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Childhood, politics, and socio-cultural positionality: the critical analysis

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Abstract

Childhood is a socially constructed phase of life shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces. While often perceived as a natural and universal experience, childhood is deeply influenced by governmental policies, socio-cultural norms, and historical contexts. This paper explores how political structures and socio-cultural positionality shape childhood experiences across different societies. By drawing from theories of social construction, political influence, and cultural diversity, the study examines the impact of policies, media, and economic factors on children's rights and identities. It also discusses contemporary challenges such as digital childhood, globalization, and social inequalities. This interdisciplinary analysis highlights the need for policies that recognize childhood as a dynamic and context-dependent experience rather than a fixed biological stage.

Keywords: childhood, politics, socio-cultural positionality, social construction, globalization

Детство, политика и социально-культурная позициональность: критический анализ

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Резюме

Детство — это социально сконструированная стадия жизни человека, формируемая политическими, экономическими и культурными силами. Хотя зачастую этот период воспринимают как естественный и универсальный опыт, детство глубоко зависит от государственных политик, социально-культурных норм и исторических контекстов. В данной статье исследуются механизмы, с помощью которых политические институты и социально-культурное окружение влияют на формирование детского опыта в различных обществах. Беря во внимание теории социального конструирования, политического воздействия и культурного многообразия, мы рассматриваем влияние государственных политик, СМИ и экономических условий на права и самобытность детей. В исследовании также затрагиваются современные проблемы, такие как цифровое детство, глобализация и социальное неравенство. Междисциплинарный анализ подчеркивает необходимость разработки политических стратегий, которые признают детство как динамический и зависящий от контекста опыт, а не как фиксированную биологическую стадию.

Ключевые слова: детство, политика, социально-культурная позициональность, социальное конструирование, глобализация

Кумар С. (2025)
Детство, политика и социально-культурная позициональность...
Культурно-историческая психология, 2025. *21*(3), 114—123.

Kumar S. (2025)
Childhood, politics, and socio-cultural positionality...
Cultural-Historical Psychology, 2025. *21*(3), 114—123.

Introduction

Often idealized as a universal and innocent stage of life, childhood is really strongly molded by political ideas, economic systems, and cultural standards. Historically, childhood was not always considered a separate stage; until the 18th century, children were frequently viewed as small adults expected to contribute to household labour and society from an early age (Aries, 1962). Modern views on childhood, on the other hand, stress the importance of rights, education, and protection as well as how social, political, and economic circumstances shape children's experiences.

Through legislation, rules, and rights frameworks, political systems help to define childhood significantly. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) established a global standard for children's rights, yet disparities persist in how different nations interpret and implement these policies. Policies on healthcare, education access, and economic disparities directly influence children's prospects and well-being (UNICEF, 2021).

Likewise, socio-cultural positionality — shaped by variables including race, class, gender, and ethnicity — affects children's lived experiences. For example, kids from underprivileged areas frequently suffer systematic inequities in legal protection, healthcare, and education (hooks, 1994). Cultural expectations also shape childhood development; in collectivist societies, children are brought up with a strong feeling of collective duty, whereas in individualist cultures, independence and self-reliance are stressed (Rogoff, 2003).

Given these intricacies, this article aims to investigate the interaction between politics, socio-cultural positionality, and childhood. It looks at how children's reality is shaped by various political systems, media portrayals, and cultural frameworks. Drawing from multidisciplinary studies, this paper emphasizes the manner in which childhood is built, lived, and changed across various social settings. It is a theoretical paper and discourse analysis has been used as an approach.

Theoretical framework

Understanding childhood through a socio-political and cultural lens requires engagement with key theoretical perspectives that highlight its constructed nature. This section explores three primary theories: (1) the social construction of childhood, (2) critical theories on childhood and power structures, and (3) socio-cultural theory. These frameworks provide insight into how political systems, cultural contexts, and power dynamics shape children's experiences.

The social construction of childhood

Childhood is a socially and culturally constructed idea that changes with time, place, and social settings rather than a set biological stage. From the social constructionist viewpoint, historical, economic, and political structures as well as cultural ideas and social expectations shape infancy (James & Prout, 2015). Unlike a universal and natural stage of human development, childhood is perceived differently in different communities shaped by gender, class, race, and historical period. This part looks at how childhood is constructed, how its meanings change across different cultures and historical settings, and how power relations affect children's experiences.

