Three Generations: The Changing Values and Political Outlook of Australians*

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IT HAS BECOME conventional wisdom that the *essential* characteristic of contemporary Australian society is its diversity. In the world of marketing, people are starting to talk about 'particles' (rather than the more traditional 'segments') of the market. Most of the traditional generalisations about Australian society can be made with less confidence than before, and many of them can no longer be made at all.

We have been living through a period of turbulent and relentless social change, and this has been re-defining the character of our society. The roles and responsibilities of men and women are being radically reassessed. Patterns of marriage and divorce have been through revolutionary upheaval. As a result, patterns of family formation and dislocation have been irrevocably changed: the one-parent family is now 'mainstream' and 25 per cent of babies are born out of wedlock.

Patterns of work and leisure have been destabilised by high unemployment, the rise of part-time work and the increasing casualisation of the workforce. Electronic technology (especially information technology) has revolutionised the workplace, the retail environment and, increasingly, the home. Money is becoming invisible and the credit revolution has wrought a culture shift in our attitudes to saving and spending.

Feminism, environmentalism, multiculturalism and republicanism have all re-shaped our agenda and our way of thinking about ourselves. There is now more diversity of thought, of

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attitudes, of values, and of behaviour and it is therefore becoming increasingly difficult to talk about 'typical' Australians or about 'mainstream' attitudes—including political attitudes.

In the midst of all this, it is easy to overlook another source of diversity in our society, and another set of changes which are progressively re-shaping us socially, culturally and politically. These are the changes in values and outlook which have been occurring, from generation to generation, since World War II.

The term 'generation gap' was coined to describe the social and cultural gap which opened up between the Baby Boomers and their parents. To the horror of the Boomers, however, a new gap is opening up between them and their children which might turn out to be even wider than the one they created between themselves and their own parents. To understand the remarkable differences between the three dominant generations in contemporary Australia (the Baby Boomers, their parents and their children), and to appreciate their impact on political attitudes and voting behaviour, we need to recognise some of the dominant influences upon those generations during the formative years of their childhood and adolescence.

1. Born in the 1920s

The generation now in their late sixties and early seventies—our tribal elders—were the children of the Great Depression. The Depression was the shadow across their childhood. They recall childhood as being tough and deprived. (Indeed, if you invite them to reflect upon childhood memories, they will try to outdo each other with tales of hardship and deprivation.)

And yet, this is the generation that *celebrates* the role of the Depression in their lives; the generation who believe that, thanks to the impact of the Depression on their families and neighbourhoods, they got their values straight at an early age. They learned about loyalty (to a marriage partner, a family, an employer, a bank); they learned about the value of hard work; they learned to accept their social obligations (particularly to the even-more disadvantaged of their neighbourhood); they learned, above all, to be prudent and cautious, and to plan carefully for their future. They also learned about the comforts of political and religious prejudice: the line between loyalty and fierce loyalty is a thin one, and many of that generation learned to hate their opponents (Catholics/Protestants; socialists/conservatives; free traders/protectionists) with unbridled passion.

This generation then became the adolescents and young adults of World War II. Again, they regard the dark years of that conflict as having been 'character-forming'; in spite of the further deprivations it visited upon their lives, they saw it as another period when values were clarified and the national focus was sharpened: 'We knew who we were, and we knew what we were doing.' (And, of course, 'We knew who the *enemy* was.')

After such a tough beginning, they came to adulthood—and to the process of career-building and family-formation—at a time when Australia was experiencing an unprecedented economic boom. They arrived, to their own surprise, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

Looking back, they describe themselves as 'the lucky generation', because they enjoyed that unique combination: a set of sound values shaped by the hardships of their parents' generation, and a subsequent period of economic comfort and prosperity undreamed of by those parents.

This is the generation who look back with pride at their stable marriages, stable work patterns, and good fortune in having had a life-cycle in fortuitous phasing with the economic cycle. It's also a generation who have tended to be stable in their voting patterns and to disapprove of the trend towards 'swinging'; a generation where the wives tended to take their voting instructions from their husbands (who had typically taken *theirs* from their fathers).

