**Godalming College**

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**Sociology & Anthropology Department**

CHILDHOOD





**FAMILY Paper 2 Workbook 3**

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**GLOSSARY**

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| --- |
| Age |
| Generation |
| Life course |
| Millenial |
| Rites of passage |
| Childhood |
| Affective Individualism |
| Cross cultural |
| Child-centredness |
| Familism |
| Welfare View |
| Control View |
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**The AQA Specification:**

***Students are expected to be familiar with sociological explanations of the following content:***

* ***the nature of childhood, and changes in the status of children in the family and society***

**If at any point you are unclear of any material it is VITAL that you discuss this with your subject tutor. You will not achieve well in your AS examinations without this knowledge and will not be able to continue onto A2 Sociology.**

All the key terms you need to know feature at the end of this workbook. We recommend that you maintain your own key studies summaries, as covered within class, to aid your revision.

**AQA Guide**

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| The nature of childhood, and changes in the status of children in the family and society | * How childhood is socially constructed. * Different sociological views on the nature and experience of childhood. * How childhood is experienced differently across gender, ethnicity and social class. * Cross cultural differences and how the experience of childhood has changed historically. |

**CHILDHOOD AND AGE**

**Theorising about Age**

Age might seem to be a purely natural category, and therefore something which sociologists have little to say about. However, sociologists have pointed out that while ageing is a natural process, how age is regarded, how it affects life chances and the way it is used as a basis for differentiating between people, is a social process. Sociologists have therefore been interested to investigate age-based inequalities and to find out how differentiation and stratification on the basis of age occurs.

**Age Identities**

We have two main ways of conceiving of our own age

1. **Chronological age** – years and months
2. **The life course** – a series of stages through which the individual necessarily passes

Even in biological terms, it is clear that the former may consist of entirely arbitrary divisions based not on biological, emotional or psychological maturity, but on cultural factors. The age of criminal responsibility or legal sexual expression for the young, or of compulsory retirement from work for the old, is determined by legal and cultural factors, not the physical or emotional wellbeing of the individual.

**Mannheim** made a distinction between age and generation identifying generations in themselves – that is simply people born at a similar time, and generations for themselves, that is people who might share a common binding cultural experience. For example, generations that experienced the Great depression, the Second World War, etc are alleged to have been brought together by a common experience of overwhelming historical events. “Millenials”, who have grown up with the internet (like yourselves) may have a radically different experience of education to older people, for example nomophobia (fear of losing or failing to have contact with one’s mobile phone may be more likely to be acute for younger people.

Another way of conceptualising issues of age is to consider the life course – a series of experiences, defined by age group, which everyone will experience as they pass from one stage to another sometimes marked by ***rites of passage***. Specific ceremonies that mark the transition from one life stage to another – e.g., marriage, graduation, retirement celebrations and so on.

**THE SOCIAL STRUCTURING OF AGE IN BRITAIN**

Several sociologists have identified a range of issues and concerns associated with different age groups in society, for example.

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| **AGE STAGE** | **RELATION TO SOCIAL STRUCTURE** | **SOCIAL ISSUES CONNECTED TO AGE** |
| 1. **Childhood** | Parents/state | Neglect , pre-school, abuse, poverty |
| 1. **Youth** | Parents, school, peers work /training | Dis/order authority, control, commitment |
| 1. **Youth/adulthood** | Committed relationship or not, children, career | Stability, divorce responsibility, equality |
| 1. **Middle age** | Continued parental role but commitment / responsibilities reduced | Achievement and failure |
| 1. **Early old age (the “young old”)** | Retirement , leisure | Irrelevance, wealth or not |
| 1. **Late old age (the “old old”)** | Retirement, single living | Irrelevance, community care, cost |

**How would you define childhood using the table above? What are the key elements that distinguish childhood from other age groups? Note your ideas around the cloud below.**

**CHILDHOOD**

**CHILDHOOD THEN**

**Has childhood a history?**

Childhood is both a biological reality and a social construction. As the latter it has a history

**Historians on childhood**

1. **Philippe Aries - Centuries of Childhood**

The great French historian and pioneer in the history of childhood. He shows how, in the past, children were regarded as "**little adults**" with no clearly distinctive period designated as childhood.

*"In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist; this is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken or despised. The idea of childhood is not to be confused with with affection for children: it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult. In medieval society, this awareness was lacking. That is why, as soon as the child could live without the constant solicitude of his mother, his nanny or his cradle-rocker, he belonged to adult society. That adult society now strikes us as rather puerile: no doubt this is largely a matter of its mental age, but it is also due to its physical age, because it was partly made up of children and youths."[p 125]*

Medieval attitudes were a result of wider social differences between then and modern society, notably demographic factors (rates of infant mortality, average life expectancy, etc.), the nature of work, the existence of specialised agencies to regulate society and the changing functions and structure of the family.

