Morals for your story

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Dilemma

I have a very serious mental illness and would like to be open about it, but I am not sure how soon to reveal it to people or to whom I should be open about it. It is well-maintained and most people don't even know I have a problem until they either see me taking medicine or I tell them about it. One day, I would like to educate the world about it, but most people already have misconceptions about the illness and make jokes about it. How do I handle this without overexposing myself?

-Weighing Education and Exposure

Responses

I think that in this dilemma the best thing to do would be to not worry about what other people think and explain the illness in order to disprove common misconceptions. This follows Kantian ethics in that you should make the decision because it's the right thing to do—not because of what may or may not come of it.

I do not think you have to tell everyone, but I also don't think that you should be self-conscious about it and try to hide it. You can explain the mental illness to people the best you can and shouldn't worry about what they think in the end.

-Brooke Evans

Tell those who deserve to know. Close friends, for instance, probably should know. Also, if these friends know, they can help you in your attempts to educate others. Several voices are more powerful than one. People can be a lot more understanding than many give them credit for, and you may be surprised at how accepting the population, specifically your friends, can be.

-Matt Glazier

Recognizing that more can be accomplished through groups than if each person tried to do everything on his or her own, people came together and created societies. Part of working in a communal setting, as most of us do every day, is recognizing the differences between people and curtailing practices that can be rationally seen as offensive. This is colloquially known as being politically correct.

Some people view being politically correct as something that holds society back, but the theory is based on sound doctrine. Societies cannot function maximally if one member is socially shunned based on something that is outside of his or her control and not detrimental to the society in general. Such things include ethnicity, gender, birthplace, and mental and physical conditions.

To answer your question, you should tell people that their jokes about your condition are offending you and are not based in a good understanding of the condition. There is not really a need to announce to the world that you have this condition, but it is not something that you should hide or of which you should be ashamed.

-By being born, you signed the social contract

I don't believe you necessarily need to tell people about your illness if you are uncomfortable doing so. There are ways to become involved in raising awareness without exposing yourself, such as helping out with a committee or starting a fundraiser.

Even by writing for this column you are beginning to raise awareness about mental illness—showing how people around us may have conditions we aren't aware of and how our behavior might negatively impact people without our even noticing.

-A Wealth of Ways to Educate

I understand your dilemma. It is difficult to decide how and when to tell people about something private. The best advice I can give you is to tell those you trust and are close to. If you inform them about your illness, you will not be stressed about what they think and your happiness will grow. Then the people you trust will become happier because you are opening up about yourself, and they will have more insight about you.

I think informing the world is a great idea. People need to know the truth about different illnesses so we can become more open about them and sensitive in terms of how we address them.

As for those who make jokes about mental illnesses, they may not understand or may be ignorant and naïve about various conditions. Informing them about the facts is a wise decision. Just be aware of who you tell because according to utilitarianism, you want to maximize happiness, and telling people you don't trust could hurt your happiness and theirs.

-Let Happiness Grow

Next Week's Dilemma

I come from a country that most people I meet in the United States think is very conservative. People here like to ask me questions about my country, such as how women are viewed there and if they are less important than men. Although some of the points they mention are facts, they tend to be very much exaggerated.

I have a difficult time deciding how to respond in these sorts of conversations. While I want to explain more about my country's customs and reasons for doing things, I don't want to come across as defensive of the country from which I come. While I'm critical of some of my home country's practices, I don't feel
like I can freely express these sentiments to Americans, who are already too aware of my home country’s flaws.

I want to be open and honest, but explaining the culture of a vastly misunderstood country feels like a big job to take on in small, day to day encounters. How do you suggest I handle this complex and delicate information?

--Student Turned Accidental Diplomat