Sociologists see childhood as being socially constructed; something that was created by society but is not fixed to one set notion; the concept of it changes geographically, culturally and over time. In the following paragraphs I will be assessing the changes of childhood based on these concepts mentioned.

Within the middle ages, the sociologist Aries believed that childhood did not exist because children were not seen as any different to adults, thus so they shared the same information which took away their innocence and naivety. There were no information barriers or laws protecting them and so they faced the exact same issues that adults did—high mortality rates and neglect only encouraged this. However Aries’s work did face criticism as he used art to evaluate his theories, which is arguably not a reliable source. Despite this, his ideas suggest that childhood has improved and this is shown through the modern notion of childhood which regards children as fundamentally different from adults to the extent where there is distance between them in order to prolong and ensure a child’s happiness and innocence. Jane Pilcher feels that the most important feature of this notion is separateness and that this is enforced through things such as child laws, and emphasised by the difference in consumer products and entertainment. The explanation behind this development from the Middle Ages to the modern day occurred due to the influence of technology, particularly that of the printing press (Which requires skill to use) which created an information barrier between children and adults, thus making them unaware and so disjointed from adults. This puts forward a ‘march of progress’ view which suggests children are in a more favourable position in today’s age.

However many sociologists argue that the changes of childhood have not been progressive. Many Marxists and feminists believe that the march of progress does not exist because of the inequalities between children and adults. They believe that children today are more controlled and oppressed rather than being privileged. For instance Firestone and Holt believe that things such as child laws only make children powerless which is enforced by the studies showing how parents control the child’s time, activity and space. It strips them of their independence as they are permanently unable to do what they want to do. Arguing against this child liberationist view however state that children do need adult supervision as they are not able to make the appropriate decisions in order to keep them safe. Another view that suggests that childhood is regressing the theories that argue that childhood itself is disappearing. This view has been put forward by Neil Postman who feels that TV blurs the distinction between adult and childhood as there is no skill needed to obtain the information it provides—this exposes children to sex, violence, death and money and so removes their innocence as it breaks down boundaries between age.

Overall sociologists are more likely to agree that childhood has changed over time for the better due to the fact that in today’s society children are cared for by their parents and not discarded or treated with complete disdain. The views which believe that childhood is disappearing and that children are oppressed are arguably correct but also I feel needed. It is essential for children to be under some control in order to protect them from the corruption of the world and preserve their childhood which many consider a treasurable part of their life.