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| **6. Childhood** |
| **Analysis** | **Application** | **Evaluation** |
| Childhood as a Social Construction | Childhood in Britain today can be seen as quite a privileged time. Children are protected by laws to prevent them from being exploited at work, or being neglected or abused by adults, they get cheaper travel, have special foods, clothes toys and leisure activities designed for them, as well as having schools to educate them and specialist health care. It is often thought that this is a perfectly natural result of children’s biological immaturity as they appear to be vulnerable and need the care and protection of adults. However, Sociologists argue that the identity and status of children, and childhood as a separate phase of life, have been ***created by society and social attitudes*** and are not actually moulded by biological immaturity. The role is imposed on children by those who have more power than them such as parents and teachers. So it is argued that childhood is a ***social construction.***There is evidence to support childhood being a social construct:* Differing status, responsibilities and treatment of children in different contemporary cultures
* The changes of these things through history
* Difference between these things even in the same society

***Cross-Cultural Differences in Childhood*** The freedom from adult responsibilities experienced by Western Children is not the same in all societies, especially those found of developing countries (Non Western societies). In these Non Western societies Children take on adult roles as soon as they are able to work. ***Historical Changes in Childhood*** In medieval times, childhood did not exist as a separate status. Children often moved straight from infancy to working roles. They were known as ‘little adults’ and had to take on adult roles as soon as they were physically able to do so. Children did not lead separate lives and mixed with adults. The family was a patriarchal unit and fathers often had little to no interaction with the children. Aries showed that the social construction of childhood was linked to industrialisation. During the nineteenth century restrictions on child labour in mines and factories was introduced. The growing speed of technological changes in the nineteenth century meant that parents were unable to pass on knowledge and skills required for working life and the need for a literate and numerate labour force led to development of compulsory education from 1880 onwards.  | ***Cross Cultural Differences**** 1/7 children in the world work
* 215 million children ages 5-17 involved in child labour in Sub-Saharan Africa
* 28% of children are involved in work (58 million)

(The International Labour Organisation)* Between 2004-2007 child soldiers were active in conflict in 21 countries around the world, with children both being brutalised and killed as well as doing this to others as part of adult conflict. Girls as well as boys are involved with girl soldiers being subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence.

(Child Soldiers International)***Historical Differences**** Child labour was commonly practiced up until the mid-nineteenth century
* Children worked as long and as hard as adults
* In poor families young children were often made to scavenge and street sell as well as girls being forced into prostitution
* Children faced the same legal punishments as adults and for criminal activity
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| Children in Contemporary Britain | During the course of the 20th and early 21st century, families have become more child-centred, with family activities and outings often focused on the interests of the children. Here are some of the causes of child-centeredness:* Families are smaller
* Change in the working week: in the 19th century a typical working week was 70-80 hours whereas now it is more like 43 hours
* Increased affluence: higher wages and higher standard of living
* Increased access to benefits from the welfare state
* A change in the way we encourage growth of a child i.e. advice from many other sources e.g. books, TV shows such as “Supernanny”
* Compulsory education in both further education and also introduced at an early age (5) gives more opportunity to acquire knowledge
* More complex lives of children: wider range of educational, medical, leisure services and so on
* Parental fears of ‘stranger danger’ – children less likely to be left on their own and are more likely to be chaperoned by parents

***The changing position of childhood***Many would see the lives of children in Britain being better than those of children in history and also in comparison to other cultures (e.g. non-western) however there are inequalities experienced by the children of Britain today. These include:* Legal controls over children: laws restricting what children can do e.g. getting married (16 with parental consent, 18 without), driving a car (17), voting (18), having sex (16)
* Unhappy children: Womack (2011) reports that children in the west are the most unhappy. Children in the UK have the poorest relationships with their parents and friends (1 in 3 living away from their biological father), suffer greater deprivation, and are exposed to more risks from alcohol, drugs and unsafe sex than any other wealthy country in the world. 3.7 million children were classified as living in poverty in 2012-2013.
* Child abuse: *Child Abuse and Neglect in the UK Today* found that 1 in 5 children had been severely maltreated during childhood, with most of the ill-treatment committed by a parent or guardian. The following percentages show how we can break down different types of maltreatment of children and young people who were the subject of a child protection plan (CPP) in the year ending March 2013: 41% neglect, 31% emotional abuse, 12% physical abuse, 5% sexual abuse and 11% fell into more than one category of abuse.
* Sibling Abuse: while most of us will have experienced a regular level of sibling rivalry, if it gets out of hand it can have very negative consequences for a child. It may even establish a pattern of abuse which resurfaces in their own adult relationships. Research by Bowes et al. (2014) revealed that children who said they had been bullied by a sibling several times a week were found by the age of 18 to be twice as likely as other children to have depression, to self-harm and to suffer anxiety.

