

Society and Culture Personal Interest Project

‘Bunches of Westies and Eastern Suburb Snobs’

Class Consciousness in Adolescent Males

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Introduction.

My personal interest project is based on the present nature of class consciousness held by adolescents and whether or not they can truly be class conscious. Social class has remained an extremely important method of social stratification. However, many are in disagreement over an exact definition of social class. For the purposes of this project and my own personal beliefs, I will use the Marxist conception of social class. The subject of class has been of personal interest of mine and therefore a perfect topic for my project. Adolescence will be examined in connection with class during this project. Adolescence is a social construct and has arisen from the changing nature of work during the industrial revolution. With a growing amount of technological innovation, increased education was needed in order to produce a class capable of operating new machinery. Because of this, workers started their labour after graduating from the new educational establishments. This extended period of training began to be thought of as a new stage of life and was henceforth known as adolescence.

This project will examine exactly how class conscious today's youth are, as well as how this has evolved over different generations. Generation Y will feature most prominently in the project and be the subject of the most primary research. Additionally, Generation X and baby boomers will be examined so as to gain an understanding of continuity and change and how class consciousness has altered over time. By doing this, a clear explanation will be provided of how trends in class consciousness have either continued or shifted throughout each recent decade in our society. The question will be asked, and answered as to whether or not adolescents can truly be class conscious. This will be an ongoing argument and hypothesis of mine that will be proven as fact. My secondary hypothesis is however, that class consciousness has weakened due to stable economic conditions. This hypothesis is based on a Marxist conception of social relations and maintains that class consciousness moves according to the fluctuation of economic conditions. Because of this, I will be arguing that class consciousness has weakened, yet certainly hasn't disappeared.

To prove this hypothesis, I have utilised a focus group, in-depth interviews and a survey of my peers. I have used (Sample size) structured interviews as they are a beneficial methodology to use regarding this topic. Because it is a structured survey, the sample can be large thus providing more detailed quantitative data which can then be used to reinforce my hypotheses. I have utilised a focus group as another methodology as it provides valuable qualitative information and thus compliments the results of the structured interview. By creating an environment of free discussion, individual class prejudices can be easily recorded. Because of the qualitative value of the focus group methodology, the discussion is flexible and can become a heated atmosphere for the clash of class prejudices. Additionally, the in-depth interviews provided more qualitative results yet with a more 'relaxed' atmosphere. The in-depth interviews have been employed in order to record any examples of class mentality that the focus group may have missed.

My investigation of this topic will include a strong cross cultural component. I will present viewpoints different from my own and perspectives that have arisen from a different culture than my immediate context. I will show how these different experiences are cross cultural as they differ from my environment because of class or time. In a sense, the cross cultural component will be both class and age based. This is completely fitting considering the topic is based on class and on adolescence. I will demonstrate the impacts of continuity and change through the assessment of these cross cultural components and through the factors of class and age. This interaction between my own immediate cultural factors and a more or less alien culture, will allow me to empathize with or at least understand the viewpoints of the opposite class or age group being researched. Because of this increased understanding of a different cultural group, I have clearly become a more socially literate person. The effects of this on myself will do doubt be an increased empathy for different strata's and generations and an increased ability to ask questions of media opinion regarding different generations. While I have interacted with baby boomers a great deal (both of my parents are baby boomers) I have not had much interaction with either the lower working or the upper class.

My father would be described as a self-employed artisan which places him in either the petit-bourgeois class or the generic 'working-class', thus I am a member of that same strata. Throughout the course of the research I will reach a greater understanding of 'the other'.

Log

Ever since I was in year 9 I have been interested in the topic of class, so you might say I began researching my PIP topic years before I had received it. The way that people stratify each other interested me immensely and was the original point that drew me into a range of different radical left viewpoints. The theories formulated by Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky, Rosa Luxembourgh, Amadeo Bordiga, Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin have all influenced my worldview in some degree or another. I have identified as a Trotskyist, Left Communist, Anarcho-Syndicalist and as a councilist (I could never bring myself to embrace Stalinism or 'Marxism-Leninism'). The discussion between my teacher and myself regarding what my PIP topic would be lasted approximately thirty seconds, as I suggested the project be based around class, which was then refined to 'class consciousness of adolescents'. So armed with this one sided perspective of capitalism and of class, I embarked on my Personal Interest Project with the intention to discover how class consciousness has either continued in a linear fashion or changed. In this respect the themes of continuity and change were simply incorporated. I also aimed to present how class conscious each strata of adolescents were in reaction one another, which is the essence of the cross cultural component.

At the time when I was conducting my research, the effects of the global financial crisis were being felt worldwide. This was the first time that I had made any predictions as to what my research findings would show. I noticed that my Macro world was obviously being affected a great deal by the crisis; however, neither I nor many of my peers felt the effects of this firsthand. Perhaps they were content to disguise any economic problems that they were going through, yet I watched on as

economists repeated the same statement that Australia had fared better than most other developed countries (especially developing countries) during the GFC. It was at this point that I first questioned just how class conscious my peers would be.

My initial research began after term 3 of 2009, unfortunately, this was followed by a large break in work that was only to resume late during the Christmas holidays. Luckily as I live in the inner city, I'm surrounded by a wealth of resources conducted by 'class enthusiasts', which ranged from the bitter ramblings of Socialist intellectuals to the smug love letters to Capitalism written by neo-Liberal economists. I utilised the state library and the fisher library in order to conduct this secondary research. During the Christmas holidays I also conducted the majority of my primary research, fitting in structured interviews and in-depth interviews. I found this aspect of research difficult because of motivation problems. It was a new feeling forcing myself to work near to Christmas as this is not usually required in previous years. I encountered problems when I was conducting my survey, as I did not know how to present my questions properly. This proved to be a hindrance considering the amount of time I had, yet with help this was resolved. As I said earlier, I took the 'chunk approach' to its extreme and completed a good portion of the PIP far too close to the due date. This was done in a fashion that can only be likened to the scene in 'Raiders of the Lost Ark' when Indiana Jones narrowly makes it out of a cave just as the entrance is about to be sealed. This surely made the final few weeks of my PIP the busiest. It is certainly safe to say that the completion of my PIP was very satisfying.

Chapter One:

Max, Marx and Rebellious Teens

I marched shoulder to shoulder among two thousand people. We were marching down Elizabeth street, young and old alike in our respective groups. It was May first possibly the only day in the year that Sydney CBD looks in any way similar to the storming of the winter palace. I moved around the

crowds, at one time marching with my friends in 'Resistance' (a socialist youth organisation) and at another joining in with the edgy chanting emanating from the Anarcho-Syndicalist 'Workers Solidarity Movement'. I was amazed to see the thousands of red flags and happy Communists marching that day, yet this sense of awe suddenly dimmed when I heard an old member of 'The Cuba- Australia friendship society' say "this is a bit so-so this year, remember the days (he turned to his mate) when there would be ten thousand? What happened aye". One thought crossed my mind that day when I noticed the age difference between 'my groups' and the old Maritime unionists who were happily chatting with each other behind us. What would those older activists say about our generation of class conscious would be revolutionaries? What would they say about my generation full stop? Is class more cunning than it used to be? Or is it simply less noticeable?