Defining childhood as a social construct

The social constructionist approach challenges biological determinism by emphasizing how society, culture, and politics affect children. This perspective is important when comparing childhood experiences around the world because children have different autonomy, labour involvement, and rights.

Childhood has evolved considerably. Philippe Aris (1962) famously claimed medieval Europe had no understanding of children. Children were considered "miniature adults" who worked and socialized without apparent maturity. After the Enlightenment and industrial capitalism, childhood became a distinct and protected stage of life, shaping modern education and child work laws (Cunningham, 2014).

This perspective shift shows how social and historical factors affect childhood. Modern Western society views children as innocent, defense less, and in need of care, which reinforces strong boundaries between childhood and maturity (Jenks, 2005). Not everyone agrees. Many non-Western societies have young children take on chores, supporting sibling care or home work (Rogoff, 2003). Thus, the idea that youngsters should avoid work and decision-making is cultural rather than biological.

Cultural variations in childhood

Cultural variances highlight even more that childhood is not a one, universal experience. Many Indigenous groups, for instance, encourage children to learn by participating in community life instead of through official schooling (Nsamenang, 2006). By contrast, Western conceptions of children stress organized schooling, play, and postponed entrance into the labour (Montgomery, 2009).

Furthermore, gender expectations influence how various communities build infancy. From early age, boys and girls are socialized into separate roles in many societies, hence affecting their future possibilities and obligations (Connell, 2009). These differences show how infancy is ingrained in more general social systems, hence

Кумар С. (2025)
Детство, политика и социально-культурная позициональность...
Культурно-историческая психология, 2025. *21*(3), 114—123.

Kumar S. (2025)
Childhood, politics, and socio-cultural positionality...
Cultural-Historical Psychology, 2025. *21*(3), 114—123.

reflecting and repeating society standards and power dynamics.

The role of power in constructing childhood

Power dynamics — including legal institutions, educational programs, and media representations — also affect the construction of childhood. Governments and institutions define childhood by laws governing age of consent, education, and labour, so reinforcing certain assumptions about what it means to be a child (Reynaert et al., 2009). Furthermore, decisions affecting children's lives frequently exclude their voices, so putting them as passive subjects instead of active social agents (James & James, 2012).

Media and commercial sectors help to mold childhood even more by stressing consumer identities, gender norms, and ideas of "suitable" conduct. Digital technology's growth has eroded conventional borders between childhood and maturity, hence challenging new issues regarding children's autonomy, privacy, and agency (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). These changing ideas of childhood show that social, political, and economic pressures are always reshaping the notion.

The social construction of childhood may be considered to question the notion that childhood is a universal or fundamentally biological period of life. Rather, historical change, cultural beliefs, and power systems defining what it means to be a child shape childhood. Understanding childhood as a social construct helps to highlight the need to rethink policies and practices that could support inequities in children's lives and enables a more inclusive knowledge of different childhood experiences.

Critical theories on childhood and power structures

The study of childhood has developed beyond developmental psychology and biological determinism to include critical theories investigating how power shapes children's lives. Critical perspectives on childhood question prevailing stories that depict children as passive, dependent, and lacking agency. Rather, these points of view emphasize how political, economic, and social power structures affect childhood experiences, access to resources, and chances for engagement in society (James & Prout, 2015). To grasp how power shapes children's social positions and lived experiences, this part investigates critical viewpoints on childhood including Marxist, feminist, postcolonial, and Foucauldian theories.

Marxist perspectives on childhood and capitalism

Marxist philosophy questions how capitalism shapes infancy as a time of need and vulnerability. Not just a biological period, childhood is also a social category formed by economic systems (Qvortrup, 2009). Often in capitalist society, children are seen as economic dependents, therefore highlighting the need for adult wage labour and the commodification of childhood via consumerism (Zelizer, 1985).

