

Q&A Summary: Manga and Anime in Professional Counseling

(Study Meeting with Dr. Francheska M. González, September 28, 2025)

The following is a summary of the Q&A session held during the study meeting on Sunday, September 28, 2025, featuring Dr. Francheska M. González. Participants had read her dissertation, *The professional counselor's opinion on the relevance of manga and anime in professional counseling*. They posed questions based on its content, and Dr. González responded to each in turn.

Compiled by Mariko Terada

Question 1 (Questioner: Ms. Etsuko Nishimaki):

From your discussion, it seems that in Puerto Rico, manga and anime are widely recognized as legitimate reading materials. Would it be accurate to interpret your findings in that way?

In Japan, even without using the term “bibliotherapy,” reading has long been a source of comfort and encouragement. For example, school libraries often include subtle recommendations such as “Books to read when you're feeling down” in their suggested reading lists.

On the other hand, I've rarely heard of counselors using manga or anime as part of their therapeutic practice. This may be because manga and comics were not traditionally acknowledged as valid reading materials in such contexts. Only recently have they begun to be described as a distinct category within the broader field of reading resources.

Answer 1 (from Dr. González):

For me, it's a legitimate form of reading, which is why I'm trying to help my colleagues understand that manga can be a valid resource in counseling. That said, it's not widely used here yet. Some field counselors or mental health professionals might use it, but it's still uncommon. It's only just beginning to gain traction.

Comment (from Ms. Nishimaki):

I see. One thing I've come to understand is that you're engaged in a very forward-

thinking initiative. I think using manga in that way is wonderful, and learning that it's not yet widely accepted made me feel it might be similar to the situation in Japan. I'm looking forward to seeing how things develop from here. Do you plan to continue working to raise awareness of manga and anime in this context?

Comment (from Dr. González):

I'll take it slowly and do my best. It's certainly important. In Japan, manga is culturally accepted, but in the United States or Puerto Rico, you have to be careful—it can be easily misinterpreted.

Comment (from Ms. Mariko Terada):

Do you mean that manga is perceived differently and generally considered something for children?

Comment (from Dr. González):

Not only that, but nudity can also be an issue. For example, showering together as a family might be misunderstood by some people. In *Naruto*, there's the *Henge no Jutsu*, where he transforms into a girl and appears basically naked. Some parents might see that as pornographic. But it's not meant that way—I understand that, though explaining it can be complicated.

Question 2 (Questioner: Ms. Etsuko Nishimaki):

In Japan, manga and anime are treated as distinct mediums. Do you also include anime within the scope of bibliotherapy?

Answer 2 (from Dr. González):

They are distinct: manga aligns with bibliotherapy, while anime aligns with cinema therapy. Still, both can be used in counseling if desired.

Comment (from Ms. Nishimaki):

I used to think that having moving images made it something entirely different, so hearing that they are indeed distinct helped clarify things for me.

Comment (from Dr. González):

In my dissertation, I noted that when people refer to anime, they often treat anime and

manga as the same thing. Most people are familiar with anime, but not necessarily with manga. I wanted to include manga in my dissertation as well—because I love it.

Question 3 (Questioner: Ms. Yoshie Shimamoto):

How is counselor training structured in your country? (For example, is it necessary to obtain a master's degree after completing an undergraduate program at university?)

Comment (from Ms. Terada):

In Japan, there are many types of counseling certifications, but most of them are issued by private organizations. The Certified Public Psychologist qualification was established in 2017 as Japan's first national license for psychology professionals. However, many professionals had already been working as counselors before its introduction, and not all of them hold this certification. Becoming a Certified Public Psychologist requires several years of study, whereas some private certifications can be obtained in just a few months.

Answer 3 (from Dr. González):

First of all, you may hear me mention the United States a lot—that's because we are essentially a colony of the U.S. To keep the explanation simple, they make most of the decisions that affect us here, and we have to comply. To become a licensed counselor, you typically need to earn a bachelor's degree followed by a master's degree, which amounts to about seven to ten years of education. You must take and pass an exam, obtain a license, and complete a required number of supervised practice hours as part of your master's program. For licensure, you also need to undergo mentorship under a licensed counselor. Some people go on to earn a doctoral degree—that's what I did—but it's not required if you already have your master's and license.

