NOTES ON OPERATIONS

Developing a Pandemic-Related Mental Health Micro-Collection for an Academic Library

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Academic library patrons dealing with the impact of trauma, depression, anxiety, or addiction spawned or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic require materials that address the unique conditions that have shaped mental health since late 2019. This paper demonstrates how one academic library endeavored to address patrons' needs for mental health resources by developing a "Coping and COVID-19" micro-collection. The paper explores the process of creating and curating a small-scale topic-specific collection using a trauma-informed approach and highlights the importance not only of acquiring materials exploring pandemic-related conditions and praxis, but also gathering contemporary texts that provide a record of the historical moment and a window into the minds of a population attempting to cope with a public health crisis that initiated a mental health one. Ultimately, the paper contends that college and university libraries are well-positioned to deliver patron-responsive service to their campuses that promotes well-being and belonging.

During an interview for the television news program *60 Minutes* on September 18, 2022, then-president of the United States Joe Biden declared that "The pandemic is over" while also acknowledging that "We still have a problem with COVID" and that the "impact on the psyche of the American people as a consequence of the pandemic is profound."[1] A piece from *The New York Times: Coronavirus Briefing* was even more explicit, noting that mental health professionals "report[ed] practices filled to capacity" and "patients who had been stable for years . . . are now in need of medication, intensive outpatient treatment or hospitalization."[2] Despite the announcement of the official termination of the COVID-19 national emergency on April 10, 2023, and a widespread inclination to return to "normal" since, the lingering psychological effects of the pandemic are not as easy to shed as an N-95 mask.[3] People dealing with the impact of trauma, depression, anxiety, or addiction spawned or exacerbated by the pandemic—as well as those trained to support and treat those individuals—require resources that address the unique conditions that have shaped mental health since late 2019.

College and university campuses are acutely in need of this kind of support, with numerous studies pointing to increased emotional strain, substance abuse, and even suicidal thoughts among students, staff, and faculty as an outgrowth of greater social isolation, economic and physical insecurity, and technostress.[4] Further, institutions of higher learning require resources because they serve as incubators for mental health professions, providing the training for the next generation of counselors, clinicians, therapists, clinical social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists who will be grappling with the after-effects of the pandemic, and they support the research that informs future practice. Academic libraries, which undergird the instruction and research missions of their institutions, are well-positioned to meet the needs of their campus communities through the development of micro-

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Library Resources & Technical Services | April 2025
https://doi.org/10.5860/lrts.69n1.8435

collections focused on the intersection of the person and the pandemic. These resources have the capacity to serve multiple constituencies and multiple purposes—offering materials for classroom and clinical use, as well as providing a foundation for professional and personal research on the mental health effects of COVID-19 and other shared traumas. This paper explores the process of creating such a collection, using a trauma-informed approach, and highlights the importance not only of acquiring materials exploring pandemic-related conditions and praxis, but also gathering contemporary texts that provide a record of the historical moment and a window into the minds of a population attempting to cope with a public health crisis that initiated a mental health one.

Literature Review

In the wake of the worldwide lockdowns that began March 2020, academic libraries immediately began reevaluating and reimagining services, resources, and workflows to ensure that patrons had access to the materials and the assistance they needed. Many studies have explored the continuum of responses. Hinchcliffe and Wolf-Eisenberg's "Academic Library Response to COVID-19" reports on the data collected and shared about the rapidly-changing nature of public services in the early days of the shift from in-person to online.[5] Shin et al.; Lierman, McCandless, and Kowalsky; Norton et al.; and many others deal with the trials and triumphs of information literacy instruction in the age of Zoom and other video conferencing platforms.[6] And Hervieux; Decker; De Groote and Scoulas; Radford, Costello, and Montague; and Vogus examine adaptations to reference interactions, including expanded use of chat and other teleconferencing services for ready reference and research consultations.[7]

Most of the conversations about academic library collection in the time of the coronavirus have focused on the question of *where,* born of a need to bring the campus library to the patron, regardless of geography. More often than not, this has manifested as a discussion about format—with Walsh and Rana; Appleton; França; Becker; Serrano and Fernandez; and Lowe all pointing to the ways in which the pandemic simply expedited the move toward e-resources as digital content became not simply a matter of convenience, but of necessity when physical spaces were closed and physical materials were unavailable.[8] Scholars have also turned their attention to the importance of *how* materials are acquired as a result of COVID-19, with França; Prelitz; Lewis et al.; and Prelitz delving into the promise—and potential complications—of increased reliance on patron- or demand-driven acquisition models of collection development for e-books and streaming video.[9] Levenson and Hess explore the possibilities of collaborative collection development in the post-pandemic world as a way for libraries to move from "building independent collection silos to building and supporting collective collections in a variety of formats."[10]