The 'lucky' generation see themselves as having laid a solid foundation for coping with prosperity: they were going to benefit from it but not be 'swayed' by it.

2. The Postwar Baby Boomers (1946–61, but especially 1946–55)

That phasing of the 'lucky' generation's life-cycle could not have been more different from the experience of their children—the babies born in record numbers during the 15 years following World War II.

Every generation is characterised by its contradictions, and the Baby Boomers certainly found themselves in the grip of a most peculiar paradox. On the one hand, they were the children of the boom years of the 1950s and 1960s. The construction boom, the manufacturing boom and the mining boom all created a period of unprecedented growth and prosperity. There was so much work to be done that we set out to attract as many immigrants as we could to help us get on with it. It was a time when Australians typically believed that the economic escalator would go infinitely upwards, and that created a mood of great optimism for the baby-boom generation. They were, in many ways, the symbols of their parents' belief in a peaceful and prosperous future.

On the other hand, they were the children of the Cold War. They grew up with the idea of World War III as a kind of 'future historical' reality. The possibility of the nuclear holocaust was planted firmly in their minds: they knew there was a chance some Russian or American would push the wrong button deliberately or accidentally—and blow us all to pieces. This created a most peculiar tension: the tension between belief in a rosy, easy future on the one hand, and no *future at all* on the other.

What would such a tension do to a generation who grew up with it? You might expect it to produce an obsession with instant gratification, encouraging people to the view that they should *have it now*. Impatience, in everything from the consumption of material goods to education, travel and sexual relationships, might be the expected outcome.

In short, such a combination of contradictory influences would be likely to produce what it did produce: the Me Generation—a generation whose catchcries became 'Do your own thing' and 'Look after Number One'. This was a generation who were destined to become poor planners, unenthusiastic savers but voracious consumers. ('We're not here for a long time; we're here for a good time.')

Its formative influences were the very opposite of those on its parents' generation. Coming out of a period of comfort and prosperity, this is the generation who hit the turbulence of the Age of Redefinition: the period since 1970 when we have been destabilised by relentless social, cultural, economic and technological change; the period that cast the Boomers in the role of social pioneers.

Their parents' generation had their values established *before* they hit the 'soft' patch. The Boomers had the soft patch as their formative influence—a start which resulted, inevitably, in a lack of a clear moral framework and of a solid value-system comparable with their parents'. The things their parents said about values, religion and morality tended to be overwhelmed by the evidence of a materialist society. And, in any case, the Boomers were the iconoclasts who wished to create a new social order!

So the Boomers were ill-equipped for what would happen to them in their middle years. In their quest for the happiness they so desperately sought, they have become our most divorced generation. In their quest to maintain a high standard of middle-class comfort, they have created the two-income household as the norm. In the process, they have redefined the dynamics of family life.

They are the generation who were on the leading edge of the gender revolution, as the Boomer women rebelled against the ideal of feminine domesticity which had been presented to them by their married and settled mothers (who had donned their postwar aprons and settled down to the serious business of creating the postwar baby boom, surviving comfortably on the income of their husbands).

This is also the generation who, having grown up with the ideal of egalitarianism, have been horrified to find our society splitting into the haves and have-nots at such an alarming rate.

Not surprisingly, the Baby Boomers are now heavily into *nostalgia.* They are reluctant to part with their youth, because they associate it with a time when everything looked rosier than it does today. They are the generation who are still trying to stuff themselves into blue jeans in their late forties (partly to pretend that they are not as old as they are, and partly to 'stay close' to the children with whom they are desperately trying to find some 'quality time'). They are still playing the music of their youth and young adulthood; they are still inclined to prefer long hair; they are determined not to act their age!

