



Graphic Novels & the Humanity of Mental Illness: An ALA Carnegie-Whitney Funded Annotated Bibliography Project

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most exciting literary trends observed in the early 21st century is the surge in popularity of graphic novels. These full-length books, whereby panel-style illustrations and text are combined to tell a complete story, are now often found on the most prominent shelves in bookstores and libraries.

In recent years, a number of graphic novels have been published that document people's experiences with health and illness. The intersection of graphic novels and medical topics continues to gain momentum. Often referred to as "graphic medicine," this field has attracted broad readership, including: patients, who find company in seeing their own experiences put to the page; caregivers, who long to understand what their loved ones are experiencing; and medical professionals, who hope to better care for their patients.

The purpose of this project was to document graphic novels that focus on a specific, yet common medical issue: mental illness. Given the fact that approximately one in five adults experiences mental illness in any given year¹, it is safe to say that its impact is both deep and wide.

METHODS

Even within the mental health community, there is still debate over what conditions can be defined as "mental illness." For simplicity's sake, the mental illnesses we considered for inclusion are those suggested by NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. According to their website, mental health conditions include: ADHD, Anxiety Disorders, Bipolar Disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder, Depression, Dissociative Disorders, Early Psychosis and Psychosis, Eating Disorders, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Schizoaffective Disorder, and Schizophrenia.³

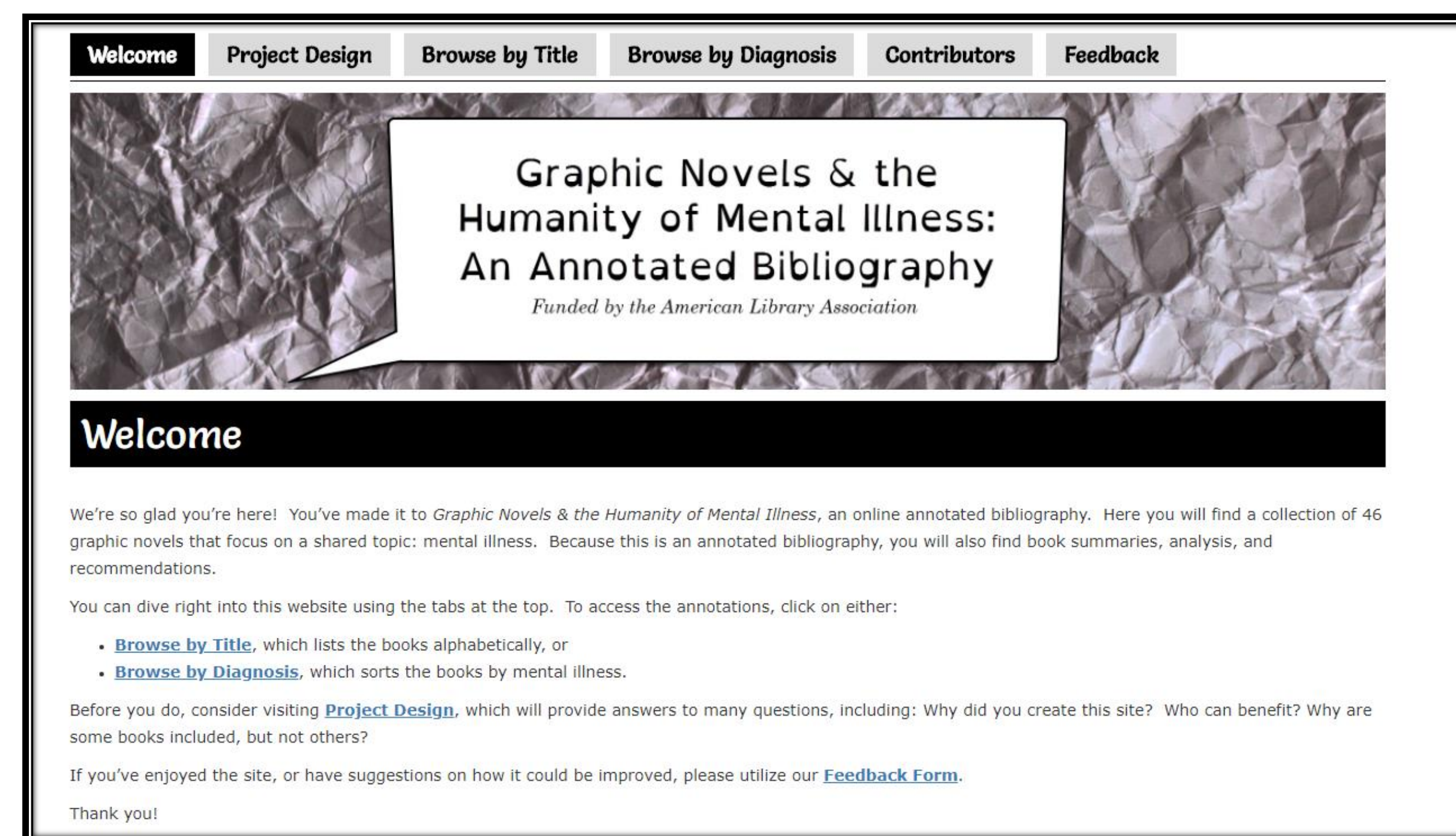
Once we determined that a book featured one of the 12 mental illnesses listed above, we applied additional filters, including form and availability. Only graphic novels in print were considered. For this reason, manga titles were included, while digital comics, zines, and short-form comics were not. Additionally, we checked to see that each title was easily accessible, which was accomplished by examining publication status and availability at major public library districts. From these qualifications, 46 graphic novels were selected.

