

Physical expression helps mental health

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Features Reporter

The bell of the door at Black Web Ink rings as junior Miranda Keeley walks inside.

Keeley has gotten two tattoos there. She has guitar for her love of music and a Jupiter tattoo because she has always wanted to be an astrophysicist. She believes that her tattoos have helped improve her mental health.

"I've dealt with mental health issues, and being able to express myself in a way you won't be judged negatively by people has been very positive for me," said Keeley.

Tattoos are not the only way someone can use self expression. Makeup is another way to express yourself. There are a variety of options to choose from when it comes to makeup. When students pride themselves in their makeup skills, that skill becomes apart of who they are.

Sophomore Annie Bulleit chooses different lip colors, eyeshadows, and highlighters. She determines how she gets to look for the rest of the day.

"It's become a huge part of who I am and how I present myself to the world," said Bulleit.

Dying hair different shades of the rainbow is another way for someone to express themselves. Unnatural hair is still not allowed in school, according to the student handbook, however, students still do it. Sophomore Zephen

Martin has bright blue hair. It is one of his favorite colors and the color calms him, so that is why he dyed it that color. Martin said he has experienced problems with anxiety in the past. "It's mainly me doubting what I know is true or not, which in split decisions or important moments of choice become extremely difficult and suffocating," said Martin.

Bulleit said she has also experienced being anxious and depressed and believes makeup has helped her cope.

"I struggled with anxiety and depressive disorders for a long time, and using my appearance to create a new kind of identity for myself definitely helped in a way," she said.

Some teens have been struggling cultivating different looks. They could be afraid of being rejected or they are anxious about if they will be treated differently based off their looks.

"Being scared of dyeing hair or wearing fun clothes varies because of experiences," said clinical social worker and therapist Aaron Hellems. "Fear of social rejection is likely another reason."

Some people may be fearful because of generalized or social anxiety, according to psychologist Dr. Leslie R. Jenkins. If someone feels stuck they should seek professional guidance from a licensed therapist.

"Many mental health conditions can develop and/or worsen when a person is not able to live in their authentic self and does not have access to some supportive space to be themselves," said Jenkins.

Some students have these struggles, but some do not have a place to go to be themselves. School could be a place in which they can express themselves and figure out what they want and need, but school dress codes could be a problem.

"Find out what you want and how you want do it. I'm going to be that adult that says as long as it's in dress code, do it. That's fine by me," said counselor Brittany Eisner.

There are also negative forms of self expression where someone can hurt their mental health negatively, so it is good to

have friends that have common interests so they do not become closed off.

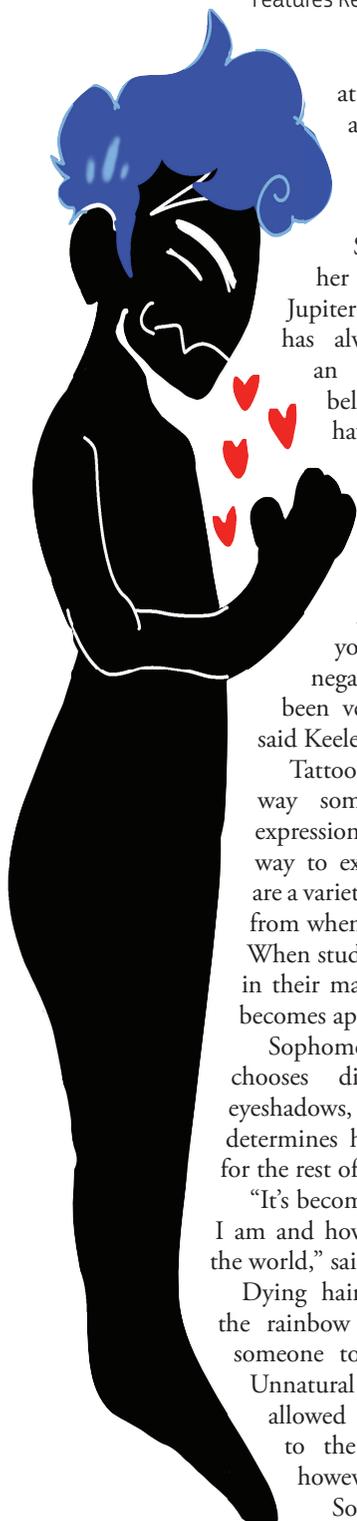
"If someone chooses to wear all black, excessive makeup but her friends are doing this too, this could be okay because she has found a group of people that apparently share her interests. However, if a person does this because she wants to hide and push people away but then complains of being lonely, this may not be a good thing," said psychological practitioner Sara W. Sutphin.

But sometimes self expression cannot do everything. It is important to know when someone needs therapy or medication to seek help. Teachers are always there to give advice or to listen and assist the student.

"There is nothing wrong with seeking professional help and therapists, and I am always careful when I encourage the use of medication because I know that can become a gray area, but I am also aware that some situations are just so severe that you need that chemical support," said English teacher Keightley Waiz.

Self expression is about figuring things out about oneself, and it is up to the individual how they do that in a way that is not harmful.

"This is a time about growing and finding who you are. So give yourself the benefit of the doubt to make those kinds of decisions," said Bulleit. "I always told myself be the kind of person your younger self would be proud of, and I know little me would not be proud to see me hiding myself."



Sam Haney/The Bagpiper