*"Medieval civilisation ... knew nothing as yet of modern education. That is the main point: it had no idea of education. Nowadays our society depends, and knows that it depends on the success of its educational system. It has a system of education, a concept of education, an awareness of its importance. New sciences such as psycho-analysis, paediatrics and psychology devote themselves to the problems of childhood, and their findings are transmitted to parents by way of a mass of popular literature. Our world is obsessed by the physical, moral and sexual problems of childhood.*

*"This preoccupation was unknown to medieval civilisation, because there was no problem for the Middle Ages: as soon as he had been weaned, or soon after, the child became the natural companion of the adult."[p 395]*

**ACTIVITY 1 - Using Sociology in Focus p113-114 (2nd edition) and Webb et al p180 to help you outline the factors that Aries identifies that have shaped the creation of “the modern cult of childhood”.**

**Schooling**

**The workplace**

**Clothing**

**Specialists**

**What criticisms have been made of Aries’ work?**

1. **Lawrence Stone - The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800**

Stone and others mentioned locate the creation of modern childhood in the nineteenth century - a feature of modernisation. Stone does not simply link childhood to the education service as such, but also to what he calls the rise of "**affective individualism**" which can be seen in what might almost be called the cult of childhood and prising of innocence in the Victorian period.

It is worth noting that this, like Young and Willmott's symmetrical family thesis, involves a kind of top-down model - at the same time of this growth of sentimentality among the middle classes, children were involved in industrial work, sometimes as the primary breadwinner, in increasing numbers and recorded cases of child prostitution reach astonishing levels. Nevertheless, this redefinition of childhood has a notable effect on the growth of education and the construction of modern childhood.

The changing nature of how society constructs the idea of childhood provides an essential back drop to what might be defined as the social problems and policy issues in this area.

**CHILDHOOD NOW**

Age is both a biological and a social construction for sociologists.

Childhood is shaped by more than simple biological immaturity. It has its own norms, values and expectations associated with it. It has legal constraints on the behaviour of children and of adults toward them.

**Does childhood vary between cultures?**

This aspect of childhood is best seen in historical and cross cultural studies. It is very clear that children in other contemporary societies have very different expectations and rights, just as they did in the past. **Raymond Firth** in his study of Tikopia in 1963 found that children would carry out dangerous tasks, such as using sharp tools and fishing in the open sea when they felt ready to do so, rather than when adults decided they were competent and safe. This is in stark contrast to modern Britain*. (****Outlined in Sociology in Focus 2nd edition pages 112-113****)*

**ACTIVITY**

Using Webb et al p 180-181 outline the how the experience of childhood differs from our own expectations in the following three case studies

1. **Samantha Punch** on childhood in rural **Bolivia**
2. **Lowell Holmes** on childhood in **Samoa**
3. **Bronislaw Malinowski** on childhood on the **Trobriand islands**

**Q. Do you agree with the idea that Western ideas of childhood have become globalised See Webb et al p 180)? Give reasons for your answer.**

**The debate on contemporary childhood.**

Contemporary debates around childhood have tended to focus on the future of childhood with two main positions. Either

1. **Childhood is disappearing** as the boundaries between adults and children become increasingly blurred. The omnipresence of the mass media is particularly involved in this, or
2. **Childhood retains a specially protected status**, perhaps even to the extent that it has become increasingly monitored and controlled (so-called “cotton wool children”) and consequently we live in a child-centred society with child-centred families

Both of these attitudes appear in the increasingly challenging moral panics about risks to children in recent years, with focus on danger and abuse both within and outside the family. The rest of this booklet focuses on these areas.

**A Child-Centred Society?**

**Using the material in Browne (5th edition) on pages 336-337, identify the main arguments for the idea that society has become more child-centred over the 20th and 21st centuries.**

Standards of living

Working Hours

Family Size

Welfare State

Marketing

**Child Centred?**

Paediatrics

“Stranger Danger”

Education

Complexity

**Q. What problems can you identify with the argument that we have become more child centred?**

**Children and the Law**

In modern Britain childhood is a legal construction. This is principally expressed in two easily identifiable ways, through the setting of age limits for particular activities and the enforcement of responsibility for the welfare of children (through the Children Act, various education acts and so on).