Generally, Class is a method of social stratification (Moore, S. 1987. Page 46). It has been a method of creating hierarchy that has existed since the birth of agriculture. There are elements of class society that have remained constant throughout each successive class society, while others have evolved. Humanity has undergone several changes in class systems throughout history. However, there is one constant feature of the ancient slave, medieval feudal and modern capitalist societies: class consciousness (Hands, 2007, page 5). This generally refers to one's awareness of their class and position in society. For the purposes of this project, 'Class' will be defined mostly in the Marxist sense, i.e. by the individual's relation to Capital. Marx argues in favour of a simpler class structure than do other theorists such as Max Weber (although many definitions of class will be considered). For example, a Marxist perspective of a small cafe would argue that a person that works at a coffee machine and dispenses latte's, yet does not own these tools would be considered as part of the working class. The individual or group that does own these tools and accumulates capital from hiring labour would be considered as a part of the bourgeois. The Bourgeois, in modern society forms the majority of the upper class, as they are the owners of industry and commerce. This class typically earns a higher

income than their 'proletarian' counterparts. Alternately, Max Weber views the Marxist class structure as overly simplistic. Weber proposes that social stratification depends on class, status (our social prestige) and power (our ability to influence people to make decisions to which they would not normally concede) (Moore, S. 1987, page 52). Because Marx's view of class is more exclusive of these other concepts, it is thus more relevant to this project.

Class consciousness can be defined as an awareness of one's class (Moore, S. 1987, page 56). Class consciousness has the potential for growing to the point where a distinct culture emerges within society. E.P. Thompson describes this concept: "*Class consciousness is the way in which these (class) experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas and institutional forms...class is a relationship, not a thing*" (Quoted by Harris, 2000, England: National Council of teachers of English). Social theorists such as Karl Marx however, would also argue that class consciousness is an awareness of one's exploitation and a precursor to revolutionary social change. For the purpose of this project, class consciousness will be defined as an awareness of one's class position and the adoption of the accompanying value systems. Class consciousness fluctuates throughout different generations, environments and time. It is influenced by the economic situation of society. The cause and influencing factors of class consciousness however, is a topic that has been the topic of much debate. It is generally accepted that class consciousness tends to be of a higher level in times of economic crisis. Marxist theory argues that it is at this point that the working class necessarily engages in class conflict due to the resulting decrease in wages and employment. Many Marxists argue also that the bourgeois class propagate ideologies that are hostile to class consciousness. Rick Kuhn argues that

"Many features of capitalist societies undermine working class consciousness... Various parts of the state propagate ideologies inimical to class consciousness; not just governments but also judiciaries, education and health systems. Then there is the mass media" (Kuhn, 2006, page 3).

Public holidays such as Australia day could be considered an example of this. By stressing unification and patriotism in a class society, the holiday necessarily builds relations between the classes. This degrades working class consciousness and conflict.

Adolescence is a social construct and has its origins in the European industrial revolution. The fact that 'Adolescence' emerged at the same time as the capitalist working class is further evidence of the capability that adolescents have to be class conscious. Perhaps surprisingly, adolescence has not always existed. On the long continuum of human history, both adolescence and class are recent developments. The development of new productive forces necessitated an improved education system. In England, the time period in which people learned to be productive members of society was lengthened. In the late the 19th century, urban based workers would typically start at work at approximately fifteen years of age. This is compared to 18th century England in which agricultural workers would start labour at approximately ten years of age. This new period of education formed a new 'adolescent' life stage. In contemporary Australia adolescence arguably occurs from approximately the time the individual graduates from primary school and generally speaking, ends around the time of university entry. This time is rightly viewed as a period of instability, where the adolescent is looking to society in order to define themselves. Thus class becomes important to the adolescent as a sub-conscious method of social differentiation.

Due to the fact that adolescence is a strong time of self identification, it is my hypothesis that adolescents are one of the most class conscious groups in modern society. This is due to the fact that generally, adolescents will use whatever means at their disposal in order to gain some understanding of their identity. This is certainly reflected in the results of a survey that I conducted on the topic: 70% of participants identified with a particular class. One respondent claimed:

" Yeah I'd be in the working class then 'cos I work at Macca's (McDonalds). But that's like better then because I can admit it, I know myself" (Interview conducted at fivedock on the 07/04/10).

Throughout the following chapters, the following focus questions will be answered: 'Can adolescents be class conscious?', 'Which class of adolescents is the more class conscious?', 'Is the middle class conscious?', 'Has class consciousness changed over time?'

Chapter 2: Class awareness

In order to answer the question of whether adolescent males can truly be class conscious, the meaning of class consciousness must be understood. Class Consciousness, when simply defined is the awareness of one's class. From this point, the meaning becomes contentious. Karl Marx for example refers to class consciousness as being the conflict between worker and the bourgeois: "*The mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle...this mass becomes united and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests. But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle*" (Karl Marx: *The Poverty of philosophy*. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/subject/hist-mat/pov-phil/ch02.htm>. Last accessed 03/07/10). The topic has been an increasingly controversial one in Australia, due to the questioning of the relevancy of class. Some well known public commentators in Australia have gone so far as to question the existence of class all together. Craig McGregor writes: "*Such blindness on the part of the commentators and writers is*

probably due to the strength of the egalitarian tradition in our society...This egalitarian tradition is sometimes regarded as making Australians less class conscious than people in parallel societies"

(McGregor, 1997, page 18).

Throughout the course of my research, I was intrigued to discover that there were many respondents who did not seem to understand their their class position. However, they did refer to the idea of a vague sense of 'the other'. I use 'the other' here to refer to an understanding of some fundamental difference between the participants (*The Other*. <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/cs6/other.html>. Last accessed 03/07/2010). The respondents identified this to be an opposite group that does not belong to their own class, thus class consciousness seemed to be located somehow in the participants sub-conscious. The fact that however, many seemed to be aware of an opposite and even an opposing class shows a high degree of class awareness. Some even provided the opinion that their class was in conflict with another class. Class consciousness is heavily related to 'values' or a system of ideas and philosophies that can be defined on both a personal and a societal level (Moore, S. 1987. Page 4) .Marx would assert that the values that my respondents espoused, provided an insight into their own class position because the class environment under which they live always informs their beliefs: *"The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production"* (Quoted by Kamenka, 1983, page 164) . The data that was recorded showed that all respondents espoused values that are strongly linked with class. For example one respondent stated that "I feel uncomfortable around really poor people, they should stick to their own kind *laughs*".

