

**Using examples from item 2 and information from elsewhere,
explain why sociologists regard childhood as being socially
constructed**

Sociologists believe that children are not natural in society, that they do not behave naturally but that society has made children act as they do, and that their parents teach them how to act and make their personality for them at an early age. However childhood 'differs enormously according to time and place' so Philippe Aries believes. Children are treated differently to each other in different parts of the world, for example in India when a girl is 16-17 years old she is forced into an arranged marriage by which her parents arrange. That type of responsibility on a girl of that age is a lot, and most Indian girls refuse and end up running away from home or worse still killing themselves, but in their culture at that age they are seen as adults. Also in China girls are made to bind their feet up at an early age so that their feet do not grow any bigger. Some people may see this as a form of child abuse, but in China, that is what is expected of them. So there are quite a lot of differences in the upbringing of children. Not every child will turn out the same, all children will vary and that is to the way that they are brought up by their parents.

It is not just the different cultures, which varies, but also the different social classes have a different way of bringing up children. The upper social class tend to spoil their children to a certain extent because they can with all the money that they have. This socially constructs the child to grow up with a spoilt nature, and would maybe affect the rest of his life because he will believe that he can get whatever he wants. This goes for 'designer babies' as well. 'Designer babies' is when the parents of the child materialise the child's upbringing with buying expensive designer clothes and all types of accessories for the child, and so this will make the child spoilt for the rest of its life because it will expect to get its own way all of the time. Whereas on the other hand the poorer classes will not have a great deal of money and so therefore the child would have to make do with what it was allowed. This means that the child misses out on what the other children are having and so that may have an affect on the child because it might feel neglected and as if he is not worthy of what the other children have.

In the old days and in some parts of the world it is still happening today, children are being exploited and forced to do child labour instead of getting an education and having fun like the other children are doing. Some parts of the world believed that children should work as soon as they are able. Some children are forced to work so hard that they get really ill and are unable to survive, that is in poorer parts of the world mainly, where parents have sold their children to labourers. This means that children didn't really get a childhood as such, and as Philippe Aries believes, 'From the 15th century onwards, however, it came to be recognised that the child was not ready for life' as mentioned in Item 2.

Another form of social construction of children is the way children are being treated in Guatemala City. In a video 'innocent's lost' it showed the

way children were living on the streets because they had been made homeless because their parents didn't want them anymore. The children were only in there teens, and some were younger than that, and they did not have any food or money to buy food, and the only way of earning money was the children prostituting themselves, and the money that they did earn was not spent on food, it was spent on Resistol, which is a form of glue which the children sniffed so that they could try to beat their hunger. This drug abuse is said to destroy the brain gradually, but that is all the children have in life. The most horrifying thing of all is that nothing is being done to stop these kids from being abused on the streets. The government and the police are not helping the children at all, if anything they are abusing them by raping and beating them children, and sometimes even killing them.

Laing uses 'Jane the tennis ball' as an example of how parents use their children as 'tennis balls', and he compares it to a game of tennis because the parents are continuously passing the 'ball' from one side of the court to another in a game of singles between them. This can lead to dangerous results like violence and war because the child can be damaged psychologically by the behaviour of there parents.

Other children are beginning to commit crimes at early ages; this is down to their upbringing, because of the lack of care in which the parents are giving the children. The children were being ignored and not looked after properly because of their parents turning to alcohol and becoming alcoholics. This is said to be one of the main causes of why children commit so many crimes at early ages, because they have not been taught the social values and how to behave, and half the time the children behave how their parents behave, and so will eventually turn into them, alcoholics.

A different reason why parents disown their children is if they are disabled. This is another example of how children are bought up and treated differently in different countries and with different beliefs. It is mainly in Greece where this happens. The reason why disabled babies are disowned is because they don't want anyone to know that they have a disabled person in their family because they believe that their family wouldn't be normal if they kept the disabled baby, and also that it wouldn't be fair on their other children because then they may not be able to marry if anyone found out they had a disable gene in the family, so it is all about family status. So the family send them to an institute at an early age and leave them there and do not visit them or anything. In these institutes they are made to stay in their beds and in some cases are tied to their beds. In these institutions there is no stimulation for the children, like children are supposed to have, so most of the children are not able to speak properly or walk properly because of the fact that they have been deprived of any sort of stimulation. They are kept in these institutes from the early age of when they were sent in there until they die basically. So this is not natural construction of children. This is social construction, because parents don't want them to lead normal lives, but instead have them locked up so that they don't get a chance in life like everybody else.

