



Alissa Fagin

Alissa is a recent graduate from Brandeis University, where she studied anthropology. Her passion for documentary filmmaking has grown over the years, and has culminated in her senior thesis film, *Mental*. Alissa has extensive production experience, in both events and film. She is currently interning at Jigsaw Productions, run by the renowned documentarian Alex Gibney, where she is developing docuseries. When she's not watching movies, Alissa can be found refining her Spotify playlists, hiking the open plains of NYC, and playing with her two pups.

### **Director Statement**

This film has been my passion, my sweat, and my energy for a full year now, and I could not be more proud of the final product. I've always had complicated feelings about mental illness diagnoses. Labels like anxiety disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, and depression have been a constant source of comfort to myself and those around me. They make us feel seen. They make us feel curable. They make us feel like we aren't crazy. But over the past four years, I've learned just how rudimentary our understanding of mental illness really is. Our illness categories did not emerge from careful scientific research, but from similar symptomatology that "made sense" to group together. The truth is, we have a long way to go before we understand the inner workings of human suffering, and to do that we need to deconstruct our ideas of mental illness. This left me with a dilemma: how are we to validate the experiences of those suffering from mental illness, while critiquing the system it was built upon? *Mental* is my bold attempt to reconcile these two, seemingly conflicting viewpoints. I hope that through the interplay of informative interviews and emotional verité footage, viewers of this film walk away believing the crushing reality of mental illness, while understanding the need for serious reform in how we understand and study mental illness categories.