Number of respondents who showed hostility to another class

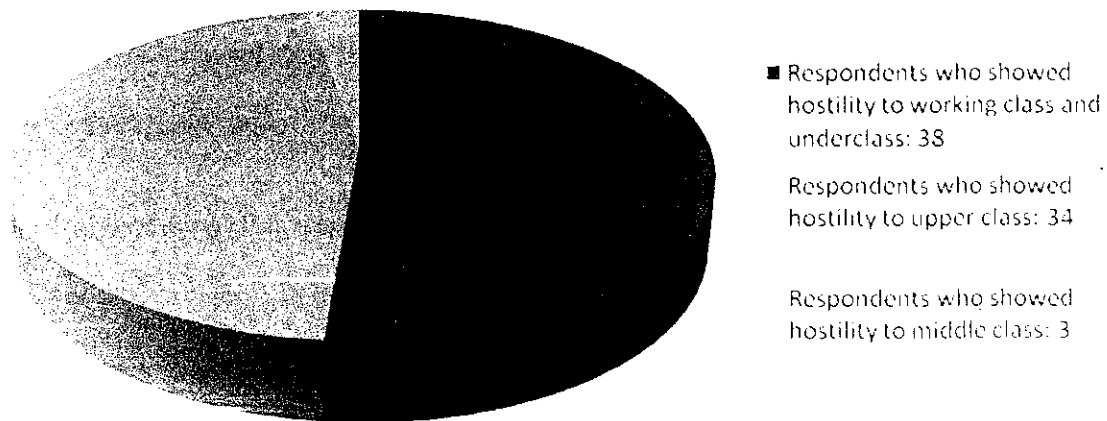


Fig. 2A

For the sake of the data, I have recorded 'hostility' as the instances during the interviews when respondents verbalised their dislike of another class. For example, many respondents attached negative stereotypes to their values:

Interviewer: *"Imagine this: A car company is experiencing decreased profits. To keep the company functioning, cuts need to be made. A chunk of the workforce will be fired. This will save the company, but mean that many workers will be out of a job. Do you think that this is ok?"*

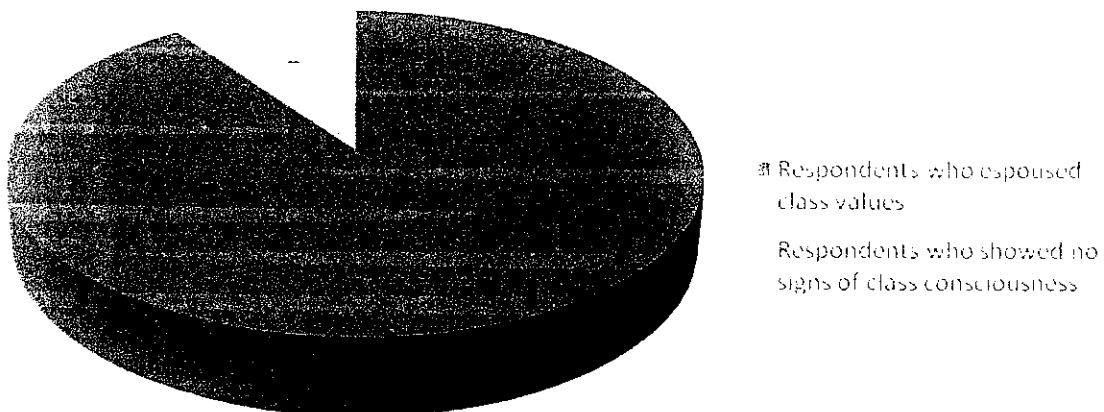
Respondent: *"Yeah that's ok because the company can't afford it. This type of thing doesn't happen much anyway it's just Bogans complaining I think".*

The fact that so many respondents expressed negative opinions regarding other classes, shows a clear level of class consciousness. Interestingly, only two respondents showed explicit hostility to the middle class, while the rest did not even mention the words "upper class". From this, two assumptions can be made. The first is that middle class is currently, a neutral class. However, the answer most likely lies in the fact that the majority of the survey respondents were from the middle

class. The respondents did not seem to feel comfortable with commenting on their own class position or even explicitly stating that they are 'middle class'. However, McGregor implies that when they are pushed for a direct answer, Australians describe themselves as middle class: "*When Australians are asked what class they belong to, more of them say middle class than any other*" (McGregor, 1997, page 145).

Interestingly, working class respondents (those who placed their parents' occupation into the 'manual workers' category) all showed animosity and voiced opinions that were antagonistic towards the upper class.

Working Class Responses



The class of the adolescents was found by asking the respondents to place their parents into one employment category out of four. These were 'The managerial/professional', the 'skilled manual worker', the 'semi-skilled manual worker' and the 'unskilled manual worker' categories. From the respondents who placed their parents into anything below the 'professional' category, the vast majority of these showed hostility to higher socio-economic groups. As can be seen in fig. 2.2, the

vast majority of working class respondents verbalised their dislike of the upper class. One of these respondents stated: *"Man I hate the liberal party, all their supporters are rich"* (Interview conducted 23/06/10). From this data, it can be confidently reasoned that my findings here are evidence of class consciousness. A similar and larger survey was undertaken 5 years ago on adults with similar results, which reinforces the reliability of my findings. Rick Kuhn writes on Chamberlain's results: *"A majority of working class respondents thought that they should 'have a big say' in the way companies are run and should share in the profits. (People higher up the socio-economic ladder generally opposed this). A total of 15% even favoured workers control (Kuhn, 1996, pg 27)..* In this sense, my findings indicate that the class values and consciousness of the adolescent typically reflect the values of their parents. This is because the class of the adolescent depends on the class of the parent.

Upon analysis, my survey results indicate that adolescent males are class conscious.

Chapter 3: Which Class of adolescents is the most conscious?

When reflecting upon my research, an important question is raised: which class was the most 'conscious'? We have already established in the last chapter what I mean by 'class consciousness', we have not however established which class was the most conscious of its own existence.

The Middle Class

As already established, the class of adolescents typically depends on the class of their parents. This is because the financial situation of the parents will impact on the adolescent. The respondents who placed their parents into the 'professional managerial' categories have been considered as middle class. This is due to the fact that these professions have commonly been associated with this status group: *"It (middle class) includes at the top end, professionals, bureaucrats and the higher grades of administrators and managers; further down are the great bulk of white collar workers"* (McGregor,

1997, page 157). Throughout the course of my research, middle class respondent's continually espoused class related values and attitudes, for example one middle class respondent in the focus group claimed that:

"On one side you've got all the bogans and stuff who try to steal your tax by bludging on the dole and then on the other side you have all the bosses and mining executives who try to steal your money by not paying you enough".

(To which another participant replied): *"So where are you in all this?"*

"I don't know, somewhere in the middle". (A0027 32)

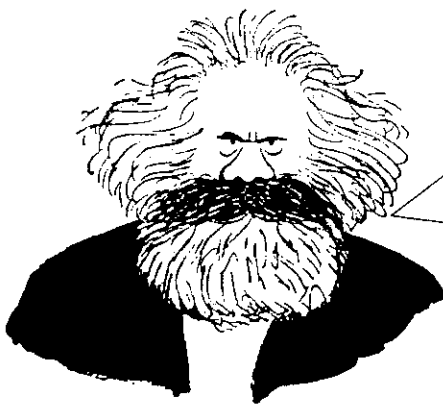
The above example illustrates the way in which middle class respondents will only refer to themselves in a class context if pushed. There are two possible reasons for this; one is the egalitarian tradition with which Australia has been embroiled:

"The myth that Australia is a classless society is one of the most damaging of the legends that Australians hold close to their hearts" (Ibid, page 1).