For clarification: after high school, you go to university, which takes about four to five years depending on your field of study. It could be something like science or social science, but you need to make sure to take courses such as psychology. After that, you can pursue a master's degree, which may take another four to five years depending on your pace and availability. It can be completed more quickly if students do not have major responsibilities outside of school and are able to finish their thesis within one semester. Since a bachelor's degree is required to begin the master's program, many students are already working. Most classes are held from 5:30 p.m. to 8:20 p.m. The

master's program in counseling consists of 39 credits; a full academic load is 9 credits per semester (three classes), and the thesis counts for 6 credits. Here is more information (in Spanish):https://ege.uprrp.edu/?page_id=365

And here in page 37 (This document is a comprehensive "Graduate Program Catalog" listing all graduate programs offered at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus (UPR-RP). The programs—master's degrees, doctoral degrees, and certificates—are organized by school or college, and the catalog functions as an official guidebook for prospective graduate students.): <https://graduados.uprrp.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/ENG-Copy-of-Ofrecimientos-Acade%CC%81micos-Graduados.pdf>

In the United States, counseling is rooted in education. Some teachers are able to form special connections with students, and over time, counseling emerged as a distinct field within the educational system. Psychology itself falls under the broader discipline of philosophy. I recently earned my doctoral degree—not a Ph.D., but an Ed.D., a Doctor of Education. Even so, my work is still focused on mental health. My license is issued by the Mental Health Board (the Junta Examinadora de Consejeros Profesionales under the Departamento de Salud del Gobierno de Puerto Rico, more information here: <https://www.salud.pr.gov/CMS/132>), which also oversees psychologists, physicians, and nurses. Currently, I work in a school setting. I love working with my students, rather than in a clinical environment. With a counseling license, you can work in various settings—hospitals, schools, universities. There's a wide range of possibilities, and once you're licensed, you can choose the path that suits you best.

I hold a doctoral degree, but in the field of counseling, it's not called a Ph.D. because that designation typically falls under psychology. Instead, it's called an Ed.D.—a Doctor of Education—since counseling is considered part of the education domain. After high school, I earned three degrees: a Bachelor's in Social Sciences, a Master's in Counseling, and a Doctorate in Counseling. To obtain my license, I needed to complete a master's degree in counseling. But I chose to continue further. Just to clarify, I'm not a medical doctor; my degree is a higher academic qualification beyond the master's level. Here, psychology and counseling are treated as two distinct fields, each with its own licensing system and educational pathway.

For your reference, you can find the licensure requirements here:

<https://www.counseling.org/resources/licensure-requirements>

Question 4 (Questioner: Ms. Yoshie Shimamoto):

In Japan, manga and anime come in a wide variety of genres. Even in the realm of practical books, there are manga-style publications designed for learning, business, and other purposes, and they are read by a broad range of readers. I wonder if manga in your country is still seen as belonging to more limited genres, compared to its broader use in Japan.

Answer 4 (from Dr. González):

It's really difficult to find manga in Puerto Rico and the United States—at least the kind I can actually purchase. While many titles are available online, the ones I truly want to buy, or recommend to my students and clients, are often unavailable. The selection is limited to what publishers believe will be popular or commercially successful. As a result, this wonderful medium for learning and emotional connection is largely inaccessible here. Someone has to translate it, and unfortunately, many meaningful works simply aren't available.

Comment (from Ms. Shimamoto)

In Japan, we have a wide-ranging materials, but in your country, the options are limited and I assume you are dealing with a very difficult situation.

Comment (from Dr. González):

We have other drawing materials, but many people don't realize that drawings aren't necessarily meant for children.

