

Childhood as a Construct

Sociology

Aries' claim that childhood is made by history, and the argument since.

The argument that childhood is a social category whose boundaries, meaning and duration are set by a particular society rather than by biology alone.

ARGUED BY

Philippe Aries, 1960

CLAIM

constructed, not natural

- Aries: medieval art shows children as small adults.
- Schooling and child labour law extended childhood.
- The age of adult responsibility varies by state.
- Childhood is separated, protected and supervised.
- Postman: media erode the boundary again.
- Global childhoods differ sharply by wealth.

LOOK FOR IT

Compulsory schooling to sixteen creates a decade of dependence that earlier economies did not have.

Educational reference. Aries' reading of medieval sources is heavily criticised by historians; the wider point has survived better.