BLOCK 1 INTERFERING IN PEOPLE'S LIVES?

UNIT 2 KIDS' LIB: THE POLITICS OF CHILDHOOD
Prepared for the course team by Mary John
The tragedy of childhood is that you have no parliament for the child, all the cards are stacked in favour of the adult. A child can't say 'I am going to write to The Times about this' - he has to accept it. (Spice Miligan)

This unit and two associated television programmes represent one week of course work. There are four discrete pieces of work and these should fit conveniently into four evenings of study (or its equivalent) as we are aware that it will not be possible for most of you to spend much longer than that on it, however interesting or difficult you might find it. It would be possible to read the whole unit and then watch the television programmes, but we feel that this would be a poor strategy as the unit is media-led. By this we mean that the programmes set up and provoke the arguments that follow them in the unit text. We therefore suggest that before you begin you should look at your course timetable and see when the programmes will be shown and then organize your study around them accordingly. We recommend that you plan your work in the following way in order to get maximum benefit from this part of the course.

**Section 1 (Media: TV1)**
This section briefly introduces the major purposes of the unit. It goes on to set an activity that you will undertake whilst watching TV1 and to set the scene generally for that programme. You should then watch the programme and in the light of the work on your activity go on to read the arguments developed from this programme about the social construction of childhood.

**Section 2**
The next period of your study time is for reading this section which links the arguments in TV1 with those that will be introduced in TV2. This section is entirely written material and focuses on the treatment of children through history. In this section you will be asked to read extracts from a paper by David Ingleby which forms part of the unit text.

**Section 3 (Media: TV2)**
This section commences with an activity to be undertaken whilst viewing TV2 and almost immediately requires you to view the programme. After the programme you will examine ideas deriving from the activity you have undertaken whilst viewing and go on to a further consideration of how the child is defined.

**Section 4**
Section 4 examines the specific case of children's rights and concludes by assessing the place of this unit in the course as a whole.

**Aims**
The aim is to introduce themes that relate to children and childhood but which are sufficiently broad that they have considerable significance for the course as a whole and will anticipate debates that will be taken up in various ways as the course proceeds. These are as follows:

1. To consider 'children's rights' by breaking the term down into its component parts and examining what the significance and implications of these issues are. Defining the child and defining what we mean by human rights will be the major components.

2. To consider in working towards a conception of 'the child', what is meant by 'childhood' and the ways in which this is historically, culturally, economically and politically defined. The 'social construction' of childhood will be established.
3 To consider the implications of these changing notions of ‘childhood’ for individual conceptions of ‘the child’, examining in particular conceptions of a child as a passive recipient of the culture as against an active participant in it

4 To examine the nature of dependency in the child and the implications for parental/state responsibility for the child

5 To consider the way in which the social construction of ‘dependency’ in the child acts as a justification for welfare intervention and makes such intervention seem ‘natural’

6 To consider children’s needs for self-determination and autonomy and to examine how these relate to their needs for nurturance, protection and care

1 THE MAKING OF ‘CHILDHOOD’

1.1 Introduction

What you might ask, is all this material on babies and children doing in a course that purports to be about social problems and the way we try to organize and administer our society? Of course, you may agree there are important issues that relate to children and indeed to infants in arms; for instance, where the responsibility for children lies, issues of child custody, neglect and/or abuse of children, protection, education and even environmental issues such as lead in petrol and its pollution of the atmosphere and the effect of this upon developing brains. Some of these specific issues will be taken up later in the course. There are aspects of the treatment of childhood and children that will be taken up in this unit, however, that are arguably major themes that run through many of the problems and anxieties that there are in social welfare.

This unit is called ‘Kids’ Lib’ – a snappy lead-in to weighty questions ‘What do we mean by ‘kids’, children, young ones? What are they wanting liberation from for or are they? This touches on how the individual, in this case the child, is defined in our society, what sort of life and freedoms a young individual may aspire to, the extent to which restraint is legitimately used in the case of children and the boundaries of care, protection, restriction and oppression. The freedom of the individual as we saw in Unit 1 sometimes conflicts with welfare seen as interference and a reduction of freedom. In the case of minors it is not so quite clear what these freedoms are.

In Unit 1 you have been confronted with the social character of the initially apparently ‘natural’ event of childbirth. You have been made very much aware that it is not possible to view an event independently of the social context. This unit, particularly the television programme that follows shortly, takes this further and, it is hoped, demonstrates by way of one particular example how childhood is constructed
This section will show that there is in fact no universal basis for childhood but that it is culturally, socially and historically constructed. This means that we cannot define ‘childhood’ in some simple way that holds for all groups of people, for all times in history. Childhood is not simply defined in terms of chronological age. It is important to realize that this concept is relative in that it underscores a more general point that the process of defining a problem, an issue, an area for intervention – of which childhood is one example – is not impartially arrived at, there are social and political forces at work influencing how we perceive these things.

The social construction of knowledge is not the only issue presented in this unit, as further dimensions of the social world are evident in a crystallized form in our relations with children. Broadly speaking, these concern human rights. In the case of a minor it would seem that the parent has a responsibility to think for, to act for and even speak for the child whilst that child is still young and dependent. The nature of this responsibility and the essence of dependence are the crux not just of parent-child relations but also of any model of the caring, responsible state. If the parent defaults on what are regarded as ‘proper’ responsibilities, the state seems legitimately to intervene. However, parent-child relationships have served as the model for much intervention, allegedly in personal welfare interests. The individual citizen is too often seen as an eternal child, a person without power, without enforceable rights, without a voice and dependent on the state. It is important therefore to examine carefully the nature of dependency in childhood, to concern ourselves with the changing nature of the balance in parent-child responsibilities and to look at the overarching themes of individual rights, parents’ rights and responsibilities, the child’s rights to protection, care and self-determination, and the ways these change. It can be argued that ‘speaking for’ another individual does not only occur when the other is a child but it is indeed a fairly pervasive and questionable feature of the adult social world where certain power interests hold sway over the interests of others. These of parent over child, professional over client, privileged over underprivileged. In the case of children these issues of rights and self-advocacy are particularly sharp and prefigure in some of the ways just indicated tensions and debates that will be raised during the course as a whole.

1.2 Defining childhood

In considering ‘children’s rights’ it is necessary first to explore and define the terms, as they are far from unambiguous and uncontroversial. First of all it is important to define what we mean by ‘the child’ and ‘childhood’. In many ways the manner in which childhood is defined determines or restricts the nature, qualities, opportunities and rights that are given to the individual child. ‘Childhood’ will be used in this unit in a quite specific sense – a usage that may be unfamiliar to you but one which it is important to be clear about now. You may in the past have used child/children/childhood interchangeably. There are important differences in the way these terms are conventionally used in the literature and the first television programme will consider the concept of ‘childhood’. When ‘children’ is used in the literature, it is largely to refer to what is expected in individual children, whereas when ‘childhood’ is used as the emphasis, this relates to the social situation in which those individuals develop and the expectations there are of them. It is, so to speak, the ‘slot’ into which they are collectively expected to fit, it is their allotted space in the social world. John Shottle’s dictum on the matter expresses what is meant very succinctly: “childhood is not something to be found within children, but within the larger society within which they exist, so to speak, which a society constructs for the development of its newborns into autonomous members” (Shottler, 1984, p. 111).

There are various common images of children which arise from such conceptions of what childhood is, these affect not only the behaviour of others towards children but also how their behaviour is interpreted and, moreover, they determine when childhood is believed to be over. Denzin (1977) gives us various examples of conceptions of children arising from background notions about childhood.
suggests that children are in fact 'social objects' without intrinsic meaning, saying that 'to be defined as a child is to be a child – the specific meaning arises out of behaviours people direct towards them.' He goes on to suggest that there are as many varieties and types of children as there are people defining what childhood and the child are. Yet politicians, educators and indeed parents have believed that if only the right expert could be found and trained, a right and proper child would be produced. This is indeed to see the child as an object of social intervention. Denzin goes on to argue that the child is not only a social product but also several other things, amongst them a 'cultural' product, in that, in his view, every social group with a distinct cultural awareness attempts to promote what to them is a proper concept of childhood and adulthood. Childhood is also an important political domain in the sense that, if one conceives of politics as involving competition over scarce resources and over the allocation of power and authority, then childhood can be defined on the basis of the significance of childhood in negotiating pieces in the larger political arena. This is an arena that permeates through every service that relates to children, whether their health (in, for example, immunization programmes), their welfare (as in compulsory education), their well-being (as in care proceedings) or their liberties (as in, for example, licensing laws etc.)

'Childhood' is also used to further the case for particular academic disciplines. The psychologist has a particular view of the significance of childhood, the educationalist likewise, the sociologist yet another and so on. The various images held about children arise from conceptions of what childhood is. In TV1, one specific view of how 'childhood' came to be, emanating from a particular discipline, will be used as a basis for a more extended consideration of the way developments in the social world influence the 'slot' or 'niche' that is childhood.

1.3 The creation of childhood

Background

Television programmes 1 and 2 are linked. The issues in TV2 will develop out of TV1 and both programmes use Neil Postman's views as expressed in his book The Disappearance of Childhood (1983) as the starting point. The discussion in these programmes centres principally around the social construction of childhood and the role which adults have played in this. TV1 examines the status of the child within the social world and follows Postman's suggestion that childhood was historically created by technological and social forces. This develops into a discussion of the implications of the creation of a particular sort of childhood for the training and rearing of the child. The programme takes off from a major emphasis in Unit 1 that 'even such a natural event as childbirth is subject to a wide variety of socially defined practices, in particular, who knows best what should be done and the form of advice that they give', and the argument that one cannot view such an apparently 'natural' event as childbirth without taking fully into account the social context. The programme examines the social context within which childhood was constructed. By clarifying and challenging ideas we take for granted now about 'childhood', the programme takes a historical sweep which suggests a changing view of childhood through the ages. In the last few decades there has been a profusion of works on the history of childhood.

TV1 presents Neil Postman's view of how, historically, 'childhood' came about. Postman's case is founded on the significance of socio-historical factors in the creation of a particular sort of adult. It is often believed that child-rearing reflecting the prevailing ideologies of the culture, shapes the individual child. Postman adds a new twist to the case, not surprisingly plying his own 'trade' as a media specialist (he is Professor of Media Ecology at New York University), arguing that it has been changing media technologies, in the first case the invention of the printing press and later the electronic media, that have had a powerful effect on the construction of the person and have created new directions in child-rearing.

Simply put, the first part of Postman's argument is 'the advent of the printing press gave possibilities for the development of a new kind of adult and by implication, therefore, a child.'
ACTIVITY 1

Whilst watching TV1, think carefully about the following points and make notes

1. Postman suggests in the programme that with the arrival of mass-produced print a new type of adult was created. After the programme think about and make notes on what characteristics of behaviour you think define an adult nowadays. Thinking back to Postman’s case, did the creation of childhood create a new person – the child? If so, what was this child like?

2. In the Victorian schoolroom what was ‘the child’ supposed to be like?

3. What model of the child was being promoted in the modern classroom?

Keep notes and refer to them when you have finished viewing.

NOW WATCH TELEVISION PROGRAMME 1

Postman’s argument

Before discussing the notes you have made as part of Activity 1, let us recap a little on Postman’s argument.