From a Marxist viewpoint, one major criticism is the commercialization of childhood, in which children are targeted as consumers via advertising, branded toys, and digital entertainment (Buckingham, 2011). As richer children have more access to educational resources and social capital, this process simultaneously forms children's identities and strengthens economic disparities. Therefore, infancy is a social creation shaped by economic and class systems rather than just a developmental stage.

Feminist theories on childhood, gender, and power

Feminist views on childhood investigate how gender expectations and patriarchal power systems affect children's experiences. Often from early age, conventional gender norms are forced on youngsters, hence affecting their socialization, prospects, and life outcomes (Connell, 2009). According to feminist academics, childhood is a location of gendered power dynamics where boys and girls are socialized into varying expectations of behaviour, responsibility, and future roles (Walkerdine, 1990).

Feminist points of view also emphasize the gendered work split in parenting. Historically, women have been given the main responsibility of caring, hence supporting the idea that childhood is a realm of maternal protection and emotional work (Hochschild, 2012). This viewpoint coincides with economic disparities since working-class and underprivileged women frequently bear more weight in juggling paid job and family obligations. Feminist academics also underline the importance of questioning strict gender stereotypes in media representations and preschool education in order to build more fair society structures (Thorne, 1993).

Postcolonial and critical race theories on childhood

Postcolonial and critical race theories question Eurocentric ideas of childhood that overlook the experiences of children in non-Western settings. Often reflecting children in the Global South as either victims in need of rescue or as 'underdeveloped' relative to Western criteria, Western discourses on childhood (Burman, 2016) tend to reinforce stereotypes and neocolonial power relations. By putting Western definitions of childhood and development onto different cultural contexts, these stories reinforce neocolonial power relations.

According to critical race theorists, racial hierarchies affect childhood experiences by means of systematic inequalities in education, healthcare, and law enforcement (Gillborn, 2008). For instance, Black and Indigenous children in many Western nations experience greater levels of school discipline, exclusion, and monitoring than their white counterparts (Ladson-Billings, 2006). These differences show how childhood is not a neutral or universal experience but one profoundly shaped by racial power dynamics and legacies of colonialism.

Foucauldian perspectives: surveillance, discipline, and childhood

Michel Foucault's power and discipline theories explain how institutions control childhood. Schools, courts, and hospitals influence children's behaviour and identity through monitoring and discipline (Foucault, 1977). Discipline practices in schools include hierarchi-

Кумар С. (2025)
Детство, политика и социально-культурная позициональность...
Культурно-историческая психология, 2025. *21*(3), 114—123.

Kumar S. (2025)
Childhood, politics, and socio-cultural positionality...
Cultural-Historical Psychology, 2025. *21*(3), 114—123.

cal power systems, behavior management, and standardized testing (Devine, 2002).

As technology advances, parents, schools, and companies monitor children's online behaviour (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). By mirroring society's concerns about control, risk, and deviance, these systems reinforce power dynamics that limit children's independence and self-expression. Foucault shows how knowledge and discipline institutions regulate infancy by defining "normal" and "acceptable" behaviour.

Michel Foucault's (1980) thoughts on power and speech help explain how political and institutional institutions affect infancy. Social control over children's behaviour, knowledge, and agency comes from legal and educational systems. Schools use standardized curricula and behavioural norms to punish children and make them compliant (Foucault, 1977).

To sum up, the important theories on childhood question conventional developmental models by stressing how power systems shape children's experiences. Marxist points of view draw attention to the economic exploitation of children; feminist theories investigate gendered power relations; postcolonial and critical race theories attack Eurocentric prejudices; and Foucauldian analysis shows how institutions control childhood by means of discipline and surveillance. Applying these critical viewpoints helps academics and legislators to strive for more fair and inclusive approaches to childhood that acknowledge children's agency and different socioeconomic reality.

Socio-cultural theory and childhood

Socio-cultural theory offers a lens through which to see childhood as a process molded by social interactions, cultural norms, and historical settings. Unlike biological or cognitive theories that highlight universal stages of child development, socio-cultural theory stresses the influence of social environment, language, and cultural practices on children's learning and identities (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). This point of view questions the idea of childhood as a static, natural stage and instead frames it as a dynamic and culturally ingrained experience. Key ideas of socio-cultural theory, its consequences for childhood development, and its significance in modern educational and social environments are discussed in this part.

