

A Graphic Medicine Reading Experience for Undergraduate Nursing Students: A Brief Report

Michelle Nielsen Ott^a

^aAssistant Professor, Sciences/Health Sciences Librarian, Cullom-Davis Library, Bradley University, Peoria, Illinois, <https://www.orcid.org/0000-0002-2730-2928>, mnielsenott@bradley.edu

Health humanities, a growing field combining humanities and health sciences, aids healthcare students and providers in developing self-reflection, empathy, personal well-being, communication skills, and observational skills. Developing these skills is important for students as they form their professional identity. One way to engage in health humanities and connect with faculty and students is through graphic medicine, which are illustrated narratives such as comics that involve health topics. As the science and health science librarian at a comprehensive university, I have been actively adding graphic medicine titles to the library's collection which prompted me to investigate what effect reading a graphic medicine book has on undergraduate nursing students' empathy and self-reflection skills.

LGBTQIA-focused efforts on campus and recent political debates about transgender healthcare informed my selection of the graphic medicine book *First Year Out: A Transition Story* by Sabrina Symington for this study. As there is currently no LGBTQIA-focused nursing course available at Bradley University, liaison contacts within the nursing department helped me identify the community health practicum course as a suitable setting with supportive instructors for this study.

Students were assigned to read *First Year Out* and answer a set of reflection questions I developed as the investigator. The library purchased an unlimited user copy of the e-book so students had immediate, no-cost, access to the title.

The course instructors graded the student reflection assignments as complete or incomplete, and not on the content of the responses, to reduce bias. Students voluntarily consented for their responses to be included in this study. Faculty members removed identifying information before sharing the reflection documents.

The student reflections were overwhelmingly positive in response to reading the book. I was pleasantly surprised since this was an extra assignment compared to previous iterations of this class. Nursing students carry a very demanding course load and I was concerned that they might not take this assignment as seriously as their other assignments, but this was not the case. I was honored to read their carefully crafted reflections.

Initial findings showed that students related to the book's main character in a variety of ways including expressing similar experiences with anxiety and body dysmorphia.

They also recognized shared traits with the main character such as determination and persistence. Students expressed that the comic format was enjoyable and helped with their comprehension of the material. Additionally, students found reading this book to be beneficial for their future as healthcare professionals, especially regarding patient interactions. Students expressed many empathetic thoughts and feelings as they practiced self-reflection in this assignment.

Regarding future work, the community health practicum course will continue to include this reading experience and may add more graphic medicine titles to the course. I plan to partner with additional faculty members in the undergraduate nursing program and other health science programs to expand the use of graphic medicine titles in the curriculum to enhance student learning. The lead classroom faculty member and I will report more about this study in a forthcoming research article.