



the **How Well?**
anthology

Wellness
for the
Rest of Us

With stories by

Maria Sweeney

A. Andrews

Christa Couture

Georgia Webber

Cora Hickoff

Andrea Shockling

Edited by

Heather Kelley

Gabriele Maier

Candace Skibba





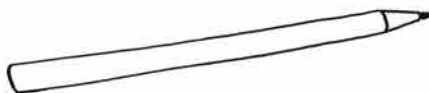
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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This book was produced in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which was previously the living and trading area of the historic Adena, Hopewell, and Monongahela cultures, and subsequently that of the Osage Nation. The Ohio Valley region is connected to this day to the Lenape, Seneca, and Shawnee Peoples. We acknowledge the genocide and displacement that Indigenous Peoples have suffered under Western colonial forces. Ongoing discrimination and injustice continue to harm the physical and mental well-being of Indigenous Peoples, here and elsewhere. To learn more about ongoing advocacy for Indigenous Peoples in the Pittsburgh area, visit the Council of the Three Rivers American Indian Center (<http://www.cotraic.org>). Further resources for Indigenous wellness can be found in the Resource List at the back of this anthology.

The HOW WELL? Anthology

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How Well? Editors' Introduction 4

WELLNESS WITH DISABILITY, EDITED BY HEATHER KELLEY

Introduction by Honey Rosenbloom 6

Disability and Self-Care, by Maria Sweeney 8

Straw Ban, by Maria Sweeney 14

Touch, by A. Andrews 19

Petal to the Mettle, by Christa Couture
and Georgia Webber 29

FOOD AND WELLNESS, EDITED BY GABRIELE MAIER

Introduction by Gabriele Maier 39

Student Wellness at Carnegie Mellon,
by Cora Hickoff 41

WELLNESS AND THE BODY, EDITED BY CANDACE SKIBBA

Introduction by Candace Skibba 49

BOOMERANG, by Andrea Shockling 51

Editor Biographies 73

Acknowledgements 73

Contributor Biographies 74





How Well?: Editors' Introduction

By Heather Kelley, Gabriele Maier and Candace Skibba

The anthology you hold in your hands is the outcome of four years of events, analysis, speakers, concerts, online galleries, workshops, articles, and other creative manifestations casting a critical (though not joyless) eye on “wellness.” It began as a three-year project reimagining human well-being outside of capitalism, consumption, and privilege, initiated in 2017 through a Narrative Initiative grant from the Center for Arts in Society at Carnegie Mellon University. We (the editors, three cisgender, female, white university professors) began a series of inquiries that would guide us in our understanding of wellness and privilege, facilitate an understanding of the relationships between stories and wellness, and prompt us to prioritize ethical collection of stories. Ultimately, it led us to share the collection of stories in this volume.

Wellness is a concept that goes beyond the mere absence of disease. It encompasses many components of human existence that are essential for our continued and sustainable thriving as a species on planet Earth. But to ask ourselves how and why these basic healthful attributes have become available to fewer and fewer individuals, it's worth examining how the concept has been popularized in public discourse. A look at a variety of writings on wellness reveals that there is no consensus on the exact definition. A literature review carried out by How Well? co-director Gabriele Maier found multiple intersecting and sometimes contradictory definitions, often with an enumeration of factors (six, eight, ten, twelve...).

Some definitions consider wellness as a state of being, while others conceptualize it as a process, subject to modification and change throughout an individual life and throughout human history. Perhaps the most salient distinction to be made is “wellness” as a personal pursuit versus a collective responsibility. Unsurprisingly, many writers on wellness emphasize and promote an individual's supposed opportunity to achieve their own goals of health and happiness. This notion that we should constantly aspire to the highest level of wellness implies that we each have the power to change our own fate on a daily basis. It also creates endless opportunities for the wellness industry to sell us their latest gadgets, programs, and devices to reach this elusive stage of optimal well-being which always seems to remain just one (pricey) step away.

Assuming wellness is universally important and achievable, how does the wellness-seeker move forward when so many of the popular solutions (such as Gwyneth Paltrow's Goop and its ilk) seem to be in service of someone's bottom line? In short, how can we conceive of wellness outside of capitalism? One possible answer gradually emerged not from the published definitions, but from our three-plus years of community engagement. Of the many practical projects we encountered, one aspect kept presenting itself in contradiction to the pressures of the market: community. These projects are founded on the notion of mutual aid, of people supporting each other, rather than each individually engaging with a cornucopia

of commercial products. As the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted the final year of our efforts, the importance of these collective visions of wellness became even more apparent. From social media groups for sufferers of long COVID-19 symptoms, to bail funds for protesters jailed in the wake of George Floyd's and Breonna Taylor's murders, to mutual aid organizations meeting local needs in real time, to the collective sharing of vaccine access information, the world saw repeatedly that wellness is a collective effort. A homemade bowl of vegetable stew hand-delivered by volunteers wearing N95 masks and face shields stands in stark contrast to a jade yoni egg sold at an exclusive spa retreat. This ground up community support for well-being was revealed as ever more important when our former bastions of societal support, such as national governments, seemed not only to ignore significant swathes of the population, but indeed to intend them further harm.

Over the now-four years of this project, we have connected to folks involved in wellness pursuits that prioritize community and eschew consumerism. At the local level, we found interlocutors in organizations such as Yoga Roots on Location, 412 Food Rescue, and Gwen's Girls. Exchanges with colleagues from other higher-ed institutions (Arizona State University, Cornell University, University of North Texas, and Kutztown University of Pennsylvania) and a comparative understanding of wellness in our specific regions of study (Spain and Germany) provided even more dimensions to our analysis. Our conversations have been practical, academic, philosophical, existential, exploratory, and sometimes even dull. While we have each taken different research paths, we converge in our commitment to finding ways to facilitate conversations around wellness that focus on basic needs such as movement, food security, and time. The three of us, while each having experienced wellness challenges, must recognize our own identities as middle-class, cisgender, white women. Furthermore, working for a highly regarded institution affords many privileges. This puts the responsibility upon us to highlight wellness efforts that are oftentimes invisible.

The stories that we put forth in this volume do not adhere to the standards typically accepted. For one, each story prioritizes the perspective of an individual. Arthur Frank wrote of this in his work *The Wounded Storyteller*, in which he explains that an illness narrative is "an interplay of mutual presences: the listener must be present as a potentially suffering body to receive the testimony that is the suffering body of the teller" (144). The mutual presence we sought was found in shared spaces, events, and performances. It was also central to the ways in which all of the contributors to this volume received one another's testimony. We could not have created this work together had it not been for sharing and listening to our own stories of wellness struggles: repetitive stress, concussions, anxiety, arthritis, grief, and acute injury.

The more we learned, the more it seemed that graphic storytelling (graphic novels, anthologies, or comic books, writ large) is the right form for an ethical process of de-centering ourselves. Graphic story is an excellent medium to convey first-person narratives, supporting non-exploitative ways of working and writing. It can be an extremely empathetic and perspectival medium. The end product is also approachable, affordable, and widely distributable. It can be downloaded from a website or found serendipitously at the laundromat. We can ship it worldwide, put it on the magazine rack in a medical clinic, or tag and shelve it at a local library. It does not require any of us to be there to explain it, and it doesn't require (although it can also benefit from) technology access.

We hope that by visually depicting wellness from a variety of personal narratives, the folks with whom we have had the privilege of connecting will find themselves honestly represented. In reading these stories, we hope you might find yourself reflected, and prompted to engage in mutual presence with us all. ∞

Disability as Diaspora

Edited by Heather Kelley

Guest Introduction by Honey Rosenbloom

When I imagine a sustainable, inclusive, and equitable future, two emotions awaken with ferocity: liberation and trepidation; two raging masses, pulling fiercely at one another until my body cannot discern the two. I imagine this is an experience that others living with a disability also feel, as we are all siblings of an identity enabled and exploited by the cultural force of separation-by-extinction I'll call Settler Capitalist White, Able-centering, Cis, heteronormative Imperialism (SCWACHI). Disability is unique in this way. It is a marginalized identity that looks only on the outside like a diaspora: numerous, distributed people, common experiences of cultural/societal systems oppressing them, each flavored heavily by other identities held, and having no agency in the assigning of these labels. What sets disability apart from a traditional diaspora is its lack of geographical origin like the Armenian, Korean, or Jewish diasporas. This centerlessness is the source of my speculation's scuffling sensations, the freedom and fear, for I am trying to envision a collective future for a part of me that has no collective past.

People living with disability comprise the largest group of people oppressed by the forces of SCWACHI, and while definitely distinct, diaspora provides a peculiar parallel by which to compare our experiences. A Lao professor with hydrocephalus in Manchester has likely experienced a vastly different life story than a Canadian farmer with fibromyalgia in Alberta, yet ask either about what it means to live with a disability and you'll hear similarities: the struggle to get needs

seen and met, the shame and rage of being viewed as "less capable", the struggling to learn and accept bodily limitations, and the cultivating of restorative practices that work inside of those limitations. Maria Sweeney's (she/her) *Disability & Self-Care* examines the common, pattern-breaking tactics of dedicating time to intentional slowness, healing, and ease, either in the present or future.