Less attention, however, has been paid to the subject of *what* specifically is being collected because of the pandemic. Bangani, as well as Babalola, Bankole, and Laoye, discuss the necessity of acquiring credible COVID-19 resources, as well as purchasing and promoting texts about fake news to enhance information literacy and help combat misinformation, such as unreliable material about vaccines.[11] However, most details about the procurement of library resources focused on pandemics—such as

SARS-CoV-2—can only be gleaned indirectly. Publicly accessible COVID-19 research guides and library webpages provide a glimpse into holdings, but as Fraser-Arnott's study notes, most academic libraries' subject guides linked out to content created by government entities or to free e-resource collections temporarily made available by scholarly publishers, as opposed to pointing toward materials available in their own permanent collections.[12] Explorations of college and university library catalogs may reveal holdings on subjects such as pandemics, coronaviruses, communicable diseases, or public health—assuming no institutional login is required to view the results of a search—but only item records that specifically refer to COVID-19 or indicate a publication after December 31, 2019, provide potential evidence of collection development activities motivated by the recent pandemic.[13]

There is, however, evidence for the collection of resources to support mental health both before and after the arrival of SARS-CoV-2. Essentially, the pandemic has hastened the adoption of compassionate and trauma-informed approaches—advocated for by Zettervall and Nienow; Frey and Powell; and Richardson et al.—that were already gaining favor in libraries.[14] Efforts to address the impact of trauma in academic libraries has, understandably, focused on welcoming and inclusive spaces and empathetic and empowering service models, with special attention directed at reference interviews and instruction sessions, as evidenced by the work of Tolley and Nelsen et al.[15] And various scholars, such as Hinchcliffe and Wong; Ramsey and Aagard; and Henrich, Bruce, and Chenevey have explored how adopting a holistic approach to patron needs—including an emphasis on emotional health and well-being—can make academic libraries more successful in serving their campuses, especially as the diagnosis and treatment of mental health conditions has increased among college students, faculty, and staff.[16]

Collection is an essential and growing part of that work. Cox and Brewster point to the employment of bibliotherapy and the creation of leisure reading and cognitive behavioral therapy collections in UK academic libraries pre-COVID.[17] Hall and McAlister note that 52 percent of the academic libraries that participated in their "Emotional Well-Being/Mental Health Resources Survey" report having materials targeting these specific well-being needs.[18] And a July 2022 *Against the Grain* article highlights marked increases in college spending (113 percent) and student use (88 percent) of e-books and audiobooks focused on mental health between 2019 and 2021.[19] Although there are collections focused on fostering the mental well-being of patrons, little work is being done on trauma- or pandemic-informed collection. In their conclusion, Cox and Brewster suggest that "the later parts of the pandemic crisis may also lead to shifts in understanding of the need and means of addressing it."[20] This article explores how one library has endeavored to address patrons' present and future needs for mental health resources through the creation of a micro-collection that both supports efforts to understand and cope with COVID-19 and preserve contemporary responses to the pandemic.

Psychological Impact of COVID-19: Campus Needs

There is no current data that would allow for any reliable measure of the enduring impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on either college campuses or society at large. More than five years after it first

appeared, the virus persists, and so does the impact on mental as well as physical health—especially for those experiencing symptoms of long COVID, whose "own emergency [was] never formally declared."[21]

Existing research does, however, indicate the pandemic's potential for significant and ongoing psychological effects on college students, since many "already experience[d] depression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorder symptoms" before being confronted with lockdowns, disruptions to work, school, housing, and daily routines, in addition to dealing with fears about personal safety and mortality. Data confirms that even students without preexisting conditions frequently experienced increased stress and somatization—the physical symptoms of psychological distress—in reaction to the pandemic.[22] Current scholarship has only begun to estimate the potential enormity of the lingering problems as well as the long-term ramifications for a global community processing a collective trauma.[23] Some have gone so far as to declare that the impact of COVID-19 on college students and higher education "is irreversible."[24] Even so, studies suggest that academic institutions can and should "take steps to prevent any further mental health deterioration and promote the well-being"[25] of their students, and that those supporting students must develop "increased, proactive, and comprehensive responses that would improve students' capacity to transit beyond the current period and remain resilient in the future."[26]

