

DOES YOUR AESTHETIC GENTRIFY THE WORKING-CLASS STRUGGLE?

I can appreciate all my privileges in life and I feel blessed to have the support system that I do, both emotionally and financially. I also know that I am extremely fortunate that by the time I went to University my parents were able to support me inexpressibly in so many ways. However, growing up in a Northern, working-class town was a magical but imbalanced experience and one which I could very rarely feel fortunate about. I vividly remember the struggle for money complete with hand-me-downs, societal anger and an overhanging sense of uncertainty. I think my working-class upbringing has positively affected me and given me strength and gratefulness. That being said, at a young age I remember the acrimonious feelings revolving around why I couldn't have all the nice things that my rich friends had (especially highlighted by the fact I went to an outrageously white, middle-class school). It was only in my teens that the financial circumstances changed for me, but the memories and traits from my upbringing have remained engraved in me. Unfortunately, University only highlighted the evident class divide.



Right from fresher's week the students who clearly had rich parents constantly complained about the students that got higher student loans or, god forbid...bursaries. Library sessions would quite often lead to people showing off their big houses on google maps. One lecturer even told me I would have to lose the accent if I ever wanted a career in broadcast journalism and continued to explain that he would offer lessons on how to get the RP voice. So you can understand my anger that whilst I was being told to disguise any indication of my northern working-class roots, other students were creating some kind of working-class persona for themselves as if it made them more progressive or even "cool".

This sustained throughout my 3 years at University with people claiming they really weren't *that* rich and that they came from very humble backgrounds despite attending schools which overall cost more than my first family home. Many claiming that they actually were part of the lower classes but would still be voting Tory in the general election because they believed in working hard for success. The same people that would use their daddy's money to buy drugs before hitting the student union didn't believe in giving money to the homeless because "they'll just spend it on drugs and alcohol". I even had one person tell me that he was sick of poor people blaming everybody else for the fact that they were poor, this same guy genuinely told me that I "don't understand economics" because I made the outrageous claim that the government should be spending more money on the welfare system than bombs that would hit innocent Syrian children – he then proceeded to share a video on Facebook which basically said the same thing as me.

And although I didn't necessarily separate myself from those types of people as discussions with opposing views can be very enlightening, I would never allow them to get to be a close friend whom I chose to confide in. However, emotionally detaching myself from people who saw themselves as different to poor people didn't stop me from seeing it on social media. Scrolling through my various apps I would see very privileged people almost glorifying about how little money they had, how Wetherspoons was their "spiritual home" and how much of a ramshackle their student accommodation was. And to me, having the confidence to not only complain about those things but lionise them was an entitlement...one which allowed them to exit that lower-class space whenever they wanted, something which wasn't the case for many.

Nevertheless, I understand the student struggle and I was impartial to cheap drinks and a nice complaint about the fact my student house had a serious ant infestation. I can also count my privileges and it was whilst studying I engaged with people from many different backgrounds and countless of them did have a lot more than me, but many also had a lot less and had to deal with types of systematic oppression that I could never imagine.

Still, even after we all graduated from the slums of student life, there's still something that will continually result in my exasperation – the gross fetishising of the working-class aesthetic for Instagram posts. Posing in outfits that, if a poor person was wearing would be labelled as "chavvy", in areas that poor people live in because it made for a good setting. If you've been living in a weird post-Instagram world, basically, in a peculiar shift, boys and girls with middle-class backgrounds have decided to pose in urban sportswear in front of a wall with some kind of graffiti on it as the backdrop. Yes, you can argue that it's individuality or even rebellion against the privileged, suburban upbringing...but this doesn't really matter if those same people judge those standing in line for the dole in the exact same tracksuit, really does it?

But I'm not asking for sympathy; working class people will always be ahead of the game. I'm proud to come from a community of people who make an identity out of the clothes they save up for with their underpaid jobs. Much like our grandparents, we make a lot out of a little and ultimately, we're a group of confident, brash, creative individuals that don't need trends or Instagram pictures to validate our ideas – because our families have gone generations with absolutely no recognition from the establishment, so it doesn't mean anything to us. What we choose to wear, write or create will always be beyond likes on an Instagram post and for that, we should really pity the rich kids going through creepy identity crises.

There's definitely such a thing as working class culture and it's filled with vibrancy, social stands, struggle, hard work and optimism. If your entire cost for University was paid by your parents, you attended private education and have never had to worry about a safety net of money when applying for jobs or internships, then just be honest about it. Wearing working-class attire whilst obsessing about Wetherspoons is nothing short of offensive, and does nothing to change the fact that the lower classes are treated as inferior every single day.