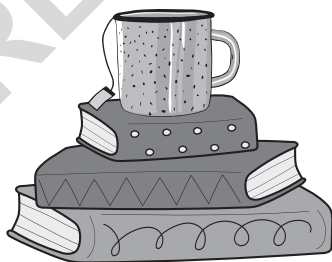




The

Librarian's Guide to

BIBLIOTHERAPY



JUDIT H. WARD and NICHOLAS A. ALLRED

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FOR REVIEW ONLY

PREFACE

A clinical psychologist walks into the library . . .

The idea of this book can be traced back to a reference interaction that happened almost two decades ago. A practicing clinical psychologist-researcher walked into the Center of Alcohol Studies Library at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, to collect reading material to complement her treatment program for couples. Little did we know that this moment—followed by joint research on the potential of bibliotherapy to complement the treatment of substance use disorder—would lead to the first-ever recovery-themed bibliotherapy project, and it would later expand into various reading programs to promote wellness in diverse settings.

It was a tall order for the new librarian. The first alcohol studies collection in the world, the Center of Alcohol Studies Library maintained one of the world's largest and most comprehensive collections of English-language documents pertaining to the biomedical and psychosocial aspects of substance use, mostly scholarly publications, until its closure in December 2016. A small part of this library was a special section featuring fiction, memoirs, biographies, and similar genres, called the Alcohol-NJ collection, sponsored by the state of New Jersey. But then a happy accident took place after weeding the reference collection. A large shelf space became available in a central area in the library, and this became the new home of Alcohol-NJ. Moving these nonscholarly titles to a more central location changed the way that users interacted with them, as these shelves were both prominent enough to invite browsing and private enough for self-conscious users not to feel watched. That privacy was particularly important—simply being seen looking through these titles might feel embarrassing for users grappling with the social stigma surrounding their own or loved ones' addictions, and librarians might wind up in reference interactions that quickly became more fraught and personal than they might feel equipped to handle. Privacy helped, but

it was only the first of many new considerations for our academic library as we started leveraging our collections for readers' emotional and therapeutic needs as well as their intellectual ones.

In short, we found that addressing therapeutic motivations for reading—an aspect that academic libraries in particular tend not to think about very often—thrust us into the role of “accidental bibliotherapists,” performing a kind of readers' advisory that our previous reference experience and training had not prepared us for. The reference infrastructure for such interactions was not there either. When that psychologist asked for a booklist on couples therapy and addiction issues, we quickly discovered that no such booklist existed—not on that topic, nor many others with a practical, therapeutic bent. We knew we had the books to help, that the books were out there that could offer counsel and comfort for almost any reader in need. The difficulty was in connecting those books to the readers who needed them.

With a strong belief in the transformative potential of reading, we developed a program called “Reading for Recovery” to help fellow librarians better serve patrons without laying claim to psychiatric expertise. Funded through a Carnegie–Whitney Grant from the American Library Association, the pilot project in 2015/16 gathered material to assist “accidental bibliotherapists” when patrons asked for reading recommendations. The project envisioned reading and/or group discussion as a supplement to, not a substitute for, recovery programs and more traditional forms of therapeutic support. In the next few years, it was followed by many other guided reading programs and bibliotherapy-inspired projects, big and small, geared toward broader audiences.

An uplifting experience inspired us to do more when we were swept away by the power of a tight-knit community with trust in a safe, non-judgmental environment. In 2016 at the joint conference of the Substance Abuse Librarians and Information Specialists and the Association of Mental Health Librarians in Denver, we shared the accomplishments of Reading for Recovery in a short demo followed by a workshop. In a conference room decorated with a series of posters related to our project, we discussed a personal but relatively safe topic—insomnia—through one of our staple short stories. Sharing their own experiences openly and recommending reading material to each other for various scenarios, librarians were not only thrilled to participate but, judging by the questions and comments during and after the presentation, many of them also felt inspired to start their own

programs. Inspiration goes both ways; we also felt more motivated by our colleagues, both by their enthusiastic participation and by their suggested further applications of these methods.

