



Got Talent? Assessing The Efficacy of the First Mental Health-Based Realabilities Comic

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Abstract

Seventy-six students (44 males and 28 females) from a High School in Long Island City, New York showed more bullying knowledge, more positive stop bullying attitudes and more positive behavioral intentions and cognitive attitudes towards a hypothetical peer with Generalized Anxiety Disorder following the reading of the first Realabilities Comic on mental health. This study was novel in not only testing out the first Realabilities mental health comic, but in employing a high school population.

Introduction

Sifton’s Realabilities Comic Book Series Curriculum, which teaches about difference and promotes a stop bullying platform, seeks to enhance typical children’s attitudes, intentions and interactions with their peers with disabilities and mental health disorders. The present authors have used the theory of mental health literacy to expand the goals and content of the *Realabilities Comic Book Series Curriculum* through the addition of the *Got Talent* (Anxiety and Depression) Comic. Mental health literacy is defined as having knowledge and an understanding of mental illnesses, which assists in preventing or managing disorders (Jorm, Korten, Jacomb, Christensen, Rodgers, & Pollitt, 1997). Jorm (2012) notes that the principal aspect of mental health literacy is the connection of knowledge to action in order to benefit oneself or others. This relates closely to adolescents since research has found that adolescents who recognize mental illness tend to be more successful with seeking help and finding treatment (Wright, Jorm, Harris, & McGorry, 2007).

Participants

Seventy-six students (44 males [61.1%] and 28 females [38.9%]) from an Information Technology High School in Long Island City, NY took pre and post-tests prior to and following the reading of the first comic book on mental health disorders in the *Realabilities Comic Book Series Curriculum*. In terms of grade, 71 (93.4%) of the students were enrolled in eleventh grade and five (6.6%) were enrolled in twelfth grade. The majority of students identified as Latino (50; 66.7%), nine (12.0%) identified as African American, five (6.7%) as Asian American, four (5.3%) as White and six (8.0%) as Other.

Procedure

The high school teachers administered brief Mental Health Knowledge and Bullying Measures, Modified Pre and Post-Test Assessments of the Shared Activities Questionnaire (SAQ; Morgan et al., 1996), a behavioral intention measure and The Adjective Checklist (ACL; Siperstein & Bak, 1980), a Cognitive Attitudinal Measure. Students were tested one day before and one day following the students reading through “Got Talent,” the first mental health-focused comic of The Realabilities Comic Book Series. “Got Talent” introduces Celia with Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Kari with Depression. The students also noted whether they would view an episode of Realabilities or would purchase a Realabilities comic.