Key principles of socio-cultural theory

One of the most important theorists in socio-cultural theory, Lev Vygotsky (1978), claimed that social contact drives cognitive growth. He proposed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which defines the distance between what a youngster can do alone and what they can accomplish with advice from more informed people, whether parents, teachers, or peers. Vygotsky believed learning to be a socially mediated process in which children gain knowledge and abilities by interacting with their surroundings.

Scaffolding — the transient support given by an adult or more knowledgeable peer to assist a youngster finish a task they would find difficult alone — is another important idea in socio-cultural theory (Wood et al., 1976). The assistance is progressively removed as the child's ability increases, so enabling independent problem-solving. This method emphasizes the importance of social connections in promoting emotional and cognitive growth.

Socio-cultural theory also stresses the need of cultural tools and language in forming children's ideas. Language is a tool for cognitive growth as well as a way of communication. Children absorb cultural values, problem-solving techniques, and ways of thinking particular to their communities by means of discussion, narrative, and social interactions (Wertsch, 1991). Therefore, depending on cultural ideas, customs, and social behaviours, childhood development differs between societies.

The role of culture in childhood development

One of the key benefits of socio-cultural theory is the awareness that cultural settings impact childhood. Emphasizing that children learn by participating in cultural events rather than by solitary individual development, Barbara Rogoff (2003) built on Vygotsky's concepts. Many non-Western cultures, for instance, believe that children learn by observing adults and participating directly in family chores and community events rather than by formal education. This questions Western-centric paradigms of childhood that give play-based learning and organized education first priority.

Based on their socio-cultural surroundings, cross-cultural research has revealed notable differences in how children learn and develop. For example, Indigenous tribes in Latin America and Africa stress shared learning and responsibility from early age, where kids help in family labour and decision-making (Gaskins, 2006). By contrast, Western countries tend to encourage individualism, organized education, and postponed autonomy in childhood. These contrasts show how infancy is not a universal experience but rather strongly ingrained in cultural beliefs and economic structures.

Implications for education and socialization

Social theory must be rethought in light of the tremendous changes in the modern world, according to this article. Though cognitively significant, classical theory's assumptions, conceptions, and procedures are increasingly out of sync with digitalization, decolonization, climatic crises, and evolving global power dynamics. The regeneration of social theory necessitates a shift in how we define the social, whose knowledge matters, and how we study.

First, the critique of universalism and positivism emphasizes the need for a pluralistic epistemology that accepts diverse knowledges. Revitalized social theory positions Indigenous, feminist, postcolonial, and Global South thinkers as integral to theoretical growth, not supplementary.

Second, conceptual novelty matters. Relational, processual, and hybrid frameworks better reflect modern life's interconnection and dynamic than binary and rigid categories. Theorists must consider human, non-human,

Кумар С. (2025)
Детство, политика и социально-культурная позициональность...
Культурно-историческая психология, 2025. *21*(3), 114—123.

Kumar S. (2025)
Childhood, politics, and socio-cultural positionality...
Cultural-Historical Psychology, 2025. *21*(3), 114—123.

material, and digital actors, widening social science ontological frontiers.

Third, this transition requires methodological renewal. Ethical, collaborative research must oppose extractive norms and emphasize reciprocity, reflexivity, and accountability. Participatory, decolonial, and digital research methods demonstrate rigor and social engagement.

Social theory revitalization is a continuing effort. It requires humility, openness, and inventiveness because theory is constantly temporary, intertwined in the world it explains, and affected by power. Social theory must imagine more just, inclusive, and sustainable futures in an uncertain and changing world.

Childhood and politics

Childhood is a politically charged idea influenced by government policies, legal frameworks, and ideological discourses, not only a biological or developmental era. Political systems shape how childhood is defined, safeguarded, and lived throughout different countries. The function of the state in forming childhood, the effects of policies on children's life, and the political representation of children's rights are discussed in this part.

The role of the state in shaping childhood
Governments shape childhood through laws, schools, and social policies. The state determines childhood's beginning and conclusion, who is a child, and their rights and safeguards (James & James, 2012). Many nations set the legal age of adulthood at 18, although culture and politics affect this.