Prior to the invention of the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century virtually all human communication had been conducted in a direct group way. Information was exchanged by word of mouth, ideas by stories, ballads, fables and wise sayings. Even the reading that was done, was done largely aloud whilst others listened or followed the reader’s finger along the characters of the handwritten manuscript. When the printed book became widely available, the reader was able to read for him/herself in privacy and solitude. In reading, ‘both the writer and the reader enter into a conspiracy of sorts against social presence and consciousness. Print created a psychological environment in which the claims of individuality became irresistible. The printing press gave us ourselves as unique individuals to think and talk about introspections could be shared and reflection about oneself undertaken’ (Postman, 1983). The ‘individuality’, these new opportunities for selfhood, that reading provided did not appear to extend to the child. The child could not read so a whole period – ‘childhood’ – was created in which the child learned to gain access to this adult world by learning to read. Childhood, claims Postman, was the consequence of the new form of adult that arose following the invention of the printing press, the wide dissemination of printed information and the consequences of that for personal growth and self-reflection.

Reading and writing meant, according to Postman’s argument, that the individual mind could address not just contemporaries but posterity. Thoughts and deeds need no longer only be communicated by word of mouth to friends, relatives, neighbours, fellow workers, groups. Printed information was also permanent and therefore openly available to anyone who could read and had access to the book. The individual’s world of communication had apparently become liberated. There was no longer any need to be tied to the needs of immediate, contemporaneous and local events and happenings. One no longer only learned from one’s immediate surroundings and the limited accounts and stories one was told, but increasingly learning came from books. The fixing of ideas in print provided an appropriate environment for the full development of symbolic and abstract thought.

When news was passed on by word of mouth, when discussions took place directly face to face or in a social gathering, there was little possibility of keeping secrets. Print opened up the possibility of a certain sort of privacy. Only people who could read, however, could become party to those secrets, which, of course, excluded
Written information became the exclusive property of a reader – who could read about sensuality, death, abominations, abuse and so on. The non-reader was excluded from such excitements. Postman goes on to claim that 'print gave us the disembodied mind but left us with a problem of how to control the rest of us.' Shame was the mechanism by which such control would be managed.

In summary, the new form of adult was characterized by:

1. A new concept of an individual, self-reflective self
2. The development of systematically ordered and symbolic thought
3. The ability to concentrate, inhibit immediate impulses and exercise self-control

Adulthood became a 'symbolic not a biological achievement' and the child was excluded from this symbolic world until he/she could read. Education was necessary to enter this world so schools were reinvented (they had existed in Greek and Roman times) and childhood became a necessity. In a predominantly oral culture, the child had had equal access to the world of adults once he/she had mastered speech, which Postman sees as principally biologically determined. Now education became an essential way into the world of adults and a significant form of social control. It became an institutionalized intervention based on a view of the adult which was a product of technological change. Power relations between the child and the adult changed. 'The mastery of the alphabet and then mastery of all skills and knowledge that were arranged to follow constituted not merely a curriculum but a definition of child development' (Postman, 1983, pp 45–6). The necessity for children to be educated for long periods had profound effects on parent-child relationships as parents became accomplices in the educative process. Adults also became secretive in that it was possible through print to control the knowledge of the young – knowledge about such things as violence, death, abuse and sexuality.
Postman claims that

all of the psychological research on childhood that has been done this century has been mere commentary on the basic childhood paradigm. No one has disputed that children are different from adults. No one has disputed that children must achieve adulthood. No one has disputed that the responsibility for the growth of children lies with adults. (Postman, 1983, p. 63)

In Activity 1 you were asked to consider not just what sort of adult Postman suggested was the result of the mass availability of printed material but also what sort of child was implied by this new creation—childhood. It seems that the child emerging from this thesis is a child who is largely defined by not being an adult, by being dependent upon adult instruction and being within the control of adults. The child had been rendered powerless and insignificant relative to adults. It is a conception of the child that, it can be argued, has survived until the present day and one which emerges from a whole variety of historical analyses of childhood. In all major studies of childhood in our culture the child comes into focus as a passive, malleable and powerless individual.

**Historical analyses and the creation of ‘childhood’**

Before considering these other analyses let us think more critically about Postman’s view. It is clearly an interesting argument, but I cannot help feeling that Postman is overstating his case. He has, as a Professor of Media Ecology, a particular interest, of course, in establishing the power of the media in determining events and in defining the human being. Was it all really that simple, however? One of the problems with this part of Postman’s argument, apart from its over-generalized sweeps through history, has been that he fails to make it clear whether, in talking of literacy, he is referring to the full ability to exchange and appreciate abstract, hypothetical and symbolic ideas through print and reflect upon them or whether in ‘reading’ he is merely referring to a fairly mechanical skill to decode letters and words. If it were the latter, then it would not be at all clear why the mastery of a mechanical skill was such a breakthrough into new realms of knowledge. It has only really been in fairly recent times that literacy of the former kind has been sufficiently widespread as to justify the distinction between adult and child. Moreover, some educationalists (for example, Professor Andrew Wilkinson in the programme you have just seen) suggest that we use books to convey to the child what it is to be a child. Of course, these notions are ‘our’ notions as adults of what a child is, based on our observations and recollections, or on what within prevailing cultural ideologies we feel the child ought to be.

First, let us look at the period prior to the invention of the printing press. If, as Postman claims, the advent of print and its consequences ‘created’ childhood then it logically follows that prior to this invention childhood did not exist at all. The argument runs that the communication conditions prior to the facility for the easy dissemination of ideas that print provided meant that childhood was unnecessary. What were these communication conditions?

Despite Postman’s eager claims, it seems we know very little about the attitudes to childhood in antiquity. The Greeks, it appears, did not pay much attention to childhood as a specific category and indeed the words ‘child’ and ‘youth’ seemed only to serve to mark out the broad sweep of time between infancy and old age. The Greeks whilst not having a developed idea of childhood did, however, believe passionately in schooling. Youth was seen as a legitimate time for intervention and training. The Romans borrowed the idea of schooling from the Greeks and even developed some notions of childhood which we can guess at from some of the paintings and vases which demonstrate a clear distinction in terms of age, of the young and growing child. Four factors in Europe’s descent into the Dark and Middle Ages after the collapse of the Roman Empire which are claimed to be particularly relevant to childhood are, firstly, education disappeared so that, secondly, literacy disappeared, then shame disappeared and the fourth, which Postman claims was the consequence of the other three, was that childhood disappeared.
In a detailed and comprehensive work on the history of childhood that pre-dates Postman (and on which he draws heavily for support), Anès (in *Centuries of Childhood*, 1962) also tries to demonstrate that in mediaeval times childhood was of no consequence. He uses as evidence the fact that no records were kept of childbirth or age. He also points out that (according to a diary kept by Henry IV’s physician at the beginning of the fifteenth century) children were not protected from witnessing all sorts of sexual behaviour that nowadays it would be regarded as profoundly shocking to expose children to (but which many children in this country probably do in fact witness). There are various speculations by the social historians of childhood about why childhood came to be such an important phase in life. There seems some consensus that with the profound changes in our civilization that have been associated with the Renaissance, and more particularly the Age of Reason that followed, there were substantial changes in views of childhood. Postman suggests an image of the child as needing to read to become an adult. Other views of childhood have emerged – views of the child as innocent, as weak and as in need of discipline. It seems, according to Anès, that changing views of childhood emerged first amongst the upper ranks of society, the prosperous and the better educated. Education became vital – not simply so that the child could learn to read but so that he/she could become disciplined into adult ways. Anès emphasizes that ideas of the innocence of childhood resulted in two kinds of behaviour towards children. They had to be protected from ‘pollution by life’, particularly by sexuality, and secondly it became important to strengthen their character and reason. Anès suggests that childhood became more extended through history for boys than for girls. For girls, ‘the habits of precocity and brief childhood remained unchanged from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century’, Anès goes on, ‘even in the seventeenth century by the age of ten girls were already little women. They could be married and running a home by the age of thirteen or fourteen.’

Anès, whilst providing a wealth of historical material supported also by anthropological evidence on changing concepts of childhood, does not account adequately for what precipitated the changes he recounts and why attitudes towards children changed. He argues, for instance, that ideas of childhood and innocence and weakness are to be found in the ideas of a ‘small minority of lawyers, priests and moralists’ but for their influence the child would have remained simply the *poupard* or *bambino*, the sweet, funny little creature with whom people played affectionately but with liberty, if not indeed with licence, and without any thought of morality or education’ (Anès, 1962, p 239). Were the changes due to moralists or pedagogues in the seventeenth century or, as Postman suggests, technological advances? Freeman (1983) emphasizes that it is not possible to ignore the links in changing attitudes as regards childhood and economic activity.

Thought is adopted when it serves the needs of significant groups in society. If education was the medium through which childhood was expressed, why was it that the emergent bourgeoisie in the seventeenth century demanded an expansion in education? Indeed, why a hundred years later, when in power, did they wish to restrict it? Anès’s idealistic interpretation of history does not, and cannot, explain these changes. They can in part be explained as a response to changes in the economic organization of society consequent upon the emergence of capitalism. This had profound effects upon the bourgeoisie and nascent professional class. Life was more complex; it demanded greater skills. It required its initiates to undergo more lengthy educational and training processes. It also produced wealth and thus required an orderly transmission to a next generation which, having been controlled, could be trusted to use it purposefully. This is
why the change in childhood affected boys rather than girls and why its impact was greatest in the middle-class ranks of society rather than amongst the nobility or landowning classes (Freeman, 1993, p. 11)

This introduces further elements in the ‘social context’, this time economic ones, that can be seen to have been relevant if not formative to prevailing views of childhood. Anès tends to concentrate rather exclusively on Jesuit teachings and the later theories of the Enlightenment. He suggests the consequences of these views were that the institutionalization of a systematized method of discipline on the part of adults served to separate children from adults.

Centuries of Childhood is a classic of its kind and certainly made everyone think hard about the changing context of childhood as well as changing conceptions of childhood itself. The work influenced many, including Postman, and notably the liberationists such as John Holt (1976) and Richard Farson (1978) who have wanted greater freedoms for the child such as they once had. Like much work in this field, it is easy to be seduced by the arguments and not examine fully the evidence on which they are based. You will have noted in TV1 that Postman generalizes from pictures painted by Breughel to make all sorts of suggestions about life at the time he claims, for instance, that life was principally out of doors. Could this impression possibly have to do with the painter’s need to paint in daylight rather than by oil and candlelight and the generally poor illumination indoors? Contemporary diaries have also been a popular source of ‘evidence’ for the social historian of childhood. This is not without problems. Anès, for example, draws extensively on records about the upbringing of the child who in fact was later to become Louis XIII. It is unlikely that the experiences of that child were particularly representative of the life of most French children around that time. Moreover, much data came from diarists who were male and arguably not so close to the life of children as women were.

Care must be taken over conclusions which may legitimately be drawn from Anès’ research. Writers who work within the children’s liberation paradigm are wont to assert that, if at earlier stages in history children were not treated differently from adults, this warrants the conclusion that children today should be treated like adults. Freeman points out that even if this conclusion were correct it would still need further logical argument to justify. He emphasizes, and this is important for us here, that few social historians of childhood have looked at the treatment of children, rather they have provided a history of the changing ‘niche’ children have been allowed to occupy. For example, the dynamics of parent-child relationships have not been major concerns. De Mause (1974) differs from the others, however, in that he suggests that the evolution of childhood has to do with the way in which from generation to generation the treatment of children gets less childish as parents mature. This is a view which, whilst interesting and supported by De Mause with copious evidence, is open to some criticisms in that in making his case he sweeps through history, largely ignoring or rendering unimportant, as many other social historians of childhood have done, differences in geography, social class and so on. He is also thought to have assumed in his interpretation of parental behaviour a greater involvement with their children than the cumulative evidence suggests they had.