This is where we begin to notice some intriguing differences between disability and diaspora, namely, how the performance of ritual emphasizes the lack of collective past among those living with disability. Whereas communities in diaspora develop rituals around singing, dancing, feasting, and other practices of gathering – briefly allowing the participants to escape by connecting to a shared past, free of SCWACHI influence – self-care for those of us living with disability often sees us taking time to perform specific, individualized rituals for care. These rituals lack a communal aspect, and those able to find a community to engage in collective self-care know they've won a tremendous victory. Those of us that live with disability don't have a collective past to which we can escape with our siblings. In fact, for many of us dependent on specialized medication or regular medical interventions, there is no livable past outside of a SCWACHI world.

The ruthless pursuit of progress and capital has often been predicated on the growth and advancement of scientific or technological products, and modern advancements in chemistry, industry, technology,

and infrastructure have created opportunities for lives that were previously impossible. In an overwhelming number of societies -- historic and present -- such as the Romans, the Machigenga, and Kenyans, children born with a disability were killed or left to die, and even in societies where they weren't outright killed, those suffering from a disability would end up with some combination of reduced life expectancy, worse quality of life, and/or discrimination. In fact, the more the world's resources and people are exploited for the sake of technological and economic progress, the better the quality of life becomes for many people with disabilities -- especially those with economic means. Christa Couture's prosthetic leg, which is the subject of Georgia Webber's (she/her) piece, was a life-altering improvement, and also plays a part in the story of oppressing miners in Chile, Guinea, and the Congo for copper, aluminum, and coltan, respectively, from which the prosthetic is manufactured.

In *Straw Ban*, Sweeney illustrates how the development of plastic -- plastic straws in particular -- has allowed a new level of access to people with partial or total loss of motor function, and yet the proliferation and marketing of this product has contributed to the destruction of our oceans and poisoning of our bodies. When I inject my Humira, I think about all the oil used -- to create the plastic housing of the needle, the styrofoam container that keeps the medicine stable in transit, and the fuel for the planes and trucks used in delivery -- which has been a contribution to the destabilization of Venezuela, Iran, Afghanistan, and the northern tribes of indigenous people in Alaska and Canada. And so, as the needle pierces my skin, I can't help but smirk at the irony of being sustained by processes that crush and exploit people deemed less valuable, while also knowing that I, too, am amongst them as evidenced by the monumentally encumbering price tag of such medication, the alternative to which is constant agony and possibly death.

In this tension of being both sustained and exploited, the centerlessness of disability as an identity presents itself as possibility. Those of us who are inheritors of a traditional diaspora can trace our

lineage back to a single, collective trauma: the reason for the scattering. Yet disability is different. There is no single event in space and time that collectively holds our origin, and certainly not a point before which we were arbiters of our own culture and life. Yet, even without a collective past, we understand our present circumstances. Whether it be from the bombing of Al-Shifa Hospital in Palestine, the denial of resources and poison water in Flint, Michigan, or the millennia of genocide and ghettoization creating genetic mutations, a proliferation of disability can be traced to oppression. This world, with its resources being depleted, its environments being ravaged, and its climate being shifted, now holds more disabled people on it than ever before, and we begin to see something new. We see with clarity the damage SCWACHI has brought to our planet because it is also a damage to our bodies, but we also see the imperative of repurposing its technological tools because those tools have given us life. Knowing we must liberate the inventions whose development has been tied to greater violence and oppression creates a tension, and when we allow ourselves to release this tension, we are propelled into the future.

We have no safe life in the past, and our current liberation comes with a contract of perpetual exploitation, so what does our preferable, inclusive future hold for all parts of our multifarious selves? How do we reach liberation for our body, culture, and souls? To these questions, there is no single answer, but explorations: individual boundaries that shift and move as we interact with others, come close, press up against one another, and move apart, a phenomenological pattern we all follow. It is in these explorations -- our struggle with the tension between infinite possibility and invisible history -- that we will find our future; it is in these explorations that we will discover our boundaries; how to hold them and show them to others. It is in these explorations that we will, together, as A. Andrews (they/them) does in *Touch*, find our "yes, yes, yes!" ∞



By: Maria Sweeney

What is self-care & how does it intersect with the disabled community?



Self-care is participating deliberately in activities that take care of your physical, emotional and mental needs

The disabled community is often challenged by able-bodied people about using assistive devices, taking rest days or saying no to draining activities.



Self-care practices allow folks to recharge and break out of harmful overworking cycles.



Using Assistive Devices

Seeking out tools to make one's life more pain-free and accessible are great examples of self-care & self-preservation. Society often stigmatizes people for using canes, wheelchairs & other accessibility tools on a varying basis.




Assistive devices help provide access where there is none. Wheelchairs, canes, auditory/language tools are all forms of freedom, autonomy, and individual expression.

Accessibility tools are ways to try to level the playing field.



Self-care Through Sharing

Dealing with chronic illness or continual lack of access can be an isolating experience.




Hey, I'm having trouble moving around today so I don't think I'll make it out tonight.

I'm sorry -- I was really looking forward to it!

Self-care is reaching out to friends/loved ones for support, even when it feels hard.

Don't worry, it's cool! I could always come over instead and we could order in?



Oh yes, that works much better for me!

A lil' TLC!

Self-care is nothing without a little pampering!
Alleviating immediate discomforts are important too.



Be kind to yourself!

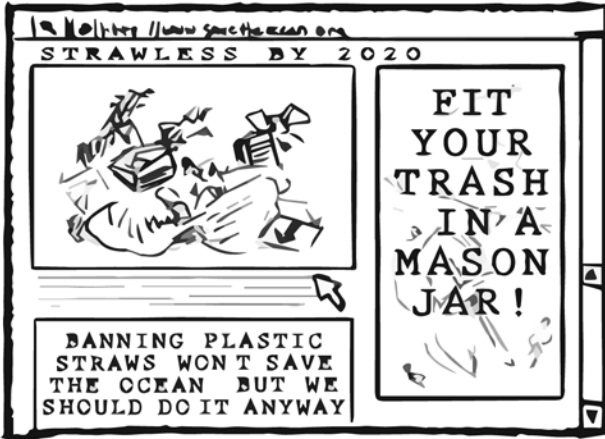
1 out of 4 people have a disability
in the United States.

Disabled people are the largest marginalized population in America, with an estimated 50 million citizens having a disability. This number does not include non-citizens or the many people that do not list themselves as disabled for fear of judgement, or loss of employment/healthcare.



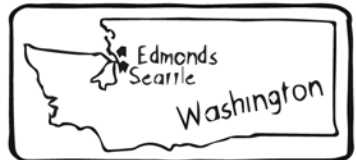


Soon after straws quickly became the symbol of a throwaway society in the US



Photos of mountainous trash & fish stuck in plastic circulated social media

Despite public condemnation from the disabled community, several cities have followed in suit with pending straw ban legislation



Disabled folks care just as much about the environment -- we live on this planet too!

But some disabled people can only drink through a plastic straw, such as people with various forms of

- Cerebral palsy
- Muscular Dystrophy
- Arthrogryposis
- Epilepsy

Starbucks later announced that they will have compostable straws available when asked, but they melt in hot drinks

Ironically Starbucks new strawless lids actually increases their plastic use

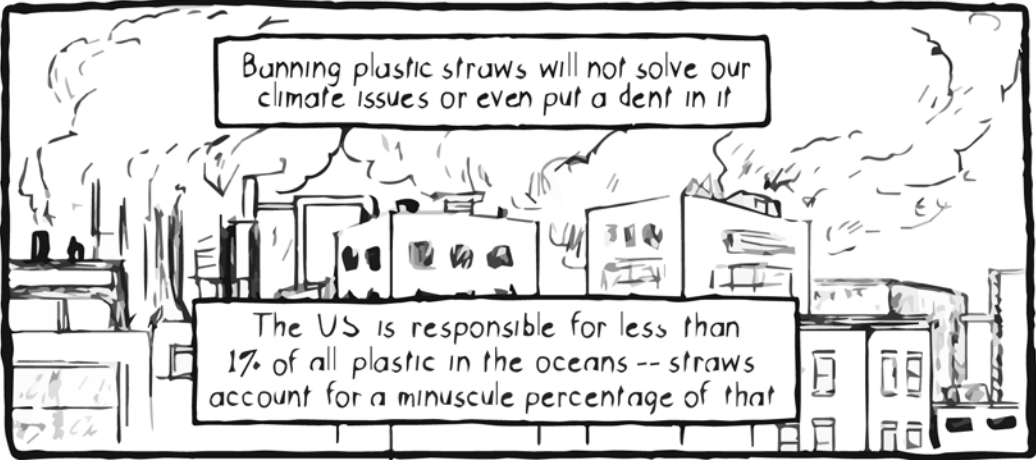


355 grams
(small lid)



323 grams
(small straw)





Ultimately multi billion dollar corporations and manufacturers are to blame
Where is the outcry against non-essential plastic production?