If their parents thought of themselves as 'lucky', the Baby Boomers seem to think of themselves as *stressed.* They are acutely conscious of their own anxieties and their own frequent retreat into alcohol, tranquillisers and other drugs as a means of easing the pain. 'Why does it all have to be so hard?' is a question they are often asking themselves as some of them confront the difficulties of a second or third marriage, and the strain of raising someone else's children, and others reflect wistfully on the gap between the expectations of the 1960s and the reality of the 1990s.

3. The Rising Generation, born in the 1970s

Generalisations are always dangerous, and I have already offered too many of them. When it comes to the rising generation of young Australians, though, generalisations are particularly hard to make. We can't talk about 18 and 19 year-olds in the same breath as 23 or 24 year-olds, and one of the characteristics of this generation is their resistance to the idea of generalisations being made about them. But there are certain things we can say about those who are now in the early years of their adulthood. These are the children of the Age of Redefinition.

Because they have grown up in a period of rapid social, cultural, economic and technological change, they are not conscious of the fact that it is a period of change at all: constant change is the air they breathe; this is simply the way the world is.

This is the generation for whom the women's movement was an established historical fact. It is the generation who take equality between the sexes for granted; who know that 50 per cent of university students are female and 45 per cent of the workforce is female. They know that 'girls can do anything' and that most mothers combine motherhood with paid employment outside the home (because that's precisely what most of their own mothers do).

They have grown up with the reality of a rising divorce rate (and they have probably heard of the widespread predictions that their own generation will experience a divorce rate around 45 per cent). They are postponing marriage: only five per cent of today's young women are married by the time they are 20 (Compared with 30 per cent of the women of the Baby-Boom generation). They are postponing the birth of the first child, and often using that as the trigger for a decision about whether or not to marry at all.

They know they are facing a tough job market. For some of them, work has already come to seem like an option which might or might not be exercised: 'I tried work once, and I didn't like it.'

For them, multiculturalism is a reality, the republic is an inevitability, and the environment is a precious resource which earlier generations abused.

The idea that technology is constantly changing is integral with their thinking. They know that today's technology will soon be superseded by something else, just over the horizon. E-mail, mobile phones, fax machines, personal computers, the Internet, virtual reality and interactive media are all rather ho-hum. (This, after all, is the generation that seemed able to program a VCR without even reading the manual.)

This is the generation who have grown up in the presence of AIDS, who know there is a drug culture in their school or their suburb and who know how to gain access to it if they wish. This is the generation who have spawned significant numbers of street kids, and it is the generation who have doubled the youth suicide rate.

If their grandparents' buzzword was 'lucky' and their parents' buzzword is 'stress', what is the buzzword of the rising generation? I think it is '*options*'. This is the wait-and-see generation; the 'hang loose' generation; the generation committed to flexibility and openness to change.

This is the generation who are inclined to postpone commitments—whether to a system of religious belief, a political philosophy, a political party, a course of study, a sexual partner or even a brand. (This is the generation whose parents say they are reluctant to commit themselves to the question of whether they will be home for dinner on Saturday night. They want to keep their options open until the last moment. And it is the generation who, when they leave home, take as little as possible with them, so that, once again, they can keep their options open.)

Ironically, this is also the generation which feels itself to be more independent than any other but which is, in fact, more dependent than their parents' or grandparents' generations: they are staying at school longer, being supported by their parents for longer, and going onto the dole sooner—and in larger numbers—than any previous generation of Australians.

For all their differences, the three generations seem to have one important thing in common: their insecurity.

For the older generation, insecurity arises from their uneasiness about the direction in which Australian society appears to be moving; fear for the future of their grandchildren; and fear for their own safety.

The Boomers are stressed by the relentless impact of change on their lives and the unexpected instability of their middle years.

The rising generation, for all their cool adaptability—for all their tendency to 'hang loose'—often feel alienated, depressed and unfocused (as reflected in their retreat into drugs and, most tragically, into suicide).

The most interesting question about Australian society in general—and politics in particular—at the end of the 20th century, therefore, is this: how will we deal with our insecurities?