Faculty also require assistance and "proactive, and comprehensive responses" to allow them to identify the challenges students face and—in the case of psychology faculty—effectively prepare future professionals in mental health fields. Although academics in the behavioral sciences are acutely aware of the trials that evidently lie ahead, both in terms of training future mental health professionals and in their own work as researchers and practitioners, they still require academic library resources and librarians to support their research and instruction activities. [27]

Traditionally, the dominant channel for the transmission of scholarly communication in the field of psychology is the peer-reviewed journal, as borne out by a number of citation analysis studies.[28] Although there is extensive COVID-related research that may inform and shape classroom and clinical practice, the sheer volume of scholarship concerning the psychological effects—and interventions to address these effects—has the potential to be overwhelming. An October 2022 article in the journal *Nature Medicine* notes that, at the time of publication, there were more than 35,000 published papers on the potential mental health ramifications of the pandemic, and that figure continues to increase, with a January 7, 2025, Google Scholar search for "mental health," "effects," "covid-19," and "pandemic" papers published between 2023 and 2025 alone returning 27,600 results.[29] Even with that volume of publication, researchers can and will access articles on the psychological impact of COVID through Google Scholar and library-licensed databases, such as PsycInfo, PsycArticles, Science Direct, Scopus, Medline, PubMed, ERIC, Sociological Abstracts, and Business Source Complete.

It is clear, however, that students, faculty, and researchers require books as well as journal articles to meet information and instruction needs, with Edwards reminding that these texts meet "a series of distinct intellectual and community needs."[30] Respondents to a 2019 Cambridge University Press/ Oxford University Press survey commented on how monographs provide "the scope and space to create

a sustained argument and extended discussion . . . synthesising research, bringing together different themes either across a subject area or more widely across multiple disciplines"—precisely the kind of approach required for such a complex topic as the mental health effects of a pandemic.[31]

Methods

Developing a COVID Micro-Collection

In spring 2020, Northern Illinois University Libraries, like many others across the United States, created a COVID-19 research guide that provided coronavirus facts; infection rates; public health advice from federal, state, and local health authorities; campus resources and updates; details about lockdowns, library closures, and service changes; and links to the latest scientific research on the disease, such as those collected by Cochrane Library and the National Library of Medicine.[32] For researchers and professionals in the mental health field who wanted information on COVID's effects and responses to them, librarians recommended materials curated and regularly updated by the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association, offered controlled vocabulary suggestions, and showed them how to set up search alerts in PsycInfo, Medline, and PubMed, as well as sharing information about Psychology-focused grey literature sites.[33]

Although valuable, the COVID-19 guide did not address patrons' information needs for managing their own mental health. In summer and fall 2020, subject specialist librarians reported that when they were delivering services to individuals and groups, patrons often divulged details about their personal struggles as well as their academic ones. In transactions, consultations, and information literacy instruction sessions, students, staff, and faculty reported numerous difficulties. These included maintaining focus, anxieties about sick family members, issues with food and housing insecurity, concerns over lack of access to mental health providers, struggles with persevering in the face of the twin pandemics of COVID and racial injustice, problems finding trans-affirming physicians, and the challenge of attending to the mental health needs of others while trying to cope with their own worries and uncertainty. The collaborative and individualized nature of one-on-one work encourages patron disclosure, and the Reference and User Services Association's 2017 and 2023 guidelines for providers of reference and information services does highlight relationship- and trust-building as a central feature of these interactions.[34] Apart from RUSA's now-retired "Health and Medical Reference Guidelines," however, many librarians at Northern Illinois University possessed neither the professional competency needed to "participate in effective wellness interventions" nor access to the appropriate health collections.[35] Librarians steered patrons toward "reliable and verifiable health information," such as relevant campus and community services and people qualified to address their needs and concerns, and the psychology subject specialist librarian curated and shared a list of materials already in Northern Illinois University Libraries' holdings.[36] However, a review of those holdings revealed a lack of current resources appropriate for explicating or ameliorating the mental health effects of a public health emergency.