Juvenile justice, compulsory education, and child labour policies reveal how different parties see youth. Some emerging countries allow child labour under specific conditions, while others prohibit it until adulthood (Boyden, 2013). These discrepancies highlight how political economics impact childhood.

Political discussion also references childhood to advocate policies and changes. When discussing immigration, social welfare, or education funding, politicians often utilize child protection to advance their interests (Wells, 2015). Political decisions are sometimes influenced by economic and ideological reasons; therefore, these policies may benefit children but not necessarily.

Policies affecting children: education, labour laws, and healthcare
Government policies affect children's school, healthcare, and social services. By defining children's growth and education organization, compulsory education legislation have substantially impacted childhood (Moss, 2012). Educational access and quality remain uneven, especially for poor children.

Child labour laws vary globally. While international organizations like the ILO aim to end child labour, economic and political realities in many nations compel youngsters into the job. Sometimes child labour laws neglect low-income families' financial realities, resulting in laws that don't benefit children (Liebel, 2020).

Healthcare restrictions determine how much dietary and medical aid youngsters receive. Universal health care systems allow children more access to medical services, but private systems may vary by socioeconomic status (UNICEF, 2021). Some nations prioritize pregnancy and child health, whereas others less prioritize child welfare.

Political representation of children's rights
After the 1989 UNCRC ratification, political debate has shifted to children's rights. The UNCRC established global children's rights to education, healthcare, and protection from exploitation (UNICEF, 2019). Despite almost universal approval, these rights are implemented differently in each country.

Children cannot vote or participate in politics; hence they lack political representation. Therefore, adult-led advocacy groups, NGOs, and politicians frequently represent their interests (Reynaert et al., 2009). Young activism has grown, especially with Greta Thunberg's climate advocacy, but children's voices are still often ignored in politics (Kallio & Hakli, 2013).

The politicization of childhood in contemporary debates
Policy debates on education, immigration, and climate change often politicize childhood. International condemnation of family separations at crossings has shaped immigration discussions by affecting migrant children.

Climate change activism by youngsters has shown how political decisions influence youth. Young activists claim current political systems imperil future generations, emphasizing the need for more inclusive legislation that considers children's perspectives (Prout, 2019).

To conclude, governmental institutions, policies, and ideologies profoundly affect childhood.

Through education, labour regulations, and healthcare, governments shape childhood across socioeconomic and cultural contexts. Despite global awareness of children's rights, political representation remains a barrier, needing continual activism and systemic change to guarantee children's voices are heard.

Socio-cultural positionality and childhood

Different social, economic, and cultural settings shape childhood experience unevenly. Socio-cultural positionality — shaped by elements including class, race, gender, ethnicity, and nationality — defines the possibilities, obstacles, and identities children create. This part looks at how childhood interacts with social class, race and ethnicity, gender, and cultural variety, hence showing how these aspects shape children's experiences in many nations.

Class and economic inequality in childhood
A child's quality of life, educational access, health care, and well-being are all affected by socioeconomic

Кумар С. (2025)
Детство, политика и социально-культурная позициональность...
Культурно-историческая психология, 2025. *21*(3), 114—123.

Kumar S. (2025)
Childhood, politics, and socio-cultural positionality...
Cultural-Historical Psychology, 2025. *21*(3), 114—123.

status. In contrast to food poverty, limited schooling, and poor healthcare, wealthy children often have better education, extracurricular activities, and healthcare (UNICEF, 2021).

Economic inequality shapes children. Early variations in baby development show in high-income nations; wealthier infants benefit from better cognitive and social environments (Lareau, 2011). However, economically disadvantaged children may face poor schools, unstable homes, and more stress and trauma (Evans, 2004).

Race, ethnicity, and childhood inequality

Race and ethnicity affect childhood experiences, especially in countries with colonialism, systematic racism, and discrimination. Racial and ethnic minority children face structural inequalities in education, health care, and legal protection (Gillborn, 2008).

Black and Latino kids in the US are more likely than white youngsters to attend underfunded schools with harsher discipline (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Indigenous children in Australia, Canada, Asia, and Latin America endure systematic barriers to adequate education and healthcare due to colonial policy.