Question 5 (Questioner: Ms. Ayami Yoshitane):

Manga and anime offer vivid visual imagery, which makes them particularly accessible and engaging. While your dissertation did not directly address the role of voice and sound in anime, I would be very interested to hear your thoughts on how voice acting and auditory expression in anime might influence or contribute to therapeutic or counseling contexts.

Answer 5 (from Dr. González):

I can say we love voice actors like Kenjiro Tsuda-sama and Kazuhiko Inoue-sama. I watch anime in Japanese, even though my first language is Spanish. When I'm tired, I switch to English or Spanish because processing Japanese audio while reading subtitles feels like double the work. Still, I prefer the soul that Japanese voice actors bring to anime. I recognize their voices and feel a kind of longing or emotional resonance when I hear certain ones. I believe anime can be more profound in its original language—and for some people, even therapeutic.

Comment (from Ms. Yoshitane)

I understand now. I think there's a noticeable difference between a voice actor who truly embodies the role and one who simply reads the lines. When the performance comes from a place of deep understanding, it resonates more—it feels alive.

Comment (from Dr. González):

Also, anime is deeply tied to its original language. For example, in *Naruto*, the phrase “Dattebayo” is translated as “Believe it” in English to match the mouth movements. But in English, it feels awkward and even annoying at times. That's why I prefer watching *Naruto* in Japanese—“Dattebayo” makes more sense and carries more character than hearing “Believe it” repeated over and over.

Question 6 (Questioner: Ms. Ayami Yoshitane):

While bibliotherapy holds great potential in counseling contexts, your dissertation noted that there is no single “correct” approach, and that further exploration is needed—both in terms of concrete applications in clinical settings and in evaluating long-term outcomes. I would be grateful if you could share any insights or considerations regarding what to keep in mind when exploring practical applications of bibliotherapy in therapeutic practice.

Answer 6 (from Dr. González):

There's no single “right” approach at the moment, because there isn't enough research—and not enough translated manga and anime available. What I do is listen to my students or clients, observe what they're drawn to, and follow their interests.

Recently, I spoke with the mother of an eight-year-old boy who doesn't enjoy reading but needs to read more. Since he likes anime, I recommended *Cells at Work!*—

originally titled *Hataraku Saibō*. He's interested in science, and that manga is culturally safe and accessible. So I encouraged the mother to explore it as a way to help him engage with reading and spark his interest.

Question 7 (Questioner: Anonymous)

When I was recovering at home from depression, I watched the anime *Maison Ikkoku* by Rumiko Takahashi. Later, I began attending counseling sessions. In the early stages of counseling, I told my counselor that I had found comfort in watching *Maison Ikkoku* during my recovery period. The counselor smiled warmly and expressed empathy. Looking back now, I feel that bringing up *Maison Ikkoku* may have helped build rapport between us. What do you think?

Answer 7 (from Dr. González):

I think you're the better judge of that. If you think it worked, it worked. But to me, it definitely sounds like it did.

Question 8 (Questioner: Anonymous):

About twenty years ago, before I began receiving counseling or treatment, I used to read manga between the ages of six and sixteen as a way to escape from abuse and bullying. Can this be considered a form of self-care? And if so, could it be said that this self-care is connected to the counseling I'm receiving now?

Answer 8 (from Dr. González):

First, I'd like to start with the self-care question. Doing something just because you love it—because it brings you joy—is absolutely a form of self-care. And I truly love that for you. During such a difficult time in your life, you protected yourself. If I had seen that child, I honestly would've been proud of you.

As for the second question, you protected yourself in probably the only way you knew—or the only way that was available. Once you grew up, you found other ways. You're the one who can confirm that connection, but it seems like another form of self-care. And indeed, it sounds like a connection—you were taking care of yourself all that time.

Comment (from Anonymous):

Thank you so much. Your words gave me confidence and courage about the counseling I'm currently receiving. I feel truly encouraged.