We are honored to share our experiences and ideas in this handbook. The intention is to inspire and empower librarians in all settings, in public, academic, special, and school libraries, who are planning to explore an innovative use of their existing collections for the purpose of guided reading for mental health. It is not a book that you have to read cover to cover. Instead, we recommend reading short passages and reflecting on what you read: Would this work in my library? How can I implement a similar program? How can I tweak this method? Where should I start? In other words, what might you learn from our story before writing your own?

We hope to inspire you just as reading and discussing texts with our users inspired and motivated us to collect and share our thoughts in this book.

FOR REVIEW ONLY

INTRODUCTION

Why Bibliotherapy

Bibliotherapy, or the use of guided reading for therapeutic purposes, is not a new concept. One could argue that bibliotherapy goes all the way back to Aristotle's *Poetics* in 335 BCE, which claims that tragedies allow spectators to experience and release difficult feelings in a controlled environment—a process he termed catharsis. If this is the ancestor of contemporary bibliotherapy, it's come a long way since then: in recent times, bibliotherapy has been used to help treat disorders including insomnia, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, and addiction, and it has shown promise in studies for both children and adults. There is a significant variety in the forms bibliotherapy can take, from a healthcare setting under the supervision of a doctor or counselor to lightly guided or entirely self-directed courses of therapeutic reading. This book will show through best practices and brief case studies how you can apply bibliotherapy's insights—that books can help readers process difficult emotions and navigate life's challenges—to create inclusive, rewarding, and sustainable programs for your library that fulfill its mission to serve its community.

Whether we recognize it or not, librarians often become “accidental bibliotherapists” (to borrow Liz Brewster's apt term) when providing book recommendations and readers' advisory to a patron or running book discussions, either in person or online. This book seeks to acknowledge the work that librarians already do—as well as the practical limits of that work for the vast majority of librarians who are not licensed mental health professionals—and offer bibliotherapy-informed ideas for library-based reading programs that draw on the skills librarians already have.

Bibliotherapy in the Library

The library isn't just a quiet place to read or use a computer—it's also a pillar of the local community and a hub of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Libraries serve patrons of all backgrounds and seek to provide information and resources to all who need it without bias or prejudice. The library is also a safe space, providing programs that foster discussions in a nonthreatening, nonjudgmental environment, even on sensitive topics of community concern. As a framework for thinking about this aspect of the library's work more broadly—helping connect patrons of all backgrounds with meaningful reading and dialog on the topics that matter most to them—bibliotherapy fits the modern library's mission like a glove.

Library-based programs inspired by bibliotherapy practices promise to engage users, showcase collections, raise the library's profile, and serve the community. Moreover, at a time when libraries are particularly interested in fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion, bibliotherapy programs are a perfect fit: being free of charge makes library-based guided reading programs already inherently inclusive and equitable, and they can allow libraries to address the needs and concerns of marginalized communities, highlight holdings that allow patrons from underrepresented backgrounds to see themselves reflected in literature, and expose all patrons to new perspectives.

This book aims to help librarians take the step beyond advising patrons, to designing and implementing bibliotherapy-informed programs with confidence and tested strategies. When properly executed, guided reading initiatives mirror the core values of the library and further its mission, whether by responding to emerging local needs, highlighting diverse collection offerings, or providing a free and intrinsically equitable open-access resource to the community.

How This Book Will Help

As a librarian, you should feel empowered in the important role of connecting books with readers. Librarians have already sought to develop their collections based on the needs of their users. Many titles already lined up on the shelves of your library are perfectly suitable for bibliotherapy-inspired programs. With a little guidance provided here, it's worth a try to

make them more discoverable and available for those who can benefit from them the most when they need them the most. Ideas in this book aim to assist librarians who want to mobilize their collections for new programs and outreach efforts.

Are you worried about lacking the expertise necessary to launch a guided reading project? Librarians are already equipped with many transferable skills required to experiment with new projects and create a successful bibliotherapy program in the long run. Think of some of the things you may be doing already: providing readers' advisory, familiarizing yourself with the collection, knowing your users, and promoting the library and its programs (including social media). You're already most of the way there!