Migrant and refugee children face greater legal issues, dislocation, and discrimination worldwide. Immigrant children struggle with language, cultural, and social service exclusion in many host nations (Lundberg, 2020).

Gender and childhood socialization

Gender influences how children are reared, educated, and treated. Boy and female roles are often set in early childhood, with expectations about their behaviour, interests, and career objectives (Connell, 2009).

Traditional gender norms hinder females' schooling and personal liberties in many nations. Cultural beliefs around gender roles, home duties, and early marriage prevent millions of girls from attending school, according to UNESCO (2020). However, boys may be pressured to be strong and emotionally controlled, which might harm their mental health and development (Kimmel, 2010).

Cultural differences in childhood socialization

Cultural norms shape childhood. Many non-Western cultures prioritize collectivism and cooperation in childrearing, while Western countries emphasize individualism and independence (Rogoff, 2003). These cultural differences affect children's family and community roles, schooling, and parenting.

Children in many Asian and African societies are expected to help with family chores and respect elders, reflecting religious values. However, Western countries prioritise children's freedom and self-expression, helping them form independent identities (Lancy, 2015).

Cultural differences affect educational practices and discipline. While some cultures encourage lenient and child-centered approaches, others believe tough discipline is required for character development (Bornstein, 2012). These variances show how culture shapes childhood, challenging universal child development theories.

The impact of globalization on childhood identity

By affecting cultural values, language, media exposure, and social interactions, globalization has greatly formed childhood identity. Children are growing up in a world quite different from that of past generations as information, commodities, and people transcend borders in greater numbers. Although globalization has increased educational possibilities and promoted cultural variety, it has also raised questions about cultural degradation and identity crisis. Considering both good and bad consequences, this part investigates how globalization influences childhood identity.

The role of media and technology during childhood

Digital technology's fast development has significantly changed childhood experiences by changing how kids engage with the world, get information, and create their identities. Media and technology can both empower people and create possible hazards, hence prompting debate regarding its influence on children's political awareness, socialization, and well-being. Digital childhood's effects, media's influence on children's political awareness, and ethical issues about children's interaction with technology are all covered in this part.

Digital childhood and the rise of social media

Technology has transformed childhood in a world where digital devices, social media, and online learning are essential. Children's growing technology use affects their cognitive development, social connections, and educational opportunities, reflecting "digital childhood" (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020).

Many youngsters today utilize digital devices for entertainment, communication, and education, exposing them to screens early on (Holloway et al., 2013). Digital tools enable online learning and global contact, but they also raise concerns about screen time, cyberbullying, and data privacy (Chaudron et al., 2018).

Social media especially shapes children's identities and peer networks. Tik-Tok, Hub, Instagram, and YouTube allow kids to follow global trends, be creative, and join communities (Boyd, 2014).

Media influence on children's socialization and political awareness

The media shapes children's worldview through politics, culture, and social issues. TV, movies, and digital platforms show kids stories that reflect social norms and power structures (Buckingham, 2013).

Digital media has substantially increased children's political exposure. Young people can engage in political discourse, activity, and civic awareness via social media (Kellner & Share, 2019). Climate activism, led by Greta Thunberg, as mentioned earlier has grown in popular-

Кумар С. (2025)
Детство, политика и социально-культурная позициональность...
Культурно-историческая психология, 2025. *21*(3), 114—123.

Kumar S. (2025)
Childhood, politics, and socio-cultural positionality...
Cultural-Historical Psychology, 2025. *21*(3), 114—123.

ity among children and teens, highlighting how media affects young people's political engagement (Pickard, 2019).

Online content quality and reliability remain concerns for children. Misinformation and biased news can influence children's political opinions by reinforcing stereotypes (Jenkins et al., 2016). Developing critical thinking skills to responsibly navigate digital content has made media literacy education increasingly important (Hobbs, 2010).

The commercialization of childhood through media

Digital media's commercialization of kids generates ethical questions around how companies and advertisers focus on youngsters. Digital marketing has led to youngsters being exposed to ads on streaming services, gaming platforms, and social media, usually without knowing the persuasive intent behind them (Montgomery, 2015).