  |  |  **March of progress view** - childhood has improved.* Better educated - £64billion spent on education in the UK each year.
* Protected from abuse – child abuse laws.
* More child centred – no longer to be ‘seen and not heard’ – focal point of families and frequently consulted on decisions.
* Media and leisure activities – cater for the needs of children.

**Evaluation**☹ Idealised image of childhood – ignores the dark side of childhood (abuse, bullying, divorce etc.).**Evaluation**☹ Adult intervention and control is necessary - to safe guard children who are not mature enough to make rational decisions. |
| The Disappearance of Childhood | Postman (1994) was concerned with the disappearance of childhood. He argues that the distinction between adults and children in disappearing. There is a merging of taste, style, behaviour language and attitudes making the two indistinguishable. Children are becoming more exposed to experiences that are shared with adults through the media, especially internet and TV. Children are no longer as sheltered from adult experiences and knowledge including sex, pornography, crime, alcohol and drug abuse, and violence. Cunning ham (2005) argues that parental authority has been undermined by children having money from either parents (pocket money) or, for those who are older, from part-time work. **Palmer** (2006, Toxic childhood) Children’s physical, emotional and intellectual development is being damaged because of junk food, computer games, long working hours of parents, over-testing in schools etc.The UK is low in surveys of children’s wellbeing - concerns exist about obesity, self-harm, drug and alcohol abuse, violence, under age sex, teenage pregnancies, anorexia, self-harm. Silva (1996) suggests that perhaps the roles of parents may be diminishing in face of the growing importance of peers, teachers, and other influences that children are exposed to through the media such as film, TV, computer games, mobiles and the internet, including chat rooms and porn sites.Margo suggests another indicator of the loss of childhood: that over the past 50 years, the average age of first sexual intercourse fell from 20 for men and 21 for women in the 1950s to 16 for both by the mid-1900s. there is concern over the sexualisation of childhood, with advertising and retailers encouraging children to dress and act in a socially precocious way, and Margo points to the proliferation of sex tips for teenagers in youth magazines and health and beauty spas for young girls as evidence that children are exposed to, and expected to navigate, adult concerns at ever younger ages.**Childhood is not disappearing** **Opie** (1993) suggests that childhood is not disappearing – children still have their own independent separate culture. She illustrates with the games, rhymes and songs children still grow up with, often unsupervised by adults.**Liberationists** claim that far from disappearing, oppressive western patterns of childhood are spreading throughout the world (globalisation of western childhood). International agencies campaign for a separate childhood where children should be seen as innocent, vulnerable, need protection and have no economic role. E.g. campaigns against child labour and concerns about ‘street children’. | * Children of a primary school age were found to express concern about adult-related themes like climate change, global warming and pollution, the gulf between rich and poor, terrorism, crime and street violence (Report from Cambridge University-based ‘Primary Review’ inquiry, 2007).
* Survey of 11 to 16 year olds in 2011 found that they were most concerned about terrorism and climate changes as threats to the world (BBC News school report)
* The average child between 8 and 15 years of age received pocket money of around £6.35 per week (£330 per year). Average spending of children (7-15 year olds) in the UK in 2007 was £12.50 per week – a total of over $4 billion a year (2014 Annual Halifax Pocket Money Survey)
 | ☹ **Evaluation**Not all children are equally affected by the above changes – mainly children from the lower social classes and poorer social groups. |