Northern Illinois University Libraries' patrons were searching for resources that did not yet exist or were not readily available to them. To address this unmet need, in spring 2021, the selector of psychology and psychiatry materials made the decision to begin acquiring recent and newly published books focused on pandemics and mental health. As the pandemic continued and the volume of publications in this area increased, the psychology subject librarian developed a more deliberate and systematic plan to create a "Coping and COVID-19" micro-collection focused on serving the information and mental health needs of the university's diverse patrons and the intersection between the coronavirus and the multiple areas of specialization of the Department of Psychology and the various mental health clinics on the campus.

Another element of the plan for the burgeoning micro-collection was to adopt a trauma-informed approach to collection practice that accords with the University Libraries' continuing work to diversify its materials and foster inclusion, and wider campus efforts to promote trauma-informed teaching and learning. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) notes that trauma knows "no boundaries" but "is especially common in the lives of people with mental and substance use disorders."[37] Writing before the advent of COVID-19, Artime, Buchholz, and Jakupcak noted that college students reported high rates of traumatic experience—postulating that those with exposure to violence, illness, and other traumas may face serious negative psychological consequences.[38] Further, Welsh, Shentu, and Sarvey highlighted marked increases in binge drinking and consumption of cannabis, prescription stimulants, psychedelic and dissociative drugs, as well as opioids amongst US college students in the decade leading up to the pandemic.[39] The COVID-19 pandemic is widely acknowledged as a collective trauma with potentially far-reaching adverse mental health outcomes for students and non-students alike.[40] Based on data collected before the pandemic, Oswalt et al. called on institutions to "create a supportive culture" to promote the mental health of students, and subsequent events have confirmed the necessity of this approach.[41] Because of an established ethos of care, academic libraries do not need to "create" this culture, only to continue to cultivate and expand it to provide students with support.[42] Additionally, the centrality of the academic library to its campus community makes it ideally placed to support faculty and staff who may have been affected by trauma before and after the expiration of the pandemic.[43]

In the absence of specific research concerning the application of a trauma-informed lens to collection development, the psychology subject librarian employed SAMHSA's key principles of a trauma-informed approach to the process—keeping in mind safety; transparency; peer support; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice, and choice; as well as cultural, historical, and gender issues.[44] The relative dearth of COVID-19–specific mental health material available early in the pandemic necessarily complicated the libraries' ability to collect as responsively and inclusively as would be ideal; however, as the literature grows, the libraries continue to acquire more texts that serve the needs of all of its users and reflect the intellectual production of a diverse range of authors. In addition, the subject specialist librarian has included a link to a Qualtrics form on the "Coping and COVID-19" research guide that allows patrons to provide anonymous feedback on the collection and suggest new titles to be added, which allows for greater collaboration and empowerment of patrons.

Safety was and is a primary concern, since texts about COVID-19 could potentially re-traumatize those suffering the mental health effects of living through the pandemic. The majority of titles in the micro-collection are research-focused and aimed at identifying and tackling the negative psychological impacts of COVID; however, to address issues of safety and offer restorative and elevating resources, the decision was made to also acquire practical self-help texts. Additionally, the psychology subject librarian provided advisory language on the "Coping and COVID-19" research guide and shared contact information for local and campus mental health resources to moderate the possible deleterious effects of the collection on users.

Few existing selection tools were applicable in this new field. Consequently, titles were selected based on notification slips sent from GOBI Library Solutions; reviews (when available) from Choice360, the American Psychological and Psychiatric Associations, Goodreads, and Amazon; faculty recommendations; appearances in bibliographies; reputation and expertise of the author, editor, and/or contributor; reputation of the publisher; inclusion in other libraries' catalogs; and patron suggestions. Because most patrons using this collection are affiliated with Northern Illinois University, the subject specialist primarily selected content for general academic, advanced academic, and professional level; however, some material for a broader reading audience was chosen to provide historical context and to allow for the inclusion of books addressing self-care and well-being. While the continuing threat of lockdowns earlier in the pandemic encouraged the adoption of texts in an e-book format, few of the titles selected for the micro-collection were available as e-books or with unlimited-user licenses—the preferred purchase option. Further, ordering e-books meant consortial and other interlibrary loan borrowers would be excluded from borrowing these texts. Ultimately, the core collection was primarily print-based, but as it has continued to grow, more unlimited-user licensed e-book titles have been added to meet the needs of Northern Illinois University patrons who desire or require digital access.