As that description also indicates, librarians are busy and sometimes stretched thin already. Luckily, there's no need to reinvent the wheel. This practical handbook offers sample programs, best practices, and templates and guidelines for how to leverage your library's existing collections and resources for your new programs and outreach initiatives. The book presents versions and alternatives that can be easily adapted to your local library environment and tailored to your target audience.

WRITE THE BOOK YOU WANT TO READ

The great novelist Toni Morrison famously said, "If there's a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it." When we launched our first bibliotherapy-inspired program called "Reading for Recovery," there was no book available for librarians on how to start a bibliotherapy program in a library. The scholarship available at that time focused on clinical rather than library settings. As we developed our collection and continued with other projects, we kept looking for ideas on how to grow, but still couldn't find a book written with our situation in mind. Thus, we decided to follow Toni Morrison's advice, and the result is this book: all the guidelines, pointers, and encouragement that we wish we'd had at the outset of our bibliotherapy-inspired journey.

How to Read This Book: Fixed Menu or Buffet

As with most handbooks, you can choose how you want to engage with this book: you're welcome either to read it cover to cover or simply to consult individual chapters for ideas that will provide answers to your most pressing questions. Organized around practical steps, each chapter starts with an overview of its full content and ends with the takeaway "In a Nutshell." Real-life examples and stories in text boxes will prompt you to reflect on the chapter while providing further information and inspiration. Templates in various chapters and in the appendixes offer material that you can tailor to your own setting.

Getting Acquainted

Part I gives an overview of bibliotherapy: the concept, its history, and different approaches to it today. Chapter 1 summarizes the distinction between clinical bibliotherapy—undertaken as part of a prescribed treatment, often featuring nonfiction self-help materials—and developmental bibliotherapy, which involves a broader view of therapeutic reading outside the clinical setting. Chapter 2 walks you through a few milestones in the history of bibliotherapy via vignettes of pioneering bibliotherapists, including some of their own words. This part will get you up to speed on what bibliotherapy looks like today, introduce theoretical models to understand the process, and hopefully inspire you to consider bibliotherapy-adjacent guided reading programs in your own library.

Turning Inward

If you fail to plan, you plan to fail, as the saying goes. Before getting started—before even taking baby steps—you may want to do a bit more than just a little soul searching. Part II presents components and options for bibliotherapy-inspired programming for you to begin. Chapter 3 walks you through the basic steps to factor in once you have set your vision and come up with your concept, such as your financial situation, the available skills, your allies, and timing, and how to put all these into practice reinventing yourself as

an accidental bibliotherapist! Chapter 4 reviews potential options from “passive programming” such as book displays, reading lists, read-alikes, and web resources to more active initiatives. Comparing them to what you are already doing, this chapter also guides you to complement your existing practice, such as incorporating a bibliotherapy focus to your one-on-one readers’ advisory consultations. Chapter 5 focuses on how to tailor your program to your audiences, offering examples and scenarios.

Getting to Work

So, you’ve decided to bring insights from bibliotherapy to your library. When it’s time to test the waters, part III is here to help! Instead of jumping into the pool in the deep end, you may want to start small. You already know a lot about book selection and matching a book with a reader. Chapter 6 focuses on how to select reading material for your audience with bibliotherapy in mind. Chapters 7 and 8 go into detail on the two most popular and visible programming methods: group discussions and large public events, respectively. Both chapters compare bibliotherapy-inspired programs to the kind of programming you already offer in your library, showing how you can build on your skills and experience. Part III will reassure you that implementing bibliotherapy-inspired programming in your library is well within reach!