Research indicates that marketing tactics using influencers, product placements, and interactive material to influence their purchasing behaviour notably affect children (Nairn & Fine, 2008). This has sparked discussions on the morality of child-directed advertising and the necessity for more rigorous rules to shield children from exploitative marketing tactics (Gunter et al., 2005).

The digital divide and inequalities in access to technology

Although digital technology has opened doors for education and communication, it has also strengthened socio-economic inequalities among youngsters. Often as a result of economic, geographic, or physical constraints, the "digital divide" describes the disparity between children with access to technology and those without.

While children from low-income homes may lack fundamental technology capabilities, those from wealthy backgrounds have more access to high-speed internet, digital devices, and online learning materials (Van Deursen & Van Dijk, 2014). Global problems like the COVID-19 epidemic have drawn even more attention to this digital inequality as differences in online education access impacted children's academic achievement (UNICEF, 2021).

Ethical and psychological concerns in digital childhood

Digital technology is altering children, making mental health, data privacy, and online safety concerns more pressing. High screen usage in children is linked to anxiety, depression, and sleep issues (Twenge et al., 2018). Cyberbullying and online harassment also harm children's mental health and self-esteem (Kowalski et al., 2014).

Kids often use digital platforms to collect personal data for targeted marketing and monitoring, raising data privacy concerns (Lupton & Williamson, 2017). Many parents and children are unaware of how their data is used, raising permission and digital rights concerns (Livingstone et al., 2018). Children's digital privacy laws have gained support from advocacy groups advocating for stricter data collection and online safety (Staksrud & Livingstone, 2009).

Thus, media and technology have changed modern childhood, offering both opportunities and challenges. Digital tools give youngsters education, social connections, and political knowledge, but they also raise worries about digital inequality, commercialization, and misinformation. Providing equal access to technology, protecting children's online experiences, and promoting media literacy are needed to solve these issues.

Challenges and future directions

Significant obstacles remain in guaranteeing an equitable and fair childhood experience for all children even with developments in child rights, education, and technology. Socioeconomic inequality, political unrest, environmental change, and digital hazards still impact infancy in multifaceted ways. Key issues affecting children worldwide are discussed in this part along with possible future paths in policy, research, and activism.

Socioeconomic inequalities and access to opportunities

The ongoing socioeconomic disparities that influence children's access to education, healthcare, and social mobility are among the most urgent issues in childhood studies. Although international bodies like the World Bank and UNICEF have worked to lower child poverty, especially in low-income and marginalized areas inequalities still exist (UNICEF, 2021).

Children from economically underprivileged households are more prone to suffer malnutrition, subpar education, and bad health outcomes (Walker et al., 2011). The world wealth disparity also implies that whilst some kids gain from sophisticated healthcare and elite private education, others lack fundamental needs like stable housing and clean water (Pickett & Wilkinson, 2015).

Future initiatives ought to emphasize closing these gaps by means of fair policies including universal access to high quality education, free healthcare for children, and social safety nets for families in poverty (Sen, 1999). Long-term remedies addressing the underlying causes of childhood disparities should be carried out by governments working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The impact of climate change on childhood

As global temperatures rise, natural disasters, and resource depletion disproportionately affect children, climate change is becoming a major threat to their futures (UNICEF, 2019). Children in developing nations, especially coastal and rural ones, are more likely to be uprooted, hungry, and exposed to natural disasters (IPCC, 2022).

Climate concern increases youth fear and despair about the future (Hickman et al., 2021). In India, kid activists are leading the fight against climate change by promoting action, education, and responsibility. Young Indian activists fight climate change by disseminating knowledge and taking action. Many know Ridhima Pan-

Кумар С. (2025)
Детство, политика и социально-культурная позициональность...
Культурно-историческая психология, 2025. *21*(3), 114—123.

Kumar S. (2025)
Childhood, politics, and socio-cultural positionality...
Cultural-Historical Psychology, 2025. *21*(3), 114—123.

dey, who petitioned, and Licypriya Kangujam, who has battled for climate action since 2018. These activists are pressuring governments to address climate change and inspiring others.

To mitigate these risks, climate policymakers must prioritize children's needs. Youth must participate in decision-making. Education on sustainability and climate resilience in schools should prepare future generations for environmental issues (Chawla, 2020).