Some of us are dealing with them by retreating into nostalgia; by distracting ourselves with a constant flow of information; by converting our homes into fortresses.

Some of us are responding to our insecurities by calling for more and more rules and regulations to control the behaviour of everyone else, and there's a real political hazard there.

Some of us are crying 'back to basics!' and calling for a return to so-called 'traditional values' in morality, religion, education, commerce.

Some of us have realised that the most effective antidote to insecurity is to re-establish our communal links and to re-connect with each other. Already, the signs are emerging that Australians are searching for ways to reconnect with 'the herd' or 'the tribe'. In everything from adult education classes to book clubs, choirs and bush-walking groups—to say nothing of clean-up campaigns—people are looking for new social contexts which will help to restore the sense of identity and security which we draw from belonging to herds. (Work groups are emerging for many people as a ready-made herd; surrogate extended families—often

comprising a number of households within a street or suburb, where working parents are prepared to share child-care, cooking, shopping and other domestic tasks—are another.)

Three Implications For Politics

Obviously, all the strategies that people can think of for dealing with their anxieties, uncertainties and insecurities will show up in the political process. Voters will clamour for tougher legislative solutions to all kinds of social, cultural and economic problems (calls for tougher censorship and 'truth in sentencing' are typical.) Similarly, voters will demand more information and explanation of policies and their consequences, in an attempt to restore some feeling of predicability to the political process. Even the 'back to basics' movement is bound to find expression in a return to more clearly distinguishable differences between the two traditional sides of politics.

But there are three other implications for our politicians which seem to flow from the changing mood in contemporary Australia.

The demand for 'strong leadership'
The older generation tend to be rather philosophical about the comings and goings of political leaders. Rather in the way they might support this or that football team, their allegiance to a political party tends not to be affected by changes in the captain or coach.

The Baby Boomers are less complacent. Nursing their own insecurities, they yearn for the security of a leader who can articulate an attractive vision and a clear sense of direction. They are more concerned about strength in leadership than they are about having a leader with 'the common touch' or even a leader who can demonstrate a strong sense of empathy with the electorate. At a time of uncertainty and change, the Boomers are listening for the strong and confident voice of a leader who can compensate for their own lack of confidence.

At such a time, therefore, there is an additional pressure on political leaders: the demand for them to appear 'strong and confident' is correspondingly greater, simply because those are the very qualities which appear to be lacking in the community at large. (For the rising generation, of course, the question of leadership appears to be rather less significant than for older voters: they are neither as interested in politics nor as willing to be impressed by leaders as their parents and grandparents are. Indeed, they are likely to assume that today's leaders will soon be replaced anyway.)

The cry for strong leadership is, in part, also an expression of the community's desire to shake off its own cynicism. Political cynicism is running at a very high level: indeed, cynicism is the dominant theme in Australians' discussion of contemporary politics. But people wish it could be different. They wish that they had more confidence in political institutions and in political leaders.

The great antidotes to cynicism are trust and confidence. Until voters—especially the Baby Boomers—believe that they are entitled to replace cynicism with trust, the call for strength in leadership will continue to be heard.

Is there a real choice?

One of the undoubted appeals of the One Nation party is that it seems to offer a tangible *difference:* Labor and the Coalition have, for many years, seemed to voters to be edging towards some kind of central position in which the philosophical differences between them are blurred to the point where they are almost indistinguishable.

The old meanings of Left and Right seem to be evaporating, and voters are no longer sure about what to expect from either side of politics. (Who is more committed to privatisation? On which side of politics would you expect to find the most enthusiastic economic rationalists? Who will lead the fight against inflation? Who first proposed a GST?)

For older Australians, policy shifts are confusing and sometimes perplexing but, in the main, they do not shake loyalty to one party or another.