Considering the context of my research, middle class adolescents seem to be a class of itself instead of a class for itself. Considering the fact that middle class respondents were reluctant to define themselves as such, it can be assumed that the egalitarian tradition within Australia and the unformed sense of self that adolescents struggle with means that adolescent class consciousness is a sub-conscious affair.

The Working Class

Working class respondents were seemingly more 'conscious' than their middle class counterparts. During the survey and the focus group, respondents who placed themselves within a class context were almost always from the working class. The focus group was conducted with a survey of eight people, three of which identified as working class. I conducted the focus group in order to gain a qualitative insight into how class conscious adolescents could be, while providing a forum where participants could voice their perspectives in reaction to each other. One respondent claimed: For the sake of the project, respondents who placed their parents into the semi-skilled manual workers and the unskilled manual workers categories have been considered as part of the working class. Respondents who placed their parents into the 'skilled manual' category have been disregarded from the working class. The question of where skilled manual workers fit into the class hierarchy is indeed contentious. However, in figure 3A I have attempted to explain in a Marxist context why this stratum is not inherently connected to the working class anymore:



I described the Bourgeoisie as the owners of the means of production. Land, Labour and Capital have become increasingly accessible in this post-modern era (Wolf, J. 2002, page 87). Therefore many tradesmen and skilled manual workers now own their own businesses, homes and even accumulate their own capital. This is not consistent with my idea of the Proletarian, who has nothing more supporting his livelihood other than selling himself to capitalism...the lowly exploited worker who has been robbed of his surplus value by a parasitic business owner. Perhaps some workers have already lost their chains?

(Satire, Karl Marx.

http://www.marxists.org/subject/art/visual_arts/satire/marx/marx4.htm

Last accessed 09/08/2010)

Interestingly, working class participants in my focus group and in the survey seemed more antagonistic towards the ambiguous 'lower class'. While often identifying themselves as working class and identifying the upper class as an 'opposing' status group, working class participants often poked fun at, abused and showed prejudice towards a lower strata of the working class or an 'underclass'. The following exchanges took place during the focus group:

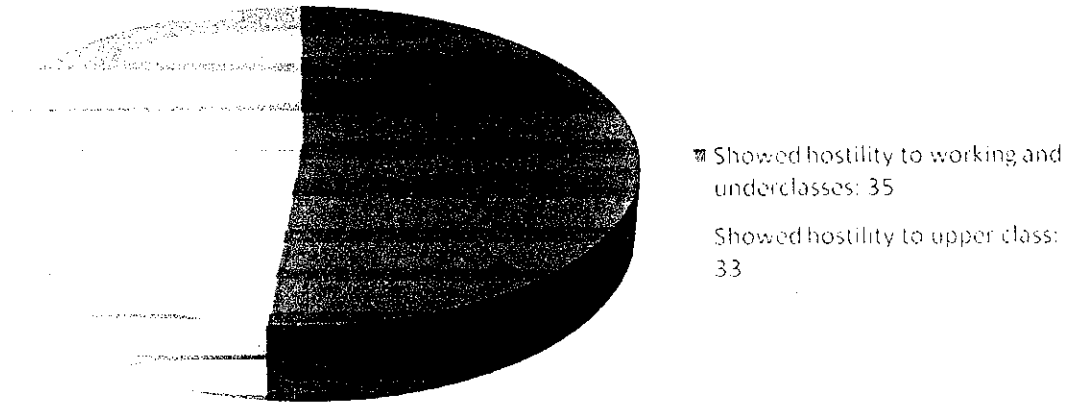
*NR: My dad's a plumber so that's not heaps... you know... wealthy but I can get along better with guys who go to private schools. I never hang out with bogans like they all work at maccas and stuff. And anyway I have more in common with my *names private school in Sydney* friends, like I'm not rich but my family go's on holiday pretty often, we live in Abbotsford so we're not westies (with all due respect to westies)".*

If isolated, the working class participants in the survey read as follows:



Ollie Wheeler, Interview conducted 23/04/2010

Respondents with working class background



Based upon my research findings, the 'underclass' seems to be a more common target of hostility from the working class than the upper class. The existence of an underclass is a heavily debated issue and is generally thought to be a class that 'prefers' to live upon state benefits than to work. Karl Marx referred to them as the '*Lumpen Proletariat*', writing in the Communist Manifesto:

“The “dangerous class”, the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue.” (Marx,K. 2008, page 14).

In my opinion, the unexpected low amount of hostility towards the upper class among adolescents is caused by two main factors:

1. Embourgeoisement.

The Marxian class structure (Bourgeois, Proletariat, lumpen-proletariat (Moore, S. 1987. Page 52)) has become less effective in recent years within an Australian context. Because of higher female employment and a stable market system, the traditional working classes have attained a higher degree of affluence, often suggesting that the upper strata of the working class (skilled-manual workers for example) have become absorbed into the bourgeoisie. The ‘new working class’ family typically has two income earners and are more likely to adopt a ‘consumerist’ lifestyle (Moore, S. 1987, page 59). Because of rising living standards,

working class adolescents are less antagonistic to the upper class compared to previous decades. The borders between the working and middle classes have become blurred therefore so has the adolescents class consciousness.

2. **Hegemony.**

This concept was developed by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci and can explain why the 'Australia is a classless society' myth is such a strong one. Gramsci argued that the ruling class (which in Australia translates to the upper-class) uses 'culture' as a stabilising influence thus deliberately blurring class distinctions and pacifying class conflict. Gramsci went so far as to argue that schools, cultural institutions and even the family served to solidify the beliefs of the ruling class, thus serving their interests through the pacification of the working class (*Antonio Gramsci, schooling and education*. <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-gram.htm> Last accessed 17/07/10). Craig McGregor often criticizes this 'dominant ideology':

"The Myth that Australia is a classless society is one of the most damaging of all the legends that Australians hold close to their hearts...It disguises the wain which a small class elite sets out to run the country for its own benefit and largely succeeds in doing so"

Out of the class background of respondents, those with a working class background seemed to be more conscious. They identified the wealthy upper-class to be an opposing and different class yet frequently attacked lower strata of the working and underclass. According to my survey results, working class adolescent males are more class conscious than their middle class superiors, however in the next chapter, we will find out how conscious they are compared to previous generations.

Chapter 4: How has class consciousness changed over time?