It should be noted that this project concluded in late 2017. For that reason, there may be newly released titles that fit the above inclusion criteria, but are not reflected on the website.

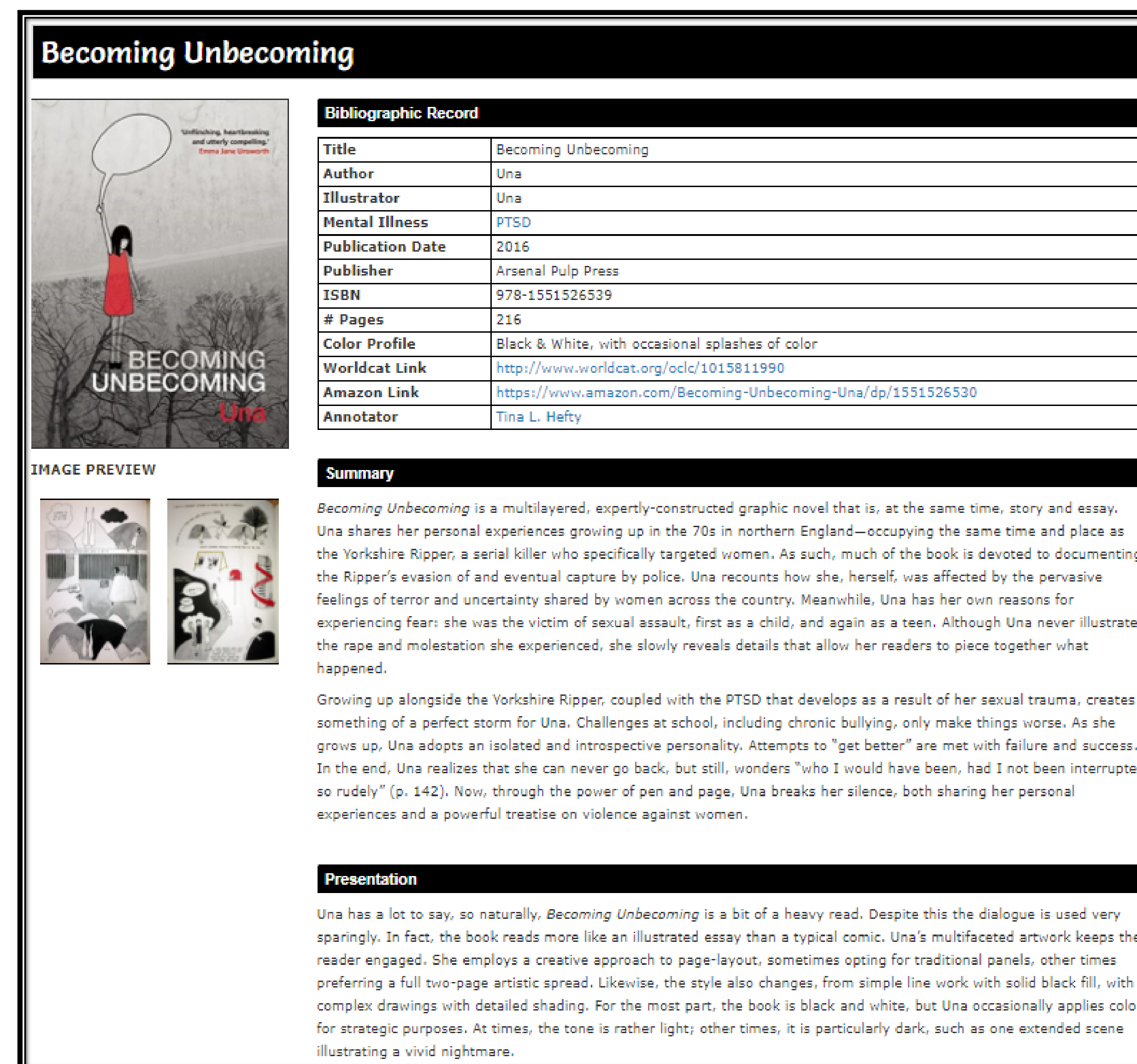
RESULTS

VISIT THE GUIDE

<https://library.rvu.edu/graphicmedicine> or QR Code



Home Page



Sample Annotation: Una's *Becoming Unbecoming* (2016)

CONCLUSION

Although we hope everyone will enjoy this website, we anticipate it will have particular benefit for three user groups:

Patients & Caregivers

Experiencing mental illness can be extremely isolating. Many of those affected feel totally alone, struggling to convey the way they feel to family and friends. Meanwhile, friends and family experience their own set of challenges, as mental illness can be very hard to understand for those who have not experienced it themselves. For both patients and caregivers, graphic novels offer a compelling solution.

Medical Professionals

Graphic novels are a great way to convey humanistic lessons to medical professionals, as they offer "...new insights into the personal experience of illness (especially regarding concerns patients might not mention in a clinical setting) and misconceptions about disease and treatment that could affect compliance and prognosis."²

Librarians

Graphic novels, in particular, pose a challenge for librarians with limited exposure to comics, as their unfamiliarity with the medium may prevent them from recommending graphic novels to patrons. This project can help librarians become familiar with how to recommend this specialized resource to a population in need of it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REFERENCES

1 Mental health by the numbers. National Alliance on Mental Illness. <http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-By-the-Numbers>. Published 2015. Accessed November 1, 2016.

2 Green M, Myers K. Graphic medicine: Use of comics in medical education and patient care. *BMJ*. March 3, 2010; 340.

3 Mental health conditions. National Alliance on Mental Illness. <http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions>. Published 2016. Accessed November 1, 2016



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