

For most of my life I kept my horrible sickness a secret. I stayed stuck, silent, and in my self-made closet of shame. Only in recent years have I been able to reveal my identity. While I have suffered through relapses that have required hospitalizations, courses of ECT, and periods during which I needed to cut back on any activity even remotely stressful, the acts of revealing the nature of my mental illnesses to friends, colleagues, the local community and beyond has helped me more in my recovery than almost any treatment. Being open about who I am has enhanced my self-esteem greatly, and the reactions of those with whom I've shared my story can be characterized as accepting and encouraging. I also sincerely hope that by telling others of my own personal suffering with schizo-affective and obsessive compulsive disorders that I have aided our struggle to achieve equality, respect, and access to effective individualized treatments for all persons with mental illness.

If you haven't already done so, consider coming out. At least think about the benefits and drawbacks of doing so. I really feel the more of us who speak freely about mental illnesses, the more we can contribute to dispelling the stigmatizing myths and fears surrounding them. The more we talk, the more support we gather from others to further our cause, and the more empowered and healthy we will be. Let us hear from you, and how you feel about this critical personal decision.

Here is a poem that I wrote a very long time ago that has relevance to this issue: [The Closet of Me](#)

The Closet of Me

The door to my closet was built with
Empty smiles
Tearless sorrow
Icy anger
Unsaid love
Unshared hopes



Inside I crouch among my fears
smothering myself with dresses of self-pity
covering my body with clothes of
self-hate and despair

The door to my closet is thick
impenetrable from without
except for those too brief moments
when I, bolstered by his love
open it a crack to give of my hidden self

Where's the key to that monstrous door
self-created, but despised?
I'll laugh, if you threaten to hint
that I may be a key-maker
Ha! I'll say. No! I'll deny
Helpless me

My door grows thicker with each
act of cowardice, of lethargy
here I'm stuck
Waiting
Waiting
for something that will never come
the love unfelt by a shattered child