Cleaners/Toiletries



Toys/Entertainment



Non-medical fabrics



Many of these products are thrown out or non-recyclable

The straw ban is a stinging reminder to disabled people that their experience is secondary to the able-bodied voice

THE STRAW BAN
Disabled People Speak Out

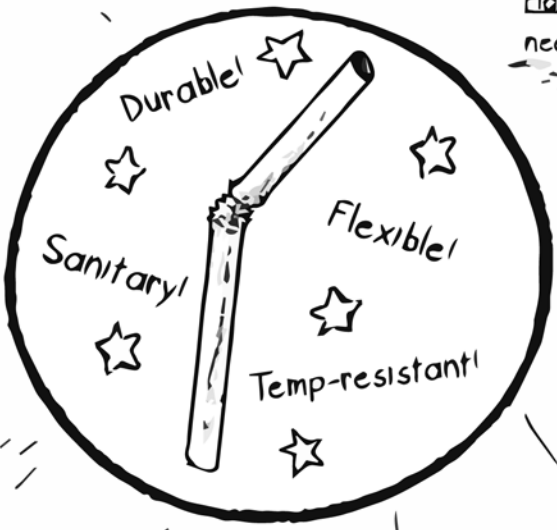
- you can use paper straws
- my mom has ms and she uses a metal one
- just bring your own straw
- disabled ppl aren't exempt from caring about the environment

WATCH

Currently, plastic straws are the only alternative that meet the needs of all disabled people

Paper and re-useable straws are not universal options

Paper disintegrates/choking hazard
Hard/re-useable injury hazard, inflexible, needs handwashing

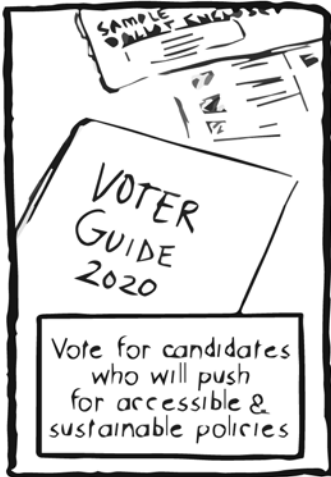


The bendy-straw is cited as an example of 'universal design,' the concept of making products accessible to as many people as possible



Inventor Joseph Freidman's first sale of the straws was to a hospital in 1947

What can we do?



Allow customers to choose which kind of straw works for them



Single-use plastics are optional for some people
For others, their lives depends on it



touch.



PEOPLE TOUCH ME ALL THE TIME.



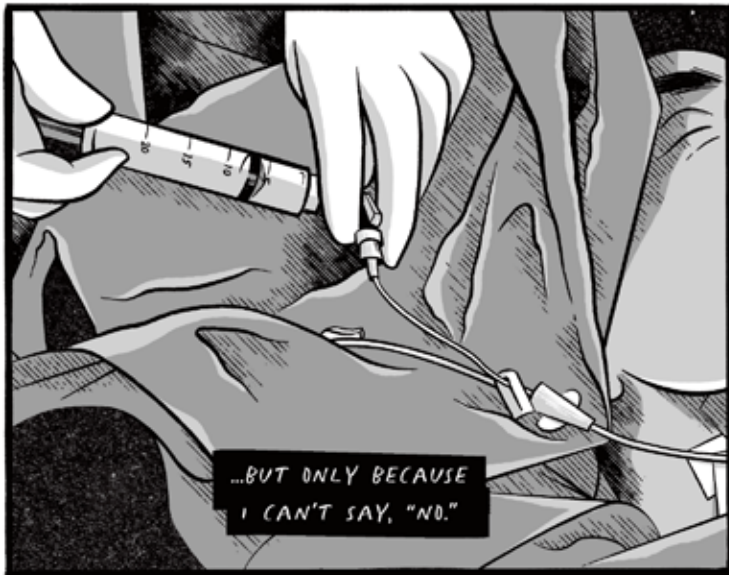
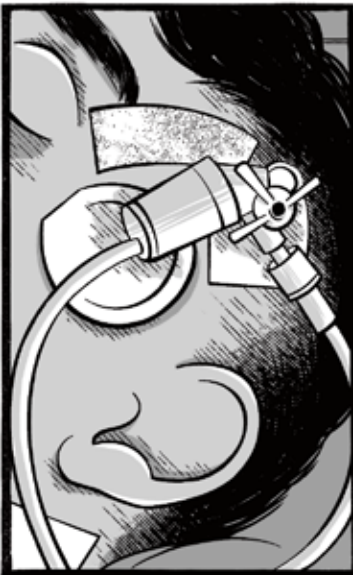
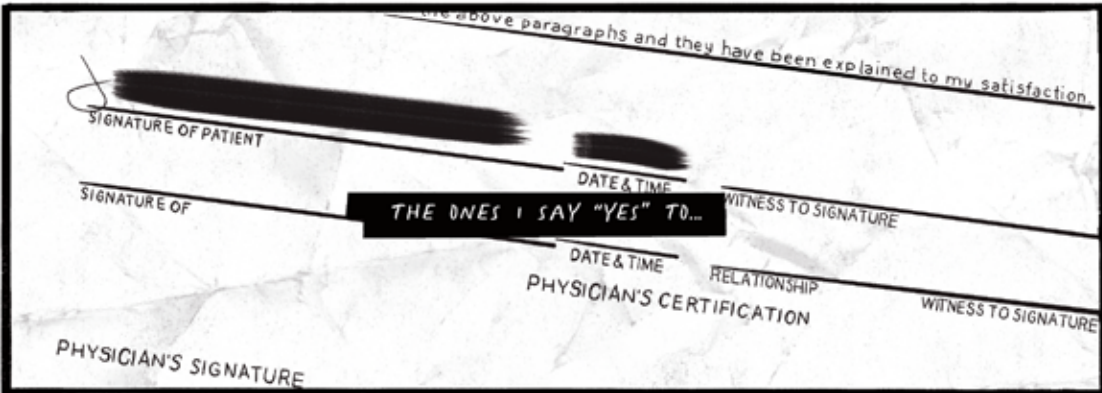
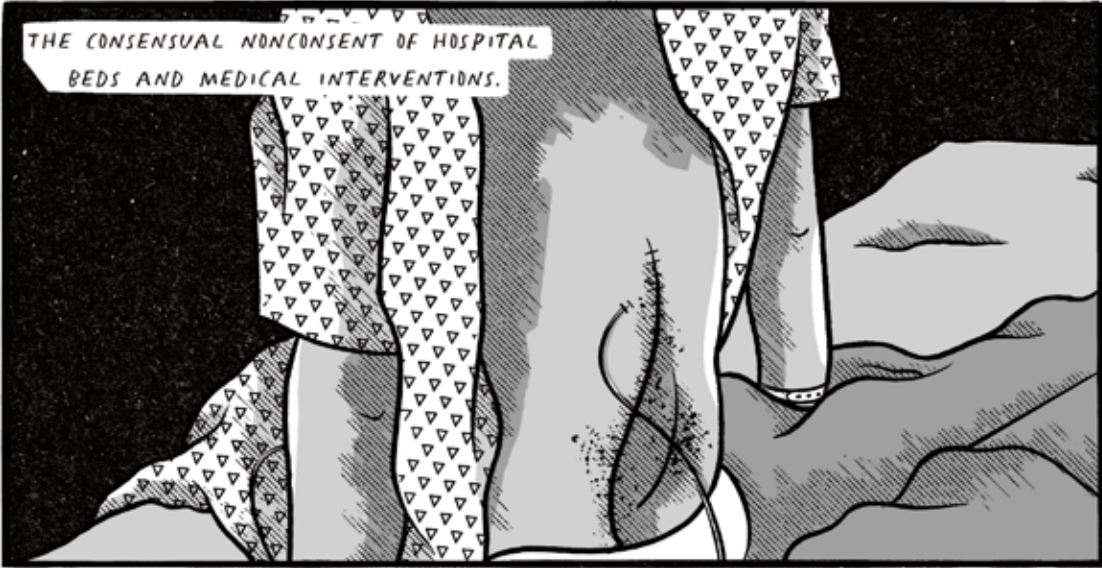
THE CASUAL BUMP
ON THE SIDEWALK.



THE FORCED HAND-
SHAKE OR HIGH FIVE.



THE AWKWARD HUG
WITH THAT ONE PERSON
I MET THAT ONE TIME.





AND BAD TOUCHES.
I'VE HAD THOSE TOO.

NO NEED TO TALK
ABOUT THEM HERE OR
NOW, BUT THEY EXIST.



IN THIS SPACE...

...IN THIS BED...

...IN ME.





MY BODY IS SO FREQUENTLY
TRESPASSED, DISMISSED,
DISREGARDED—OVER-REGARDED.





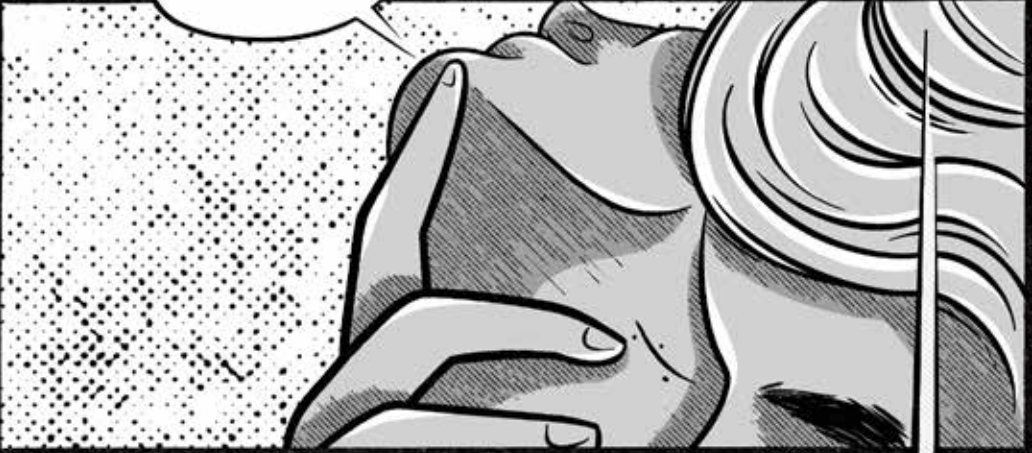


UNLESS, OF COURSE,
I'M ASKING FOR IT.





YES. PLEASE.