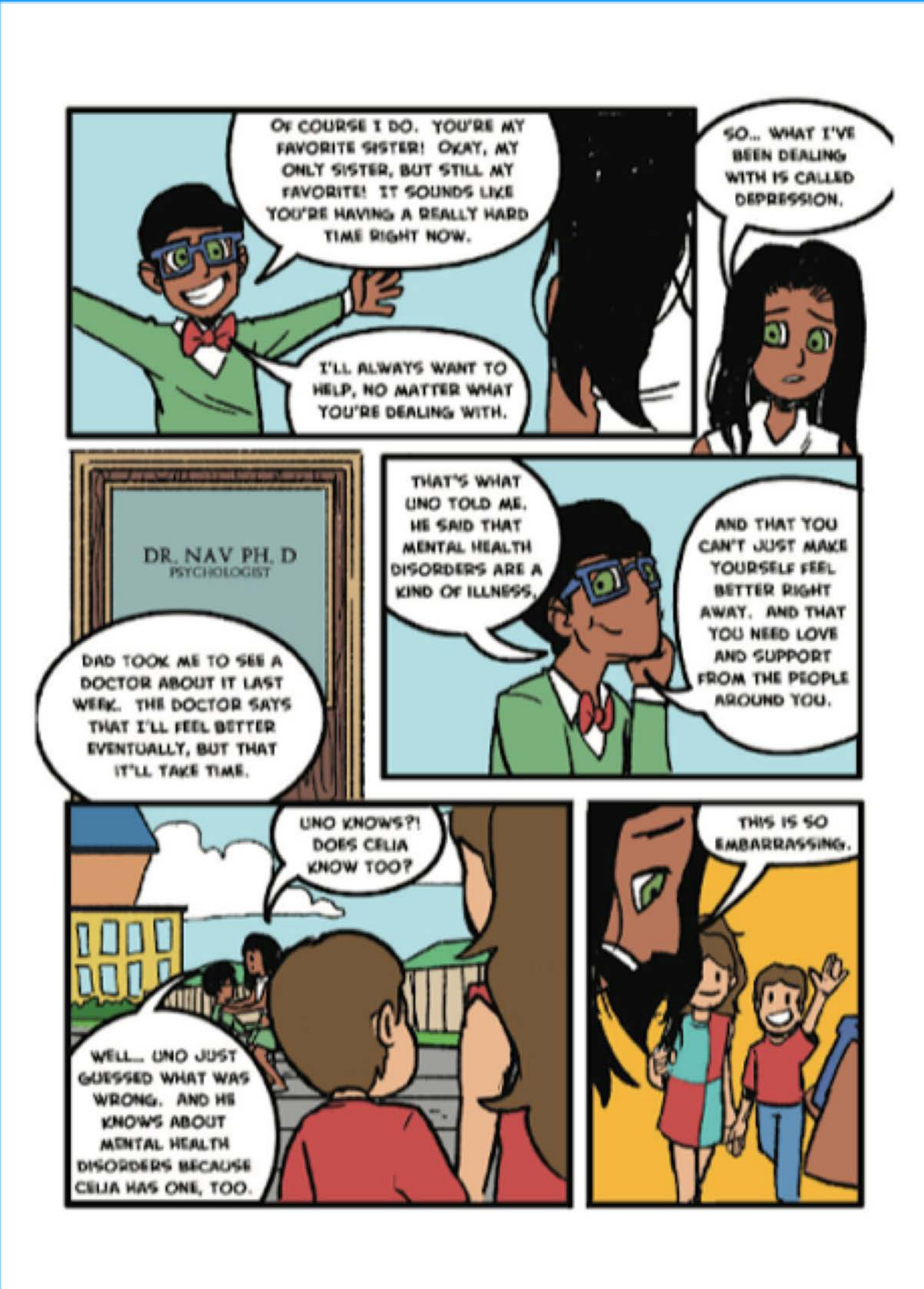
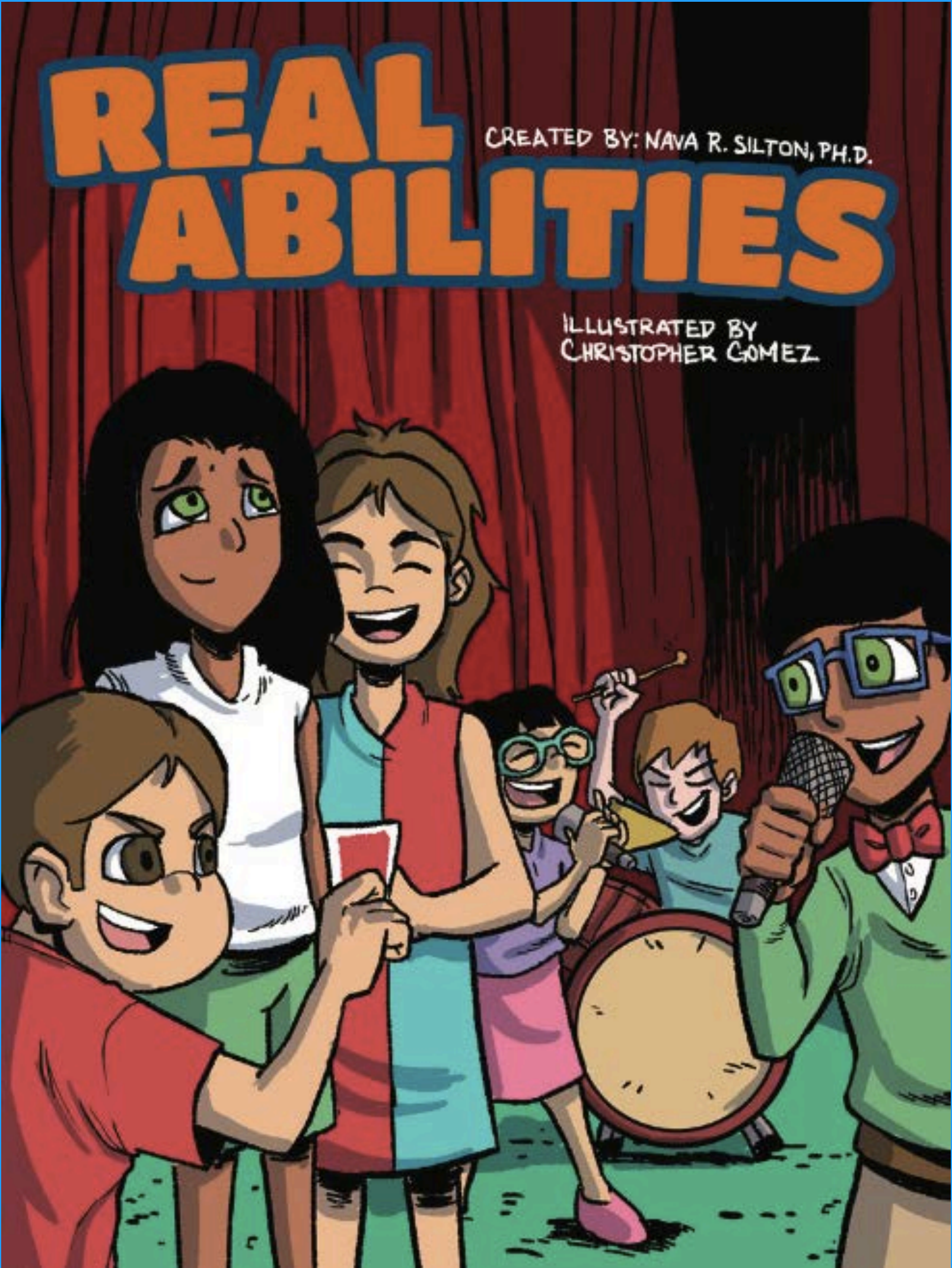