Before I conducted my research in order to answer this question, my hypothesis was that class consciousness has been steadily decreasing since the era of the baby boom. I believe this was shown to be slightly more or less correct throughout the course of both my primary and secondary research. My research findings give an indication that baby boomer adolescents growing up during the 1960's and 70's had been more 'politically' conscious when they were adolescents than generation X and Y. While the nature of my primary research into this topic was qualitative, one piece of quantitative information catches the eye: all 5 of the males interviewed identified the baby boom generation as the most class conscious. This should come as no surprise considering the events taking place within the global community during the era of this generation. The Civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam war movement and the women's liberation movement had all occurred during the era of the baby boom and were most influenced by the baby boomer generation. Baby boomer respondents had however, both revealed they had become pacified as they aged. Generation X males were all of the opinion that the years of their adolescence had also been

characterised by Class consciousness; more so than generation Y, who possess very little consciousness of their class as compared to the older strata's.

Baby Boomers

During the 1960's and 70's, adolescents had as a whole been a wildly conscious bunch. Specifically, adolescent males during these years had shaped the movements for civil rights (1967 referendum. <http://www.abc.net.au/messageclub/duknow/stories/s888141.htm>. Last accessed 18/07/10). However, can this be described as class consciousness? Do these movements represent an accurate display of class conflict? Hannah Middleton (permission granted to use real name) is a baby boomer and was an adolescent during this era of change. Ms Middleton actively participated in the student Maoist movement and is now the general-secretary of the Communist Party of Australia. She describes the type of consciousness that existed during this time:

"Yes I would describe the young people who lived through this era as extremely class conscious. Not so much as in direct, worker struggles (although there was much of this going on) but in the movement against the international status quo. Many young people identified 'the enemy' as those allied to the state, the police and of course the owners of the means of production. In the struggle for peace and for civil rights (references the 1967 referendum, which included indigenous Australians as citizens), there was undoubtedly a major conflict between the...petit-bourgeois and working classes on one side and the wealthy, conservative side on the other". Interview

conducted in Surry Hills 28/06/10. (APP P3 34)

Whether or not the 1960's was actually typified by a flourishing of class consciousness, it must be known that worldwide, conflict was certainly leading to social change. The fact that conflict was producing social change, already implies the existence of some kind of class conflict. After all, the years surrounding the election and sacking of Gough Whitlam (1972-1975) were typified by a conflict between the progressive lower middle class and working class one hand, and the upper class supporting the opposing Liberal party. I argue that during this decade, conflict occurring in politics reflected the conflict occurring in society. The reforms carried out by the Whitlam government including recognition of indigenous land rights, women's rights and the withdrawal of troops from Vietnam were all carried out due to class conflict occurring within society.

Generation X

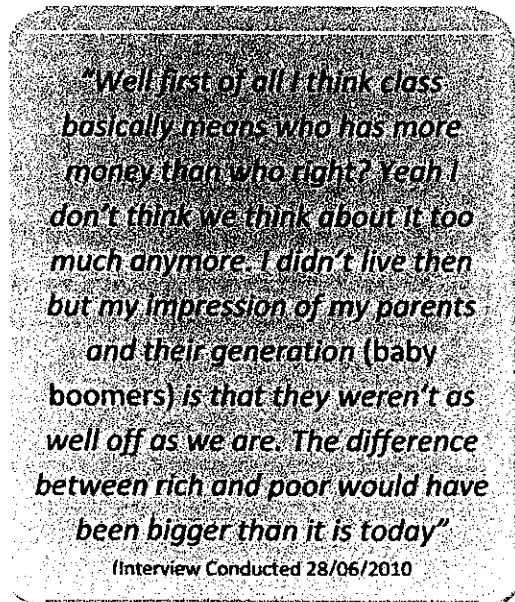
As a generation, it would be correct to state that adolescents from generation X were not as class conscious as the baby boomers were. The movements that defined the political consciousness of the 1960's (which inevitable overlapped with class consciousness) did not exist during the 1980's. Workers struggles however, were still rampant as the opposing interests of neo-liberalism and social democracy clashed:

"The Hawke and Keating Labor Governments used the Accord with the ACTU to undermine workers' capacity to fight... That is, they cut real wages..When particular groups of workers stepped out of line to back demands for real pay increases with industrial action, Labor governments and the ACTU combined to defeat them... The Builders Labourers' Federation and the domestic airline pilots' union were smashed.Paul Keating recently boasted that his industrial relations reforms are still responsible for the low rate of growth in wages, despite fifteen years without a serious recession... Labor preferred to undermine workers' ability to struggle by gaining the voluntary collaboration of trade union leaders. Real wages fell, production lines sped up, the proportion of workers in trade unions and their self-confidence declined." (Socialist Alternative: *The Real History of Class Struggle in Australia* by Rick Kuhn. <http://www.sa.org.au/mag-archive-from-old-website/79-edition-97/348-the-real-history-of-class-struggle-in-australia>. Last accessed 18/07/10.

Kuhn implies here that that class consciousness declined during the 1980's due to ongoing losses in the smouldering class conflict. When interviewed, Karol Foyle was of the opinion that he was more class conscious as an adolescent than teenagers of generation Y. However, he questions the degree to which he was aware of this: *"Yeah, my dad's an electrician and he still was when I was a teenager (used here as synonymous with adolescent). I Would say that we were more aware of who had money and who didn't in the 80's. I mean I can't say much but when the teenagers that I do know, even the more working class ones seem to be better off. We still hated private school kids though...I went to Leichardt High."* We should take note of the way Hannah from the baby boomers describes the class consciousness during the 1960's and 70's compared to the way that Karol describes class consciousness during the 80's. Of course Hannah Middleton is a self-proclaimed Communist so the answers do depend somewhat on the personal experience of the respondents, but it is quite clear that the two participants each paint a vastly different portrait of class consciousness.

Generation Y

Tim Jones (nom-de-plum) told me his impression of the class system in Australia:



'Tim Jones', 28/06/10 (APP Pg 36)

Further evidence that class consciousness has decreased since the 1960's and 70's can be seen in that murky realm of politics. Economically Liberal politicians (what a Marxist would call 'the ruling class') such as Peter Costello was happy to proclaim that "we are all working class now because we all work". Similarly, Conservative British politician John Major stated in 1996 that "we are all middle class now" (*International Viewpoint: 'Has working class consciousness collapsed?'*.

<http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article1516>. Last accessed 18/07/2010). These

may be horrendous exaggerations yet they are made from noticeable changes in how people view class today. Of course adolescents have much the same view of this than their parents so any indifference from generation X will pass itself on to generation Y. Declan Crowley(permission

granted to use name) was certainly of the opinion that class is less visible to generation Y than to previous generations:

"Yeah it's harder to see class today, like you have lads (youth subculture) walking around who are probably on centrelink but they're walking around in these gold chains and TN's (expensive brand of runners). This is why we probably don't see class as much because everyone buys expensive stuff in the end" (Interview conducted 28/06/2010) *(see app pg 37)*

This is a statement that I can I can agree with as I can observe this type of conspicuous consumption and large scale investment in status symbols in my own micro world. Ross Gittens explains this mentality of class neutrality that has arisen in recent years:

"Throughout his time as prime minister, John Howard endlessly repeated his contention that the old class conflict was dead and buried. He was right. These days most people think of themselves as "middle class" regardless of the extent of their means. We're conscious of social status, but we don't think in class terms." (Sydney Morning Herald: 'Misguided, Middle class moaners'. May 20 2009. <http://www.smh.com.au/business/misguided-middleclass-moaners-20090519-be7c.html> Last accessed 19/07/2010).