ASK ME AGAIN.
LET ME TELL YOU, "YES."





Petal to the Mettle

by Christa Couture and Georgia Webber



Excuse me, is that a microprocessor knee?

Yes!

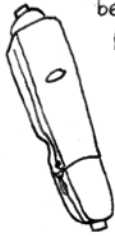
It's the C-leg!

I've heard about the C-leg: it has a microprocessor that, they say, greatly improves gait and comfort.

REGULAR HYDRAULIC KNEE

supports moderate activity level

increased stability in stance phase



knee must be in locked position to weight-bear

large flexion angle

covered by Canadian healthcare

MICROPROCESSOR KNEE

mimics "natural" gait

stumble recover function

bluetooth technology to adjust settings



cool robot light

sensors make realtime adjustments to determine where it is in space

navigates ramps, stairs, uneven terrain

\$40,000! NOT covered by Canadian healthcare



...What's it like?



I've only got it for a two-week trial, but it's amazing!



I had two typical legs until I was thirteen.



I remember what it feels like.



Would a microprocessor really feel the same?



Christa?

I want to try that.

Sure! There are actually a few knees you can try!



With the Genium[®] you can walk backwards!

Climb stairs step-over-step!

Walk and Look better!

The salesmen circle like vultures.



I'm reminded of when I first got cancer, before my leg was amputated as the cure, and my hair began to fall out from the chemotherapy.

At recess, kids surrounded me and started pulling at my hair, marvelling at how it came out in clumps.

The bell rang

HAHAHAHA

HA HA
HA

EWWW
HAHA

HAHAHA COOL

and I looked at my hair scattered on the ground...

HAHA GROSS!
HAAHAH

HAHAHA

HAHA

HAHAHAHA

EWWW

HAHA

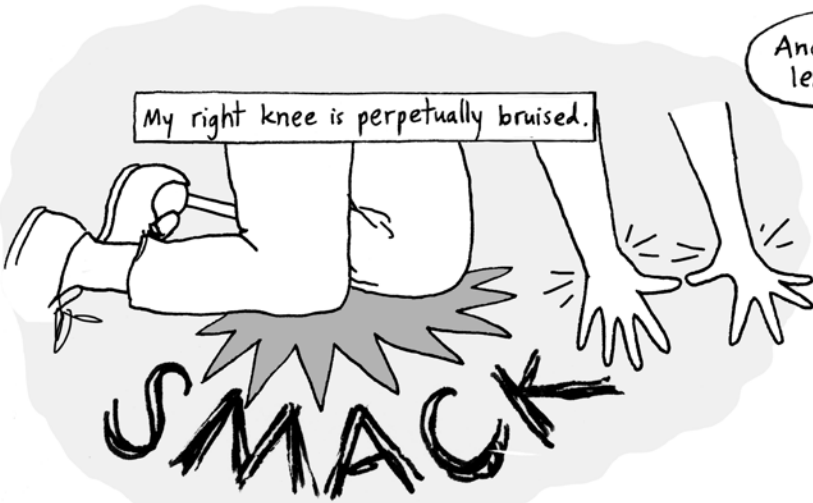
Christa?





As a transfemoral amputee, I fall at least once a week—SLAM—onto my knees,

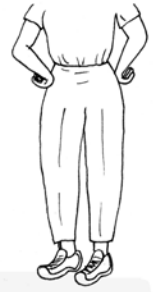
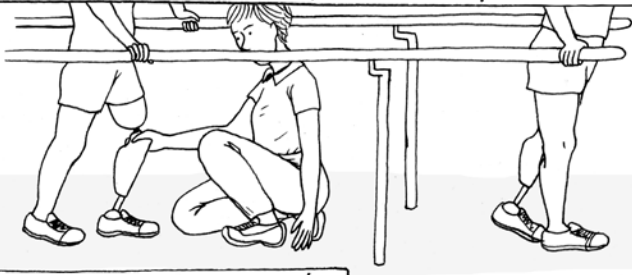
sometimes onto my hands.



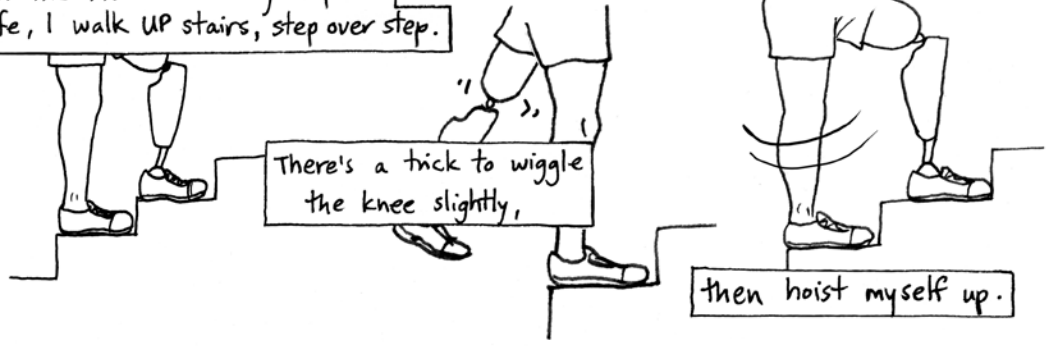
And I want less pain.



I get the Genium® for a two-week trial, and my physiotherapist and I practice with it away from the prosthetics clinic.



For the first time in my amputee life, I walk UP stairs, step over step.



There's a trick to wiggle the knee slightly,

then hoist myself up.



To gain and maintain the strength to use this knee, you'd have to be dedicated to going to the gym on a regular basis.



I can't see myself working out—



I want to spend my time playing piano, singing, and cooking.



Sure, I'd save some time not going up stairs one at a time, but I don't care that much for it to become a new hobby.



Wouldn't it be better to look like you've got two legs?

Don't you want to look NORMAL?

...I do. Or at least I did.

It's hard to ignore the signs everywhere that tell us:

be straight,



be thin,



be cisgender,



be non-disabled.



When I walk down the street, people stop me all the time.



For a long time, I confused hating the questions with hating myself.

But why should I have to change to be accepted?
I don't want to hide or pass, I want to look like me.

One night at Drag Bingo, queen Joan-E gave me an idea.



CROWDFUND A KNEE!

A microprocessor knee will improve Christa's life dramatically, but it's not covered by healthcare. Any amount helps!

\$25,000 goal



I don't need to go up stairs
step over step, I don't need to
wash my car in this thing, and
I don't need to change settings
by bouncing my heel...

I want the Rheo knee, and
I want it to look like this.

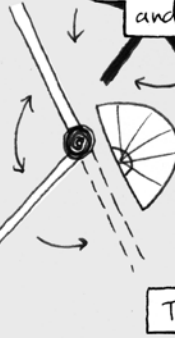


A prosthetist has an amazing job —

they know anatomy,
mechanics, software,



plus they sew
and carve
and paint —



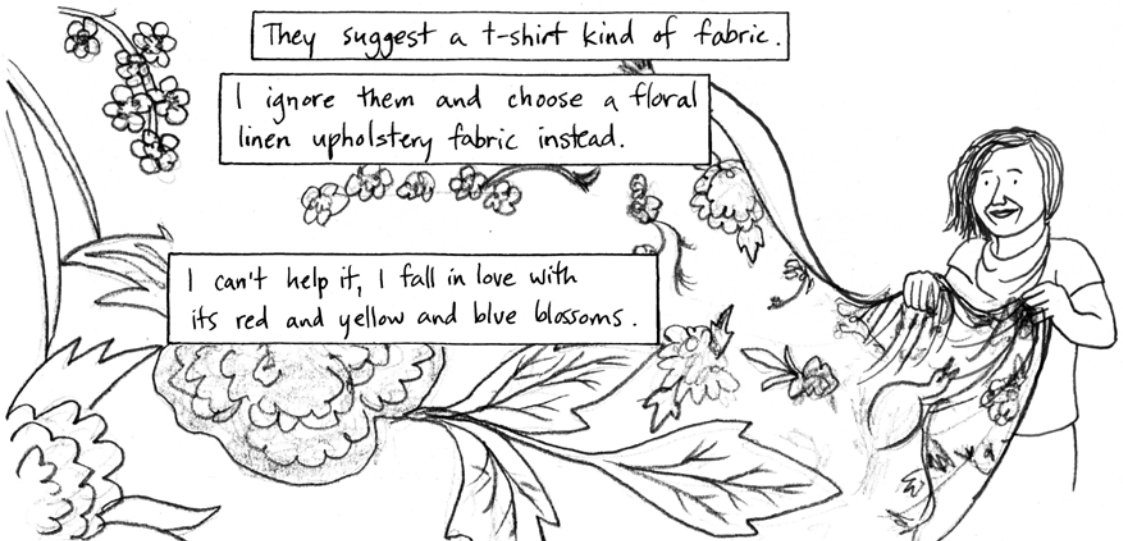
and they've never made a leg
like the one I showed them.

They're up for the task.