1. **The Law: Evidence for a child-centred legal system**

**THE CHILDREN ACTS OF 1989**

The main principles of the 1989 act of parliament were as follows

* **the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration**
* **wherever possible, children should be brought up and cared for within their own families**
* **parents with children in need should be helped to bring up their children themselves; this help would be provided as a service to the child and his family and should:**
  + **be provided in partnership with the parents:**
  + **meet each child's identified needs;**
  + **be appropriate to the child's race, culture, religion and language;**
  + **be open to effective independent representations and complaints procedures;**
  + **draw upon effective partnership between the local authority and other agencies, including voluntary agencies.**
* **children should be safe and be protected by effective intervention if they are in danger**
* **when dealing with children, courts should ensure that delay is avoided, and may only make and Order if to do so is better than making no order at all**
* **children should be kept informed about what happens to them, and should participate when decisions are made about their future**
* **parents will continue to have parental responsibility for their children, even when their children are no longer living with them. They should be kept informed about their children and participate when decisions are made about their children's future**

Parental responsibility is defined in Section 3(1) of the 1989 Children Act as ***all the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority which, by law, a parent has in relation to a child and his property’*** and care and supervision orders to safeguard the child from harm are allowable only against this framework.

Some sociologists have argued that this sort of legislation represents a loss of function for the modern family, as other agencies, including the education system, health authorities, social workers and even the criminal law safeguard and regulate the lives of family members and especially children. Others have stressed the way that such acts reinforce the functions of the family and even create new responsibilities for those who care for children. This assumption that the family is always right is sometimes referred to as the “**ideology of familism**”.

**ACTIVITY**

**Q. Identify and explain 2 other laws created in the UK in the 20th century that have had an impact on the role of children in society today:**

3. **The Law: Evidence for a blurred line between childhood and adulthood**

**ACTIVITY:** Using Internet sources identify the age at which you will be entitled to do the following things:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Vote in a general election | Buy a lottery ticket | Get married without parental consent | Consent to a homosexual relationship |
| Watch an “adult” DVD | Be sent to prison | Join the armed forces | Be convicted of a criminal offence |
| Work a restricted number of hours | Buy drinks at the bar of a public house | Consent to a homosexual relationship | Drink alcohol in private |

**Q. How does this table illustrate how difficult it is for us to identify a clear division between childhood and adulthood in modern Britain?**

**Two views of modern childhood**

The debate about the legal status of children often reflects underlying attitudes towards children, either as innocents requiring protection from a harsh outside world or as, in some sense, dangerous (feral youths, juvenile delinquency, teenagers).

Using **Sociology in Focus** (2nd edition ***pages 86-87***) describe what is meant by the **welfare view** and the **control view** of modern childhood as outlined by **Wendy Stainton Rogers**, and, using the material in this booklet give examples of laws which embody each of these views.

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|  | **Welfare View** | **Control View** |
| **Definitionn** |  |  |
| **Examples** |  |  |

**The End of Childhood?**

**Has childhood disappeared at the beginning of the 21st century?**

**Using the following sources - Webb et al p 182, Sociology in Focus pp 87 – 88 - and any other material available outline the arguments of Nick Lee Neil Postman, Iona Opie, and Christopher Jenks for and against this idea. And outline your own conclusions beneath.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Childhood is disappearing** | **Neil Postman** |
| **Childhood has its own culture and has never disappeared** | **Iona Opie** |
| **Childhood is changing but not disappearing**  **Market Forces** | **Nick Lee** |
| **Childhood is changing but not disappearing**  **Postmodernity** | **Christopher Jenks** |
| **My Opinion and why** | **Me** |

**Exam practice**

* Outline and explain two changes in society which may be reducing the distinction between “childhood” and “adulthood”. (10marks)
* Outline and explain two changes in society which demonstrate that society has become increasingly child centred (10marks)

*Item A: A popular view is that childhood is a fixed, universal, biological stage of physical and physiological immaturity that is common to all human beings. Everyone will pass through it on the way to biological maturity and adulthood. However, evidence shows that what counts as childhood, what experiences children undergo and what roles they play, are far from universal.*

Applying material from Item A, analyse two argument against the view that childhood is a fixed, universal stage [10]

*Item B: According to some sociologists, children in today’s supposedly child-centred society lead lives that are segregated and controlled, but childhood was not always like this. Aries describes a medieval world where there was little distinction between children and adults in either work or leisure. According to this view, industrial society brought major changes. Children’s lives became increasingly confined and regulated by adults. Not all sociologists share this view. Some argue that the distinction between childhood and adulthood is again becoming blurred.*

Applying material from Item B and your knowledge, evaluate sociological explanations of changes in the status of childhood [20]

*Item B: Some sociologists suggest that contemporary families have become more child-centred than in the past. Parents today spend much more time with their children, and spend a great deal more money to ensure they give their children the most fulfilling upbringing possible. Many parents want their children to have opportunities they never had themselves as children. Critics of this point to children’s lack of control over their lives, child abuse and other problems that children today may face.*

Applying material from Item B and your knowledge, evaluate the view that contemporary families have become more child-centred [20]