Turning Outward

If your program is not on social media, it’s not happening, right? Marketing and assessment are important elements of any program in the library. They both, however, add to the workload of librarians. Chapter 9 recommends thinking about marketing early and often as you plan your program, and it offers tips, tools, and branding ideas to make the most of your resources and effectively find your audience. Social media gets its own turn in the spotlight in Chapter 10: it can be fun, but it’s also important to recognize as work and plan for actively! Chapter 11 helps demystify SMART goals, which are broken down in the context of bibliotherapy-inspired projects in the library. There’s no single recipe for a successful program, and the proof

is in the pudding—building in assessment tools from the beginning will allow you to taste-test and tweak your program at every stage to achieve the results you want. Along with synergies with existing programs and templates we advocate in various places in the book, this chapter will help you focus on improving and sustaining your bibliotherapy-inspired projects.

Looking Forward

The final chapter features new areas for exploration and experimentation. Therapeutic reading is just the proverbial tip of the iceberg: once you've started to facilitate the kind of personal development and growth that reading can provide, why not expand to related pursuits like creative writing, visual art, and more? Our farewell chapter is meant to encourage you to not only put into practice what you take away from this book, but also take your programs into new directions that fit your own library and community. You may find yourself developing as well, personally and professionally.

ENTERING THE GLASS CASTLE

When we received our first query on reading material suitable for addictions bibliotherapy, we dug into our circulation metrics and discovered that certain nonacademic books in the collection were checked out way more often than others in this academic library! The most frequently circulating title was *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls, a memoir “about the author’s unconventional, poverty-stricken upbringing at the hands of eccentric, nomadic parents, one a frustrated artist and the other a brilliant alcoholic,” as summarized in “R4R @ Rutgers: Reading for Recovery,” our first bibliotherapy-themed guide. There was a clear interest in stories that reflected people’s experiences with substance use disorders.

The logical approach was to get way out of our comfort zone and look into readers’ advisory—a practice familiar in public libraries, far less familiar in academic libraries like ours. The reading lists we created for in-house use served as the basis for Reading

for Recovery, our ALA-funded bibliotherapy project. That project, in turn, eventually led us to writing this book. It all started with a single query and a surprising finding about our circulation that indicated an unexpected need among our users. We hope that bibliotherapy leads you in exciting new directions as well!

It All Adds Up

Although this book is the brainchild of an academic librarian and English literature professor, it should be noted that contributions received from readers and program participants, consciously or accidentally, have been considered, incorporated, and greatly appreciated. This book is an example of how to engage a variety of people, embrace diverse opinions, and respond to evolving needs such as reading for wellness, to create something meaningful. Our own journey followed a route from specific to more general; yours can take any direction, turn, or zigzag.

Bibliotherapy as You Do It

Do these activities all really fall under bibliotherapy? Well, yes and no. Very few librarians are certified to run counseling sessions. But we are perfectly qualified to select reading material for the library collection to meet our patrons' needs; make book recommendations based on a readers' advisory interview; organize a book club for targeted groups; host a large public event (even on a shoestring budget); and document, assess, and promote all these activities for our patrons, library administration, and stakeholders.

A Job Well Done Is Its Own Reward

Working with people—adults and children alike—and watching them grow is very rewarding as they take on the journey to becoming a better self, a better version of themselves, whether in a bibliotherapy group setting or among coworkers working on the bibliotherapy project. We have experienced how

the process made an impact on our own lives, helping us through difficult phases, from a library closure to new beginnings, professional crisis and personal loss, even a global pandemic. Helping others helped us cope, and we hope it will do the same for you. Alongside the material benefits mentioned above, reading and sharing books with others can be a rewarding, transformative experience in its own right—indeed, bibliotherapy itself is all about taking that personally transformative aspect of reading seriously. We hope you'll find as much fulfillment and joy in sharing bibliotherapy with your patrons as we have with ours.

LANGUAGE AND BIBLIOTHERAPY

A note on the language used for guided reading and in this book. Librarians are familiar with the challenges of communicating ideas to all patrons, colleagues, and stakeholders without sounding omniscient and patronizing. Language use is a significant component of creating an environment for everyone to feel safe and inspired to speak up. A book is not any different. We have tried to use inclusive and empowering language in this book to the best of our ability. In particular, we want to be transparent about our direct address to “you,” the reader, throughout the book: we chose this approach in order to make readers feel welcome. This book is meant for all who can use it, in whatever way they see fit.

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