I think that the results of my research in this area have confirmed the noticeable decline in class consciousness. This trend seems to be noticed by all of my interview participants as all shared the same opinion that class consciousness among adolescent males has been steadily decreasing since the 1960's and 1970's.

Considering all of the research presented here, the question of whether or not adolescent males can be class conscious has been answered. The answer is undoubtedly yes, however it is also clear that class consciousness among generation Y is considerably weaker when compared to generation X and the 'baby boom' generation.

Conclusion

Throughout the course of my research I have not only learned theories, ideas and methods of perceiving the world, but I have also gained a great deal of insight into the way my peers perceive

themselves. I have learned the extent of social differentiation among my peers and how diverse their viewpoints can truly be. Due to the undertaking of this research, I now understand the full complexity of the question of class and how it has become embroiled in so many different ideas. Social differentiation, stratification hierarchy, equality, difference and status are all related in some way to class, therefore any meaningful understanding of 'class' must be complimented by an understanding of these additional concepts. I have learned that my peers do not seem to be as conscious of their own class as I thought.

However, my research did prove my hypothesis that adolescents can be class conscious. The answers that the participants provided and the views which they expressed were all intimately bound to an implicit understanding of their own position in society's pecking order. Most identified themselves with the middle class and differentiated themselves from their 'upper' and 'lower' class counterparts. The focus group, in-depth interviews and surveys all helped to create an image of the class conscious adolescent. The in-depth interviews and secondary research that I conducted however implied a decrease in class consciousness since the 1960's. Therefore, my research also proved my secondary hypothesis that class consciousness has been decreasing since the baby-boom years. I suggest that the reason for this is the embourgeoisement of the developed world, including Australia. The ranks of the middle class have indeed swollen in recent years, decreasing the contradiction between Capital and Labour. I now disagree with the common Marxist argument that 'there is no such thing as a middle class', because this argument refuses to recognise:

1. The vast shift in income levels between unskilled manual labourers and 'white collar' workers.
2. The fact that much of the working class now owns land, property and even shares whilst still providing labour for an employer. In other words, the overlap that has occurred between Proletarian and Bourgeois.

Generally, my research tools were effective with the exception of some weaknesses. For example, the research into 'continuity and change' and how class consciousness has changed since the 1960's was reliant upon my in-depth interviews and thus was overly qualitative. This has negative implications for the reliability of my conclusions. Because of the qualitative nature of this research, it cannot be confidently said that if conducted again, the results would not differ. In other words, the repeatability of these results is uncertain. Fortunately, a wealth of secondary information was found and utilised upon investigation. This provided needed evidence for my conclusions and played the major role in proving my secondary hypothesis. Unfortunately, in this case, primary research served secondary research and not vice versa as it should be. Alternately, the survey that I conducted was quantitative; therefore it provided valuable insight while proving my hypothesis that adolescents can be class conscious. This was undoubtedly the most difficult primary research that I undertook due to the confusing nature of constantly organising short interviews with my peers. However, the results gained here are the most valuable and without them, the conclusions of this project would be invalid. The focus group conducted provided valuable qualitative results and was at the same time, an enjoyable process. The eight participants all agreed at the end that they had enjoyed the discussion and showed a greater interest in my project's topic. All of these research methodologies were entirely appropriate to the topic as they all provided valuable insights into the how class consciousness has changed, how class conscious adolescent males can be and into the reason why class is perceived to be less relevant today as it once was.

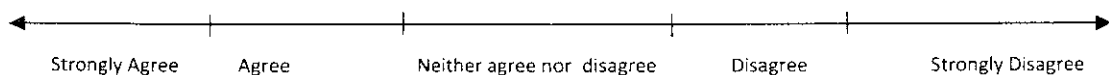
Retrospectively, If I was to undertake this project again I would surely enlist the help of an internet based survey to achieve greater efficiency when conducting my survey. If I had more time, I would possibly have conducted wide ranging content analysis in order to gain an understanding of how the dominant culture views class in relation to adolescents. I also would have better spaced out my work load, as I took 'the chunk approach' to its extreme and completed stressful amounts of work in a relatively short and strained amount of time.

Conclusively, this project has massively increased my social literacy. I realise that many students who complete this topic must claim or exaggerate the extent to which they have achieved a higher amount of social literacy. However, I can confidently say that my whole worldview has changed. Upon the start of this project, I was indeed a card carrying 'socialist alliance' member, upon research however, I too begrudgingly admit that the relevance of class (in Australia at least) is rightly being questioned. Of course one percent of Australian society owns twenty-five percent of its wealth. However, how visible is this when the living conditions of the population have been on the increase thanks to a prosperous capitalism? Upon reading Jonathan Wolf's book 'Why Read Marx Today?' for my secondary research, I realised that perhaps the class structure of Bourgeois and Proletariat has indeed lost relevance in the advanced capitalist economies. My research into this project has made me feel a greater understanding for a liberal (note the small 'L') worldview and a contemporised understanding of class.

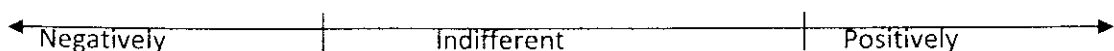
Appendices

Survey

- What are the strengths/weaknesses of the Labor Party?
- What are the strengths/weaknesses of the Liberal Party?
- Do you think that Australian society adequately looks after those who are on the margins?
Who should we be supporting more/less?
- Do you think that in a healthy society, there is a natural hierarchy?
- Consider this: a car company is experiencing decreased profits. To keep the company functioning, cuts need to be made. A chunk of the workforce will be fired. This will save the company, but mean that many workers will be out of a job. Do you think that this is ok?
- Rate this statement: 'Private schools are important for parent choice'.



- How do you react when you see people your age driving expensive cars bought for them by their parents?



- What best describes your parents' profession out of the following options?

1. Managerial, professional
 2. Skilled manual workers
 3. Semi skilled manual workers
 4. Unskilled manual workers
- How old were you when you found out how your parents voted? Do they tend to vote Left (Labor/Greens) or Right (Conservative/National./Lib)
 - What do your parents/guardians want you to do after you leave school?
 - Rate the fairness of the welfare system: Fair- Indifferent- Unfair.