For the sake of the developing case in this unit, however, it is important to move on from an analysis of the social construction of childhood to consider what treatment the child has received and is now receiving. You will recall that in looking at the component elements in children’s rights that is the first of the unit’s aims we needed to look at childhood to help in our definition of the child. The child, as has been implied, is often defined by the treatment he/she receives.

If the development of the society is such that at various points childhood comes to be defined in different ways, the logical implication is that in order to mould the individual child to accord with the attitudes and expectations of a prevailing view of childhood, certain parental practices and educational treatments will have to be adopted.
2.1 Controlling children

In TV1, in addition to the arguments of the social historians of childhood, you will have noted differences in the treatment accorded to children in the illustrations you were given of educational settings at different points in history. These indicated ways in which the child was encouraged to develop to fit in with the culturally prescribed ideals. In the Victorian schoolroom we saw the child being encouraged to be self-disciplined, to learn self-control. Children were generally viewed around that time as intrinsically sinful, undisciplined and reckless. They were taught to seek salvation in spirituality, self-control and the inhibition of most of their impulses. They had to learn to behave appropriately and decorously. In the more recent classroom scenes, it was clear that the emphasis was not so much on deportment, good behaviour and the subduing of youthful exuberance as on the encouragement of self-reflection, self-knowledge – the result of a very different view of what children should be like. Children are no longer to be seen and not heard; they are to be heard, expressing themselves albeit in socially sanctioned ways. Both approaches, it can be argued, involve control by adults over the child, the manipulation of the child’s behaviour and consciousness to fit in with the prevailing view of childhood. Both models render the child very much dependent on adult manipulation. The emphasis on self-reflection, on teaching the child what it is to be a child, is, in fact, little different from the Victorian school’s emphasis on what it is to be a child. It is true that the models of the ideal child are quite contrasting, but what is most fundamentally different are the ways in which this rendering the child into the desired type are achieved. The methods used for such shaping in the most recent schoolroom scene, however, seem more palatable. Are these methods indeed as controlling as the obvious disciplinary approach of the Victorian school?
2.2 Children as property

In looking at the treatment which children have received from their parents throughout history and the educational stances that have been thereby reinforced, Stone (1977) has shown that there have been changes in parent-child relationships but that such changes have been neither uniform nor linear. He suggests that for a very long period of time children have, for different reasons it is true, been treated as property. Attitudes towards children which cast them as personal property do not simply belong to a bygone age. In a study specially commissioned by the Department of Health and Social Security, *The Needs of Children* (1974), whose aim was ‘To prepare a comprehensive document about the developmental needs of all children, about the ways in which these needs are normally met’. Kellmer Pringle detected an attitude that ‘a baby completes the family, rather like a TV set or a fridge that a child belongs to his parents like other possessions over which they may exercise exclusive rights.’

She suggests that these notions ought to be dispelled. It seems, however, that such propretorial ideas have long historical roots and account, in part, for the way children have been and continue to be treated. Are children controlled and rendered dependent not just because they cannot read but because they are regarded as chattels? In this conceptualization of the child as property, dependence is not that of the young and developing child on guidance, support and instruction. Rather it is the dependence of poverty, dependence which often offers no protection, no choice and no rights. The child is not a separate person but an adjunct to the individuality of the parent, an amplification of their power and dominion.

Looking back to where this all started, it seems that in the sixteenth century (a century after the appearance of the printing press) middle-class children were in complete subordination to their parents (Stone, 1977). Severe upbringing was part of a drive for ‘moral regeneration’, a desire to suppress the sinfulness of children and also, importantly, aimed at maintaining the social order. At that time children were indeed very much regarded as the possessions of their parents. In the seventeenth century the treatment meted out to children was similar to that given to other prize possessions such as young horses, hunting dogs and hawks. Children had to have their youthful spirits curbed, they were not to have a will of their own.

the early training of children was directly equated with the taming of hawks or the breaking in of young horses or hunting dogs. All animals which were highly valued and cherished and it was only natural that the same principle should be applied to the education of children (Stone, 1977, p 163)

Corporal punishment, whipping and flogging were a regular feature of the child’s early life, so much so that Stone quotes a moral theologian of the time who, in attempting to convey to children what Heaven would be like, claimed that it would be a place where children ‘would never be beat anymore’.

The reasons that lay behind submission to patriarchy (that is, the power of the father) were largely practical and related to the transmission of property and wealth, so were crucially important to the land-owning classes. There was parental control over marriage partners which obviously lasted for a longer period in history amongst those who had most to lose through a misalliance – status, power and, above all, property. It wasn’t merely the aristocracy who were involved, the squirearchy also had land-owning interests. Children enjoyed a greater freedom, particularly over the choice of marriage partner, the lower down the social scale one went. Even so, children were still regarded as the personal property of their parents and very much under their control to do with as they pleased. Among the poor the labour of children was exploited, among the rich their marriages were contrived, all to the economic advantage of the parents (Pinchbeck and Hewitt, 1973, p 348).
2.3 Liberal attitudes, ‘concern’ for children and family autonomy

Parental control was only released gradually. Stone argues that most noticeable changes in attitudes to children were evidenced during the time between the Restoration and the beginning of the French Revolution. There was during this period a more liberal atmosphere with children being given more affection, greater freedom and a certain status of their own. Teaching methods became less severe with psychological persuasion, or perhaps manipulation, as a better term, replacing physical coercion. Parent-child relations seemed to become characterised by a greater warmth, child-centredness and permissiveness. The aristocracy, however, maintained their previous indifference to their children, and among the artisans and what Stone calls the 'cottager class', children were still often brutally treated and exploited for labour. The move towards a more liberal approach amongst some sections of society seemed to reverse in the Victorian period of authoritarian rule, as you have seen illustrated in the Victorian schoolroom scene in TV1. There was a revival of the old Punish concept of the innate sinfulness of the child. Punishments were severe including flogging and sensory deprivation, as much of this behaviour was motivated by extreme religious fervour, supervision of the child was intense, as you just witnessed. The fact that the Victorian age was a dark age for children is partially explained by Pinchbeck and Hewitt who suggest that the exploitation of children 'sprang from the notion, supported by religious sanctions, that in society there was a place for everyone, and everyone should remain in his place. Hence the knowledge that for some that place would be unpleasant was merely confirmation that they belonged to a lesser and lower order of creation.' (1793, p 357) They also noted that there was a link with parental rights. Views of parental rights and responsibility identified patriarchal decision-making -- and all that went with it -- with societal stability and cohesion.
Surprisingly, even well-known reformers such as Lord Shaftesbury who had campaigned so vigorously to protect child workers from exploitation by ruthless factory owners, would not interfere in parents’ rights. He actually opposed proposals for the compulsory education of children on the grounds that he felt it infringed the parents’ right to bring up the child as they saw fit. According to Pinchbeck and Hewitt, around this time the Charity Organization Society, a leading welfare agency (which is discussed further in Unit 14 and Chapter 2 of the Reader), strenuously opposed free school meals because they believed that it was in the better interests of the community to allow ‘the sins of the parents to be visited on the children than to impair the principle of the solidarity of the family and run the risk of permanently demoralizing large numbers of the population’ Stone (1977) suggests that ever since the emergence of the concept of ‘childhood’ there has been concern for children, even when child-rearing practices have been at extremes of repressiveness. It is necessary, therefore, to view ‘concern’ with caution as, for example, the ‘child saving movement’ of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which expressed very humanitarian concern for children but produced social practices that can only be regarded as totally oppressive to children.

There was a small illustration in the programme of the way, at least in education, in which there have been reversals in this repressive trend, with the dominant pattern of child-rearing being permissive. This was reflected in what happened in the modern school where less overt control was evident than in the Victorian schoolroom. Stone (1977) suggests that the treatment of children has not been consistent. Throughout the period of history he analysed, he says it ‘has oscillated cyclically between the permissiveness and repression. It seems, lately, that there has been a general trend towards substantially more permissiveness in child-rearing and in education than was the case in the harsh days when Queen Victoria ruled the land and father ruled the family.’ Stone sees this permissiveness beginning amongst the middle classes as early as the 1870s, by the 1890s having spread to the social elite and ‘then in the 1920s and more dramatically in the 1960s and 1970s spreading to all sections of the population.’ It seems in the pleasant contemporary classroom scene you saw that children are freer than before. But are they? Freeman (1983) remarks:

> Children are freer today than they were fifty or a hundred years ago, they have even greater autonomy than in previous permissive ages such as the eighteenth century. At no other time in history could a children’s liberation movement have flourished. Yet remnants of earlier philosophies remain and ideas of the child as property rather than person or on the importance of protecting family autonomy are still with us. They led also, until about 1973, to an unwillingness on the part of social workers and others to remove children who had been physically abused from their parents and to an over-hasty readiness to return such children to their parents. Such attitudes were commented upon critically in the reports of enquiries after such children died at the hands of their parents (Freeman, 1983, p. 17)

The belief in family autonomy is also still alive and permeating much contemporary writing and is, for example, evidenced in the reflections of the combined thinking of lawyers and psychoanalysts such as Joseph Goldstein, Anna Freud and Albert Solnit (1979) in *Beyond the Best Interests of the Child*, who advocate minimal state intervention in child-rearing decisions and point out the dangers inherent in intervention in the family.

### 2.4 Psychological intervention in the family

There is a pervasive form of intervention in the family that is not widely recognized as such. It does not obviously appear to violate secret yearnings for the preservation of family autonomy and at the same time adheres to traditional notions of the child as the property of that family. This is a form of psychological intervention where the parent is taught the necessary psychological skills for shaping, not just the child’s behaviour, but the way the child thinks. The professional infiltrates the family by
engaging the parent as an agent and collaborator. It is this form of control, for such it is, that was operating in the second schoolroom scene we saw, teaching the child what to be, how to become that and how to think and feel. Subtle psychological techniques were at work here, the teacher using such techniques to tool the child to fit the status quo, the socially constructed niche of childhood. Such psychological manipulation of the child may be just as controlling as the Victorian techniques and possibly more extensive and insidious in its influence. Ingleby (1985) in a paper on Professionals as socializers’ entitles the final section of it ‘Children – the new “dangerous classes”’? He points to new forms of control and gives an alarming analysis of how psychological intervention in childhood is infiltrating the very psyche of the child, making sure not only that the child ‘behaves’ but that he/she thinks in certain socially prescribed and acceptable ways. Teaching the child what it is to be a child when coupled with an effective psychological method of manipulation is a questionable activity and holds the possibility of creating a much more far-reaching and worrying uniformity than the regimentation of the Victorian schoolroom. This time it is not simply dependence on adult guidance and instruction that is being created, the child is manipulated into a passive unresisting victim of a particular sort of indoctrination on how to ‘be’. How can this be done?

Ingleby’s paper focuses on what he sees as a takeover of the socialization of the child by the state and its agencies to a very substantial degree. Ingleby says that there is ‘a growing army of professionals operating in the psychological sphere’. He notes that a previous preoccupation with medically-based psychiatry has now changed to give way to a whole ensemble of various agencies – educational, clinical and social psychology, social work and some parts of the legal system – what Ingleby refers to as the psy complex engaged in applying, with various degrees of expertise, psychological technology to social problems. What Ingleby is concerned about is the type of power exercised by the professional through the parent. The psy complex has homed right in on the child’s primary induction into the culture by trying, so Ingleby claims, to guide the construction, not only of the child’s behaviour, but his/her thinking and consciousness as well. This is a long way from some people’s fervent beliefs in ‘natural’ development, says Ingleby, as, far from allowing freedom, it is a subtle and pervasive form of control. It is controlling not just the child’s behaviour but how that child even thinks. The ‘psy’ professionals exercise considerable power. He claims they fool themselves into thinking that their ends are benevolent and the means of achieving those ends are rational. What they are actually trying to produce are ways of living that are consistent with the social order. In fact, they are maintaining the social order by these activities. They seem, according to Ingleby, to produce a form of social control. He looks at the challenge to the social order that children present. Ingleby believes that the provision of care has increasingly become a matter of socializing people. He says it has therefore become ‘difficult to think of “help” as separable from “control”’.