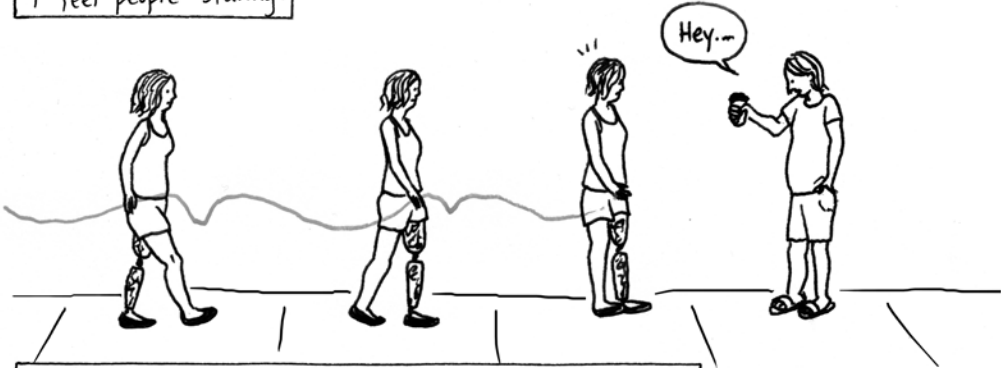
They suggest a t-shirt kind of fabric.

I ignore them and choose a floral
linen upholstery fabric instead.

I can't help it, I fall in love with
its red and yellow and blue blossoms.



The first day I walk in the world with my new flower leg,
I feel people staring.



I brace myself for the usual questions, but instead:



Be Well at CMU – But What Does It Mean?

Introduction by Gabriele Maier

Comic by Cora Hickoff

What does it mean for a CMU student to be “well” today? That was a question I had been wondering about for some time and that seemed important to find answers to even before the pandemic happened. I had been doing research on the term “wellness,” a rather fashionable term today, a buzzword that can be found on everyone’s lips. No matter the product or service, it appeared to me that everything could be easily linked to wellness, starting from juice bars, to super foods like quinoa or goji berries, dietary supplements, wearable fitness devices, to meditation or mindfulness apps. But what did wellness mean in connection with university life? Were our students doing as well as they should?

A few years ago, the university had seen a proliferation of new wellness opportunities in the form of a new gym for exercising, a mindfulness room where students could relax, use the crafts corner, pet service dogs or attend a mindfulness session, a newsletter called *Be Well* to inform students about wellness-related activities, the expansion of Counseling and Psychological Services to help with personal or academic difficulties, and a food pantry to combat food insecurity among students. Yet, how much of this was truly beneficial to our students? Did students know about all of those options that were at their fingertips? Did students even understand the meaning of wellness, so heavily promoted on CMU’s campus? And most importantly, did they even have time to take advantage of all those new initiatives in a

place whose motto proclaimed that “My heart is in my work?” I really wanted to find out – so I teamed up with Nora Bridges, a food anthropologist at the University of Pittsburgh, and Michelle Delahanty, a recent graduate in Public Health, who helped me devise and execute a study that examined wellness on CMU’s campus.

Thus, in the fall semester of 2019, Michelle and I conducted 37 interviews with students from all over CMU’s campus. Our interviewees came from the humanities, the fine arts, computer science, engineering, public policy and business administration, to name only a few areas, and ranged from freshmen all the way to doctoral students who were about to defend their dissertation. Likewise, students’ nationalities were quite diverse, with many hailing from the US but also from Germany, India, China, Colombia, etc. It was a cross-section of CMU’s student body where almost every age from 18 to 30 was represented. Our interviews lasted between 30 and 40 minutes and included questions on the meaning of wellness and well-being in general and on being well as a student on CMU’s campus in particular.

Overall, we were very pleased with the fact that most students were able to give rather sophisticated definitions of both wellness and well-being, which meant that they had obviously thought about the meaning of both concepts before. For the rest of our interview, we wanted to probe a little further and find out whether CMU was able to create an environment

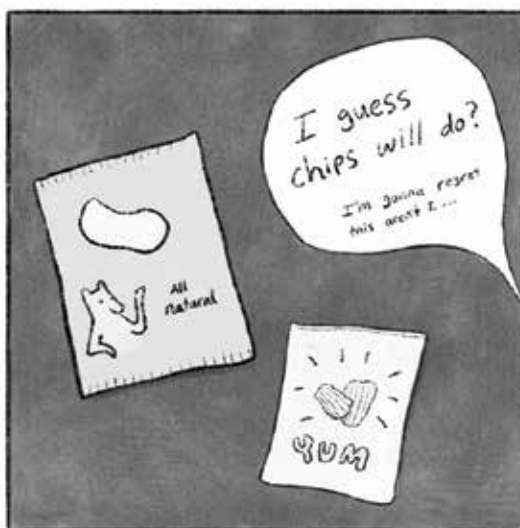
that students felt was conducive to wellness. We wanted to know what CMU was doing well and what areas needed improvement; with which areas in their lives students were struggling the most and what could be done to improve their situations.

What students shared with us boiled down to two major points of criticism: 1) Lack of information: Most students had heard about wellness offerings during their orientation weeks, when they first came to CMU, but due to the overload of new information found it difficult to remember everything. Now in their second or third year they had a hard time retrieving all those wellness resources and wanted to see a centralized website where they could find everything at a glance. 2) Time: Yet, gaining more knowledge did not always necessarily lead to more wellness activities since most students' academic schedules were so tight that fitting in one more activity a week proved nearly impossible. What students really wanted to see was a systemic change regarding academic teaching, homework assignments, and end-of-the-semester test-taking that would reduce the stress and pressure that weighed them down and made it often impossible for them to lead healthy and well-balanced lives.

Students freely shared their personal stories with us that ranged from a lack of time to eat, to no energy to exercise to feelings of isolation due to too much homework. We also learned about international students who had trouble dealing with Pittsburgh winters, PhD students who were exposed to misogyny, and undergraduate students whose desire to receive only As resulted in severe eating disorders. Yet, most students were aware of their problems and had proactively sought help to remedy their personal ailments. They had thought long and hard about ways to improve their situation and had come up with numerous solutions for a problem that seemed to affect a large number of CMU students. Even though the primary remedy was a fundamental change in the culture of CMU with less emphasis on work and competition and a heightened sense of community building and supportive collaboration – both among students but also between students and faculty – other suggestions

entailed spending more time with friends, making time to exercise on a regular basis, and making sure to get enough sleep. There was a great sense of hope and optimism among the students we interviewed that wellness could be accomplished if priorities shifted just a little bit which meant that not every assignment and test had to receive a perfect score.

In order to convey the outcome of the interviews it seemed important to us to find an entertaining, yet informative way to get our message across – something that would pique students' interest beyond the topic of wellness. Creating a comic seemed the perfect way to go about it – and that's what we decided to do. I hired a student in the School of Fine Arts, Cora Hickoff, who, at the time, was still in her last year at CMU, and discussed my ideas with her. I also involved two other students, Jonathan Fritz and Katherine Kim, who were very active in CMU's student community, and who helped me conceptualize the stories and provided us with important feedback along the way. The result are the subsequent comics that Cora created and that tell stories of struggles, challenges and success. In an ideal world, playing sports, cooking delicious meals, checking out museums, and socializing with friends would be activities we could all engage in on a regular basis, activities that don't have to wait until we graduate from college. We hope that our comics will make students more aware of their wellness struggles and more hopeful that solutions, even if small and seemingly insignificant at first glance, can be found that will improve lives in the long run. ∞

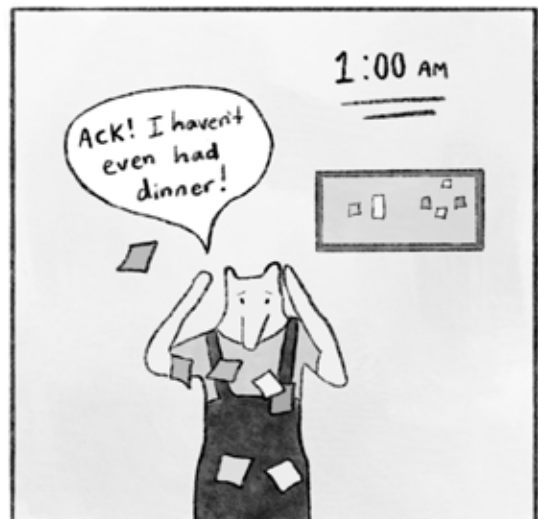
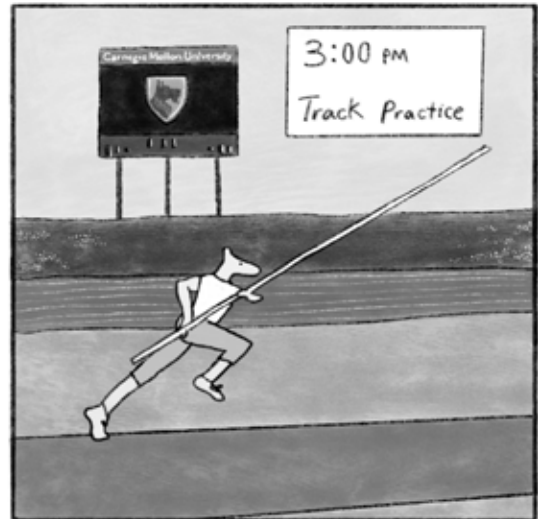












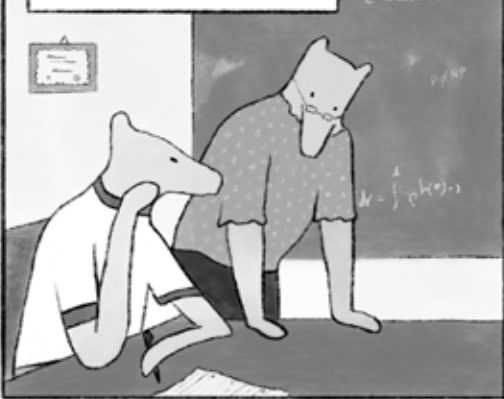
Orientation HOUSE WARS!