Results

The Micro-Collection: Access, Assessment, and Promotion

The original "Coping and COVID-19" micro-collection included twenty-one titles: primarily scholarly works published during the pandemic and one evidence-based self-support text. Five of the books acquired comprise Routledge's *Psychological Insights for Understanding COVID-19* Series—which collected previously published material. Three titles were narrative nonfiction works or other creative responses to the coronavirus that focused on hope and resiliency, with the purpose of supporting well-being. Thirteen additional texts have been acquired since spring 2023, including monographs and edited collections on the impact of COVID on student mental health, resilience in the face of disaster, preparing practitioners to provide effective service in a time of crisis, memory and commemoration, activism and coping, global perspectives on the effects of the pandemic, vaccine safety, and living with long COVID.

The collection exists in multiple formats—a combination of unlimited-user e-books and print (both cloth and paper), with the latter being requestable by patrons across the state via the Consortium of

Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois and across the globe via interlibrary loan. The collection was designed with Northern Illinois University's patrons in mind, but the libraries wanted to ensure that it can be used by those who need these resources, regardless of geographic location.

Although the University Libraries has stand-alone collections—Popular Reading, Graphic Novels, and Student Success—all shelved on the main floor and adjacent to the Learning Commons, the "Coping and COVID-19" collection is not shelved separately but is blended within the larger collection, mostly located in the BF, HQ, and RC Library of Congress call number ranges. Discrete shelving would potentially make the texts more findable, but also more visible, which could be uncomfortable or even triggering for some patrons who have experienced pandemic-related trauma, working against efforts to make the library a space "of restoration and the promotion of well-being."[45] As Williams and Antobam-Ntekudzi note, "Ensuring *safety* means providing and maintaining an environment that is both physically and psychologically secure."[46] By allowing patrons to elect to explore texts from the micro-collection through the libraries' catalog or in the stacks—with assistance from the research guide—they are both empowered and made safe.

Traditional methods to assess a collection—such as circulation statistics or e-book usage and downloads—are likely insufficient for assessing this particular collection, especially in the short term. As an article in the *Dallas Morning News* aptly put it, "Even with all the tragedy and trauma inflicted by the coronavirus, it seems like just about everyone is sick of thinking and talking about it."[47] Given these circumstances, it may not be surprising that, thus far, usage of materials in the micro-collection has been relatively low: fifteen of the titles have circulated, been viewed, or downloaded.

Circulations and clicks can be constructive but must be used in concert with data about research guide usage and conversations with clinicians, faculty, and students in psychology—and related fields—about what in the collection works and what needs work. In the three years since the "Coping and COVID-19" research guide was published, there have been ninety-three views; however, the vast majority of these date from the most recent nineteen months, with 86 percent of the total views recorded between September and November 2024—following on the heels of the largest summer COVID-19 surge since July 2022. The majority (69 percent) of circulations of print items in the micro-collection were recorded between July and October 2024, again coinciding with the uptick in infections. To date, no comments or recommendations have been submitted via the Qualtrics form on the research guide, although the psychology subject librarian has received purchase recommendations via email, chat, and in-person exchanges with students, faculty, staff, and members of the public, including the suggestion to acquire a reliable and current text on vaccines. The e-book, *Vaccination: Examining the Facts* has been used nine times between its activation in September 2024 and November 2024. Eight additional texts have recently been ordered at the behest of library patrons on topics such as stress management for students, mental health and addiction, and teletherapy, as well as resource guides for mental health professionals working in the post-pandemic era.

Marketing a micro-collection of this type is also not without complications; it does not lend itself to the same kinds of outreach and marketing as a cookbook or graphic novel collection that can

benefit from displays and publicity through social media, especially if the aim is to "actively resist re-traumatization."[48] However, some of the usual channels of communication on campus are still potentially effective: conveying information to departments via subject specialists, offering details about the collection in library instruction sessions for the most appropriate disciplines, partnering with researchers on campus who are engaging in scholarly activities focused on COVID-19 and mental health to provide programming, and sharing the research guide with campus clinics so they can disseminate it to clients or colleagues who they think might benefit from it. To boost awareness and use, the psychology subject specialist librarian has reached out to local chapters of the Psi Chi: International Honor Society in Psychology, the Association of Black Psychologists, and the Student Psychology Association to collaborate on a book discussion of one of the titles in the micro-collection. Nonetheless, promoting a collection focused on pandemics and mental health in a world—and on a campus—eager to think about neither obviously poses a challenge. The increased usage of the guide and the books during the fall 2024 semester suggests that the steady though subdued approach to promotion is having an impact. And because this collection is not simply a product of the COVID-19 emergency, but for grappling with the enduring impact of that emergency and any future emergencies, its utility has less to do with its novel nature than with its value for patrons in the months and years to come.