Focus Group

- Mediator: *"Thank you everybody for coming... (Introduction of topic, outlines purpose of the focus group). Today I was hoping that this could be an environment where people could express their views in relation to the question 'Can adolescent boys be class conscious?'*
- Mediator: *"What do you think the term 'class' means?"*
- NR: *"It means who has more money doesn't it? Like who's on the top and who's on the bottom"*
- Mediator: *"Who do you think is on the bottom?"*
- JR: *"The labourers and the poorer people...people working at mechanics and stuff and tradies"*
- NR: *"But tradies aren't poor though. They earn a bit, they earn more than uni students and stuff. My dad's a tradie and we're not lower class."*
- (further discussion) HB: *"I don't like to think of myself as in any class. It's weird to think of. On one side you've got all the bogans and stuff who try to steal your tax by bludging on the dole and then on the other side you have all the bosses and mining executives who try to steal your money by not paying you enough".*
- JW: *"So where are you in all this?"*
- HB *"I don't know, somewhere in the middle".*
- JM: *"That's so wrong though! You just said that all workers are bludgers, that's disgusting. Why don't the mining executives get called bludgers?"*

- Mediator: *"That's interesting, why do you think the mining executives would be bludgers?"*
- (Discussion of Julia Gillard)JM *"Because they're the ones that don't do anything, they just reap the profits of what the miners do...I mean I'm not working class really but I sympathise with them"*
- HB (apologises for earlier comments).
- N.R: *"I feel really un"*
- O.W: *"Just quietly, I don't think class really matters anymore. I mean it's not like it's the eighteenth century anymore where we're working as chimney sweeps down the road from the railroad tycoon or anything. I mean I don't really think of myself as a member of a particular class."*
- Mediator: *"But if you had to where do you think you would place yourself?"*
- O.W: *"I don't know probably in the middle class I guess".*
.....
- DR: (refers to O.W) *"But your dads a lawyer though. Like with all due respect I reckon you'd be above middle class. Maybe upper middle even...I mean you live in Balmain."*
- O.W *"Alright well maybe upper-middle *laughs*. But everyone's more equal now"*
- JH: *"Well I mean that's easy for you to say, I'm not lower class or anything but my dad's a panel beater and it's not easy for him I don't think. Does our class depend on what our parents do though?"*
- Mediator: *"What do you think?"*
- JH: *"Well I guess so, I don't know that could mean that I'm working class then, I'm not ashamed of it. I'm not poor though"*
- DR: *"Yeah same...I might be working class".*
- Mediator: *"Think about this: a car company is experiencing decreased profits. To keep the company functioning, cuts need to be made. A chunk of the workforce will be fired. This will save the company, but mean that many workers will be out of a job. Do you think that this is ok?"*
- Participants consider and ask me to repeat the question
- JB: *"Yeah I think it's alright. I mean otherwise the company's going to go bankrupt and more people are going to be out of a job"*
- DR: *"Yeah but whose fault is that though? Maybe the owners should pay since they're the ones who ran the company into the ground."*
- O.W *"But that's not how the economy works though..."*
- Discussion about economics
- Mediator: *"Well how do you feel about the situation? Do you think the government should provide? Do you think they should just find another job?"*
- JB: *"They should be helped to find another job. I mean I might be in that situation one day because I don't think I'm going to be a mining executive or anything *laughs*. Like I have nothing in common with them. They should be taxed"*
- DR: *"Yeah I agree because the lower class does more work I reckon"*
.....

- Mediator: *"What do you mean by the term 'the lower class'?"*
- DR: *"Well the working class is kind of the same I guess"*
- O.W: *"What about rootty hill and stuff"*
- DR: **laughs* "Oh nah nothing like that. They're like below I'm nowhere near them"*
- All of the participants agree
- Mediator: *"That's interesting who do you mean by 'them'."*
- DR: *"You know like thieves and people without jobs. They dropout after year 4 and don't work."*
- NR: *"I feel uncomfortable around really poor people, they should stick to their own kind *laughs*."*
- JM: *"That's a bit mean. What if they have mental health issues? Like I'm not part of the 'underclass' or anything, hobo's scare me. But to say they're all bludgers is a bit...simplistic"*
- Further discussion about the homeless.
- Mediator: *"Thank you all for coming today, I hope you enjoyed it."*

.....

Every one thanks each other

END

In-depth Interviews with Baby boomer Interview conducted 28/01/10 in Surry Hills

- **Interviewer:** *"The word 'class' has come to mean how much a person owns in relation to other people. Some have more while some have less. Back when you were an adolescent, would you say that you and you're peers were more aware of your class as compared to generation Y?"*
- **HM:** *"I think so yes. Today Australia is operating under very different conditions to what it was during my day. The gap between rich and poor wasn't bigger but I admit that it was more noticeable. Also, during the 1960's and 70's, there were massive social movements for change such as the peace marches and moratorium's, the civil rights movement and the women's liberation movements."*
- **Interviewer:** *"What do you think that 'class' had to do with these movements? Do you think that it played a role?"*

.....

- **HM:** *"Yes I would describe the young people who lived through this era as extremely class conscious. Not so much as in direct, worker struggles (although there was much of this going on) but in the movement against the international status quo. Many young people identified 'the enemy' as those*

allied to the state, the police and of course the owners of the means of production. In the struggle for peace and for civil rights (references the 1967 referendum, which included indigenous Australians as citizens), there was undoubtedly a major conflict between the...petit-bourgeois and working classes on one side and the wealthy, conservative side on the other”.

- **Interviewer:** *“If you don’t mind me asking, where do you position yourself during this time using the terms that you just used”*
- **HM:** *Certainly in the working class, my dad was a miner. I grew up under very working class conditions, all of my peers in that neighbourhood had a very deep knowledge of where fitted too. So I would say we were all very class conscious*

.....

Interview with second baby boomer 28/06/10 in Rozelle

Interviewer: *“The word ‘class’ has come to mean how much a person owns in relation to other people. Some have more while some have less. Back when you were an adolescent, would you say that you and you’re peers were more aware of your class as compared to generation Y?”*

JJ: *Yeah the place where I grew up in Richmond was very working class, when I was a teenager we used to make fun of kids from more up-market places. I’m not sure if that’s what you mean...I hate to say ‘in my day’ because it makes me sound so old *laughs*. When I went to school, I never did it but some of the kids in my class used to meet after school to actually fight with the nearby private school kids. We were definitely a different breed”*

.....

Interviewer: So would you say that social class was the cause of these fights?

JJ: *“I don’t know I guess it’s hard to say, it was definitely one the of the main reasons but you know, kids letting off steam I guess”... We just looked at each other going to school some times and it was just sought of implied that we stick to our own. One thing I find interesting though is that now in Sydney I mean, there’s suburbs for rich and poor... more concentration right? Back in my day I’m sure there was less of that. Maybe the reason that your generation is less class conscious is because you see less of other classes*

.....

Mediator: *“So do you think my generation is less class conscious then?”*

JJ: *“Well I mean there are probably a few exceptions but yeah I would say generation Y...is definitely less concerned with it all. I mean that’s probably good because it means that the lower ones will be less miserable”.*

.....