I signed up for 15 Orgs at the Activities Fair ...



I want to make My Professors Proud...



Thanksgiving "Break"

Still working?



Ping Pong w/ a friend, then work



And just like that, my first semester was over.



Wellness When the Well is Empty?

Introduction by Candace Skibba

"You can't pour from a glass that's already empty. You have to fill yourself up too."
– Empower Interviewee

A dark and damp church basement in a small, blighted Monongahela River Valley town is an unlikely place to experience feelings of warmth, lightness, and freshness. Descending the stairs, the stale air inside is reminiscent of the poor air quality outside, poisoned by hydrogen sulfide spewing from coke ovens in the nearby steel mills. And yet care, humility, inclusion, empowerment and agency would all come together here.

This experience in lightness was curated collaboratively by yoga therapist Ali Popivchak and the women of the wellness program Empower. In Ali's therapeutic work, there is no prescriptive focus on weight goals, inches off, or firm tush. Rather, the gentle yoga program was inspired by the great disconnect in which "means" are loosely defined not as the money to take an exercise class, buy a fancy fresh juice, or purchase the latest athleisure trend, but rather time, transportation, safety, and comfort. While more and more people are inclined to be well, there are basic needs, unmet by the infrastructure of our society, that prohibit this from happening. Today's wellness industry, like the American healthcare industry, highlights existing inequities. Yet, there are ways to promote and understand wellness which don't require consumption and profit.

I participated in the Empower program over the course of eight weeks as part of a research project to understand how wellness can be defined when wealth, prestige, and power are not the driving forces. My research method was based on a responsibility for ethical collection of personal stories alongside traditional research tools like questionnaires and interviews. Becoming a part of the experience provided an opportunity for connection and trust with the participants. As Amy Schuman distinguished in her book *Subversive Stories and the Critique of Empathy*, I sought to be a witness to the story as opposed to a voyeur. Establishing relationships with the communities in which we were working, and becoming vulnerable alongside our storytellers, gave us the opportunity to consider the inherent hierarchy of author and subject.

I had the privilege of recording interviews with four of the women who participated in Empower, and each opportunity felt like a gift. Two of those stories are included in the comic *BOOMERANG*, beautifully illustrated by Andrea Shockling. With each *click* of the imagined tape recorder opening up the interview, I was left wondering why would these women trust me? How could I best honor them? How could the perspectives that these women shared be most

helpful to others? What is my responsibility to the story, the project, and most importantly, the women? Collaborating with Ali and Andrea facilitated working through those questions - though they are still very present in my mind as this volume is shared.

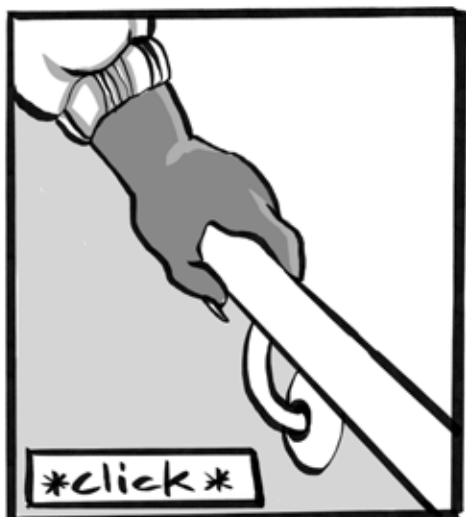
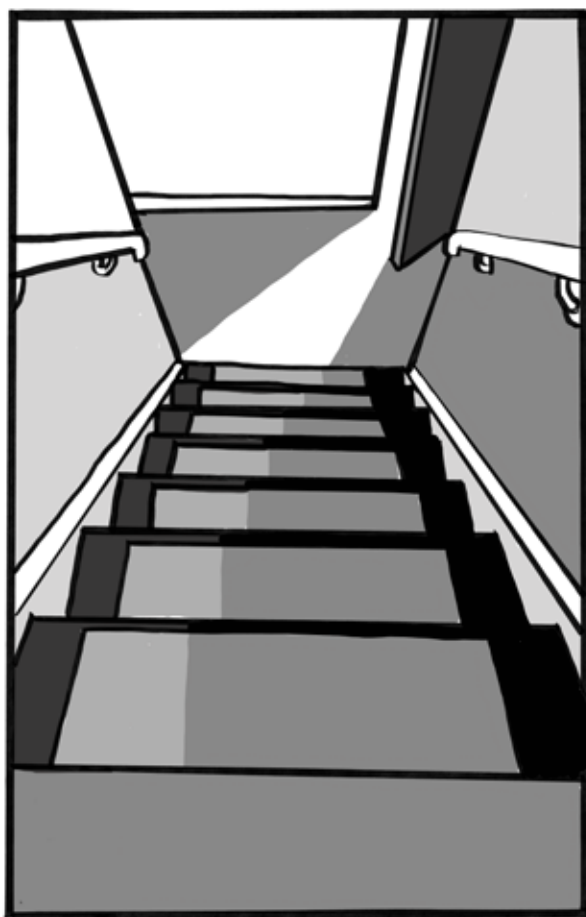
Andrea's aesthetic and creative processes are influenced by the need to honor the experiences of these women as they are. She illustrates the stories in a way that empowers the speaker, while being cautious neither to stereotype nor essentialize. While it would be tempting to imagine that the experiences of these women are shared among many, Andrea honors their uniqueness by including their exact language, by focusing on their specific experiences, and by visually capturing the gravity of their situations.

It is important to highlight that these women's stories do not begin and end with their depictions here. These pages provide a snapshot of one particular moment in time. Much like a photograph, the imagery is unique to these stories, but also viewed through the lenses of narrative collection, transcription, and visual reproduction. As collectors, custodians, and creators, Andrea and I hope you feel invited to witness the stories conveyed by these two women. Depending upon your own relationship with your body, wellness journey, privilege, race, ethnicity - all of these factors will influence your own reading experience. May that experience be one that empowers you and others. May we all work to fill the well.



BOOMERANG

a comic about wellness.



ADAPTED AND DRAWN BY ANDREA SHOCKLING, BASED ON TRANSCRIPTS OF INTERVIEWS BY CANDACE SKIRBA.



"Wellness to me is where I don't have a lot of pain or when it rains, I don't ache as much, or you know, when I'm sitting down, not having trouble getting up.

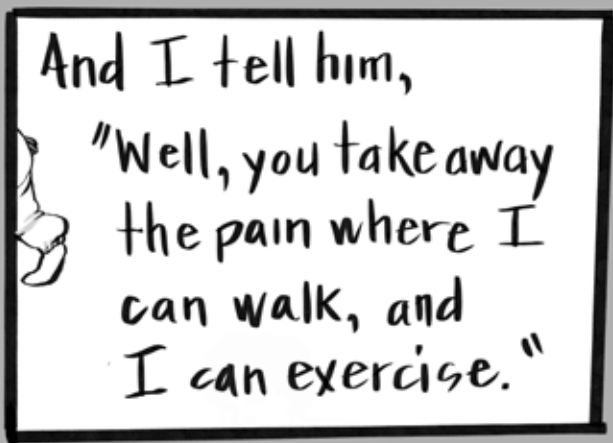
Wellness to me is not only being well physically

but mentally."

I've always been
BIG BONED
and so I never really
felt like I fit in
anywhere, you know?

And I heard somebody
say once that
FAT
PEOPLE
are happy people,
and I say—





and I'm done,
I'm done.

I don't go to a gym
or whatever.

I tried that.



and you know people look at you coming in




I'm covering up my
whole body with big
shirts and sweatpants.

And you know I can hear what I feel like
they are saying and stuff.



So I don't go to the gym.



I love to swim.

But when I put on my swimsuit, you know, I realize they're getting lifeguards and I'm like,