---

**ACTIVITY 2.**

Now read the extract by David Ingleby ominously entitled ‘Children – the new “dangerous classes”? which is a section taken from ‘Professionals as socializers the psy complex’. It is rather a compact argument and you may need to read it twice to understand it fully.

**Whilst you read it focus on the following questions**

1. Why does Ingleby suggest that all children are in a sense ‘in care’?

2. Why are children seen as the new ‘dangerous classes’?
Children – the new ‘dangerous classes’?

The tendency throughout the twentieth century has been for interventions to be made at progressively earlier stages of the (presumed) development of disorders, and as a result regulation of the family’s child-rearing functions has become an important target of intervention. In the process, professionals have become less concerned with looking after problem cases, and more with managing the process of socialization so that problems do not arise.

In seeking to control the very earliest stages in the development of the human psyche, the psyche complex has earned its takeover of the parental function to the ultimate limit. At the same time, its mode of operation has also been transformed: the client (or their parent) is seen as a partner rather than as a passive recipient of help and advice; and a more intimate and democratic relationship is cultivated. I will consider both the methods and the aims of these new modes of intervention.

Methods

When a child is ‘taken into care’ by the state, the professionals take over the role of the parent quite literally. Thus, however, concerns only a relatively small number of children. Of more general interest is the sense in which all children today are ‘in care’. What is this sense?

The sheer quantity of services intervening in the everyday private lives of adults and children has of course increased enormously in the last decades. Child guidance, screening, parent education, social work, child protection, marital and family therapy, day care, the range of experts and services provided expands yearly, in contrast to the cuts in provisions made for the chronically sick and needy (The formation in 1980 of the large International Association for Infant Psychiatry, some of whose members are even proposing to make psychotherapy available to the unborn foetus, shows which way things are going.)

Thus, however, is not only an expansion, but a transformation of the mode of intervention. Since World War II, the character of the parent figure represented by the professional has changed, in keeping with the character of parents themselves. Indeed, there is an intriguing circularity here, for the professionals have themselves contributed to the mellowing of the parental role, by promoting ‘child-centred’ approaches and disapproving of ‘authoritarian’ ones. Having taken away the absolute authority of parents, the experts now encourage them to adopt a suitably less authoritarian manner in turn, they (as parent figures) have adopted the same manner themselves.

Thus can be seen in the style of relations between professional and family. Whereas previously this involved a clash between rival powers, dictating an aloof, formal and authoritative manner on the professional’s part, the relationship encouraged today is one of mutual understanding and respect, and negotiation of the measures to be taken. The client is seen as the partner in a joint enterprise, with increasing opportunity to exercise his or her autonomy. Indeed, over a large area the actual performance of the task may be delegated entirely to the client. When this happens we may speak of ‘proto-professionalization’ [... the lay person acquires the mentality of the professional, through instruction and advice or through assimilation of ideas from books and the media. Here we should note the increase in parent-education courses and in material on child-rearing. ‘Proto-professionalization’ implies a dramatic change in a profession’s attitude to its own knowledge whereas previously, power was maintained by keeping knowledge secret. today the professions extend their influence by publicizing it]

Insofar as psychological discourses constitute an important part of our present-day moral ecology, psychology itself has become a powerful socializing force. Were psychology to become the only version of reality available – which in some places, it already may have become – it would be functioning in exactly the same way as Ossian’s ‘total institutions’ [1970], except that in this case, the institution has no walls.

Why are the proffered discourses so readily taken up? Partly, because the population accepts on trust the benevolent motives of those who produce them, but also because they are presented in a deceptive way, as matters of skill or technique rather than as moral systems. The lack of ideological content in the professionals’ advice is paramount; it must be seen as dictated by ‘scientific’ considerations alone. In reality, of course, the advice given is necessarily value-laden, and it is interesting to analyze how the disguise is achieved. The method is to incorporate personal life into the realm of ‘technological rationality’, so that parenthood (or sexual relations, or even being a child) becomes a technical accomplishment – a matter of acquiring pedagogic, erotic, or cognitive skills [... At the same time, the commonsense skills of the lay person are downgraded, so that the dependence on professionals (‘disabling’, in Illich’s term) is increased]
One should not be misled into ridiculing the notion of 'skill' in human relationships. Clearly, one can be an incompetent parent, lover or child experience tends to remove one's difficulties at the beginning, and wisdom comes in handy. There is, of course, a question about whether that wisdom can ever be adequately encapsulated in a form which professionals could teach, but that is not the issue here. The point is that none of these human capacities can be reduced to the skills that they utilize; they are all opportunities for expressing oneself as a moral being, and it makes no sense to speak of exercising these capacities in a 'value-free' way. For that reason there can be no guidance, therapy, or training for social relationships which does not embody firm presuppositions about desirable forms of life. The notion of an 'optimal' environment begs the question, 'optimal for what?' All too often, we find the covert ideals espoused by developmental psychologists are simply a reflection of their own middle-class upbringing.

What, then, are the values promoted by the psy complex? This is an enormous question, but I shall single out one emerging priority to guide the construction of the child's psyche itself. No longer can the formation of the infant self be left to the unknowing parents, there is too much danger that this crucial and sensitive process will go awry, resulting in a 'failure of socialization.' It seems almost as if children were threatening to refuse to join the human race. Whereas in the late nineteenth century the danger to social order was seen as coming from criminals, mental defectives and vagabonds, the 'dangerous classes' now seem to be babies.

Thus psychology, not to be daunted in its quest for the origin of all social problems in the childhood environment, has moved the spotlight further back to the child's very entry into the human world. Of course, a great deal of theoretical interest has also accumulated these new lines of research, but this whole territory could have been exploited half a century earlier — no strikingly new technology or concepts are called into play. What was absent then but is present now is a demand for the production of this knowledge and the means for applying it. The task is for psychology to build strong and healthy psyches, and to repair and reinforce the work done by parents. Consider carefully the following remarks made by the Bavarian State Minister for culture and education to the International Society for the State of Behavioural Development in Munich, July 1983.

Our younger generation will be agitated by the storms of the times, as scarcely any generation preceding it has been. Standing up to these tempests demands not only biological stability, but above all a mental defence mechanism which it is our job to provide. For this, we need to possess knowledge of the developmental-psychological rules of the game.

If you succeed through your scientific methods in finding ways and means appropriate to the age concerned for conveying to childhood and youth those values which belong to human maturing and which lend to age that authority and magnanimity required for understanding youthful protest, this seems to me to indicate how youth crises can be overcome, perplexity among youth reduced and thoughtlessness in all ages avoided.

How could anyone stand in the path of such progress? Unfortunately we know what lies behind this rhetoric — a right-wing politician's fears about the weakening of authority, the alienation of unemployed youth, the breakdown of traditional sex roles and family patterns, to say nothing of the West German peace movement. This is the 'perplexity and thoughtlessness' which developmental psychology is here being called upon to remedy.

Of course most developmental psychologists see themselves as politically liberal or progressive, and would strongly disown such motives (though nobody was so impolite as to do so at the above congress) Where psychology has adopted overt goals, these have usually concerned laudable aims such as compensating for disadvantage, avoiding racist or sexist attitudes in children, and preventing cruelty and suffering. However, it is the covert aims we are concerned with; those which are hidden by the notion of 'expertise.' Good intentions are not enough, as a study of the nineteenth-century reformers makes plain.

It is foolish to deny the undoubted advances in our ability to understand and regulate the developmental process. Moreover, there is no moral reason why the skills and experience necessary in child care or personal relationships should not be maintained and transmitted through a group of specialists, rather than through folklore or popular literature. Inevitably, these cultural resources promote norms and embody a particular view of life. Indeed, a culture from which similar processes were lacking would be a
contradiction in terms. But such norms must be declared and debated, and in the psy
complex the ideology of positivism ensures that they are not.
As I have repeatedly stressed, the psy complex is founded on a contradiction with
one hand it supports the sacredness of family relations, with the other it infiltrates them
and subjects them to its management. I suggest, in conclusion, that it is this
contradiction which throws both its supporters and its critics into confusion, giving rise
to the conflicts we have discussed between help and control, or wellfanzan and
libertarianism. The solution to these dilemmas can only come through a demystification
of the role of welfare institutions. In the territory of the human psyche, they must either
establish themselves as legitimate authorities, or withdraw their forces.

Comment
Children are seen as the new 'dangerous classes' because it is feared that without
proper guidance they will not build up a strong psyche, will not develop the 'mental
defences' to stand up to the strains of the times. They are seen as needing to learn
the 'values that belong to human maturing'. It is feared that if the job of teaching
them these skills is left entirely to parents, problems might arise, there might be
failures of socialization, the child might rebel and not fit smoothly into a context of
what the harmonious running of society expects of him/her. They are dangerous
because, if they are not trained to think in socially acceptable ways (what is
acceptable being implicitly defined by psychologists but not revealed by them),
problems might arise. Sensitive processes might go awry. Childhood has become a
technical process in which skills are learnt – skills of fitting into the existing society.
The values that are implicitly being taught are not explicitly stated.

Inglesby is suggesting that all children are 'in care' in the sense that psychology has
now become the domain in which all beliefs, values and ideologies are thought to be
located. That the agencies of the state should have the psychological means to
disseminate this psychological correctness to the child is not questioned. When
children are actually in care they must submit to decisions made by the state on
their behalf, so, too, now the treatment of the child aims to channel, with the
skilfully achieved connivance of the parent, development of the child's personality,
emotions, and thinking into the models of good citizenship prescribed by these
technicians of the state and mediated through the psy complex team.

3 DEFINING THE CHILD

So far in this unit in the analysis of the social construction of childhood and the
treatments that follow from such constructions, the child has barely emerged but has
been a much-talked about object of intervention. In the post mortem on the first
television programme, the fact that the child had become simply an illiterate non-
adult was bewailed. The child has not fared much better under other schools of
thought, but has emerged as passive, dependent and potentially dangerous if left to
his/her own devices. This passivity and dependence, as has already been pointed
out, is not the natural dependence of the young and immature for protection and
nurturance but extends into another depersonalizing dependence – the dependence
of restriction of choice, limitations of self-determination and personal autonomy.
Children may at last be ceasing to be property but they are not yet fully persons.
In TV2 questions will be posed as to whether the child is indifferent to what is happening, whether the child is dependent and in what sense, and whether children are passive recipients of the culture or active agents in the process of their own socialization. We move on to consider within the treatments meted out to him/her the extent to which the child is an agent in control of her/his own life. We will attempt to define the child by taking a look at some of the ways the child sees him/herself. So far, the perspective has been very much ‘top-down’, in that, in defining childhood and the treatment of the child, it was the adult’s stance that has been taken. It could be said that in going on to look at issues through the eyes of the child, the perspective will change to ‘bottom-up’. You will find, like so many tensions in social welfare and social problem intervention, that in defining the problem, the means towards a solution or amelioration of the problem or merely establishing the significance of the case, much depends on where you look from and where you stand. So it is with the life of the child. The move in our thinking here is away from notions of ‘giving children what is good for them’ towards an appreciation of what freedoms children have to claim in order to decide ‘what is good for themselves’.

