



USING A GRAPHIC NOVEL AS AN INTERVENTION FOR THOSE STRUGGLING WITH ANOREXIA, BULIMIA, AND BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDERS: A WORKSHOP OUTLINE

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INTRODUCTION

Poor body image is a worldwide public health crisis that disproportionately affects females.¹ Physical bodies are social bodies; beauty is linked to perceptions of health, wealth, power, and overall success, which affect women's overall views of their capabilities, strengths, and worth. *The Body Issue: What Global and Historical Perspectives of the Ideal Female Body Can Teach Us About Our Own Present-Day Bodies* is a graphic novel that uses historical and contemporary sources, as well as personal experience, to explore the cultural and social factors influencing female body image and how these affect women's mental and physical health.²

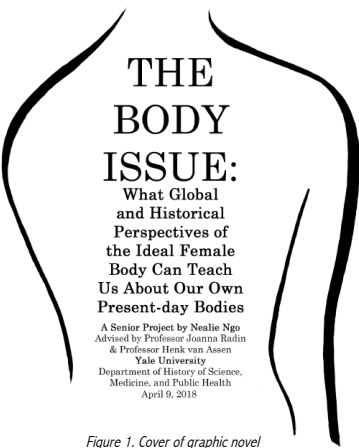


Figure 1. Cover of graphic novel

The Body Issue is an example of Graphic Medicine, a field which merges comics, graphic novels, and art with medicine and public health. The graphic novel aims to be an educational and entertaining tool for not only teaching history and medicine, but also a tool to help reframe the way we talk about our bodies that prioritizes personal goals and capabilities and de-emphasizes the adherence to societal norms for the sake of beauty. In this way, the graphic novel hopes to serve as a resource for those struggling with body image, anorexia, bulimia, and body dysmorphic disorders.



Figure 2. Page 1 of graphic novel

This is me.

GOALS

Learning objectives:

1. Recognize the historical, social, and cultural factors influencing female body image.
2. Acknowledge the potential of using graphic medicine and art as vehicles to deliver complex and diverse information and as forms of therapy.
3. Draw on your own experience to create a four-box comic addressing your relationship with your body.

Skills learned:

1. Observe that no perfect female body exists, has existed, or will exist, and that history can be an effective teaching tool to empower women.
2. Recognize that history has not progressed the body towards perfection; today's "ideal body" is not an evolution of the "best bodies" in history.
3. Define your own personal body goals with the understanding that what is right for you may be different than what both history and society dictates as ideal.

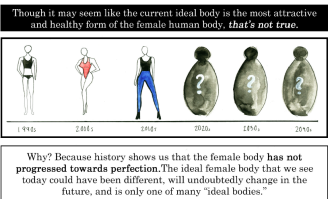


Figure 3. Excerpt of page 5 of graphic novel

OUTLINE

Participants anonymously take the *Body Image States Scale* (6-question poll) at the beginning of the workshop

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Introduce graphic novel

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Read excerpt about personal body image + reflection questions

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Read excerpt about historical body image + reflection questions

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Read excerpt about contemporary body image + reflection questions

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Reflection exercise: draw a short four-box comic responding to a series of questions related to body image

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Participants share their comics and discuss the exercise

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Participants anonymously retake the *Body Image States Scale* + workshop wrap-up

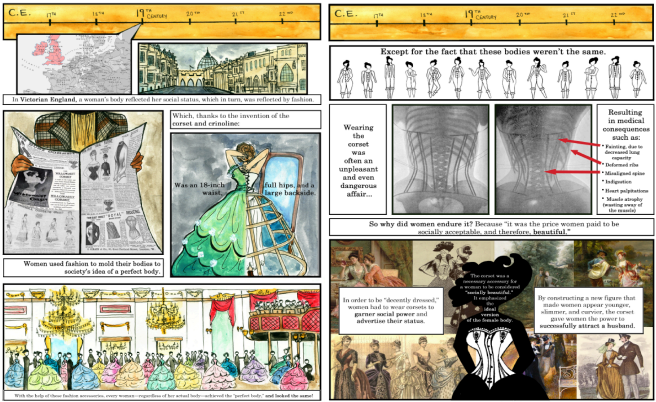


Figure 4. Pages 39-40 of graphic novel: Victorian Era analysis of the ideal female body (historical body image)

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This workshop is designed so it can be modified to fit any format, such as a virtual vs. in-person vs. hybrid platform for a 20, 45, or 90 minute workshop. This allows for flexibility in tailoring the workshop to meet requirements. For example, in a 20 minute workshop, emphasis can be placed on the reflection exercise, with sharing the personal body image excerpt during the wrap-up discussion and reflection period.

In the three years since its inception, this project has gained interest in collaboration with both public and private settings, and currently this workshop is under consideration for an upcoming conference. The project is now also working towards securing IRB approval towards future data collection to analyze the effectiveness of using this graphic novel in those struggling with body image issues.

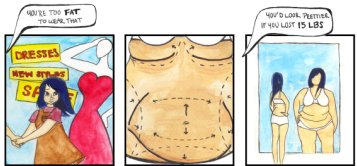


Figure 5. Excerpt of page 7 of graphic novel

REFERENCES

1. Buchianeri, M. M., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2014). Body dissatisfaction: An overlooked public health concern. *Journal of Public Mental Health*, 13(2), 64–69. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPMH-11-2013-0071>.
2. Ngo NT. What Historical Ideals of Women's Shapes Teach Us About Women's Self-Perception and Body Decisions Today. *AMA J Ethics*. 2019 Oct 1;21(10):E879-901. doi: 10.1001/amajethics.2019.879.