



The Concussion Collective

Naiya Tsang

The Concussion Collective website was created in the spring of 2018, as part of a project for the Critical Disability Studies course I was taking at the time. My aim for the website was that it would become a space for people who have experienced concussions to share their stories and perhaps make sense of the confusing and frustrating experience of having an acquired brain injury within a world that does not yet understand the full implications of this condition. Unfortunately, one of those consequences has been my own follow-through with the site – as of October 2018 as I write this update, there has only been one submission: my own. In the future I hope for that to change, but for now, my limited resources and capacity have made it what you will see in these snapshots; perhaps in the future they will be just the beginning of an expanding story.

To view the website, visit <https://theconcussioncollective.weebly.com> (perhaps www.theconcussioncollective.com if I ever buy the domain name).

“The Concussion Collective” website was inspired by my experience with concussions and post-concussion syndrome, and incorporates concepts centered around neurodiversity, comics, and mental health, including Johanna Hedva’s “[Sick Woman Theory](#)” (2016), Dana Walrath’s [Aliceheimers: Alzheimer’s Through the Looking Glass](#) (2016), and Allie Brosh’s “[Adventures in Depression](#)” (2013).

mask



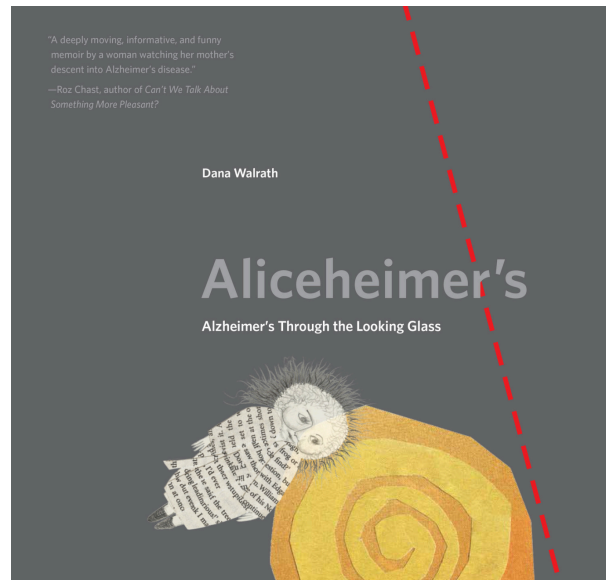
All photos by *Pamila Payne*; Styling, hair and makeup: *Myrithia Rodriguez*; Art Direction: *Johanna Hedva*

options

A screenshot of Johanna Hedva’s article “Sick Woman Theory,” shows Hedva wearing a red dress and dark lipstick, lying on a white mattress with a pile of pill bottles and medication next to her.

sick woman theory

johanna hedva lives with chronic illness and their sick woman theory is for those who were never meant to survive but did.



The cover of Dana Walrath’s *Aliceheimer’s: Alzheimer’s Through the Looking Glass* displays a paper cutout version of Alice, composed of newsprint paper, staring into a swirling yellow and orange sun. A dotted red line cuts across the page, and the entire scene is placed on a dark grey background.

Adventures in Depression

Some people have a legitimate reason to feel depressed, but not me. I just woke up one day feeling sad and helpless for absolutely no reason.



It’s disappointing to feel sad for no reason. Sadness can be almost pleasantly indulgent when you have a way to justify it - you can listen to sad music and imagine yourself as the protagonist in a dramatic movie. You can gaze out the window while you’re crying and think “This is so sad. I can’t even believe how sad this whole situation is. I bet even a reenactment of my sadness could bring an entire theater audience to tears.”

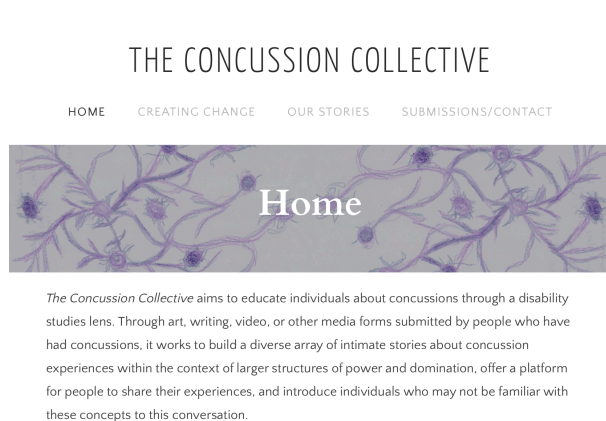
A screenshot of Allie Brosh’s “Adventures in Depression” shows a sad cartoon version of Brosh lying in bed staring outside at a widely smiling sun. The word “no...” rolls across the green hills outside, followed by four unhappy faces.



