

Earlier this year I was sitting in our school Staffroom for a School Council meeting. It was business as usual and then one of our school student representatives brought up the topic of changing the School Uniform. The same rhetoric was used, 'decency' this, 'school image' that, but then one of the arguments struck a different chord than usual with me.

"It protects disadvantaged children from stigma and bullying".

My face twinged, I felt sick in my stomach, and I zoned out of the meeting whilst I asked myself a series of questions.

Why do we need to protect poor children?

Why do they need to have their clothes and style nullified to achieve safety and security?

Why are children and young adults already practicing prejudice against disadvantaged people?

Why isn't this discussed more?

When has having to hide one's, identity ever been a sign of a healthy society? Oh, you can be you! Just hide your pride pins. You're one of us! Just cut off your dreads. You can be whatever you want to be! just don't be poor.

Just like how it's absurd to discriminate people against their race, creed, gender or sexuality, its equally unjustified to mistreat people who in poverty because it is not something that is earned, it is an effect of the worst cyclical and intergenerational elements of our society.

After meeting my grandfather, my grandmother moved to Australia from occupied Cold-war Germany. She had a degree in linguistics and was a qualified language teacher and translator in German, French, English and Latin.

Being an immigrant 'wog' in Australia during the 70's, she was poor and came from meagre circumstances that made it a daily struggle to make ends meet. She and my grandfather would eventually separate – which combined with his bipolar disorder drove him to suicide a few years later – leaving my mother and aunt fatherless at the ages of five and four.

My Grandma continued to date but was also a victim of domestic violence, suffering a brutal beating at the hands of one of these partners that resulted in the shattering of her nose. This would end up putting them in a Women's Rescue shelter for a period of 6 months

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reported in 2018 that 1 in 6 women have experienced intimate partner violence and 1 in 3 people who seek homelessness services cite domestic violence as their reason for looking for help. But we don't like to talk about it because it makes us feel uncomfortable.

My Mother was accepted to MacRobertsons Girls School in 1992 because of her academic success, she wouldn't complete Year 12 however because she was homeless at 16, fleeing the abusive and negligent household of my grandma, she had to couch-surf amongst her mates until she found stable housing.

Homelessness, according to the 2016 Census, affects at least 116 thousand Australians and that number has increased steadily since 2006. Although only a small fraction of homeless people are living on the streets like you might imagine. Most homeless people either live in overcrowded dwellings, stay temporarily with friends or are in homelessness shelters provided by the government. 60% of them are women, and just under a third of them are children under the age of 18. Yet, we don't talk about it because it makes us feel like we might not be doing enough.

Despite this setback, mum would go onto complete her bachelor's degree and be accepted to Melbourne University to do her Master of Teaching but wouldn't complete it as the childcare centre I went to wouldn't accommodate my dust allergy and would send me home when I got into sneezing fits.

I was born in 2005, my parents separated almost immediately after birth. My mother struggled to find employment as she was also dealing with long-term depression, anxiety and physical ailments. This meant that we were reliant on the notoriously low welfare payments from Centrelink.

In addition to this, my father, being a lawyer, utilized legal loopholes to pay well-below the national standard for child-support, squeezing us even drier and making things more difficult.

When I was nine, I distinctly recall receiving an excursion form for a school trip. We were meant to go to a local conservation park as part of an environment project we were doing in class. I remember waiting for my bus and looking down at the paper slip and wondering whether I should even bring this home, knowing instinctively, even at this young age, that it would cause my mother more financial strife. At age nine, I did not know how to tie my shoelaces, but I did know what my I was allowed to participate in with my financial background.

I would move houses pretty much every year throughout my childhood. Not because we were bad tenants, far from it, it was because we were constantly chased by the renting sector for higher and higher rent tolls as our suburb became more gentrified and people were able to pay more than us.

In the OECD's 2020 ranking of the 32 richest countries' poverty rates, Australia places 16th worst, worse than countries like Russia and Greece. In a report on childhood poverty, the OECD reported that 13% of Children in Australia live below the poverty line of 50% of the median income. Just under 1 in 8 children are considered to live in poverty in our country, yet we're still conditioned to think that we must hide this fact, keep it from sight, MAINTAIN THE UNIFORM AND CIVILITY, for fear of the social repercussions of being vulnerable.

People living in poverty are one of the most susceptible groups in our society and are at risk to its worse elements, they're more likely to abuse substances, experience physical and sexual violence, more prone to homelessness, more likely to have separated parents. All of this is cyclical and multigenerational as well, such has been the experience of my lineage, none of us are 'dumb' or 'lazy', I come from a long line of highly educated immigrants, we've just been fighting an uphill battle this entire time.

Yet still people insist that the opposite is true including our former prime minister.

Dear Scott Morrison,

My Grandma had a go, my mother had a go and now I've had a go to, and your system has worked for none of us. I have put on YOUR uniform for 6 hours a day, 5 days a week, 40 weeks a year for 12 years now. But I'm done wearing this uniform, because if I am not my authentic self and I do not speak for myself then who will."