Table 1. SAQ and ACL Paired Sample T-test Results of The Got Talent Comic Book Intervention.

	SAQ Total		SAQ Academic Subtest		SAQ Social Subtest		SAQ Recreational Subtest		ACL	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Anxiety (mean ± SD)	18.79 ± 3.98	19.87 ± 4.75*	7.03 ± 1.62	7.57 ± 1.84**	7.34 ± 1.75	7.64 ± 1.78	4.25 ± 1.29	4.59 ± 1.51*	6.04 ± 2.66	6.96 ± 2.89**
Depression (mean ± SD)	18.86 ± 4.77	19.55 ± 5.19	7.26 ± 1.76	7.49 ± 1.94	7.23 ± 1.95	7.52 ± 1.96	4.27 ± 1.49	4.53 ± 1.53	4.69 ± 2.31	4.79 ± 2.36

Asterisks indicate significance of pre- versus post-test results: * $p < .05$, ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$



Results

In terms of descriptive statistics, more than half of the participants (42; 56.8%) stated that they would purchase a Realabilities Comic and would watch an episode of the comic series (39; 50.6%) following the intervention.

Regarding principal study results, Paired Sample T-tests revealed that participants showed significantly more bullying knowledge, $t(76) = -2.296$, $p < .05$ and more stop bullying attitudes, $t(76) = -2.173$, $p < .05$ following the comic book intervention. The participants also showed more positive behavioral intentions (as measured via the Shared Activities Questionnaire [SAQ]) toward a hypothetical peer with Generalized Anxiety Disorder on the SAQ Total, $t(76) = -2.514$, $p < .05$, on the SAQ Academic, $t(76) = -3.103$, $p < .01$, and on the SAQ Recreational, $t(76) = -2.164$, $p < .05$ following the comic. Moreover, students showed more positive cognitive attitudes, as measured via The Adjective Checklist (ACL), towards hypothetical peers with Generalized Anxiety Disorder, $t(76) = -2.992$, $p < .01$ following the comic book intervention.

Following the comic book intervention, participants shared that “anxiety and depression can be treated in different ways” and “that your friends are what can make a difference in your mood.” Participants indicated that they would help a hypothetical peer with anxiety by giving him/her “support and guidance,” and that they would help him/her “look for professional help.” Additionally, following the intervention, participants reported that they would help a hypothetical peer presenting with depression by giving him/her “support, patience, and empathy,” encouraging him/her “to see a therapist,” and would try to “get them to do fun activities with a group of friends.” A majority of participants expressed they believed it was important to stop bullying because it can “affect a person’s mental, physical, social, and spiritual health” and “everyone deserves to be treated equally and fairly.”

Discussion

The researchers discovered that the students who participated in the comic book intervention, involving the “Got Talent” Comic, which discusses Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Depression and is the first comic to focus on Mental Health Disorders in the Realabilities Series, appeared to show more bullying knowledge and more positive stop bullying attitudes following the intervention. Additionally, the participants displayed more positive intentions and cognitive attitudes towards a hypothetical peer with GAD following the comic book intervention. This study was novel because it showed the efficacy of a comic book in enhancing attitudes toward GAD and in successfully employing a high school population for this subject matter. Due to the success of the first comic book on mental health in enhancing intentions and attitudes towards GAD, the researchers plan to test the efficacy of the brand-new, second comic book on mental health, “Carnival,” which teaches about more specific anxiety disorders, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Social Phobia, and Agoraphobia. An additional future goal is to design virtual reality equipment to accompany the curricula, in order to help students empathize and take a deeper interest in their peers with disabilities, by simulating what it might actually feel like to have a disability.