

Every day, students walk the halls feeling they are different. Exploring...

Differences

Abuse victim shares story of trauma, painful

SHOSHANA KOON

Staff Reporter

As a survivor of sexual abuse, I know the difficulties it encompasses. Once someone experiences abuse or abandonment, his or her life changes. How it changes depends on how the person reacts and deals with the trauma.

I was sexually abused from age seven to nine by multiple men. I will never be the same. At first I didn't tell anyone. I felt scared, lonely, violated and tainted. I struggled about telling my mom, but I was only a little kid and I didn't know whether or not she would be mad at me, blame me or comfort me.

When I finally decided to tell her, I was embraced with love and much sorrow. My mom went to the police and while they were dealing with my perpetrators, I was taken away from my mother and thrown into a place completely foreign to me—a stranger's house, a hellhole, a "foster home." It never made sense to me.

I thought, "Okay, I told what happened to me and then social services takes me away from my mom? What the heck? They should be going after the guys who raped me, NOT taking me away!"

The only explanation I ever received was that they were protecting me. I saw being taken away as a sign that it was my fault for what happened to me, that I had somehow deserved it.

Hurt, afraid, and confused, I went on to live with people I didn't know.

Switching from family to family, I learned a lot about why kids acted the way they did after they had been traumatized. In group therapy sessions I watched guys hide their feelings because they weren't equipped to handle what had happened to them. I saw teenage boys turn their depression into

I found all of these things are 100 percent true. I still have many things to work on. I experience post traumatic stress all the time and it is very difficult to work through.

I've noticed I have control issues because when I was raped, control was taken from me. I hate being in large groups because it's more people that I have to watch to make sure that I'm safe; making sure no one can hurt me. I don't like history because my history is horrid.

In personal relationships I can't do certain things because I feel I'm tainted and not worthy, or I feel awkward. When I hear the name of one of my perpetrators I cringe and hide. I'm scared when I meet one of my



WLHS personalities labeled as unique

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Are you loud and do you always have something to say? Or are you so quiet that no one notices you're there? What about somewhere in between? Everyone has a unique personality—and those personalities are key to a person's outlook on life, as well as how they are treated by others.

"I would describe myself as perky, quirky, outgoing, bubbly, and at times a little bit awkward. People think I'm fun, but they don't believe I have a lot of depth," Madeline Benoit, senior, said.

Marisa Brookhouse, freshman, believes her personality doesn't influence how her friends treat her. "If they truly are my friends then they don't care about my differences," she said.

Some view "being different" from the masses as something that hurts them. Others strive to be unique.

"Usually when people look different, they feel different. It's more noticeable. That seems to be what a lot of people strive for, but there is more to it than that," an anonymous student said.

People tend to change their personalities depending on the environment they are in, or who they spend most of their time around—adapting their actions to the group.

"I don't often get a chance to know people all that well at school, so I don't make friends easily, but I do get the chance to watch and see how people interact before I

have a conversation with them myself," Anya Lehman, freshman, said. "On the other hand, with my friends from dance I have more confidence to have fun and enjoy myself!"

Lifestyles and events can cause personality changes. Depression, loss of a loved one, divorce, serious illness, relationships, or substance abuse are some of the factors that can cause substantial changes to one's personality.

Social environments change throughout life, and these factors have been suggested as important influences on personality, according to the 2003 article "Development of Personality in Early and Middle Adulthood: Set Like Plaster or Persistent Change?" published in the Journal of Personality

"You should let your personality shine through. Be yourself!"
—Madeline Benoit, senior

and Social Psychology.

Stereotypes are commonly used to describe teenagers, though this often causes problems. Many teens resent being labeled because they don't feel they fit into just one particular group.

In a poll dealing with personalities, teens identified groups such as preppy and skater, but some students claim, though, that WLHS is generally unique and different in its own ways. Others believe it is not very accepting of people who are different in any way—physically or behaviorally.

"West Linn is stereotypically close-minded, and its citizens seem to reject differences or change," an anonymous student said. "I think more so than many other schools around, the students at WLHS are sheltered from the diversity seen in the world, so when they are confronted with diversity, they don't know how to react."

On the other hand, some believe that some people at West Linn are generally patient with those who are more introverted and quiet and those who might be loud, the more outgoing extroverts. "There are some very nice people at our school who are willing to talk to anyone and just overall be friendly," Lehman said.

Brookhouse doesn't let the way people treat her affect what she does. "I don't need to overcome my differences for people to like me," she said.

Benoit summed up the feelings of others, "You should let your personality shine through. Be yourself!"

anger and act out with their friends. Girls masked their feelings and pretended everything was okay, because society has told women to just "grin and bear it."

These teens became more stressed when they tried to go to their friends for support. This is not usually the best option because friends often don't have the scope of experience needed to give the necessary support.

I have seen over 10 different therapists over the years and I am STILL trying to reconcile what happened to me. When I saw my first counselor I was a complete mess. I didn't know what I was supposed to do, what to say or how to respond to the questions she was asking.

The three things that ALL my therapists told me were, 1) It is not my fault. I was a victim. 2) It will follow me for the rest of my life so I must learn to cope with it now. 3) That the best thing I could do for myself was go to a therapist who has experience handling those situations.

friends' dads just simply because he is a man. I tend not to trust adults because adults are the ones who have mishandled me. When I hear rape jokes that are told in the classrooms by ignorant kids, I am hurt and defensive because they laugh and mock, thinking it's funny. They can't even begin to grasp the amount of pain it causes me.

All of these are a result of my sexual abuse. This will never go away: I just have to learn how to handle them. That is what I'm currently working through. I know from experience that talking to a