3.1 Adults’ definitions of children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whilst watching TV2, ‘Disappearing Childhood’, make notes on the following</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 How would Postman define the child (not childhood here but ‘the child’)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 How would Carolyn Steedman define the child?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 How would Judith Ennew do so?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 How would some of the children interviewed in Jamaica define themselves?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 How would some of the Peruvian children we heard about define themselves?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The programme began with the development of Postman’s argument to his conclusion where he claims that childhood is disappearing. He argues that the advent of television has meant that childhood is being lost as a discrete stage in the life-cycle. He sees that television, far from acting as a catalyst for new ways of thinking, does not encourage the viewer to respond to the material in any intellectual way at all. The response, he claims, is entirely emotional. The child viewer has effortless access to the adult world. The privacy of the written word is gone – the conspiracy between reader and writer has vanished, as have the secrets that Postman felt that only print could carry. The consequences have been that the adult world is completely exposed and rigorous education has become irrelevant. Television is not regarded as making complex demands upon the audience. It requires, he claims, no training to understand it and does not segregate the audience by age. He sees the child as passively soaking up everything that television offers. It would deflect us from our overall purpose here to challenge, as several scholars have, these views of Postman that television makes no demands on the viewer. The result, he claims, of this exposure has been such precocity in the young that ‘childhood’ can be thought of as a thing of the past. He points to the ‘adultifying’ of children generally on the social scene and the ‘childifying’ of adults, in the simplistic portrayals of them on television. He sees now, amongst these former apprentices to the adult world, drink problems, drug abuse, sophisticated ‘adult’ life-styles, ‘adult’ clothes and self-presentations, adult crimes, adult language (mostly abusive and
blasphemous) and a whole variety of problems previously only occurring amongst grown-ups. He feels that the differences between adults and children have now been eroded completely.

Thinking carefully about this claim that 'childhood' is disappearing raises the possibility that what Postman is really disturbed about is that adult control over children is disappearing. It could be argued that new models of the child are emerging to which he is not sufficiently attuned. He grieves, it seems, for the death of the traditional model of childhood with its dependency on adults for instruction into the rites of the adult, literate, symbolic world. Has television, far from making childhood disappear, freed the child, enabling him/her to participate in the adult world, not just the snatches of it he/she was allowed to know about through controlled literacy? Examination of Postman's advice on how it is possible to resist the disappearance of childhood reveals the lament for what it is. He suggests that parents have to resist the culture. He talks of the evils of a throwaway culture in which 'continuity is of little value and remaining in close proximity with one's extended family so that children can experience, daily, the meaning of kinship and the value of deference and responsibility to elders' is distinctly at odds, in his view, with North American culture at the present time.

Similarly, to insist that one's children learn the discipline of delayed gratification or modesty in their sexuality or self-restraint in manners, language and style is to place oneself in opposition to every social trend. But most rebellious of all the attempt to control the media's access to one's children there are in fact two ways to do this. The first is to limit the amount of exposure that children have to the media. The second is to monitor
carefully what they are exposed to and to provide them with a continuously running critique of the themes and values of the media’s content. Both are very difficult to do and require a level of attention that most parents are not prepared to give to child-rearing (Postman, 1983, pp. 152–3).

There are shades of the psy complex losing its hold here, and Postman is seriously worried by the loosening grip of the parent over the child. He appears to be trying to reclaim or reinstate that control. Clearly evidenced in his view is a definition of what the child is that is based on adult views of what the child should be. Such a child embodies the virtues of ‘deference and responsibility to elders’. It seems clear that these might be important characteristics of the child in one stratum of society. In lower social classes ‘deference to elders’ may well have been regarded as poor equipment for the child to survive with in a ruthless uncaring social world. Being street-wise, cunning and suspicious of one’s elders might be seen to be altogether more adaptive characteristics. Such children might still, however, be very much under the control of their parents.

As one rather original, though possibly superficial, version, Postman has represented the views of a whole school of thought that childhood is not what it used to be. Children are seen in such views as not being polite any longer, they are rude and insolent, they dress as they please, often apparently in defiance of adult convention, they are lazy and irresponsible, they fail to do tasks assigned to them, they question authority, have no respect for property and in sum are feckless, insubordinate and idle. They have ceased to be children as parents and adults want them to be. Thinking about such allegations carefully, you may also come to the conclusion that what is disturbing these bewailers of vanishing childhood is the threat held in the behaviours we have listed to traditional views of the child as subordinate and dependent. It seems that part of the problem might be that, with the weakening of adult power over children, children are demonstrating (obviously to a different degree and at different ages) their own form of personal assertiveness and challenge to the social order. It seems that children have now started to mount in subtle ways their own counter-offensive to the control of adults. In 1986, 979 children under 14 and 2187 between the ages of 14 and 17 were reported missing. Are children beginning to vote with their feet?

**Defining adults as children**

This is an appropriate point to emphasize that ‘childhood’ as it has been conceived so far in this unit is not confined to the ‘young’. Adults are sometimes treated as such, which constitutes a powerful way of depersonalizing and diminishing that individual. The North American black slave provides an example, the treatment of black people in South Africa today yet another. They are kept, much as children, in a powerless position, under ‘paternal’ supervision, called by diminishing terms such as ‘girl’ or ‘boy’ or simply by their first name, punished by beatings, whippings or violent abuse. In ways similar to how the child is rendered powerless by adult control and ‘ownership’, so, too, the black South African labourer is widely exploited and has restriction over sexual activities, purchasing abilities, travel and so on. Just as parents have adult definitions of what a child should be like, similarly here those in authority determine who is a child. Elderly people, disabled adults, women and people from ethnic minority groups often receive treatment based on implicit definitions of a child-like and dependent status. Before going on to the gradual dismantling of adult definitions of the child, it is important to summarize what the major elements in such traditional adult definitions have been. This will enable you to see readily how such definitions of the child can be generalized to the eternal childhood of a wide variety of oppressed minority groups.

---

1 This is a conservative estimate as although the Metropolitan Police Missing Persons Bureau keeps the statistics, provincial and overseas figures are only reported to the Bureau by choice. These figures are therefore not necessarily a representative indication of the number of young people missing in the UK outside the Metropolitan Police District.
Running through adult definitions of the child have been the following characteristics:

- The child as a possession or a piece of property
- The child as an object of intervention, rather than a person, to whom, therefore, respect is not appropriate
- The child as powerless and dependent
- The child as someone who is irrational and weak and therefore cannot know what his/her best interests are, for whom decisions have to be taken
- The child as having no opportunities or choices of his/her own
- The child as a person without a voice/a person who is not listened to, who has to be ‘spoken for’ or ‘on behalf of’
- The child as a person who need not be consulted on matters that concern him/her.

Moving on towards children’s definitions of themselves, it is helpful to observe that the first stage in claiming rights is to define oneself. As women and some ethnic minorities started to define their situation, it became clear that they have problems in common. Oppression is then seen not as a matter of the individual case but common elements in the experience of the group. Children have started to throw off adult definitions and, with their peers, have started to define themselves and their situation.

3.2 Using children’s views

Not all adults have defined the child in oppressive ways, although rarely have they been totally disinterested parties in the ways in which they have defined the child. Carolyn Steedman, who appeared in TV2, does not see the child as so passively under the control, ownership and direction of adults. She draws her clues as to how children view themselves from their own writings. Her research work was amongst young children living in deprived and desperately depressing worlds where it was not just the television that exposes adults’ secrets but where adults’ secrets form the very fabric of their lives – despair, poverty, the progression of pregnancies, worries, family tensions. The separation of adult and child worlds was not clearly marked. She claims in The Tidy House in which she presents her research findings.

By many external indices, then, the children who wrote the story that is the subject of this book [The Tidy House] came from a background of material deprivation. They had, like all children in their class and many thousands of others, to deal with the tension, conflict and anxiety that are the attendants of poverty. It has been observed many times before that children in such circumstances have to deal with problems that would floor many twice their age and that attempts on their part to cope with these difficulties do not merely mirror the complexities of adult life that surround them, but are rather a measure of the way in which the exigencies of general social life become a dominant factor in the growth of their sense of self (Steedman, 1982 p. 9).

The writings in The Tidy House gave some indication of how three little girls coped with difficult lives, made sense of it and looked into the adult world with an insight that seemed to sit oddly on their young shoulders. They were not bewildered by what they saw but simply accepted the inevitability of it all. They stoically demonstrated their belief that it was a life much as the one that they saw would be their lot as they grew into adulthood. In the way they wove this life into their fantasies and hopes, Steedman claims, they colluded with the culture and became agents in their own socialization. They created a framework within their imagination thus making such a future palatable to themselves. They wrote a story which, whilst magical and romantic, incorporated their astute observations of the life that was and would be their lot. From their writings it was clear that, aided by imagination in this way, the unacceptable became the accepted.
This is a view of the child very much as a person, a young developing person struggling to make sense of the more enigmatical elements of the adult world. Steedman sees children as collaborators within the continuing mediation of the culture to succeeding generations. Here she is picking up upon a generally changing emphasis from the child as property to the child as an agent in his/her own life. She does not see the child as passively dependent on the social context but as a party to it, a view that also emerges in the research of Judith Ennew, who also tried to see the world through the eyes of the child.

Judith Ennew produced evidence in TV2 that the preoccupations of the culture inform the way the child makes sense to him/herself of the world, and colour the way the child defines him/herself. It was claimed, for instance, in TV2 that in Jamaica the children were always talking about suffering. She recounted how there is a pervasive concept of the sufferer in Jamaica and of this suffering having to be borne. In Peru, on the other hand, the major theme in the many conversations with children was that of the happy family. Children ‘happiness’ was something they referred to a lot in discussing the family. Perhaps in their different ways these ideologies help the children to cope with the demanding lives they lead and structure and rationalize their personal worlds. Perhaps such concepts act as a form of control – one has to put up with suffering to be an accepted member of Jamaican society or in Peru it is important to be seen as a happy person.

Overarching cultural themes coloured the niche of childhood too. Ennew emphasizes that it is important to look at the broad philosophical and ideological backdrop against which our views on childhood and child-rearing occur, as she believes that the individual is partly a product of these implicit ideologies. As you saw in the programme, she believes that power relationships are crucial. She says, ‘Adult power over children is so absolute that in a sense all children are abused and all adults abusers.’ She believes, as she explains in the programme, that the two axes of the power relationships as they influence children’s lives are:

1. Power relationships between men and women (as so often children are bound up in problems faced by women)

2. Power relationships between adults and children

Both of these are further complicated by race and class. This means that although a boy child may have a more powerful position than a girl of the same age and ethnic origin, if the girl is white and he is black this may not be so. If the boy is older and black this imbalance may be changed. If he is younger, black but of a higher social class he might well overcome the power advantages of age. It is not an entirely simple picture. This has important implications. Jordan says (1976), ‘The case against intervention in family life often rests on the freedom of more powerful members (usually husbands in relation to wives, and parents in relation to children) to exercise power without restriction.’ The child carries no political, economic or personal weight behind what he/she feels, wants or does not want to do. The child is helpless and often unhelped. So the child is seen here by cultural anthropology as mirroring the power struggles of the society as a whole.