For Baby Boomers, however, policy shifts are just another symptom of the Age of Uncertainty, or the Age of Discontinuity or the Age of Redefinition—call it what you will. Their sense of blurred distinctions between the major parties has been a significant factor driving the swinging vote up from about five per cent to about 30 per cent within the past 25 years. Feeling that the philosophical basis for distinction between the parties has weakened, middle-aged voters now acknowledge that the game has moved to 'personality politics' and they accept that this has already made their own voting patterns more volatile. Younger voters view all this with a jaundiced eye. Cynicism about politics and political institutions, in fact, is at its worst among young Australians. Teenagers and young adults report that they find little to interest or excite them in politics (and there is some evidence to suggest that, if voting were not compulsory, a very large minority—if not a majority—of them would not bother to vote). The rising generation—*the keep-your-options-open* generation—are characteristically disinclined to be committed to a political party; content to 'see how things go', from election to election; more inclined to regard loyalty as a sign of inflexibility or insensitivity. Their parents have been passionate about the need to choose, and about the significance of the choices they make. The rising generation, by contrast, are less interested in choice because they are so accustomed to it. A choice, for them, is unlikely to imply a commitment and their perception of contemporary politics only serves to confirm the wisdom of that attitude.

Will the politics of tribalism re-emerge?

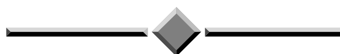
Given the insecurities of the present era, it would not be surprising if new political alignments occurred, based on a new sense of political tribalism. (One Nation is a symptom of a possible future trend.)

Even though voters are currently confused about the hard policy content which might discriminate between Labor and the Coalition, they would like to feel more emotionally attached to one side of politics or the other. Here again, the question of cynicism arises: voters would feel better about voting if they felt less cynical about the process and more able to put their faith in one side of politics or the other.

This point connects with the leadership issue: a new sense of tribal passion is likely to emerge when recognisable and credible 'tribal elders' emerge. When voters call for a higher standard of integrity in their political leaders, and for a stronger sense of vision and inspiration, they are really asking for more wisdom and more maturity at the highest level of politics. They want to feel confident in aligning themselves with a leader, whether or not that implies alignment with a strong policy framework as well.

To some extent, the current state of Australian politics—as viewed through the eyes of these three generations—is another example of a fundamental culture shift. From our passionate attachment to the idea that 'seeing is believing' (which translates in politics as 'show me your policies'), we might be moving back to a more ancient idea that 'believing is seeing'. Perhaps our cynicism will finally yield to the idea that we have no alternative but to trust the person, not the system; the leader, not the policies.

If that is the way we're going, what will become of the Westminster system as we now understand it?



Questioner — You spoke about tribal policies in a negative way. In your social analysis, have you come up with anything positive in that area that identifies any positive philosophy, or prophetic vision, or labels, or words that we can grasp hold on to, to see a light of hope for the twenty-first century?

Hugh Mackay — In the political context the answer is no. I wish I could say something encouraging. When Australians talk about leadership in politics, there is no doubt in their minds about what they want. There are three characteristics of political leadership which are desirable in this electorate. One is strength, I've mentioned that. Another is integrity and the third is inspiration; and when people look around federally and in the states for the leaders who meet those three criteria there is no-one who is seen as embodying those three characteristics. On the subject of strength, Jeff Kennett in Victoria goes off the top of the scale; whatever else you say about him, he appears to be strong. On the subject of integrity, Cheryl Kernot is very highly rated. On the subject of inspiration, I cannot actually give you a single name, there is a bit of a vacuum. Now that is where a lot of the cynicism comes from, but how it is going to work itself out in the political arena, I do not know. In the social arena more generally, I think the message the rising generation are giving us is 'do not forget your friends', which translates as, 'relationships are really the most important resource we have got'. The hopeful thing that I see happening in our community at large is a much stronger interest in the idea of community, of building and nurturing social networks, of taking your friends seriously; among young people you even hear comments like 'well, yes, we might get married and if we do get married ten years might be a good innings, but we will have our friends for life'. I do not know what that says about the status of a spouse. The idea is that there is a community we can count on. Even the revival of street gangs in Sydney and Melbourne, which are not always socially approved of, is a symptom of a growing feeling in the community that we need each other; that relationships are the most precious resource. Information is not the most precious resource; a swimming pool in the back yard or three cars in the drive, these are not precious resources that are going to still our anxieties or relieve our sense of uneasiness. The rising generation know how to do that better than the rather self-obsessed baby boom generation did.

