

Hello, my name is Teresa Hoskins, and thank you for coming to the presentation on my project: *Flipped: The Lives of Those with Mental Disorders*. This project is a compilation of four short, fictional stories which I have written over the past several months. Each of these stories takes place in an everyday location, with an everyday event, with ordinary people, it just so happens that one of these ordinary people in each story has a mental disorder.

The purpose of these stories is to give little bit of insight into the minds of those with mental disorders in an effort to the decrease stigma surrounding such disorders, in a format that's easily accessible to a general audience, almost entirely void of technical jargon, and that's entertaining as well.

Each story consists of two parts, two different perspectives of the same brief moment in time. First we see the events from an outside perspective, through the eyes of someone without a mental disorder. Then we switch, or flip, our perspective to the main character's, to the person who has a mental disorder. We learn what's happening inside of their head, see how their thought process differs and become privy to information that an outsider normally wouldn't have.

I would like to take the time now to read you abridged versions of the first two stories, "Math Lesson" and "Morning Coffee." Afterwards I will be expand on each story and then finish by discussing the research basis of this project.

[Read "Math Lesson"]

Following each story is a short profile, explaining parts of the story and expounding upon the mental disorder our main character has. For this story our main character is Diego, who has been recently diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD, but hasn't

received any treatment yet. His ADHD is shown in his tangential thought process, his failure to carry out Ms. Risotto's instructions and his fidgeting behaviors.

Now, the second story:

[Read "Morning Coffee"]

Lindsay's profile explains how she has generalized anxiety disorder, which is the source of her constant and disproportionate worrying. This is better illustrated in the full story. Lindsay also suffers from panic attacks, which is what she is going through at the end and why Raj believes she is choking. Panic attacks can occur with many mental disorders, notably anxiety and stress-related disorders, along with some medical conditions, but I want to emphasize that a panic attack in and of itself is *not* a mental disorder.

I want to encourage all of you to read the full versions of these stories, along with the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, "At the Airport," and "Out Shopping," covering other mental disorders. The full compilation is available on Scholarworks.

All four of these stories were crafted with the utmost care. I didn't just pull them out of thin air. That would have only led to them being stereotypical and biased, completely detrimental to the goal of decreasing stigma and misunderstanding. To best facilitate greater understanding these stories had to be as realistic as possible.

The method I used to accomplish this began with the creation of the 4 main characters with mental disorders, including Diego and Lindsay. The characters did not start with mental disorders however, but with their age, gender, personality, and backgrounds. It was only after I had established who they were as people that mental disorders were added, based on what fit for their individual circumstances, for example Diego has ADHD because it makes sense for a 5<sup>th</sup>

grader to be showing a neurodevelopmental disorder. This process was used to emulate how people with mental disorders are people first, they are not defined by their disorder.

Throughout this process I was thoroughly researching each of these disorders, reading journals, consulting the DSM-V (which is the manual which holds the criteria for diagnosing mental illnesses), and asking lots of questions of my psychology mentor. This is how I got the technical aspects of these stories. The barebones of what symptoms go with what disorders and how they differ from one another. But these stories aren't just technical exposes, they are human narratives. I wanted them to be as close to reality as possible while remaining works of fiction. So I looked for the human aspect. I read case studies, and reached out through various platforms to contact those who had had mental illnesses themselves or who have loved ones who do. To put everything into context, and gain that human touch.

This was the crucial step. A manual can't tell you all of the challenges that someone with a mental illness is going to face, how their mind is working, how they are afraid of other's reactions to their disorder. This is the human aspect, the part that we can all relate to, and the part that we unfortunately sometimes forget about. When we are irritated at the one kid who never listens, or tired of a friend's constant worrying, or shy away from the person walking down the street, yelling at someone who isn't there, we don't think about their perspective. We get angry at that kid, irritated at our friend, fear the stranger. They're a bad kid, an "over-thinker," a crazy guy. But it's not that simple. People aren't that simple. And that's what they are. People. Their brains may be wired a bit differently, or their thoughts be constantly interrupting them, or they may be hearing a voice that doesn't exist, but at the end of the day they're just people, their perspective is simply a bit different.

So in addition to reading the full stories on Scholarworks, I invite all of you here to take a moment in the next few days, when someone does something that you don't understand, or you find irritating or strange, to stop, and take a moment to flip your perspective. What is going through that person's mind, how are they seeing the situation, what might they know that you don't? If everyone in this room does that, and learns just a bit more about someone else's perspective, then I will consider this project a success.

Thank you for your time. Any questions?