Ennew claims that her interpretations of the writings and interviews that she had with children convey something about the prevailing values of the culture. Just as Postman ‘used’ children to put forward the case for the power of the media and just as Steedman used children as vehicles for the mediation of social history, so Ennew is looking through the child’s fresh eyes, not just at the child’s lot, but at ideologies and values of the culture in which that child is located.

So, although it is true that these last two interpretations have brought us nearer a more personal view of the child, nevertheless they are interpretations, serving some purpose within the advancement of a particular academic discipline. The child has still not really spoken to define him/herself. Children have been used as expert witnesses in an argument, thesis or theory that was not of their making.
3.3 The child’s voice

Is what we learn from talking to children and listening to them illuminating only about power relations in the culture and for the professional imperialism of the various social science disciplines? Do children have a far worse lot than so far suggested in adults’ definitions of them? Eileen Vizard, a leading psychiatrist involved in eliciting information from sexually abused children and offering them therapeutic support, asserted at a recent conference (1986) that ‘nobody listens to children in this country, they don’t even count.’ If this is so, what does it tell us about our society? What does it mean to the children to whom we do not lend an ear? Why do we not listen to children except when it serves some other interests to do so? Is it because they are not regarded as important, as people with views? There have been times when children have made their views known and sometimes they have been listened to and acted upon, and sometimes they have been ignored.

ACTIVITY 4
Take the following two examples from Freeman (1983) of the importance of the child’s wishes

1 In the American Supreme Court in the case of Wisconsin v. Yoder the question the Court had to answer was whether Amish parents could withdraw their children from public schools in the eighth grade [aged around 13]. The parents argued that for the children to be educated beyond this point would be detrimental to those about to live an Amish life. The parents’ claim was upheld. Chief Justice Burger writing (1972) about it said the primary role of the parents in the upbringing of their children is now established beyond debate as an enduring American tradition. It was not thought to be such an ‘enduring American tradition’ by everyone who wrote about it later and was regarded by some as an invasion of the child’s rights for the court to impose parental rights without canvassing that child’s views.

What do you feel the situation should be here? What power do you feel the child should have in determining his/her own education?

2 Education is one matter, decisions about the child leaving home are another. A notable cause célèbre that identified the problems was the Polovchak case. Walter, a twelve-year-old boy had emigrated with his parents from the USSR to USA but the father later decided he did not like the USA and made arrangements for the family to return to the Soviet Union. Walter liked America and wanted to stay so ran away from home and would not accompany his parents to Russia. A legal battle ensued.

What do you think should have been the outcome and why?

On the basis of the decision in relation to Amish children in Wisconsin you might well think in the case of Walter Polovchak that the parental wish would have been upheld. The legal battle that resulted, however, demonstrates to us quite clearly the social and political influences that are at work in ‘listening’ to the child’s wishes. The American Civil Liberties Union which traditionally campaigns for children’s rights amazingly supported the father’s case. Let us follow this further. The ACLU’s lawyer said, ‘We believe kids have rights, but not a twelve-year-old to choose where his family should live.’ Is this what Walter was claiming? Think about this carefully.
What Walter was actually claiming was the right to decide where he should live. The synonymity of the family and the child seem even to have clouded the minds of what might have been the child's major advocate. As it turned out, he won the first round of this fight. He was declared by Chicago Juvenile Court to be a 'minor in need of supervision' and was put into foster care. Is this what you had suggested ought to happen? He was that same day granted asylum to guard him against being snatched by Soviet agents. A higher court reversed this decision declaring:

We have serious doubts as to whether the state would have intervened in this realm of family life and privacy, had the parents' decision to relocate involved a move to another city or state. The fact that the parents have decided to move to a country which is ruled under principles of government which are alien to those of the USA should not compel different results.

Walter, despite this reversal of the original judgement, remains in Chicago because the unprecedented (in the case of a child) step was taken to issue a departure control order with all US border guards instructed to prevent his departure from the USA. Clearly here the political overtones of the case meant that a child was indeed listened to as there was some political mileage to be gained from it. Did you feel the child had power or was he merely used as a pawn in a political game?

This provides further evidence for the view that the ways in which children are defined and treated reflects the values of the culture, that the personal interests of the individual are less important than the political interests of the state. In this specific example it worked out to the advantage of the child. It is not always so.

Children have been trying to make themselves heard and their perspective known in a whole variety of areas of their life, in family affairs, in schooling and indeed in work. You may have thought in looking at the situation of children in Peru and Jamaica whose lives were so much dominated by the work they had to do to keep
the family economy going that this was a distinctive feature of the Third World. But here in the United Kingdom children have been an important part of keeping some families going financially, if only by providing for themselves through the work they do.

Children today in increasing numbers are working on building sites, in factories, in sweatshops and bakeries, in abattoirs, garages, pubs and hotels. They clean hospitals, process vegetables and make furniture. Their pay is low – most children earn one pound per hour or less with one in ten earning less than 50p per hour (New Statesman, 1 February 1985).
Copyright material removed
OpenLearn
Child labour is not a thing of the past nor is it confined solely to countries in the developing world, as you might have thought in listening to some of the children from Peru and Jamaica in TV2. The International Labour Office thinks that, worldwide, as many as 52 million children under the age of 15 are economically active (Blanchard, 1983), a figure which is likely to increase in times of economic recession. The latest in a number of studies in the UK by the Low Pay Unit (1985) was a survey of six London schools, three Luton schools and two rural schools in mid Bedfordshire. The report suggested that 40% of children have some form of paid employment which if extrapolated to a national figure, would give a total of 2.5 million children working. A total of 305 of the sample studied had suffered 'industrial' accidents, 10% of them serious. More than half the children working were working for one pound an hour, one working for 17p. Many children probably work for no pay at all. It could be argued that it is precisely because children have no voice, no union, that they are so attractive as members of the work force. Of all workers children are most likely to be exploited because of their dependent position. They are attractive to employers because they will work for very little money and do not organize themselves to demand better and safer working conditions. The result is that children in the United Kingdom are increasingly doing the work of adults and being paid as children. There has, recently, been considerable media interest in child labour. See the extracts from the Observer and News of the World above.

Like so many activities emanating from 'concern' for children, the results of intervening and producing more systematically implemented legislation outlawing child labour can be that children are rendered once again even more powerless and dependent. They then would not even have status within the family as a working contributor to the family economy. For many children, work, whilst it might be exploitative and ill paid, is the 'light at the end of the tunnel', offering the possibility of escape, of breaking out from the oppressive situations in which children find themselves. Again the child is 'protected' in the interests of what adults think children are.

Moving from the political manoeuvres of the state and the economy to the extent to which the child is heard in family matters, it is clear that they often fare no better. In new research emanating from custody and access arrangements following divorce, it becomes clear that the child's view carries little weight. It is true that a number of judges in matrimonial and family affairs have been concerned to emphasize children's rights. Where there has been a conflict of interests, the English judiciary has recently attempted to give priority to the child's interests. It is in establishing what these interests are that the problems often arise.

the most common adult fault – that of assuming that children will not have sensible views about how their lives should be ordered – means that they fail to include their children when taking decisions and making plans for the separated family's future.

George, who is nine, had something to say about [such] assumptions. George was six when his parents separated, although it had been an unhappy marriage and George remembers it as sometimes violent. He was greatly shocked on hearing (or rather overhearing) that the marriage was over. 'No one told us – they should have told us what was happening instead of me just listening in.' No one had asked George what he had wanted after the parents' decision to separate had been taken. Nothing worked out as he hoped it would. No one ever talked about plans. He lives with his mother, but wants to live with his father he has not been able to tell either of his parents what he feels, what he wants or how unhappy he is. He remembers crying for weeks, alone in bed at night and at school. He thinks about it all the time, he told us, and has no-one to tell about his feelings. (Walczak and Burns, 1984, p. 79)

On the basis of the research of Walczak and Burns on a hundred 'victims' of the divorce process, it seems that this is not just an individual problem but a very general experience of the children involved. It stems from the way in which adults view children – as their property, and not as real persons with significant views. Children in ever increasing numbers are becoming victims of the divorce process.
Even though in recent years there have been attempts to establish procedures through which the child’s interests might be determined, not only does the system often fail but children’s views are interpreted through adult conceptions of what are the best interests of the child. Even if this decision is removed from the warning parents it does not necessarily mean that the child’s own wishes guide what happens. Take the following case of three children sexually and physically abused by their father, children who themselves tried to fight his application for access:

“In our case which started over two years ago, six different people, closely involved with us and the divorce case, did not attempt to find out what our wishes or points of view were or totally disregarded them and us. They were our doctor, two different solicitors, a local court welfare officer and the official solicitor. You will see how badly the children are treated by people they should have been able to trust and get help from” (Childnight, June 1986)

The proportion of divorces involving dependent children has increased phenomenally over recent years. In 1978, 60% of divorces in England involved dependent children. In that year nearly 86,000 couples who divorced had children under 16 years of age — a total of 163,000 children (Rimmer, 1981). Seven years earlier the number of children involved was only half that number (Leete, 1979). At the time of writing, in early 1987, about one in three marriages will break up if the divorce rate continues at its present level. This means that many, many children will be condemned to even more miserable lives if the advocates appointed to protect their interest fail to hear what they say or only listen within existing adult preconceptions of what children are and what children want.

Not all children are, however, brought up by one or both parents in ‘families’, even families in dissolution. Even in 1980, 100,000 children were in the care of the local authorities and voluntary organizations (DHSS, 1980). To this number must be added children in private foster homes and mentally handicapped children in hospitals and special units. The majority in care are from deprived backgrounds and separation from their parents has made them even more vulnerable. Children who are separated from their parents do not necessarily move to a more stable situation. Rasse Page, on the basis of her analysis of children in the ‘Who Cares?’ project, notes that the majority had moved from children’s home to children’s home and foster homes ‘almost as though they were required by statute to be perpetuated’ (Page, 1977-8, p 18). It does seem on the basis of a whole variety of evidence that ‘children of the state’ have a very difficult time. The difficulties range from the demoralizing practices of their clothes being bought for them through an order book system, to more serious limitations on their individual liberty, and there are even allegations that in some instances they are drugged and beaten. Children in care have few opportunities to express what their feelings are about their situation and fewer still opportunities to make choices about it.

Advocacy is always difficult if the advocate does not fully share the experiences of the client group. There are parallels in the experience of children with the experiences of other minority groups. The complaint amongst disabled people, elderly people, and people from ethnic minority groups has often been that their advocates did not really have inside knowledge of their situation — they did not know what it is like to be black, disabled or elderly. Although it might seem that adults have all been children and therefore ought to know what it is like, as they have grown older they have learnt adult ways of thinking about children and have largely forgotten what it was like to be a child. They now have their own power interests as adults to protect. So advocacy for the young has some problems, problems in common with the emergence of advocacy within other minority groups. In common with such groups, until very recently, there has been little information on their self-definition, on how they see themselves. The main reason, suggests Saffos-Rothschild (1976), in the case of oppressed groups such as women, black people, disabled people, poor people and elderly people is the popular notion that they all entail biological inferiority. They are therefore considered less intelligent, less
able to make the ‘right’ decision, less ‘realistic’, less logical, and less able to
determine their own lives as compared to other ‘better endowed’ people. How much
more true this is of children who are thought, on account of their age and
developmental status, to have no abilities to hold significant personal views or make
decisions in any areas that concern them Safilos-Rothschild goes on,

There is an acknowledged paucity of direct information concerning the feelings, wishes
and self-deﬁnitions of underprivileged minority groups. Yet without gathering sufﬁcient
direct information from their target populations, professionals assume the authority to
declare the fate of underprivileged persons (Safilos-Rothschild, 1976, p. 45)

This is very true in the case of children. Trying to ﬁnd children’s deﬁnitions of
themselves is diﬃcult and the reason for that diﬃculty shares common features with
the situation of other minority groups. In common with these groups, it has become
necessary for the child to cease to rely on advocates speaking on his/her behalf and
instead to ﬁnd ways of putting their own case, having their wishes, hopes and fears
listened to and understood on their own terms. In the case of children, as compared
with other minority rights groups, there are some special diﬃculties which we will
examine in section 4, it is important, however, not to underestimate these
similarities.