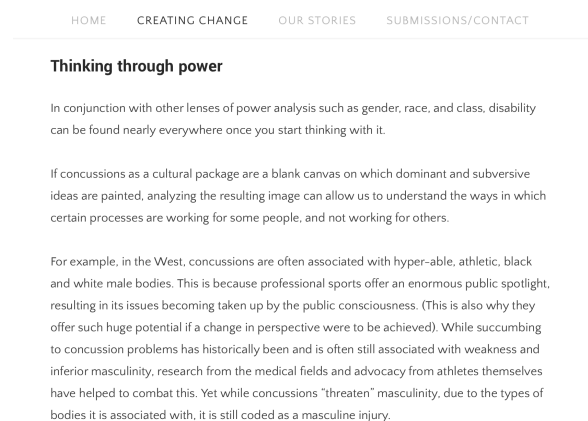
The aim of the project is to build a diverse array of intimate stories about concussion experiences within the context of larger structures of power and domination, offer a platform for people to share their experiences, and call-in individuals who may not be familiar with the structural roots of oppression into this conversation.

As Johanna Hedva writes, “Sick Woman Theory maintains that the body and mind are sensitive and reactive to regimes of oppression – particularly our current regime of neoliberal, white-supremacist, imperial-capitalist, cis-hetero-patriarchy” (2016). The conversations around concussions in North American society tend not to challenge the regimes of oppression that certain institutions, such as the professional sports industry and the medical industrial complex uphold. Both these institutions reproduce expectations of gender norms, violence, racism, and ableism; operate within neoliberal, capitalist frameworks; and do very little to challenge them.

By utilizing the current visibility of concussions in the public eye — due to its very alignment with these institutions — I felt I could construct a platform where an extremely individualized and non-politicized condition could make visible the larger power structures it rests within. I attempted to do this by writing explicitly about these connections on the “Home” and “Creating Change” pages of the website, where I analyzed how concussions can intersect with various power structures, and provided some quotes by disability studies theorists Eli Clare, A.J. Withers, and Don Kulick and Jens Rydström in order to introduce the audience to this mode of thinking.



A screenshot of The Concussion Collective “Home” page shows the website’s mission statement, as well as the purple abstract neuronal illustration that is the website’s header.



This screenshot shows text from the “Creating Change” page, which works through how one can think through power in relation to concussions and disability.

However, people who have been raised thinking and breathing the hegemonic ideals reinforced by oppressive regimes of power can have a difficult time understanding these issues if they are presented from a solely theoretical viewpoint. Furthermore, the language that is often used to describe these ideas can be inaccessible to some people as it can seem like academic jargon, which can require extensive education to understand and can therefore be classed. Solely providing an analysis from within the institution of academia was not enough; finding an additional way to trouble some of the hidden assumptions and norms that are embedded within these regimes of power was a vital part of this project.

The blog portion of this website, “Our Stories,” and the first post I submitted aim to do that. While this one post does not cover many of the issues that I hope the website as a whole will eventually encompass — such as an in-depth detailing of experiences within the medical and health care systems, how individuals are treated based on gender and race, acknowledgement of the differences of care afforded to people of different class backgrounds, nationalities, and perhaps citizenship statuses, as well as many other issues — it acts as a starting point. Additionally, the first post intermittently uses comics to open up this conversation in a more accessible manner by utilizing a medium that is not solely based on written-language.



Mind matters by Naiya Tsang

4/15/2018 0 Comments

When I turned 22, I looked back on the last 12 months of my life and felt like this:



[My year of nothing. Stick person holding a balloon that says "22!"]

