

Who I Pretend to Be

I pretend to be happy when I'm not. Most people don't know that I am afraid to eat. They just think I am a small eater. I tell everyone I am trying to gain weight, and I am, but they do not know the terror I face when doing so. They joke that I will eat only three bites of my lunch and that I am good at fasting, and as they tease me, I pretend that I am laughing with them, even though inside I am crying; if they only knew.

I give the impression that I am easy-going, always ready for a new assignment. In the meantime, I spend most of my days ruminating about how fat I feel, the calories I am consuming, and how ugly I feel. I feel sad all the time.

The mask I wear is one of a happy, humorous, individual that "has it all together," when in reality I am trembling, depressed, anxious and lonely. My body feels as though it is being ripped to shreds everyday, and my mind curses me. I'm glad I work in my own cubicle facing the wall, so no one can see me struggle. No one bothers me, and I can take off my mask for a little while. Wearing a mask is exhausting.

On the surface, I make self-deprecating jokes, laugh when others are laughing, and act as though I am working hard when I cannot concentrate. My co-workers think I am a happy-go-lucky person, never stressed or worried. If only they knew the truth, would they embrace me or would I become an anathema?

The game I play is a difficult one. It's hard to always hide behind a façade. Those with whom I am close think they know who I really am. But even they don't know the whole me. No one would like to know the real me. So even with them I smile and laugh. I share my progress with them, not the distress I am in, and it causes my stomach to turn in knots, my limbs and hands to shake, and my eyes to ache and tear.

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I hide behind my smile. No one knows I wish to be dead most of the time. My friend has cancer, and I wish it were myself instead. She is suffering and scared, just like me. But at least her fear people understand. People make fun of mental illness, so I don't dare tell anyone how I suffer. Meanwhile, the fear, the anxiety, the sadness, and the depression linger on inside me. I am confused about myself. Would anyone in his or her right mind want to be sick and to die? I am not in my right mind, and I fear that I never will be. I will always be alone in my thoughts.

I wear makeup to make myself look healthier than I really am, even though secretly I wish I were dying.

The clothes I wear sometime show how thin I am, but I always wear a sweater so no one can see my bones. Sometimes I wear bulky clothes to hide my body of which I am so ashamed.

The car I drive shows that I am sensible. My job and education reveal to others that I am intelligent, the only true thing about me that I let people see.

The real me hides under the covers, stays in her pajamas on the weekends, and doesn't go outside except to go to an appointment, to work, or to keep her dad company. I listen to him and my friends share their problems, only rarely sharing my own. I celebrate their successes, and comfort and empathize with them when they need someone with whom to talk. I've always been a good listener. I just don't listen to myself. I listen to Ed, to my negative thoughts, and ruminate about my mistakes, flaws, and under-achievements. I always feel like a failure.

I never have fun anymore. I don't even think I know how. Improv used to be fun, but I always ruminated about my mistakes and worried that I wasn't really good at making people laugh. Now I am too sad to make people laugh. It is just too tiring. I've been

pretending ever since I can remember, and I pretend everyday. No one knows the real me, and I am so very lonely. Now, Dr. Susie, I am ready for you to meet the real me.

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