LIS Interrupted
Intersections of Mental Illness and Library Work

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Contents

1   A Letter to the Reader

The Process of Becoming
7   The Space Between Neurodiversity and a Degree: Misinterpretations of ADHD in Higher Education
    Kaelyn Leonard
15  There’s no Dublin Core Element for “Body Issues”
    Zoë Nissen
29  Surviving to Thriving: Creating a Culture of Radical Vulnerability in Libraries
    Karina Hagelin
39  Diversity Scholar with the Trifecta of Mental Disorders
    Marisol Moreno Ortiz
51  Finding Mental Balance at the Fortunoff Archive
    Christy Bailey-Tomecek
65  The Downward Spiral
    Nina Clements
71  If You’re Happy & You Know It, Tell Me How
    Chelsea Tarwater
79  On Surviving
    Allison Rand

Critical Perspectives and Narratives
87  Full Disclosure? Issues Around Disclosing Mental Illness in an Academic Library Workplace
    Alice Bennett
105 Words Matter: Examining the Language Used to Describe Mental Health Conditions in the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)
    Carolyn Hansen
117 Neoliberalism, Mental Health, and Labor in the Library Workplace
    Michelle Ashley Gohr and Andrew Barber
135 Defusing Stereotypes Through Humor: A Social Media Analysis
    Pamela Andrews and Melissa Freiley
153 The Perils of Public Service: Emotional Labor and Mental Illness in Library Employees
    Sara Harrington
167 The Language of Libraries: What Does It All Mean?
   Brady Lund

181 Stuck in the Filter: Health, Anxiety, and Feeding the Fear
   Stacey Astill

195 Mental Illness and the In-Person Interview
   Ian Ross Hughes

203 Caring Work: Reflections on Care and Librarianship
   Stephanie S. Rosen

219 Lean on Me: Support and Shared Experience in the Anxious Workplace
   Marie Campbell, Clayton Hume, Max Powers, and Ann Sen

   The Situated Experience

237 ILL, NOT I.L.L
   Chaundria Campos

245 Arbitrary and Capricious: Mental Health, Library Work, and Deciding Just How Much to
   Talk About It All
   Jasmine Rizer

255 One Among Many: Fit, Precarity, and Neurodiversity in Academic Libraries
   Evelyn E. Nalepinski

271 Bipolar Disorder and the Drive to Lead
   John Cohen

281 Fog
   Avery Adams

293 Depression and Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder (OCPD)
   Jodene R. Peck Pappas

305 Librarian vs. The Machine That Goes Beep: Professional Adventures on the
   Autism Spectrum
   Jess Alexander

315 A Critical Conversation about LIS Interrupted
   with Miranda Dube and Carrie Wade

335 Editor Bios

337 Author Biographies

343 Index
Dear Reader,

Thank you for picking up this book. Regardless of how or why you have arrived here in this moment—if it’s to see yourself in the pages, learn more about mental illness, improve your library praxis, none or any combination of the above—we want to express our gratitude towards you.

Brave and vulnerable people opened up their minds to write this book. They have invited us to witness their challenges and triumphs as they navigate both mental illness and the Library and Information Science (LIS) field. Authors featured here have dedicated their time and energy to help the field, both as individuals and as a community. Being brave and vulnerable is not just limited to the authors of these chapters though. You, dear reader, are brave and vulnerable. Willing to talk about mental illness, and reflecting as both humans and professionals to examine how we can improve the world for ourselves and our colleagues, is a brave and vulnerable act.

This book has been organized into three sections: “The Process of Becoming,” “Critical Perspectives and Narratives,” and “The Situated Experience.”