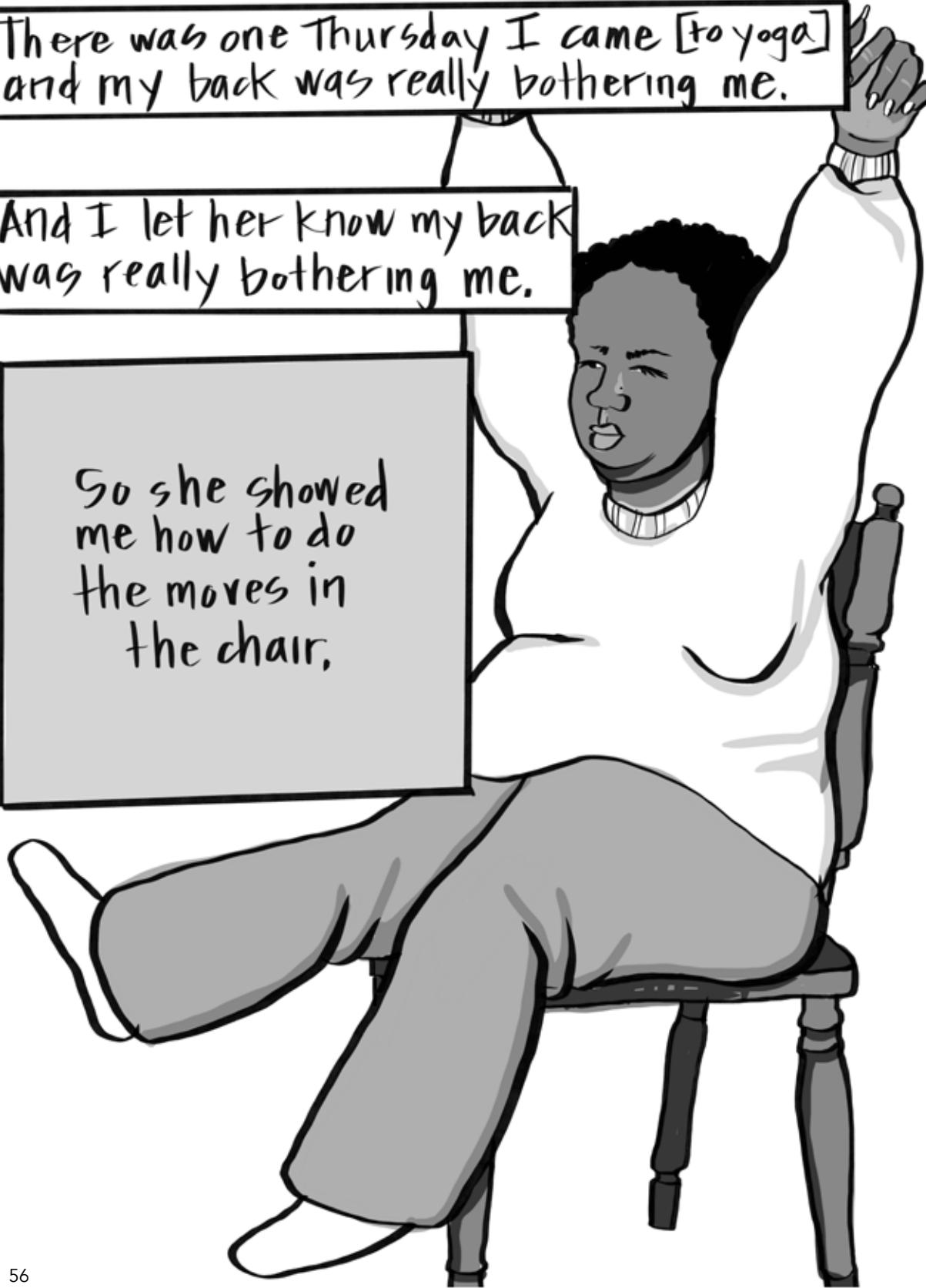
"Is it ever going to stop?"

So I don't exercise because of the stereotype.

There was one Thursday I came [to yoga] and my back was really bothering me.

And I let her know my back was really bothering me.

So she showed me how to do the moves in the chair,



She didn't pressure me to get on the floor.



She didn't pressure me to do anything that I was uncomfortable doing.



And that's why I love it.



Yeah.

We do need more programs like this.

I came one day [to yoga] and I really had been going through something and I kind of shared a bit and she just grabbed me and held me tight.



So most definitely, we need more programs like this. Most definitely.

My doctor is on me
all the time, you know.



Give me some tools I can
use to get to where you
think I need to be.

But let me do it on
my own time.



And give me the
tools.

Let me get some therapy somewhere.



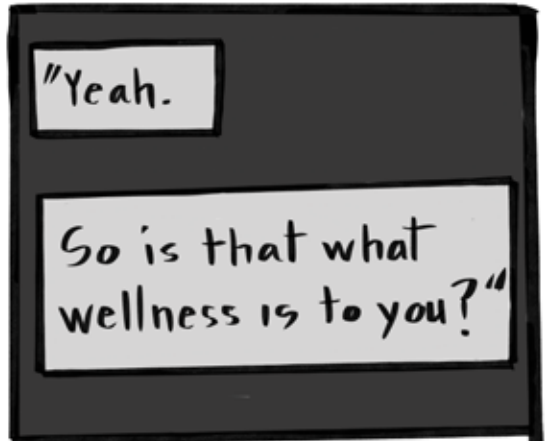
Or point me to some places or some things
I can do other than walking, because
if I'm going to start hurting,




I'm going to quit.



But give me the tools that I need to get
healthy. I want to be **happy healthy.**





Wellness is really,
like, taking care
of yourself:

your mind

your body

and your soul, really.

You neglect yourself
a lot when you take
care of a young
child.



You put that
all into your
child.



You can't pour
it from a glass
that's already
empty.

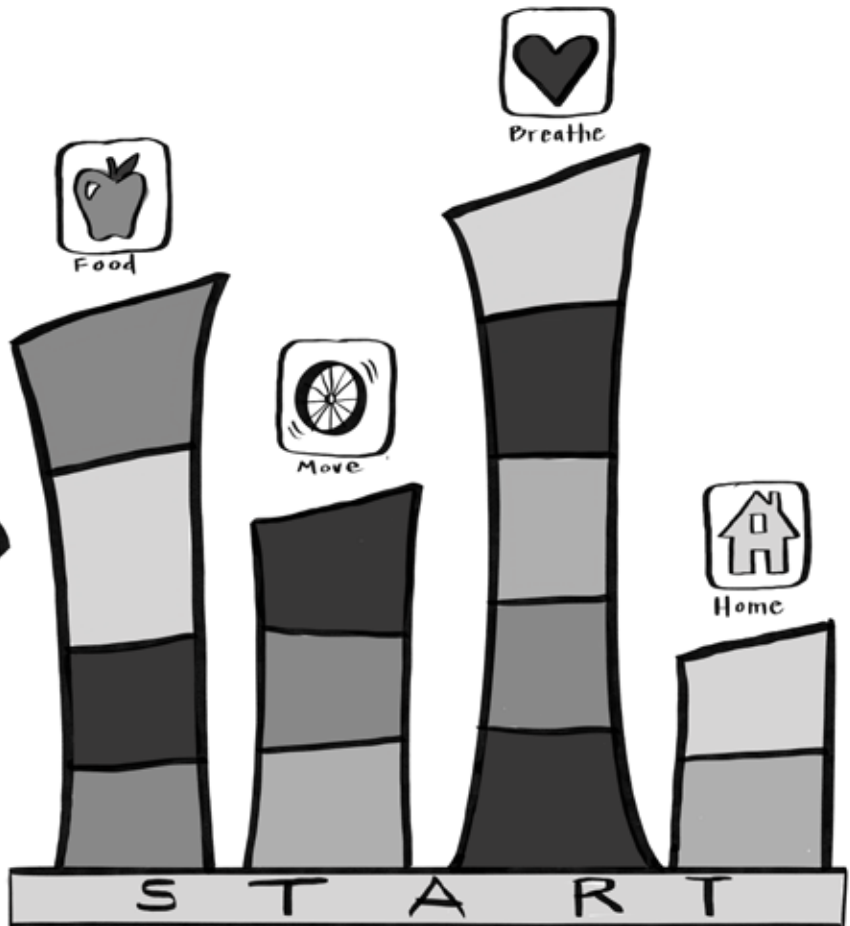


You have to
fill yourself
up, too.

I try my best to
take care of myself.



My thing is, I have
like, goals every day.



I'm part of the stroke group.

That's when I had a stroke, after I had him.



A piece of the clot broke off in my lung,

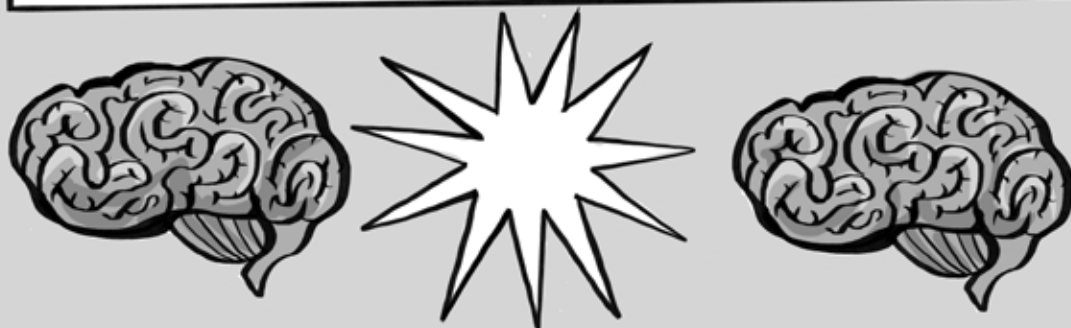


so it was hard for me to breathe, too.

I still have paralysis on my left side.



It's been — you know, it's hard, because if you don't know anything about stroke —



even like, my family, so it's like, some of the changes I was experiencing —

they didn't understand.

Like my mood swings

and stuff like that.

When you have a brain injury, you have to sleep




a lot.

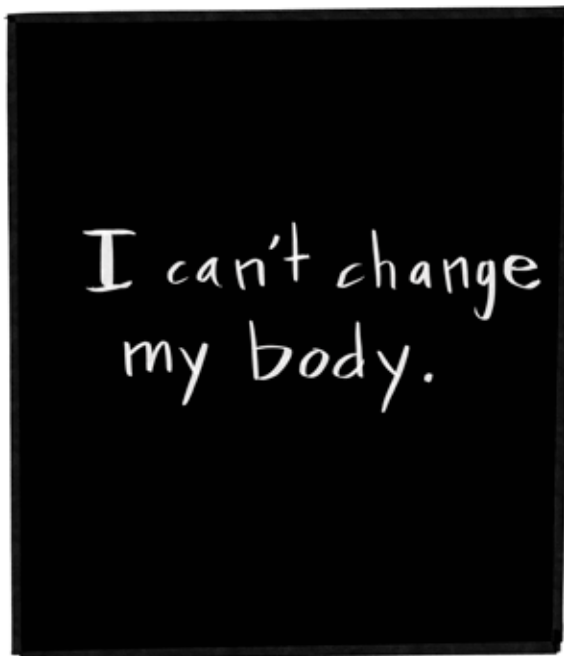


That's when your brain is trying to repair itself.