Interviewer: *“So what did you think of the private school kids?”*

JJ: *"*Laughs* I hated them like everyone else, I think I was supposed to. Everyone in the school just kept making jokes about them. Some of them were pretty funny...but I'm sure that still goes on today"*

Interview with Generation X Interview conducted 16/01/10 in Stanmore.

Interviewer: *"The word 'class' has come to mean how much a person owns in relation to other people. Some have more while some have less. Back when you were an adolescent, would you say that you and your peers were more aware of your class as compared to generation Y?"*

K.F: *"Yeah definitely. I went to *names public school in inner city* and my class mates always used to pick fights with the *names private school in Sydney*. Mind you I never did, I got picked on by both *Laughs*...I guess we were more aware of who had money and who didn't, my school was pretty rough, I really didn't like it. I don't know many teenagers but you all seem to be less aware about class I guess. I just notice that in the wider sort of...community.*

Interviewer: *"So your generation was more aware of social class then?"*

K.F. *"Yeah, my dad's an electrician and he still was when I was a teenager (used here as synonymous with adolescent). I would say that we were more aware of who had money and who didn't in the 80's. I mean I can't say much but when the teenagers that I do know, even the more working class ones seem to be better off. We still hated private school kids though..."*

Interviewer: *"Why do you think that was?"*

K.F: *"Because they just made the kids who went to my school angry. I mean it's kind of easy to see why we were more involved with this sort of thing. I remember lots of companies were being privatised then and there were more industrial disputes. Remember the 80's was when everyone went ultra Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. Now on the other hand...well we've had the whole financial tornado but that never really hit Australia did it? I mean we avoided recession and compared to previous years our economy's good."*

.....

Further talking about the economy, END.

From Interview with generation Y. Interview conducted 28/06/10 in Rozelle

T.J: *"Well first of all I think class basically means who has more money than who right? Yeah I don't think we think about it too much anymore. I didn't live then but my impression of my parents and their generation (baby boomers) is that they weren't as well off as we are. The difference between rich and poor would have been bigger than it is today"*

D.C: *"Yeah it's harder to see class today, like you have lads (youth subculture) walking around who are probably on centrelink but they're walking around in these gold chains and TN's (expensive brand of runners). This is why we probably don't see class as much because everyone buys expensive stuff in the end"*

Bibliography

- Hands, G. (2007) *'Teach Yourself Marx.'* London: 'Teach Yourself'.
This was primarily used in the opening chapter for a simple explanation of the Marxian class structure. This book was fantastic as it presents this weighty subject in a simple and accessible manner, meaning that when I was not completely sure of a definition I could quickly use this book.
- Kuhn, R. (2006) *'Classes in Australia, in themselves and for themselves'*. Australia: University of Wollongong.
This source was useful in providing an explanation into a modernised conception of the word 'Proletarian'. However, the article was written as an argument that class consciousness is still strong in Australia. The author is a member of the Socialist Alternative therefore some bias is bound to exist.
- Harris, J. (2000) *'Meet the new boss, Same as the Old Boss: Class Consciousness in Composition'*. England: National Council of Teachers of English.

This article was only truly useful in providing a brief description of modern classes and the growing ranks of the middle class. The language was difficult to understand and was based in an English context and not an Australian one. Therefore the source was slightly irrelevant yet could still serve that small purpose.

- McGregor, C. (1997). *Class in Australia*. Victoria: 'Penguin'.
This book was excellent as it provided an opinion on the concept of 'hegemony'. It was also a very useful source as it was accessible and easy to understand. I noticed McGregor writes his books without the usual smug intellectualism that is so common to other authors on the topic.
- Wolf, J. (2002). *'Why Read Marx Today?'*. New York: 'Oxford University Press'.
This book helped me to understand the different perspectives of class and the subtle differences between the words 'upper class' and 'bourgeois'. I used this in order to argue the changing nature of the Australian class system and the shrinking differences between the bourgeoisie and the Proletariat.
- Karl Marx: *The Poverty of philosophy*.
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/subject/hist-mat/pov-phil/ch02.htm>. Last accessed 03/07/10).
Karl Marx is a genius but unfortunately his works are testament to this. Much of his writing is difficult to comprehend, yet I understood a section of this work where he was briefly explaining his materialist philosophy, i.e. that matter impacts on consciousness and not vice versa.
- Kuhn, R. (1997). *'Class and Class Conflict in Australia'*. Melbourne: 'Longman House'.
This work was easy to understand and helped me to explain the Marxist conception of class struggle as inevitable. In this work Kuhn (and Diane Fields) explain that the bourgeois and Proletariat have irreconcilable class interests.
- Kamenka, E. (1983). *The Portable Karl Marx*. New York: Penguin.
This text was also difficult to understand yet provided me with an understanding of the means of production. It thus aided me in my argument that skilled manual workers are being increasingly absorbed into the bourgeois.
- Marx, K. (2008). *The Communist Manifesto*. New York: 'Oxford University Press'.
This is his most comprehensible text and was thus helpful in providing a simple (and entertaining) definition of the 'lumpen Proletariat'.
- Moore, S. (1987). *Sociology Alive!* UK, Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes.
This society and culture textbook was integral to relating the project back to the course in a simple and easy to understand way. It also provided valuable definitions of terms such as 'class', 'adolescence' and 'class consciousness'.
- Antonio Gramsci, *schooling and education*. <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-gram.htm> Last accessed 17/07/10
This text formed the basis around my explanation of the term 'hegemony'. This was central to my argument that Social cohesion is often stressed through culture and can act as a device used by the upper class to pacify the Proletariat.

- Socialist Alternative: *The Real History of Class Struggle in Australia* by Rick Kuhn.
<http://www.sa.org.au/mag-archive-from-old-website/79-edition-97/348-the-real-history-of-class-struggle-in-australia>. Last accessed 18/07/10.
This text was biased as I retrieved this directly from the Socialist Alternative website. This did not detract from its relevancy however, as it provided me with a historical context in relation to class struggle. Kuhn gives a brief overview regarding class conflict during the 1980's.
- Sydney Morning Herald: 'Misguided, Middle class moaners'. May 20 2009.
<http://www.smh.com.au/business/misguided-middleclass-moaners-20090519-be7c.html>.
(Last accessed 19/07/2010).
Ross Gittens here provided extra voice to my argument that more and more people are starting to view themselves as 'middle class'. Including opinion from the media to my argument added to its credibility.
- (International Viewpoint: 'Has working class consciousness collapsed?').
<http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article1516>.
This source was little used, it only became relevant when I argued that class consciousness still exists, yet this argument was self evident in my primary research and should be obvious to anyone.
- (The Other. <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/cs6/other.html>. Last accessed 03/07/2010).
This source provided me with a quick and useful definition of the 'the other' in relation to post-modernist philosophy.
- (Satire, Karl Marx.
http://www.marxists.org/subject/art/visual_arts/satire/marx/marx4.htm
Last accessed 09/08/2010)
This was used in order to make my argument that skilled manual workers are being drawn into the bourgeois more entertaining and engaging.