There is evidence that in one particular area the child is beginning to state his/her
own case. Wringe (1981) gives a detailed and well-documented account of how the
children’s rights movement in schools as ﬁrst represented in The Little Red School
Book has been developing with pupils in a wide variety of settings and
circumstances claiming various degrees of participation in school government. His
review shows the considerable range of sources from which such claims have
emanated, and shows that the movement has at least been sufﬁciently concerted as
to pose for school authorities and general adult bodies both problems of
administration and questions of general attitude and policy. It also emphasizes how
such challenges to the status quo have been resisted.

In late October 1986 children were given ‘a voice’ with which to express the ways in
which they were being abused within the family. A BBC programme ‘Childwatch’
presented a report on the sexual abuse of children within families and following the
programme set up a conﬁdential telephone service, ‘Childline’, for abused children to
telephone in for help. Paul Griffiths, Director of Childline, said ‘In 20 years spent
working with abused children I have never before heard them talking so freely. We
are too accustomed to regarding children as an irritation, a noisy messy nuisance. If
we continue to believe children should be seen and not heard their silence protects
the molester’ (Sunday Times, 9 November 1986). In the ﬁrst ten days of the
operation of Childline, 3000 stories of abuse, each one echoing pain, guilt and self-
disgust, were received. The national poll commissioned by Childline revealed that an
estimated 15 million suffer some form of abuse, emotional cruelty, violence or sexual
abuse. When the pain became too intense to endure in silence they were previously
rarely believed, their testimony discounted. One can ask questions about the
usefulness of this activity, however. Experts predicted the already overloaded social
services would be swamped with requests for help. But the crisis never developed
because more than 90% of the young callers remain anonymous. It seems the
children are too fearful of the consequences of revealing their identity. So they were
heard but received no practical help in changing their situation.

The child’s deﬁnition of what it is to be a child, how he/she sees the situation in
which he/she lives, their hopes, fears and aspirations have rarely been voiced by
children themselves but rather by adults, who because they are not always
disinterested parties, do not reliably mediate the child’s views to the ultimate beneﬁt
and liberation of that young person. There is an increasing interest in children’s
rights, a concept which has been described as something of a ‘hurrah idea’
4 CHILDREN’S RIGHTS

4.1 The United Nations’ Declaration of the Rights of the Child

‘Children’s rights’ have been described as ‘a slogan in search of a definition’ (Rocham, 1973) It seems whilst the search continues progress has been made in attempts both to define and to achieve children’s rights In the development of thinking on children’s rights the ideas of protection and rescue of children in extremely difficult circumstances have had a major influence Concern about children afflicted by the devastation of the First World War and its aftermath led to pressure for permanent action on behalf of children Notable in this was Eglantyne Jebb, founder of Save the Children Fund, who had been profoundly affected by her involvement with relief activities for Balkan children at the end of the Great War She, with a number of other committed individuals, laid the foundations for the Declaration of the Rights of the Child which was adopted by the 5th Assembly of the League of Nations in 1924 It emphasized children’s material needs This document was later revised and adopted by the United Nations in 1959 (The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights had not specifically mentioned children) In the Appendix you will find the full text of the 1959 Declaration In essence it outlines the following rights

1959 United Nations’ Declaration of the Rights of the Child

- The right to affection, love and understanding
- The right to adequate nutrition and medical care
- The right to full opportunity for play and recreation
- The right to have a name and nationality
- The right to special care if handicapped
- The right to be amongst the first to receive relief in times of disaster
- The right to learn to be a useful member of society and to develop individual abilities
- The right to be brought up in a spirit of universal peace and brotherhood
- The right to enjoy these rights regardless of race, colour, sex, religion, national or social origin

ACTIVITY 5

Examine the rights given above, looking if you wish at the detailed exposition given in the Appendix Try to establish

1 Who is to provide each of these rights?
2 Is responsibility in fact specified?
3 How can one guarantee that such responsibilities are met?
4 Which rights emphasize the freedoms of the child?

The 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child is based upon the premise that ‘mankind owes to the child the best it has to give’ It aims at a ‘happy childhood’ for the child Implicit in the document are obligations and duties to the child You will have noted, however, that there is no indication as to who is to meet these claims The party/parties against whom such claims can be made are not specified nor is any procedure of legislative sanction or enforcement outlined You will also have noticed that the document mentions no rights to autonomy, self-determination, self-advocacy or to be listened to, that we have so far discussed in the unit It is vague both about the details of the rights, responsibilities, guaranteed enforcement
and about the personhood of the child. It is in effect a manifesto, a statement of moral rights and ideal responsibilities, a generalized claim against those who make society’s rules. It does not outline legal or institutional rights.

Seeing rights beyond the manifesto language of the Declaration as claims against some other party is an interesting one. Indeed Freeman (1983) advocates the conception of ‘rights’ as clearly formulated duties and obligations as a useful way to proceed. It is precisely the specification of children’s rights as identifiable claims against the parents that has caused some people to feel threatened almost as if there were some finite quantity of rights in each family and giving some to children would involve taking some from parents. In its vagueness the Declaration of the Rights of the Child avoids such anxieties. The Declaration, however, with its generalized principles and ideal moral entitlements has not extended children’s enabling rights. In its worthy principles it also fails to recognize the unequal distribution of world resources that has made some of the most fundamental welfare rights impossible to achieve in Third World countries. The hopes of the achievement of certain social and moral goals contained in the Declaration have, although commonly quoted, no real influence on the lives of children throughout the world.

Not only do an alarming proportion of the world’s children realize few, if any, of these rights but many have minimal chances of even survival. In the UK in 1976 the Court Report on Child Health Services noted, for example, that ‘children die in our lifetime for nineteenth-century reasons’. Twice as many children of unskilled workers die in the first year of life as children of professional workers and the gap is widening not closing. Two and a half times more children die in socio-economic classes 4 and 5 than in classes 1 and 2 of certain infectious diseases. At least one million children live in families where although both parents go to work, the income is below the official poverty level. At least a million children are dependent upon supplementary benefit because the head of the family is sick, unemployed, elderly or a single parent. Thus means often they are hungry and insecure, a situation further compounded for many who still live in houses unfit for human habitation. In the Third World, the scale of child mortality, malnutrition and non-existent access to health services is on a scale past all comprehending. In the International Year of the Child in 1979, for example, when interest was more than usually focused on children, and ‘concern’ was widely expressed, fifteen million children suffered from malnutrition.

This is the real context in which any discussion of children’s rights proceeds. It is easy to get diverted into the exotic claims of the libertarian writers such as Holt (1975) who claims for a child a right to virtually everything an adult in the developed world might do and Farson’s (1978) similar list with a primary focus on rights to self-determination, and forget the grim reality of many children’s lives in which quite fundamental human rights are violated. It is significant that the United Nations 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights did not specifically mention children, an increase of awareness of their plight, if nothing else, has been marked by the later Declaration. Awareness and interest are increasing all the time, although it is doubtful whether the lives of children have benefited in proportion to this interest. In 1982 the Minority Rights Group published a monograph summarizing the issues central to working towards improving the lot of the world’s children. It begins.

The welfare of the child is identified closely with that of the family and protected by the state. It is assumed that adult caretakers will protect children’s interests. From this general premise, the suffering of countless children throughout the world can be explained away as unavoidable, the result of overwhelming forces beyond the control of their adult protectors.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the reality is quite different. Certainly many children do fall victim to extremes of poverty, hardship and political oppression and instability, and yet large numbers are victims of their adult protectors’ either through serious civil rights violations perpetrated by governments or through physical and psychological abuse often by familiar adults. (Minority Rights Group, 1982, p 3)
It is clear that adults have largely failed in their responsibilities to children. What are these responsibilities? In analyzing children's rights we suggested that some of the rights imply obligations on the part of some other party such as the parent or the state, whilst other rights which had not been included by the UN relate to the status of the child as a person. Rogers and Wrightsman (1978) distinguish two such orientations, 'nurturance' and 'self-determination'. The first orientation, in terms of the line of reasoning we have been using in this unit, really relates to how 'childhood' should be conceived with the obligations of adults to children spelt out, the 'niche' or 'slot' defined in terms of society's responsibilities to the child. The latter relates to the individual child and enabling that child's voice, wishes and participation in the decision-making process to be actualized, such rights relate to the child's personhood and allow that child responsibilities of his/her own. Rights relating to 'nurturance' recognize the child's dependence whilst rights relating to 'self-determination' recognize the child's need for independence.

In conceptualizing rights there are further subdivisions within the 'nurturance' and 'self-determination' framework that it is useful to make. Being the analysis here largely on Freeman's categories (1983) we can see there are four distinguishable ones, which we could think of as falling into two groups.

General obligations to the child for nurturance
1. Child's rights to welfare
2. Child's rights to protection

Opportunities for self-determination
3. Child's rights to treatment like adults
4. Child's rights against parents

It is clear that a potential conflict of interests is involved in all these areas. In the first group there may be conflicts about who is to provide the state versus the family. There may be conflicts about interfering in the autonomy of the family, or where the family does not exist or defaults there may well be conflicts about state provision. The state may have conflicts of interest as to how to deploy resources caring for children versus a defence budget. Clearly the second group of rights holds all the potential for interpersonal conflict in challenging the responsibilities of the parents and the state see into personal oppression and restriction of the child.

Let us briefly look at each of these areas.

4.2 General obligations to the child

Child's rights to welfare

Very few of the rights usually listed here are contentious. Welfare of the child is seen as generally a 'good thing' and an exposition of these rights is in the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child that you have just studied. The rights so formulated, as we have already noted, are not easily conceived as rights claimable 'against' anyone, and as they are so general it is very difficult to use them in the enforcement of specific rights. They are rights against the world. This Declaration was not, as you might have originally thought, concerned with children's liberation. It is essentially a protectionist statement and it might really be better, given the difficulties in implementing such a charter, to think of them as protections rather than rights, as a definition of childhood against which detailed specific rights are identified.

