

AS Sociology Coursework

Hypothesis

‘Childhood over the last 50 years has changed’

Throughout my life my elders have said ‘that’s not how it was when I was a child’ so this has made me interested in finding out how childhood has changed over generations. Each generation is claimed to have a different experience of childhood. I will study this to find out what exactly has led to these changes.

In the 21st Century childhood is seen as very important and families accommodate this by becoming more child-centred again, I am interested in what has led to this change, and why are children seen differently today.

(101)

Contexts and Concepts

My first context is by Philippe Ariès a study which also includes my first concept ‘industrialisation’. Industrialisation is the process whereby societies moved from agricultural production to industrial manufacturing. Ariès showed that industrialisation changed almost completely the position of children. He argues that, before industrialisation, most children were seen as mini-adults. Children dressed like their parents and did the same work, mainly in the fields or in the home. Industrialisation caused the family to change in order for it to perform and run successfully. As well as smaller families and shorter working hours, jobs for women were created. This meant there were fewer roles for the child and more time for families spend together. Parents had the opportunity to see their children more often making a closer bond and more aware of the needs of their children.

The changes in my second concept ‘childhood’ over the generations were also caused by the changes in the family. Childhood was considered the time for a child, what should be included in it, was decided by society. There was increased affluence which allowed families to spend more money which made a child ask for more, this formed a huge commercial market for children which included things especially for them such as toys, clothes, books, television programmes etc. which separated them from their parents and they no longer looked like or were seen as mini-adults. The younger generation were now seen as children who needed a childhood, and with this my third concept ‘child-centred’ families developed because there were less children and parents could concentrate and spend more time with their individual children. Families worked around children and so did society this included school, holidays, accommodation, finance etc. Children had to undertake 10-12 years of formal education, often learning things their parents had no knowledge of.

My second context is The Children Act 1989 which was forced into practice in 1991. It was acknowledged that children are vulnerable but however still have certain rights. This act also defined the roles and rights of children, parents and local authority social services

department. A child's future was what the act was most interested in especially the most significant factor in any legal actions. The act also allows courts to overrule parental decisions of a child for some cases such as medical treatment. This is in order to have the child's best interest and heart and make sure it is the best decision for them.

(409)

Main Research Methods

The main research method I would use to test my hypothesis 'Childhood over the last 50 years has changed' are questionnaires.

Questionnaires will be my primary data which can provide me with both qualitative and quantitative data. There will be the benefit of me collecting this data in this form, this will give me statistical information especially through the quantitative data which will come from my closed questions. I will need to do a questionnaire that would allow me to get results from at least 30 people from each decade that would mean 1500 people in total. This will then help me to compare the results of each generation. I would need a large response rate in order for me to compare the results efficiently from each generation. I would use a specific sampling frame because otherwise I will not get the results I need in order to get efficient and correct results. I specifically need the same number of results from at least each decade starting from 1950 in order for me to get the results that will allow me compare the changes in childhood. However this will cause me a big problem because I will have to create a questionnaire suitable for ages 10 and 60. I will have respondents of a very young age who need to be able to understand questions and answer them efficiently

These questionnaires will be simple to answer and will contain several types of questions including closed, multiple choice and open questions. This gives a variety and allows the respondent to give more information and fit into a category giving me better results. The data I will collect should not be biased and ethical factors need to be considered because I cannot be too personal as people may be hesitant to tell information about their childhood.

I will conduct a pilot study which will allow me to make sure the results I get are the best I can achieve. This will entail me to help my respondents answer the questions the best they can. I will help them and explain anything they don't understand in order for me to get more reliable results.

I will find a sample that should hopefully be representative of the population, the bigger the sample the more accurate results of the population I will get. I will give the questionnaire to those who were born at the beginning of each decade. This is so each respondent's childhood was contained in and during that decade. (415)

Potential problems

There are undoubtedly any numbers of problems encountered when conducting a study. Here are some of the ones I may face.

Questionnaires will be time consuming because I would need to design one which needs to be suitable to what I am doing and the results I want to gain. A lot of time will be needed because I will need to find and pick suitable respondents who will then have to take time to fill the questionnaire in.

When giving out questionnaires I may get a low response rate which means I will not get sufficient amount of results I need in order to do my research. This will affect the validity of my sample. I specifically need the same amount of respondents from each decade starting from the 1950's, without this I will not be able compare each generation and the changes over time.

I will need to make a questionnaire suitable for all ages that includes children, teenagers, middle-aged and the elderly, this because all the ages will be filling it in and they need to understand the questions. This could cause me problems because people may not understand the questions to answer it properly which would mean some of my results may not be reliable. Children are the age bracket that needs to be considered when designing the questionnaires because those are ones who may have difficulty in filling in the questionnaire.

Testing childhood and how it has changed can be very difficult because other factors need to be considered which will affect my results this includes affluence, the development of technology, jobs available, education, wars etc. these factors will all affect a child's childhood which will need to be taken into consideration. All these problems will and can occur I will need to overcome these in order to get reliable and valid results. (308)