Political instability and the plight of refugee children

Children in areas impacted by war, political strife, and forced migration suffer great difficulties that undermine their physical and mental well-being. UNHCR estimates that more than 36,5 million children globally have been forcefully displaced by armed conflict, persecution, and economic instability as of 2022. Often, these kids suffer from a lack of fundamental healthcare, trauma, and interrupted schooling.

To guarantee their access to safe housing, schooling, and psychosocial assistance, policies giving child refugees and asylum seekers top priority must be strengthened (Lundberg, 2020). To offer humanitarian help and relocation initiatives for children impacted by violence and displacement, international cooperation is required.

Digital risks and children's online safety

Digital privacy, cyberbullying, and false information have all grown increasingly important as kids spend more time online. Although technology provides great social and educational advantages, it also exposes children to exploitation, manipulation, and mental health concerns (Livingstone et al., 2017).

Governments and technology businesses have to cooperate to provide child-friendly digital spaces that give safety, privacy, and media literacy top priority. Stricter data protection legislation for minors, social media content moderation, and awareness campaigns about online threats are among policies required to maintain children's digital well-being (Staksrud & Livingstone, 2009).

The future of childhood studies and policy development

Looking ahead, the field of childhood studies must continue evolving to address the complex and dynamic factors shaping children's experiences. Future research should focus on:
• Intersectionality and childhood: Examining how race, gender, class, and disability intersect in shaping childhood experiences.
• Children's agency and participation: Expanding efforts to include children's voices in policymaking and advocacy efforts.
• Post-pandemic childhood: Studying the long-term effects of COVID-19 on children's education, mental health, and socialization.
• Global South perspectives: Moving beyond Western-centric frameworks to incorporate

To summarise, although many romanticize childhood as a time of innocence and safety, actual events like economic inequality, political unrest, and digital threats undermine this image. Dealing with these problems calls for worldwide cooperation, inclusive policy development, and a dedication to strengthening children's voices. Ensuring that every child has access to a safe, encouraging, and empowering environment has to stay a worldwide goal as society develops.

Conclusion

Political, socio-cultural, and economic institutions affect childhood, a complex and dynamic time. Historical contexts, political policies, cultural expectations, and technological advancement shape an experience. This study examines how political beliefs, socio-cultural positionality, and digital transformations affect childhood, focusing on power, privilege, and inequality.

Political discussions over childhood highlighted the state's effect on children's rights, education, labour regulations, and social protections. While political and economic factors affect implementation in different nations, international treaties like the UNCRC set universal standards for children's wellbeing. Children still lack direct political representation, making advocacy and youth action essential to ensure their voices are heard.

In its socio-cultural positionality analysis, this study showed how class, race, gender, and culture affect childhood experiences. Socioeconomic gaps strongly influence education, healthcare, and social mobility. Cultural standards affect parental behaviours, gender expectations, and childhood notions, challenging the idea of a universal experience. Cross-cultural interaction and cultural uniformity have further affected childhood due to globalization.

Another major concern is how media and technology affect childhood. Technology has expanded children's access to knowledge and political participation, but it has also caused cyberbullying, privacy difficulties, and misinformation. Digital platforms' commercialization of childhood raises ethical problems about consumerism and children's autonomy, emphasizing the need for stronger digital literacy and child-centered internet policies.

Digital risks, political unrest, climate change, and economic inequality remain major concerns. These issues require global cooperation, inclusive policymaking, and more child participation in society and politics. Governments, teachers, and child welfare groups must work together to give every child a safe, supportive, and empowered upbringing.

In conclusion, childhood is not just a biological stage but a social and political construct. Understanding it through an interdisciplinary lens — incorporating political science, sociology, and cultural studies — allows for a more nuanced perspective on the forces that shape children's lives. By acknowledging the diversity of childhood experiences and advocating for policies that prioritize children's well-being, societies can work towards a more just and equitable future for all children.

Кумар С. (2025)
Детство, политика и социально-культурная позициональность...
Культурно-историческая психология, 2025. 21(3), 114—123.

Kumar S. (2025)
Childhood, politics, and socio-cultural positionality...
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Культурно-историческая психология, 2025. 21(3), 114—123.

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