

Starter for 12 Sociology

The social construction of childhood

“Childhood doesn’t exist - Not in the same way the number 4 exists, or an apple exists.”

1. What is the person who made this comment trying to say?

Childhood as a social construction

Sociologists believe that ‘childhood’ only exists because of the way society has created it. For example, there is no factual age at which childhood stops.

We can prove that childhood is a social construct by looking at 3 categories:

Differences in
childhood between
societies

Differences in
childhood within a
society

Differences in
childhood over
time

Differences in childhood between societies

2. Do we know of any ways in which childhood is different between societies around the world? *Hints: If you have experience with other cultures, is there anything you can think of that’s different? Or have you travelled anywhere and noticed anything?*

Challenge – Can you use the studies below to support your answers?

Benedict (1934) found that children in non-western cultures have more responsibility at home and work. He also found that in many non-western cultures, the expected behaviour of children was less clearly separated from the expected behaviour of adults.

Childhood in the west is seen as an innocent and vulnerable, and needing a lengthy period of nurturing and socialisation. Childhood in the west is clearly defined as a separate section of life to adulthood (Pilcher, 1995).

What about the future?

How do you think childhood will be different in:

- a) 10 years
- b) 100 years

Postman (1994) a sociologist, thinks that childhood is disappearing. He thinks that the shift from print culture (written words) to television culture has been the cause of change.

3. Why might this be?

Postman (1994) Here are some of the reasons Postman gave for his theory.

Print Culture	Television Culture
Children lacked literacy skills so they couldn't explore adult matters and material such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Sex- Money- Violence- Illness- Death	Adult authority is weakened Boundaries between adults and children are blurred Information available to adults and children alike.

4. Do you agree with the reasons Postman has given?

Initiation With Ants | National Geographic

Watch the video below and explain how this could relate to what we've learned so far about childhood?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGIZ-zUvotM>