



# **A Mind Less Ordinary: My Experience of Living with Anorexia and Schizoaffective Disorder**

*Tanya J. Sheldon*

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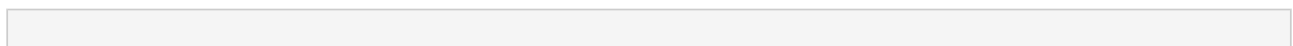
"A Mind Less Ordinary: My Experience of Living with Anorexia and Schizoaffective Disorder" is a book about my illness, but it is by no means a 'misery memoir'. Instead, it is intended to help people who have not experienced mental health problems to understand what it is like to live through them. It is not written chronologically. I begin with a chapter in which I introduce myself; I finish with a summary of where I am in relation to my schizoaffective disorder and its treatment at present. The chapters in between form a series of essays about different aspects of my illness experience.

Psychiatrists use a language called 'phenomenology' to describe psychological symptoms. For example, I have periods of depression, periods of hypomania, and periods of psychosis. But what do those words really mean to a sufferer? That is the question which I seek to answer in my book, stretching the English language to explain as best as it is possible in mere words what each of these states of mind feels like. I have also devoted chapters to my teenage anorexia and to my difficulties with self-harm and suicidal behaviour, as well as to my hospitalisations and the various treatments which I have had both in the UK and in the United States.

Although there are many people who suffer from schizoaffective disorder, I bring a unique perspective because I am also qualified as a doctor. My medical background has allowed me to have greater insight than I would have as a lay person, which has at times been helpful and has at other times undoubtedly made life more difficult. I explain how, as a doctor, I have suffered particular loss due to my psychosis, since the General Medical Council refused to grant me a licence to practise; however, I also write about the wealth of life experience my illness has given me, including living in a condemned psychiatric ward for over a year and hearing patients' perspectives on their treatment which I would never have been privy to as a health professional.

For me, it has been a privilege to be able to write this book during a period of relative health and lucidity. I know that I will not always be able to articulate myself so well, and it is possible that my illness will deteriorate to a point where I lose the capacity to write altogether. Many of my friends have already reached that stage and are eager that I should be their voice. For that reason, I feel both obliged and privileged to leave a legacy of understanding. I hope that mental health professionals will read my book and begin to think beyond textbook definitions of psychiatric phenomena; I hope that carers will read my book and finish it with greater insight into their loved-one's particular battles; and I hope that the general public will read my book and begin to comprehend what it is like to suffer from severe mental illness.

My brain is both my best friend and my worst enemy. For example, it has allowed me to pass final medical exams whilst detained in a psychiatric unit. As I wrote in my 'biography' page, my life has been remarkable; as the title of my book declares, my mind is certainly far from ordinary.



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