Questioner — Picking up on the point about the elements people want for political leadership, something very funny is going on in Britain around Tony Blair. If you look at the research, he is seen as having the integrity, seen as having the strength, seen as having the

inspiration. What is coming out, is people think he is not stupid. Every time he opens his mouth, he seems to have the capacity to come at things from different angles. So the issue of intelligence might be quite important too, as perceived by quite ordinary people. I do not think that people know that is what they like about him.

Hugh Mackay — I think that is probably right. There is certainly evidence here, that one dimension of the cynicism in the community, is not that people are saying our leaders are unintelligent, but that they seem to be trapped in rhetoric, they seem to be trapped in platitudes and slogans and that does dull the sense of imagination, creativity, the sort of things that might add up to a feeling of intelligence. I think that is an issue for us. One of the things that has appealed to people about Pauline Hanson, strangely enough, and many people think of her as unintelligent, is that she seems to speak with what they regard as a kind of freshness, as though she is outside the conventional, traditional, political language.

Questioner — You have written a very interesting article: 'Re-inventing Anzac Day'. Would you like to expand a bit on that?

Hugh Mackay — I think Anzac Day as a symbol is becoming more important, rather than less important in contemporary Australia, but that its meaning is changing, and a lot of old diggers do not like this, so that when that article appeared I received some very hostile mail from people saying 'don't you tamper with Anzac Day'. I was not tampering with Anzac Day, I was trying to describe how perceptions of it seem to be changing. It does seem as though Anzac Day is taking on a new kind of focus which is not about Gallipoli, and not even about war, but is something to do with the question of what we have done with the society secured for us by military sacrifice. Anzac Day, it seems to me, has the potential to become, is already becoming in fact, a national day of celebration of what we have achieved, of what kind of society we are creating, of our extraordinary stability in the face of our diversity; a celebration which has less and less to do with military questions and more and more to do with cultural questions; more to do with outcomes.

Questioner — As you are aware, in 1788, before white settlement began, Aboriginal people were 100 per cent of the population. We are now 1.97 per cent, at the last count. We have just celebrated (although I don't know if you could call it a celebration) the 30th anniversary of the 1967 referendum.

Canberra is a wonderful place to live, depending on who you are, and I would like to put this to you: how do you see the Aboriginal people's future in relation to the reconciliation process, in view of what you have said about inter-generational differences; and also our future generation's political influence; whether we will get people into Parliament; and whether our children will have to work as hard as we have to be recognised; that's one aspect of it, our future as a political entity in this country. I would also like to ask you your view on what effect it will have on us if the country becomes a republic; and the last thing, whether there is hope for us?

Hugh Mackay — Well, there is hope for all of us is what I would say in response to the last question. It seems to me that the good news is, particularly coming out of the reconciliation convention of this year, that there is now a level of awareness in the community about the need for Aboriginal reconciliation, to do something about the Aboriginal question, which I have not previously detected with such intensity. In fact I think a very significant change is

under way from a position where white Australians really did not want to know that there was an Aboriginal question because it was just too puzzling, too daunting for them. At least, in the light of Mabo and Wik, white Australians now have something to focus on. They now grasp the whole idea of land rights and the possibility of co-existence in ways that they have previously not been able to articulate because they did not actually have a framework. In fact a long standing criticism of black Australians by white Australians has been we do not actually know what they want from us. I think that is changing, I think we are beginning to understand. So, while there is of course a debate raging in the community at the moment about whether Aborigines should receive special treatment because of their special history, or whether they should just be treated the same as everyone else, my sense is that that debate will be resolved in favour of recognition that their history is such and our history is such that the so-called special treatment is actually not very special at all. It is a unique case that needs unique handling. So I think there are grounds for hope.