Discussion

In March 2023, half of adults aged eighteen to twenty-four who participated in a Kaiser Family Foundation/CNN survey described symptoms of depressive or anxiety disorders—with data demonstrating poor mental health and elevated rates of substance use and abuse among young adults and people of color as a result of disruptions and stress associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.[49] That same month, the Pew Research Center and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that nearly half of the high school students they surveyed felt sad and hopeless during the pandemic, with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning plus (LGBTQ+) students reporting even more negative mental health effects.[50] These young people who have struggled with high levels of psychological stress during the pandemic are now our students. Dave, Jaffe, and O'Shea rightfully point out that "College health programs play an incredibly important role in the health and wellbeing of students," especially in the aftermath of the coronavirus.[51] But as Salimi et al. note, academic support is also central to cultivating student well-being.[52]

College and university libraries, and resources like those in the "Coping and COVID-19" micro-collection, have a vital role to play in helping faculty and students living with the aftereffects of the pandemic.[53] Providing this support is especially important at campuses like Northern Illinois University: 66 percent of the incoming class for fall 2024 identified as people of color and 50 percent as first-generation college students—groups who "report a notably lower sense of belonging than their peers, further negatively impacting academic and wellness outcomes."[54] But patrons must know support exists to take advantage of it. To that end, the "Coping and COVID-19" research guide has been shared with campus diversity and cultural resource centers and programs, the university honors program, and campus clinics, as well as with faculty and students in the behavioral sciences. Anecdotal evidence

gleaned from research consultations and instruction sessions suggests that students and faculty are using the texts *within* the library, even though circulation statistics show that they are not necessarily checking them out. Academic library staff are often hesitant to divulge their mental health challenges, and patrons too may equate borrowing with disclosing.[55] Adopting a trauma-informed approach to collecting means acknowledging that offering safety and choice to patrons may complicate assessment of usage and the success of promotional efforts. But in fall 2023, a member of the psychology faculty used selections from a book in the micro-collection for a graduate course aimed at preparing future clinicians.[56]

Fostering inclusion and providing support to those most likely to experience negative mental health outcomes was an early aim of the "Coping and COVID-19" micro-collection. However, one of the major limitations of the earliest incarnation of the project was its general and homogeneous nature. Moving forward, the emphasis will be on seeking out diverse authors and texts centered on more diverse populations, including Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), LGBTQ+, Latine, persons with disabilities, and other frequently underrepresented groups, as well as works written in languages other than English. Future COVID micro-collection development would benefit from greater campus feedback through anonymous surveys, focus groups, or the creation of working groups that would allow greater collaboration with units outside the University Libraries.

Being responsive to patron needs means embracing change—and some changes are already on the horizon. Although print had originally been the default format choice, usage statistics demonstrate a preference for digital: 52 percent of all circulations in the micro-collection were associated with just three e-book titles, and at the time of writing, no external patrons had submitted requests for Northern Illinois University Libraries' print copies. Interest in electronic resources is likely to intensify as campuses across the country continue to expand their graduate and undergraduate online degree programs and their outreach to adult learners who require flexible program formats to balance work, life, and education. Unlimited-user e-book licenses, when available and affordable, will become the standard so that these resources can meet students, faculty, and staff where they are.

