

What extent is it accurate to claim that australians

[Parts of the World](#), [Australia](#)



Australians are committed to a 'fair go' and that they belong to a classless society? Since Australia opened its doors to the rest of the world it has been widely regarded as a land of 'golden opportunity well endowed in resources with a small population; it appeared to be an escape from the rigid aristocratic ruling of European nations (Furze, 2008: 349). For such a long time many Australians have been reluctant to recognize that social classes do in fact exist within our society and that these classes perpetuate inequality.

To claim that all Australians are committed to a 'fair go' would be ignorant, and I will explore in this discussion the barriers that prohibit Australians from being equal. I will begin by providing an understanding of class constructs and stratification, I will then go on to highlight the Inequalities Inherent in different spheres of Australian society and how these Inequalities are products of a class hierarchy. I have chosen to concentrate on healthcare; education and the legal system for these are resources that all citizens should have equal access to.

Class is a significant force in all societies, understanding class is crucial if we are to see how groups of people within our society have different experiences. Social stratification refers to the way society is organized within hierarchical layers (Furze, 2008: 320). It is impossible to live in Australia without coming to realize that these different social classes are employed in different types of jobs, live in different suburbs, attend different schools, receive different incomes and experience crucial differences in privilege and inequality (McGregor, 1997: 2).

As we begin to investigate how social, lattice and economic resources are distributed the disparities between groups becomes apparent- the nature of stratification creates a systematic and enduring pattern of Inequality. (Habits & Walter, 2009: 2) The Inequalities that arise from class differences are largely based on constraints to access of resources; one of these resources is healthcare. It is evident thathealthdisparities within Australia are linked to different income groups.

Lifestyle factors attributed to ill health such as poor diets, drugs and alcohol are most prominent in low income groups and minorities such as the Indigenous. These groups are socially disadvantaged and therefore have limited access to resources such as housing, health information and education. For these reasons, studies have found that pregnant aboriginal women are at a high risk of birthing underweight babies- contributing to a higher infant mortality rate, high rates of morbidity with 20 years less life expectancy than non Indigenous Australians and higher rates of alcohol abuse and self harm (Furze, 2008: 314).

Health risks are not just limited to minority groups however, blue collar workers also experience significant occupation related Issues; mining and Intensive Barbour as well as exposure to toxic substances Is likely to cause subsequent Illness. Contested due to its inaccessibility. The Federal, State and Territory governments share theresponsibilityof publicly funded healthcare and also provide Medicare- a healthcare system that all wage earners pay a levy toward. Recently however, there has been a growth in

private health care investment illustrated by a rise in private hospital beds from 24439 in 2003 to 26988 in 2006 (Furze, 2008: 317).

Citizens are being encouraged to take out private health care for better and quicker treatment, forever, this causes an ethical debate as public waiting lists are profoundly long and yet private health care is unaffordable by many. It is evident then, that class placement determines opportunity and creates barriers to achieving equal access to healthcare. Another sphere of Australian society divided by class stratification is education and schooling. In many ways education and knowledge are the keys to a prosperous and successful life; however it is not possible for everyone to access this valuable resource (Habit's and Walter, 2009: 149).

The shift of government funding from public schools to private schools means that a child's class background easily distorts their educational path. As private schools began to emerge, upper class parents would send their children to private school due to the preferred prestige and elite status they were associated with. More recently however, the decision to enroll children in private educational institutions reflects the decline the educational quality provided by public schools.

The government have turned to 'economic rationalism' where their focus is no longer on committing to maximizing general welfare through the development of public resources but by operating on economic efficiency (Furze, 2008: 255). For this reason, private schools have been advantaged and public schools left behind. What is most significant about this change is that it generates socioeconomic inequality; parents with lower incomes cannot

afford to send their children to private school and this subsequently reproduces the stratification system.

Socioeconomic status has further implications within the education system; this is particularly evident within the low socioeconomic groups and indigenous community. Education attrition rates for these groups are as low as 14.5%; this is significantly low compared to a 76.4% obtained by higher socioeconomic groups (Furze, 2008: 252). Students are sorted by ability and performance indicators through standardized testing; these tests routinely consign Aboriginals to a hard competition for jobs, income and social mobility (Furze, 2008: 261).

Aboriginal children concentrated in rural areas suffer inequitable access to education, particularly as schools in remote areas have low achievement levels and staffing problems. In 2004 only 39.5% of Aboriginals progressed to year 12 whilst 6.8% of non indigenous students did (Furze, 2008: 263). Social inequalities and class implications are reproduced academically as wealthy schools continue to be subsidized and children of lower socioeconomic status remain disadvantaged.

Substantial evidence of class related inequality also exists within the political sphere, lower socioeconomic groups and minorities possess limitations to accessing and actively participating in this sphere in comparison to upper class citizens who are able to actively participate. Great controversy surrounds the overrepresentation of Indigenous and lower class citizens in Australia; discriminatory attitudes are prevalent toward these groups due to their higher rates of unemployment.

Low levels disenfranchisement and a lack of knowledge (McGregor, 1997; 76) Relative poverty, poor health standards and a lack of educational and social opportunities have underpinned greater Aboriginal representation amongst criminal offenders. "Aborigines, it is said, make up one per cent of the general population, but nearly 30 per cent of prison inmates," (Wolcott & Dowse, 2004: 253). This statement is echoed by statements of the Australian Law Reform Commission which claims the Aborigines are 29 times more likely to be imprisoned than non Aborigines. Wolcott & Dowse, 2004: 256) As laws of a society are connected with the dominant cultural attitudes of society, it seems the inherent bias of Australian judicial system is ethnocentric. The ALRC have also alluded to the, 'many instances [that] exist when Aborigines have been imprisoned, fined or otherwise sentenced without having understood their rights,' (Wolcott & Dowse, 2004: 259). This can be attributed again to the lack of education available to this community and the lack of access to legal aid due to financial constraints.

For Australia to be committed to a 'fair go' all citizens should possess the same standard of access and equity in the legal system, however, the implications of class inequality prevent this from occurring. We can be certain that class divisions do exist in Australian society, and that these divisions limit one's entitlement to a 'fair go.' 'Myths of equality aside, the evidence is quite clear that in Australia, as in every other capitalist system, success depends very strongly on one's socioeconomic status (Hillier, 1981 : 214); it plays a pivotal role in determining access to political, social and economic resources .