were not allowed to marry and they must have been seen as adults.

Roger says that there are two views on childhood this century. The “innocent child” and the “wicked, sinful child”. Each view suggests a way of treating children either children should be protected and cared for so that they have a happy and carefree life or they are naughty and must be restrained and disciplined. In both cases the responsibility of parents.

The 1989 Children act says that the court’s main priority with children must be their own welfare, and this reflects the need to care point of view. However the education system is based on the control of children, they have no choice but to go to school, they no say in what they are taught and they are expected to do as they are told.

Postman in ‘The Disappearance of Childhood’ believes that the idea of childhood will disappear because the boundaries between children and parents is breaking down as children have access to the adult world through television and internet which has brought adults interests and concerns into the lives of children.

However, Lee disagrees with Postman, Lee says that childhood continues to exist because children are economical dependent on their parents of until the age 18 or beyond. Although children have economical influence on what is produced and brought, for example mobile phones, toys and games they are still children in that they depend on their parent’s purchasing power. In many ways the nature of childhood is not clear because children are at different times both dependent and independent.

Archard (1993) notes that in our common sense though, childhood is based on notions of ‘separateness’ from adulthood. Children are not adults they are separate from adults and need to grow up to be able to join the adult world.

Robert Boccock (1993) has suggested that over the past century we have seen the rise at a consumption role of children and also particular for the age we describe ‘teenagehood’. Capitalism needs people to buy the things it produces in order to keep profits flowing. Children today, unlike ever before, are part of this process. Many products are aimed directly at them, effectively “creating” and “constructing” their identity as children from toys and sweets, from clothes to single charts. All this spending is by and for children living directly to the ways in which the family is now often centered directly on children. Previously before the creation of capitalism contributed to the family, rather than the family providing them.