

Being a Perfectionist

Women¹ wrote about school as an escape from the horrors of home, the dangers of low grades, and the fear of failing to be perfect.

Joanne²:

Pointing out the opposite responses two sisters had in relation to trying hard in school:

My older sister...was the constant in my life, my parent my friend, my companion that shared my fears. Although she was the opposite of me in regards to school, she excelled and escaped in books and I didn't.

Marlene:

When I was attending elementary school I was always excited to go to school, because it was a way out of the horror. I used to dread going home after school because I would have to become a different person.

School was a place where I felt somewhat free to be myself even though I was still timid and not very outgoing I knew I could at least be happy for a little while.

Sonya:

As I approached puberty the violence I was experiencing at home began to escalate. At that time school shifted from being a place that I enjoyed (or that at least did not dislike) to my safe space.

I stayed late everyday to help the teacher with cleaning, marking, running notes and lesson preparations. It was mostly just simple errands and tasks but it's what I remember most about school at that age.

Despite the changes in my life I still excelled at school. Between going out with friends and doing homework I was able to almost completely segregate myself from the family.

I have been a perfectionist for as long as I can remember, but my real fear of failure (measured as anything less than perfection) was honed due to the abuse that was going on at home.

Theme: Being a Perfectionist/Escape into the Mind

Kari:

I have always been a perfectionist and expected a lot of myself. I was extremely shy and quiet. I would obtain A's in all areas of my report card except in public speaking - in which I would normally get a C

Starting in grade four I started carrying home all my text books from school regardless if I had homework or not. I was told that I developed Scoliosis for this reason. I was afraid that somehow there would be homework due for the next day, even after the teacher would inform us that there was none.

...my self-esteem was greatly affected therefore I never felt good enough. This pushed me to be a perfectionist and over achiever. Being an over achiever sets me up for failure because I go into a project thinking that it needs to be the best however I become paralyzed by that thought and I procrastinate about starting it. This is especially difficult when my self-esteem is low therefore I feel like I can't produce something good but I feel that the only option is to do something "perfectly" and so therefore I am immobilized. This becomes an overwhelming task to defeat and that may be one reason why I have experienced panic and anxiety.

Leanne:

Because I was always afraid of getting in trouble at home, this also reflected in the school. I was always trying to get perfect marks and be the perfect student so when I went home to show my family my test marks, I would not be in trouble

¹ In 2007 some students in the Assaulted Women and Children's Counsellor/Advocate Program at George Brown College took part in a research study where they reflected on the ways they could now recognize that violence had had an impact on their own learning. This research was carried out as part of the Weaving a Web project to develop www.learningandviolence.net The rest of the themes identified can be found in other sections of The Impact of Violence on Learning.

² All names are fictional.