Read our stories

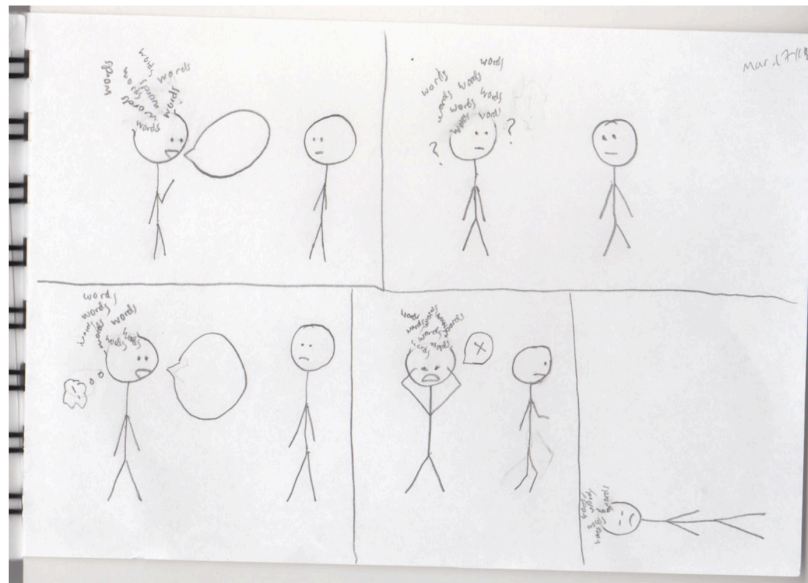
Personal accounts of concussion experiences expressed through art, writing, photos, videos, audio or other media types by people who have had concussions.

 [RSS Feed](#)

Archives

April 2018

This screenshot shows the “Our Stories” page, as well as the beginning of the first entry “Mind Matters by Naiya Tsang.” The first illustration shows a stick figure wearing a party hat and holding a balloon labeled “22,” with the words “My year of nothing” floating overhead.



Words

This comic is included in the “Mind Matters” post. Panel 1 shows a stick figure attempting to talk to another stick figure, though only an empty speech bubble exits their mouth. From the backside of their head, multiple repeats of the word “words” begin floating out. Panel 2: the first stick figure is puzzled, and continues to attempt speech. Panel 3: The first stick figure becomes frustrated, raising their hands to their head, while the second walks away. Panel 4: The first stick figure lies on the floor, words still spilling out of their head.

Certain artists and storytellers have used comics to convey difficult or complex emotions, including Allie Brosh, who wrote *Adventures in Depression* on her website “Hyperbole and a Half,” and Dana Walrath, who wrote *Aliceheimers*, a book which utilized comics to portray her experience with her mother who had Alzheimer’s disease. I started drawing stick-figure comics because I was having trouble portraying my experience with words, often too tired to draw anything requiring effort, but still wanting to convey my emotions in some way; frustration, impatience, joy, and the resignation that comes with waiting and waiting for a recovery that doesn’t come. The comics collapsed and expanded time, took whatever form I gave them, and allowed me to step off both linear tracks of thought and circular ruminations into a different space. I included a few of them in the first blog post, and they became an attempt at transforming the theory that undergirds the premise of the website into something less impersonal, and will hopefully be one part of a larger construction of our stories of concussions.



Ultimately, this project hopes to align with a larger movement of disability justice. By using art and creative forms of expression mixed with theory and activism it aims to tell a larger story about the many ways in which our bodies and minds act and exist in spite of the structures which aim to stamp out difference. It aims to add more voices to the many who are already working to disrupt the structures that insist that some bodies should be visible and some invisible, valuable and invaluable, along different lines of race, gender, nationality, class, and many more forms of oppression. Finally, it aims to work collectively towards insisting that, as Johanna Hedva writes, we “take seriously each other’s vulnerability and fragility and precarity, and [...] support it, honor it, empower it” (2016).

References

- Brosh, A. (2013). Adventures in Depression and Depression Part 2. *Hyperbole and a Half*.
Hedva, J. (2016). Sick Woman Theory. *Mask Magazine*.
Walrath, D. (2016). *Aliceheimers: Alzheimer’s Through the Looking Glass*. State College, Pennsylvania: Penn State Press.