The question of the republic, I think, is not relevant to it. I cannot see that people will say in the process of Australia becoming a republic that has some implications, that are different from the implications that exist now about the need for Aboriginal reconciliation. In fact, I think it is probably fair to say on the subject of the republic that the urgency in general seems to have diminished, partly because of the sense of inevitability. I mean that is one of the problems about Aboriginal reconciliation as well. The worst thing that could happen would be a feeling that some grand gesture or some incremental program towards Aboriginal reconciliation is inevitable, therefore we do not have to worry about it. That is certainly what is happening to the republic.

I think there would be enormous resistance in the community to affirmative action on behalf of Aborigines, or women, or any other defined group. When it comes to the crunch, people will vote for candidates who appeal to them, for whatever reason, and I am absolutely confident that in the electorate at large, an Aboriginal candidate would be evaluated as a candidate not as an Aborigine. In the same way as female candidates, by and large, will be evaluated as candidates.

Questioner — I am one of the parents of the Baby Boomers (and I did not wear shoes, by the way, when I was young). When it came to the fifties and sixties, when the government of the day put on recessions which I suppose today we would call a miniature depression, there were thousands out of work. Your friend and my friend the banks took over homes; but it gave my children an idea that jobs were never 100 per cent secure. It was the whim of government. That went on through my family, and I think it did something for my family. I think they had the idea that in the future they would have to work hard for their job, they had to realise that the job was their security. What is your opinion of all that?

Hugh Mackay — I agree, of course, with what you are saying. You are talking about the experience in your own family and of course I accept that is the experience. I think it is true, nevertheless, that the experience of the fifties and sixties which was that life was going to be easy and that employment was certain, was the more influential determinate because that is what created the expectations that led to the disappointment. If that period had not been as buoyant and as promising as it was, then the revision that you have described in your own family would not have felt as harsh as it did. I think that is the peculiarity of the fifties and sixties that it created expectations that were never going to be met, but you had a whole generation hoping, and in a way still hoping, that those expectations will be met.

Questioner — I remember reading your article ‘My generation’, in 1995, which was very similar to this talk today. My question is more on the research behind these talks as the pine cone effect, the narrowing of the bulge of the Baby Boomers, comes into effect. How will you discern the wishy-washy effect of the fewer numbers heading in the same direction; the different age groups interacting?

Hugh Mackay —Clearly a major social and cultural effect will occur as a result of declining numbers. The markets and facilities and infrastructure created for the Baby Boomers will turn out to be excessive for the following generations. The most recent figures I have looked at tell us that in the under five age group, there are 200,000 fewer members of the pre-school generation in Australia now than there were thirty-five years ago. Our birth rate is at an all time low at the moment. So that is going to affect the nature of our society as we adapt to the idea that there are just simply fewer kids, then fewer adolescents, fewer young adults, and so on. I am not sure that it is an issue particularly for research. We are still continuously engaged in the process of trying to understand the relationship between the formative influences and the attitudes and outlooks that result from those. I do not think that will change. What is changing is that you do not have this enormous muscular group coming through. You have people, and perhaps this is what you meant by the wishy-washy factor, who are in a sense in the shadow of this vast baby boom generation.

It is interesting to look at the generation born immediately after the boom, those who are now in their late twenties and early thirties. I was not talking about them specifically today, but we have just completed a study on them, and they are a generation who in a way are the happiest group that I can find in contemporary Australia. They are very relaxed. The Baby Boomers have done all the pioneering, that was great, our parents worked really hard to get us educated and started, that is great, thanks mum and dad, I do not want to be like you, but I am glad you were like you, I do not want to be like the Baby Boomers, we are not heavily into social pioneering here, we are going to have—their favourite word is lifestyle—we are going to create a good lifestyle. Now that is almost like a counter-revolution in the wake of the boomers and I guess that is part of what you are describing. It is the counter-effect.