Conclusion

Higher education institutions across the United States invited people to share their lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and make their struggles and triumphs part of the collective memory.[57] Documenting those personal narratives is incredibly important and provides a window into a historic moment when we were both fundamentally together and simultaneously separated. One account captures a sense of the fear and the isolation that a pandemic can engender: "We were almost afraid to breathe, the theaters were closed down so you didn't get into any crowds. . . . You felt like you were walking on eggshells, you were afraid to even go out. . . . you had to stay home and just be careful."[58] This memory of the pandemic is moving, partly because of how universal it feels. However, it is not a remembrance of *our* pandemic, but of the H1N1 influenza outbreak that spread worldwide during 1918–1919—a catastrophic period for which there is a dearth of contemporary resources to draw upon,

especially for those interested in its psychological impact. In the preface to *Psychiatry of Pandemics,* Huremović notes:

> Content that a crisis was avoided or prevented, individuals and communities alike would long to return to their daily routines and banish the plague from their conscious thoughts. . . . This process of etching the memory of a disease into our antibodies, yet erasing it from our thoughts, appears to be natural and to foster self-preservation.[59]

Although forgetting unwanted memories is a normal and even necessary part of an individual's emotional well-being, COVID's impact is global and nearly universal, not simply personal.[60] An editorial in *The Lancet* warned of the dangers of disremembering entirely: "The country may move on for now, but unless it faces up to the root causes of the harm COVID-19 did in the USA—health inequities, lack of access to health care, non-communicable diseases, a poisonous political discourse, and mistrust in public health institutions—it will likely find history repeating itself when the next pandemic comes."[61] As Hirschberger points out, "the process that begins with a collective trauma, transforms into a collective memory . . . culminat[ing] in a system of meaning that allows groups to redefine who they are and where they are going."[62] Remembering the pandemic—and contemporary attempts to cope with COVID-19—then, is essentially an act of literal and figurative preservation, and academic libraries, like other cultural heritage institutions, have a duty to be stewards of "collected memory."[63]

The value of this micro-collection cannot be accurately calculated while the desire to forget is still so powerful, but the creation and curation of a small-scale topic-specific collection offers college and university libraries an opportunity to deliver patron-responsive service to their campuses. Academic libraries can and should take steps to support the mental health of their communities in a post-pandemic world by not only assembling titles written about COVID-19 and mental health between the virus's first appearance and the official end of the public health emergency in May 2023, but also by adopting trauma-informed approaches and building on that core collection as students, faculty, and clinicians process the after-effects and find new ways of coping *with* COVID so that we learn from history, rather than repeat it.

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56. Katherine Hall and Shenika McAlister, "Library Services and Resources in Support of Mental Health: A Survey of Initiatives in Public and Academic Libraries," *Journal of Library Administration* 61, no. 8 (2021): 936–46, https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2021.1984137.

57. Many colleges and universities across the United States undertook pandemic-related oral history projects, including Columbia University's NYC Covid-19 Oral History, Narrative, and Memory Project, Colorado State University's Ram Stories Covid-19 Oral History Project, Virginia Tech and Voces Oral History Center at the University of Texas at Austin's Voces of a Pandemic Oral History Project, and Northern Illinois University's Documenting the NIU Experience to the COVID-19 Pandemic to name just a few.

58. John M. Barry, *The Great Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague in History* (Penguin Books, 2005), 346. See also Justin Hunt and Daniel Eisenberg, "Mental Health Problems and Help-Seeking Behavior Among College Students," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 46, no. 1 (2010): 3–10, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2009.08.008; Rebecca Beiter et al., "The Prevalence and Correlates of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress in a Sample of College Students," *Journal of Affective Disorders* 173 (2015): 90–96, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2014.10.054; Carrie S. Hurst, Lisa E. Baranik, and Francis Daniel, "College Student Stressors: A Review of the Qualitative Research: Qualitative Stress Review," *Stress and Health* 29, no. 4 (2012): 275–85, https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2465.

59. Huremović, *Psychiatry of Pandemics*, v.

60. Marco Costanzi et al., "Forgetting Unwanted Memories: Active Forgetting and Implications for the Development of Psychological Disorders," *Journal of Personalized Medicine* 11, no. 4 (2021), 241,

https://doi.org/10.3390/jpm11040241; Scott A. Small, *Forgetting: The Benefits of Not Remembering* (Crown, 2021).

61. The Lancet, "Moving Past the COVID-19 Emergency in the USA," *The Lancet* 401, no. 10386 (2023): 1399, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(23)00848-6.
62. Gilad Hirschberger, "Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning," *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (2018): 1–14, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.0144.
63. Marc Kosciejew, "Remembering COVID-19; or, a Duty to Document the Coronavirus Pandemic," *IFLA Journal* 48, no. 1 (2022): 20–32, https://doi.org/10.1177/03400352211023786.