The first section, “The Process of Becoming,” focuses on folks entering the world of library work—from their experiences as graduate students to establishing themselves as new professionals. Kaelyn Leonard tells of their experience working towards a master’s degree in library and information science (MLIS) as a person with ADHD. Zoë Nissen opens up about their experience developing and recovering from an eating disorder (ED) as they attended graduate school and entered library workplaces. Karina Hagelin shares their radically vulnerable experience with assault and mental illness, and provides ways we can begin practicing the same within libraries. Marisol Moreno-Ortiz outlines
the ways they navigated their mental health as a new career Diversity Scholar. From the Fortunoff Video Archive of Holocaust Testimonials comes Christy Bailey-Tomacek whose own experiences with difficult mental illness has helped create an emotionally safer workplace amongst coworkers handling and transcribing materials related to human trauma. Nina Clements helps us understand that there is never a clear ending when it comes to disclosures and mental illness. Chelsea Tarwater invites us to witness the darkest moments of their depression and sing story time songs as we go. The section closes with Allison Rand, present for the Boston Marathon bombings, who discusses how the resulting Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has impacted their life.

For “Critical Perspectives and Narratives” the book takes an analytic turn. This section contains chapters that challenge norms and practices in libraries by examining our foundations. It opens with Alice Bennett who examines mental health disclosures in the context of western academic libraries in Higher Education. Carolyn Hansen reviews outdated and problematic catalog headings, specifically focusing on Library of Congress subject headings. Michelle Ashley Gohr and Andrew Barber use critical theories to address concerning trends in librarianship that focus on class and alienation of paraprofessionals and other library workers in the neoliberal landscape. Pamela Andrews and Melissa Freiley analyze librarians’ use of humor on Twitter in relation to librarian stereotypes and mental illness. Sara Harrington explores how emotional labor, gender, and mental illness intersect in the LIS field. Brady Lund discusses communication disorders and provides suggestions for improvements the LIS field can make to reduce barriers. Stacey Astill considers the impact of health news on library staff who experience anxiety. Ian Ross Hughes questions aspects of the in-person interview and provides ways to reduce barriers in order to hire the most qualified candidates. Stephanie S. Rosen, through highlighting their personal experience, provides us with a path to understanding healthy care work in LIS. Marie Campbell, Clayton Hume, Max Powers, and Ann Sen conclude this section with an analysis of their shared experience and formation of a solidarity network as co-workers experiencing workplace anxiety under toxic leadership.

To close out the book is the third section and a return to personal narratives with “The Situated Experience,” which focuses on established professionals who have coexisted with their conditions and careers. It begins with Chaundria Campos, a black woman and veteran
with PTSD, who discusses workplace resources as the classic line that seldom helps. Jasmine Rizer explores how ongoing mental health issues has affected their decisions of how and why they have chosen to be open or not in the workplace. Evelyn E. Nalepinski outlines ways we can turn the misfit nature of librarianship into a more inclusive space for neurodivergent individuals. John Cohen illuminates how their experience with bipolar disorder has positively improved their ability to lead. Jodene R. Peck Pappas examines their experience as a cataloguer who also has Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder (OCPD) and depression. Jess Alexander concludes this section with their recount of their battle with The Machine That Goes Beep—a villain to the author’s neurodivergent brain.

There are many ways to read this book: you may choose to read one chapter, all chapters, or somewhere in between. You may choose to mark up the pages with your thoughts. You may choose to read this cuddled up under covers alone or in a group of trusted friends. There is no right or wrong way to engage with this book, just like there is no right or wrong way to experience, learn about, or reduce stigma around mental illness. We hope if anything resonates too deeply, or creates feelings of unease, that you will have a trusted confidant to process with, or a tried and true way to provide yourself care that you can utilize.

We encourage you to practice mindfulness, to breathe and ground yourself as you explore the lives and experiences of others. Understand that one life is not a universal experience either—each glimmers as its own unique set of circumstances and conditions to create the lives presented here. Similarly, the thoughts and ideas presented here will hopefully open you up to new possibilities as well.

We are honored that you have picked this book up, and hope you find something befitting your needs in its pages.

With care and gratitude,
Miranda Dube and Carrie Wade