Child's rights of protection

These are seen very much in terms of injecting more responsibility into the parental role by stressing the dependency and vulnerability of the young and it represents the most traditional and long-standing approach to children's rights. Bound up with it is a normative view of parental behaviour, which assumes that the parent does protect the child. When children die at the hands of their abusing parents it is this view...
that parents \textit{ought} to protect their children that is violated and receives outraged
comment. Most states implicitly define, in however haphazard a way, standards for
parental conduct. Bound up with this concept is not just the obligations of the
parents and the duties of the state but the freedoms that children ought to enjoy –
the freedom from abuse and neglect. The Childline initiative has served further to
crude traditional conceptions of ‘protection’ in the family but, as yet, has not evolved
new ways of protecting the child’s freedoms without the destruction and dissolution
of the family and the guilt that the child often then bears for this. Recent events
have increased the state’s concern to monitor parental care. Policing the family,
however, does not necessarily protect the children within it. There is no clear
consensus amongst the various campaigners for children’s rights as to where the
dividing line between family autonomy and state intervention should be drawn. They
make it clear that by substituting one adult for another where the parent defaults
does not change the status of the child. Decisions are still made ‘on behalf of’ that
child but this time by a different adult. Children are rarely given the choice of
deciding whether they like the conditions in which they find themselves. The
opinions of the children of divorcing parents quoted earlier in the unit were not even
canvased. A powerful reason why children do not report sexual abuse within the
family may well be because they suspect that they will substitute total restriction of
choices within an unfamiliar situation for oppressions within a familiar one

The Minority Rights Group monograph (1982) looks on an international scale at some
of the failures to protect children and at some of the underlying social and economic
structures which rationalize and legitimate such activities. They address collective
issues such as the maltreatment of children through poverty, politics, neglect and
the exploitation of children in the labour force. In this latter respect they point out
that children are a valuable commodity in the transactions between rich and poor.
Child exploitation, whilst having many forms, usually implies the involvement of
children in activities beyond their physical and mental capacities and usually, except
possibly in the case of child prostitution, involves adult patronage. The traditional
protectors of the child therefore cannot be relied upon.

4.3 Opportunities for self-determination

\textbf{Child’s right to treatment like adults}

The reasons behind this claim have been the double standard of treatment for adults
and children, resulting in the denial of privileges to children which further serves the
power interests of adults. Many age distinctions are quite arbitrarily arrived at. For
example, at ten a child may be convicted of a criminal offence, at fourteen a child
can own an air-riifle and have legal sexual relationships (in the case of boys only), at
sixteen a child can leave school, start work, ride a moped and (if a girl) have legal
sexual relationships, at eighteen they can buy alcoholic drinks etc. Farson (1975)
would like to see the child have a fundamental right to self-determination, a right on
which he thanks all other rights depend. Holt (1975) would like the child to have
equal treatment at the hands of the law, the right to vote and take part in political
affairs, the right to be legally responsible for one’s life and acts, the right to privacy,
the right to fundamental independence and responsibility, the right to manage and
direct education, the right to travel and live away from home, the right to choose or
make one’s own home, the right to receive from the state whatever minimum
income it might guarantee, the right to make and to enter into, on the basis of
mutual consent, quasi-familial relationships, for instance choose guardians. Neither
Holt nor Farson confine themselves just to adolescents but refer to younger children
as well.

It is significant that the most articulate expressions of children’s rights have come
yet again from adults speaking ‘for’ children and in so doing yet again underscoring
their dependence and powerlessness and their remaining need for a ‘voice of their
own’
Child’s rights against parents

We have already in Activity 4 examined the factors at play when the child’s choices do not concur with those of the parent when the child wishes to decide for himself where he lives. Whilst conflict with parents is a familiar theme in children’s rights, all claims to rights involve potential conflict with other people’s rights. The children’s rights movement has been born of this tension. It has always been the case until now that the parents’ rights have overruled the child’s counter-claims, thus underlining the parents’ power. This power has become the focus of resistance. It is suggested that the conflict is greater today than previously in that children are exposed to a wider range of ideas which are potentially conflictual. Could this be, you might wonder, anything to do with the advent of television, and children, far from disappearing, are actually becoming more powerful, questioning and assertive? There are wide-ranging debates in this area about what the limits of parental responsibility and control are and the extent and reality of the child’s freedom to act independently.

Two strands can be discerned in the debate. One of them is to give children rights against parents, thus enabling them to act independently. A second theme is that the child should seek approval for his/her challenge to parental authority. Of course, some challenges are quite trivial, others are more serious and far reaching. In the case of contraception, abortion, medical care, drugs and alcohol, however, really serious conflicts may arise between children and their parents. Traditionally these problems have been viewed as only problems of adolescents against parents. Much of our argument so far makes it clear, however, that to make this distinction would be to consign the pre-adolescent child to remaining the property of parents and powerless to challenge their behaviour or decisions on his/her behalf. Whilst the autonomy of children at certain levels of maturity and cognitive ability may be recognized, it is not clear what might be done in cases where there is conflict. Litigation is costly, unwieldy and slow. In settling such disputes, value judgements about appropriate family relationships would have to be invoked. There is no scientific means of arriving at a child’s ‘best interests’ so these interests always reflect someone else’s. A major problem is that parental decision-making is not always – and sometimes for a whole variety of reasons cannot be – geared towards the maximization of the child’s eventual development of self-determination and responsibility. In Britain a non-governmental organization, the Children’s Legal Centre, has suggested local networks of Ombudspersons or child advocates (1984). Alternative proposals have been to set up complaints procedures in schools, hospitals, care systems and so on (Freeman, 1983). They all bear the same problems of the mediation of the child’s case through adults.

4.4 Eternal children?

Many of these issues, such as those of child welfare and protection, will reappear in various guises later in the course. This unit has not aimed to be an exhaustive account of the history, development and current ‘state of the art’ in children’s rights. It has been part of an overtone to the course and has hopefully set you thinking about the social construction of the individual. Essentially it has focused on the construction of ‘dependency’ and appropriate advocacy, namely upon the extent to which it is possible or proper to ‘speak for’ another individual. You will find that alleged ‘dependency’ in the client and speaking for or making decisions ‘on behalf of’ the client is a familiar theme in social welfare activities. From the material you have encountered in this unit and its associated television programmes you will see that, in the case of children, their developmental needs for protection and support, their ‘dependency’ in that sense, has spilled over into another sense of not listening to what they have to say. It has depersonalized them and meant that they have not been listened to and have been rendered powerless. You will note how frequently the responsibilities, obligations and duties implied in rights are extended to eclipse the second constellation of rights – rights to self-determination. The ‘protectors’ often take it upon themselves to determine and define what the child is, what the
Legal restrictions on children what they can do and when
Source: Woman, 7
February 1987
Copyright material removed

OpenLearn
problems are and what rights that child has. Ingleby highlighted for us how professionals using psychology as a tool and parents as their agents have taken over the shaping of the child's mind, consciousness and thinking. It seems that professionals, too, are threatening to take over shaping what are permissible 'rights' of the child. There is a possibility that the 'dangerous' self of the child will not be acknowledged. The child's rights to be cared for and provided for will be accepted but the child's rights to be a person, to be, to choose, to define and determine elements of their own lives will remain too threatening.

The increasing interest in self-advocacy amongst children, and indeed amongst many client groups you will encounter in the course, has begun to make it clear that even if an individual is dependent on protection, support and services, that does not mean they have to relinquish their rights to choices and self-determination. To relinquish such rights or to have them taken away is to cease to be a person and to begin to be treated as children have been treated since the eighteenth century. It is hoped that as you proceed through the course you will be able to 'deconstruct' the 'eternal childhood' of various grown-up client groups.

UNIT SUMMARY

This unit has emphasized that 'childhood' is not merely shaped by social, historical and political forces but is actually created by them. Whilst having some elements of biological dependency and natural needs for care and protection, childhood is not completely biologically determined. Nevertheless the young have been seen to be dependent long past the age at which they are physically so, and the creation of this extended dependency has served to legitimize intervention. We have seen, however, that the consequences of such views of the child have been to depersonalize that child and make him/her an object of intervention. Such dependency has also thrown into sharp relief questions about who is responsible for the child. We have seen that the allocation of such responsibility sometimes serves political and ideological ends. Dependency as attributed to the child has also made it apparently 'necessary' to 'speak' for the child. Thus itself is a questionable business. In activities associated with the promotion of social welfare assumed dependency in the client and the 'necessity' to speak for that client have formed the points of tension in which many social problems are based. We have argued that by looking at childhood and the processes by which it appears to have been created, and by examining the extent to which the child has a voice, we have provided a paradigm case for how the client is often treated in professional intervention. We have attempted to retrieve 'the person' from the professionalization of intervention.
United Nations' Declaration of the Rights of the Child

Preamble
Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have, in the Charter, reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, and in the dignity and worth of the human person, and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom

Whereas the United Nations has, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth therein, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status

Whereas the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth

Whereas the need for such special safeguards has been stated in the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1924, and recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the statutes of specialized agencies and international organisations concerned with the welfare of children

Whereas mankind owes to the child the best it has to give

Now therefore, the General Assembly proclaims this Declaration of the Rights of the Child to the end that he may have a happy childhood and enjoy for his own good and for the good of society the rights and freedoms herein set forth, and calls upon parents, upon men and women as individuals and upon voluntary organizations, local authorities and national governments to recognize these rights and strive for their observance by legislative and other measures progressively taken in accordance with the following principles

Principle 1
The child shall enjoy all the rights set forth in the Declaration. All children, without any exception whatsoever, shall be entitled to these rights, without distinction or discrimination on account of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, whether of himself or of his family

Principle 2
The child shall enjoy special protection, and shall be given opportunities and facilities, by law and by other means, to enable him to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially in a healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity. In the enactment of laws for this purpose the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration

Principle 3
The child shall be entitled from his birth to a name and a nationality

Principle 4
The child shall enjoy the benefits of social security. He shall be entitled to grow and develop in health, to this end special care and protection shall be provided both to him and to his mother, including adequate prenatal and postnatal care. The child shall have the right to adequate nutrition, housing, recreation and medical services

Principle 5
The child who is physically, mentally or socially handicapped shall be given the special treatment, education and care required by his particular condition
Principle 6
The child, for the full and harmonious development of his personality, needs love and understanding. He shall, wherever possible, grow up in the care and under the responsibility of his parents, and in any case in an atmosphere of affection and of moral and material security, a child of tender years shall not, save in exceptional circumstances, be separated from his mother. Society and the public authorities shall have the duty to extend particular care to children without a family and to those without adequate means of support. Payment of state and other assistance toward the maintenance of children of large families is desirable.

Principle 7
The child is entitled to receive education, which shall be free and compulsory, at least in the elementary stages. He shall be given an education which will promote his general culture, and enable him to develop his abilities, his individual judgement, and his sense of moral and social responsibility, and to become a useful member of society.

The best interests of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his education and guidance, that responsibility lies in the first place with his parents.

The child shall have full opportunity for play and recreation, which should be directed towards the same purposes as education, society and the public authorities shall endeavour to promote the enjoyment of this right.

Principle 8
The child shall in all circumstances be among the first to receive protection and relief.

Principle 9
The child shall be protected against all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation. He shall not be the subject of traffic, in any form.

The child shall not be admitted to employment before an appropriate minimum age, he shall in no case be caused or permitted to engage in any occupation or employment which would prejudice his health or education, or interfere with his physical, mental or moral development.

Principle 10
The child shall be protected from practices which may foster racial, religious and any other form of discrimination. He shall be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship among peoples, peace and universal brotherhood and in full consciousness that his energy and talents should be devoted to the service of his fellow men.
REFERENCES

ARIES, P (1962) Centuries of Childhood A Social History of Family Life (translated from the French by R Baldick), London, Jonathan Cape


MILLIGAN, S (1985) quotation from a BBC Radio 4 interview reprinted in Clare, A (ed ) In the Psychiatrist’s Chair, London, Chatto and Windus/The Hogarth Press


VIZARD, E (1986) Discussion at the Ethnomethodology of Childhood Conference in Kings College, Cambridge, July

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following sources for permission to use material in this unit.

Text

Illustrations
Page 9, Copyright British Library, p 11, from an engraving of an original in the National Museum, Naples, p 13, Greater London Photograph Library, p 15 (left), Mansell Collection, p 15 (right), Hulton Picture Library, p 22, reprinted by permission of A D Peters & Co Ltd, p 27, Antonio Melcopol/Oxfam