So they thought, "Oh well, she's got a baby and she just had a stroke. All she wants to do is sleep all day."



You know, they just didn't understand.



It's coming up on my four year anniversary.



It just took a lot out of me.

Seriously, I was actually homeless —
so I was in a shelter.



His dad got tired of a newborn baby, plus he was trying to take care of me, you know?



It's a lot.


MAMA

MAMA

MAMA
MAMA

MAMA





Life is like a boomerang.

Whatever you throw out, it comes right back to you.

That's my debt to society, because they're not getting this Black man. He'll have good memories and grow up and be a good man, you know?

click

click



end.

Acknowledgements

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Candace would like to thank Ali Popivchak, Susan Polansky, Felicia Savage Friedman, Emily Anderson, Alyssa Cypher, Jessica Benham, Rachel Kallem Whitman, and Andrea Shockling.

Editor Biographies

Candace Skibba (she/her) is an Associate Teaching Professor in the Department of Modern Languages at Carnegie Mellon University. She specializes in contemporary Spanish literature and film and has concentrated her research on investigating the intersection between literary and film studies and studies of the body -most notably the abnormal body. The study of the body has taken her to gender analysis, dis/ability studies, and health humanities. The convergence of her literary and cultural studies interests and pedagogical foci have led her to investigate agency and empathy in both artistic expression and classroom practices.

Gabriele Maier (she/her) is Teaching Professor of German Studies and Director of the M.A. program in Global Communication and Applied Translation at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. Maier's research includes literature of the 20th and 21st century and focuses primarily on travel writing, questions of home and identity, transcultural writers, graphic novels, and social justice pedagogy. She has published a co-edited anthology on questions of home, a textbook entitled *Deutschland im Zeitalter der Globalisierung (Germany in the Age of Globalization)*, and recently a volume on curriculum development and small German program building. She has taught classes on social justice and contributed an article to the *MLA Handbook Strategies and Perspectives on Social Justice Work*. Being a fellow of the "How Well?" project, funded by the Center for the Arts in Society at CMU, provided her with the opportunity to study questions of wellness and well-being among CMU's student population and helped her understand what could be done to improve well-being on CMU's campus.

Heather Kelley (she/her) is an award-winning game designer, media artist, curator, and an Assistant Teaching Professor with the Entertainment Technology Center at Carnegie Mellon University. Her professional career began in AAA and licensed games with companies like Ubisoft, Eidos (Ion Storm), Girl Games and Behavior Interactive, and continues with independent and experimental projects, many featuring physical and sensory interfaces like smell and vibration. She is a founding member of the influential experimental game collective Kokoromi, developers of VR puzzle game SUPERHYPERCUBE, and she co-curated *Joue le jeu*, a groundbreaking 2012 exhibition of art games and playful installations in Paris, France.

Contributor Biographies

Maria Sweeney (she/her) is a Moldova-born, New Jersey-based freelance illustrator and comic artist. She graduated magna cum laude from Moore College of Art and Design with a BFA in Illustration. *Brittle Joints* won a Massachusetts Independent Comics Expo Mini-Grant in 2018 and was featured in Comic Con's 2019 *Truth is a Superhero* panel. Her educational mini-comic, *The Straw Ban*, won an outstanding submission for the 2019 Locher Memorial Awards. She has worked extensively in digital, oils, watercolors, and other traditional mediums. She writes and self-publishes comics relating to her experience navigating the world with a rare disability. When she's not reading or sketching comics, she's snuggling with her tiny dog, Bambi. For commissions and inquiries: mariasweeney.com.

A. Andrews (they/them) is a 33-year-old disabled queer writer and illustrator based in Minneapolis, MN. Their first published graphic novel, *A Quick and Easy Guide to Sex & Disability* (Oni/Limerence Press) was released in June of 2020, and they're currently illustrating their second published project: a young adult graphic novel about the Stonewall Riots, for *First Second*. They are a Tin House Summer Workshop Scholar and are the creator of *Autostraddle's Oh, Hey!*, a bi-monthly autobiographical webcomic about being queer, sick, and sometimes embarrassing.

Christa Couture (she/her) is an award-winning performing and recording artist, non-fiction writer and broadcaster. She is also proudly Indigenous, queer, disabled and a mom. Her sixth recording, *Safe Harbour*, was released March 2020. Her writing has been published in *Room*, *Shameless* and *Augur* magazines and cbc.ca. As a speaker and storyteller, she has addressed audiences for *The Walrus Talks*, CBC's *DNTO*, Moses Znaimer's *ideaCity* and *Imagine* in Port Hope, ON. She is a frequent contributor to CBC Radio's *Now or Never* and *The Next Chapter*, and she is a weekday afternoon host on 106.5 ELMNT FM in Toronto, ON.

Georgia Webber (she/her) is a queer, disabled comics artist, writer, and educator. She adores teaching and leads by exemplifying curiosity in the classroom. Her philosophy is that teaching is a relationship first, allowing the learning process to be fun and organic and suited to each learner's specific access needs. Georgia is best known for her graphic memoir, *Dumb: Living without a Voice* (Fantagraphics 2018), the chronicle of her severe vocal injury and sustained vocal condition, which makes using her voice painful (though she manages it well these days). Georgia's comics have been published in major magazines and studied extensively by the Graphic Medicine community. Her most recent publication was a collaboration with dancer, athlete, and artist Vivian Chong to create Vivian's graphic memoir about losing her sight: *Dancing*

After TEN (Fantagraphics 2020). Learn more about Georgia's teaching and comics work at www.drawingtheinsideout.ca.

Cora Hickoff (she/her) is an animator, illustrator, and educational designer passionate about integrating art and technology. In May 2020, she graduated from Carnegie Mellon with a BFA in Art and a Minor in Educational Design through CMU's Human-Computer Interaction Institute (HCII). Hickoff has been drawing ever since she was a child –always striving to create art that is visually unexpected and just a little bit different. She loves combining her unique artistic aesthetic with her technical skills to inspire and emotionally move viewers and teach complex scientific and psychological concepts. Hickoff has programming, sound design, stop motion, and digital special effects experience and she enjoys creating immersive spaces in both the physical world (museums, parks, theaters) and virtual world (animated stories, interactive apps, video games). She can be found at: <https://www.corahickoff.com/about>.

Andrea Leigh Shockling (she/her) is an artist based in Pittsburgh and Queens. She's worked on Broadway and in regional theatres as a painter, scenic designer, and educator. Andrea's comics have appeared in several award-winning anthologies, and she has published two volumes of her ongoing project *SUBJECTIVE LINE WEIGHT*, sharing the real stories of women's bodies we're not supposed to talk about. Her comic strip *ELBOW ROOM* was featured in the *Pittsburgh Current*, a bi-weekly alternative newspaper. She is currently working on her graphic memoir *A DANGLING CONVERSATION*. Andrea prefers cats to dogs, watercolors to acrylics, music to silence, light to dark, digital to analog, and order to chaos. She misses her mom, loves her son, and will probably never be caught up on her reading.

Honey Rosenbloom (they/them) is a Queer Cyborg Mystic, a Tool-Toting, Trailer-Towing Trans Texan Technologist, a game designer, nonprofit runner, organizer, facilitator, and programmer. They want to create spaces, words, and games that allow people to connect more deeply with themselves, others, and the ineffable infinite that is being. They are the Executive Director of Friendship Garden Game Developers, a nonprofit organization grounded in healing and restorative practices dedicated to advocating for inclusivity in the games industry. Through funding, promoting, and providing resources to game makers from historically marginalized backgrounds and curating a gentle, diverse community, they hope to show that a soft, supportive ecosystem of players and developers is the best way for the industry to flourish as a tool for collective liberation.

How Well? Resource List

The following organizations and initiatives offer wellness care and information to underserved groups and communities, both in Pittsburgh and nationwide. Reach out, get involved, or contribute to show your support!

Wellness with Disability

Disability Visibility Project
Rebirth Garments
Access Mob Pittsburgh
Accessible YOUiverse

disabilityvisibilityproject.com
rebirthgarments.com
accessmobpittsburgh.org
www.accessibleyouiverse.org

Food and Wellness

412 Food Rescue
Garfield Community Farm
CMU Food Pantry
Feeding America

412foodrescue.org
garfieldfarm.com
tinyurl.com/erxprcdx
feedingamerica.org

Wellness and the Body

Yoga motif
Yoga Roots
Movement Foundation
Body Politic

yogamotif.com
yogarootsonlocation.com
movemeantfoundation.org
[bipoc-fitness
wearebodypolitic.com](http://bipoc-fitness.wearebodypolitic.com)

Community Wellness

Community Wellness Initiative
WeRNative
Native Wellness Institute
Allies Pittsburgh

ceapittsburgh.org
wernative.org
nativewellness.com
alliespgh.org/about-us

The How Well? Anthology is a compilation of illustrated short stories centered around ideas of community and mutual caretaking as antidotes to the corporately-driven, dominant notion of "Wellness" prevalent in the Western world today. Bringing together diverse perspectives from notable graphic narrative artists, and community members in the editors' home city of Pittsburgh, the book is the outcome of a three-year project finding stories which represent alternatives to the insistence of neoliberalism that human well-being is earned solely through power and privilege.

All proceeds from the sale of this book will be donated to initiatives serving the wellness needs of underrepresented communities. To find out more about these and other relevant organizations, visit HowWellProject.org

\$15.00

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