

History of Childhood

The background of the slide is a solid light beige color. In the bottom right corner, there are several overlapping, wavy, light grey lines that create a sense of movement and depth, resembling stylized waves or a path leading into the distance.

What is childhood?

- Differs between cultures and societies
- Has changed over time and will continue to change

Therefore

- Childhood is a social construction rather than a biological fact
- When does childhood end?

Childhood & Sociology

- Childhood fairly new as a subject of sociological study
- Phillipe Aries (1962) one of first to see childhood as a changeable cultural product – Centuries of Childhood

History of Childhood

- “Creation” of childhood through the separation of the child from society
 - Family – creation of the private sphere
 - Education
- Many stages of development of childhood
- Pre-16th Century
 - Childhood short – up to age of about 7
 - High infant mortality

■ 16th-17th Century

- Idea of children as innocent
 - Concept of moral, spiritual & physical responsibility of family for the child
- Idea of the child as weak & stupid
 - Need to look beyond the child to the future adult
 - Need for strict discipline, supervision & education
- Childhood as preparation for life in public sphere

■ 18th Century

- Industrialisation
- Better health care & basic contraception lead to smaller families
- Movement of the child into the centre of the family

- 19th Century
 - Exclusion of children from mines & factories
 - BUT working class parents often dependent on children's wages
 - Campaign against child prostitution & beggars
- Education lengthened childhood & separation from adult world
 - Especially for boys

Childhood in modern society

- View of children as not fully developed
- Childhood as a time to:
 - Build character
 - Learn morals
 - Become ready to join society
- Children as vulnerable, in need of protection
- BUT – Erosion of child/adult division?

Further reading

- Sociology for AS Level, pp.56-58
- Introducing Sociology for AS-Level, pp.58-61
- Plus numerous books specifically on childhood which can be found in the LRC