Question 9 (Questioner: Mr. Yoshihiko Miyata):

Due to past experiences and other factors, I became socially withdrawn and lived a life where my days and nights were reversed, without seeing anyone. During that time, I became deeply absorbed in the anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, which contains many intense and emotionally challenging scenes. I watched the original broadcast and the many reruns that followed, and as I did, my mental health deteriorated further. It was a painful experience—loving the series, yet feeling deeply affected by it. Looking back, I wonder if things might have been different had I been in an environment where I could talk with someone about my impressions. Perhaps sharing those feelings could have had a healing effect. Also, when I consulted with a professional, I felt that the intake process went more smoothly when they had even a little knowledge about the things I liked.

Answer 9 (from Dr. González):

I have to confess that *Evangelion* is on my list, but I haven't watched it yet. I need to be in a certain state of mind to watch or read certain anime or manga, and I haven't reached that mindset yet. Still, I understand that—even though it can be painful for some—it's considered a masterpiece. Sharing those feelings might have a healing effect. But if it's something that could be detrimental to your mental health, staying away from it is a better option. And if you find it hard to do so, being able to talk to someone—ideally a professional—could help. Understanding why you're drawn to it, or why you can't stop watching, may help you better understand yourself and take meaningful action.

Question 10 (Questioner: Ms. Aya Koizumi):

In order for media such as manga and anime to be both widely recognized by the general public and actively utilized by professional counselors as therapeutic resources, do you have any concrete plans or strategies for how to advance these goals?

Answer 10 (from Dr. González):

Currently, I'm not necessarily working in a therapeutic setting. I'm in an educational environment—a place of study, not a clinic. So I'm not in a position to apply this directly, but I do want to support others working in different settings to make use of it. I'd like to begin with a book—a kind of guide to help my colleagues understand this medium. I want to explain its history, its current realities, and what readers or their clients might already know about it. That includes topics such as voice actors, fan service, the conception and creation of manga and anime, as well as behind-the-scenes aspects—at least as far as I understand them, from my own limited perspective. I also hope to give presentations and write a few articles on the subject, little by little. I don't want to place high expectations on myself. I just want to go slowly and leave a mark. It doesn't have to be big—but if possible, I'd like to become an expert in this field.

Question 11 (Questioner: Ms. Aya Koizumi):

It has been suggested that manga and anime can serve as a “natural connection that facilitates the therapeutic relationship” and may have positive effects as therapeutic resources. At the same time, I understand that the scientific evidence supporting their therapeutic efficacy is still limited. Given this context, how do you approach the criteria for selecting specific works when introducing manga or anime as therapeutic tools for clients?

As bibliotherapy continues to develop, I believe someone, somewhere will need to make judgments—such as which book might be suitable for a particular person, or which manga might be helpful for certain symptoms. However, since there's currently no established evidence base, I wonder how this challenge might eventually be addressed. I do think some kind of criteria will be necessary. What kind of framework or vision do you have in mind for that?

Answer 11 (from Dr. González):

Even though I'm working in the academic field, my education has been broad and interdisciplinary. So while I enjoy working with students, I also have the knowledge to engage with other aspects of counseling—I'm simply choosing not to at the moment. First, it's important to let the client take the lead, rather than prescribing what to read. If we had more research, we might be able to say “this works for that,” but for now, the

client or student is the best person to bring manga or anime into the counseling space. If a client brings up anime or manga, feel free to use it as a therapeutic tool. If they mention *Dragon Ball*, *Naruto*, *Jujutsu Kaisen*, or *Fruits Basket*, use that as a bridge—an opportunity to connect. You don't have to know the content yourself. You can ask about it and let them explain. In doing so, you're showing that you care.

Use the parts you do know, depending on the situation. For example, in *Fruits Basket*, there's a scene where Shigure-san explains to Honda Tohru how to approach a pile of laundry—one piece at a time, so it doesn't feel overwhelming. Life is the same: one step at a time, so you can move forward without being crushed by the weight of it all. That moment in the anime and manga—though I'm explaining it vaguely—is truly beautiful. If you have a client who feels overwhelmed, you can use that analogy to support them. Even if you haven't read or watched that particular series, if you know that part, you can still use it. Through it, you can suggest a story or chapter you're familiar with—and it's even better if the client is already interested in that manga or anime.