An additional way in which children are socially constructed is by the media. The media influences children a lot at early ages, and makes the

children want to grow up to be somebody that they idolise, like pop stars, this is known as having role models. A common role model who young children look up to is Britney Spears. She was once seen to be innocent and pure, and set an example to children, things such as save sex until after marriage and promoted against not smoking, but then more recently she went against these so called beliefs, and it has been uncovered that she has had sex before marriage and that she does smoke now. This has a huge affect on children because the person who they once looked up to and admired has now set up a new trend, and children will think 'well if she is smoking and if she is having sex before marriage then it must be ok and it must be right so I will follow her examples' and that is how children are going to be socially constructed. The media have huge powers of children, and could almost brainwash them at an early age into how to behave because children love watching television. Also soaps such as Neighbours and Hollyoaks are put on at an early time because children mainly watch them, but some of the story lines in them are meant for adults and are not quite appropriate for children to understand. For example in Hollyoaks there are a lot of controversial story lines, which would maybe entice young children to behave like their favourite soap character. Parents could be to blame for this because they should be supervising what their children are watching.

Something else which links into role models, is nowadays parents are working full time to earn a living and the children are being sent off to child minders and things like that. This means that children are mixing with older peers at a much early age, and this can lead to peer group pressure. When children look up to their peers and copy what they are doing, and this can mean that children may be growing up quicker to try to catch up with their peers of a slightly older age.

Also the problem with both parents at work, most children these days are left to their own devices, and this means that children are becoming more independent at an earlier age and that they are started to rely on the mselves rather than on their parents. Therefore the children are missing out on their childhood. On the other hand some parents may be really strict with their children and may smother them too much, and that could lead to children rebelling at a later stage and once they realise how much their parents are controlling them they will rebel against their parents and so do the exact opposite of what their parents are expecting of them.

Childhood has never actually had a defined time when the child turns into an adult. It varies in different cultures all around the world. In this country many people used to believe that the official age of turning into an adult is 21, but nowadays it varies, nobody actually knows. Compulsory education has lengthened childhood. It has done this because it means that whilst the child is still in education then they still rely highly on their parents for financial support. However some parents want their children to grow up more quickly. In a film documentary 'Under the Sun' it shows examples of 'painted babies'. This is where parents put pressure on their children at an early age to win things such as beauty pageants and talent competitions. This is not done of their natural looks or their natural talent, it is socially constructed, the children are forced to go through lots of training and lessons

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to get their talent just right, and they are made to dress up in revealing dresses and to plaster their faces with makeup to make them look older, and also to do their hair nicely to also make them look more good looking and older than they are. The parents put them through this when they are only babies and they do it when they are toddlers. This means that children are missing out on their childhood and are having too much pressure to win these competitions for their parents sake more than their own. They are lacking on education to a certain extent as well because the children are made to travel long distances for singing lessons and dance lessons and to travel to beauty pageants and talent contests. When they are not doing this children are forced to practise their dance routines and what they are going to do and what they are going to sing on stage. Some children have even been made wooden catwalks in their bedrooms so that they can practise properly. All this is bringing out paedophilia and it teaches girls to be precautious because of the way they are being made to dress sexily at such an early age. Also it encourages stripping at an early age. In one of the routines that the young children have to do is they have to take off layers of their clothes in a sexy and perfectly timed manor to show off what they are wearing underneath. This shouldn't be forced upon young children because they will grow up with attitude problems all because the parents expecting too much from them.

This idea of 'painted babies' is an obsessive way in which parents put pressure and abuse on their children. The way that they get the children to dress and look isn't natural for them at all, and this is a final exam ple of how childhood is gradually disappearing in society today.