

Transformative Pleasure: Finding Joy in the Discomfort

Living with a physical disability is something that induces anxiety and discomfort in many different individuals. Digging deeper into why individuals, once including myself, feel this way reveals that society views those with physical impairments as abject. The concept of abject acts as a disruption, or challenge to one's identity. The abject causes us to turn our eyes and avoid what makes us uncomfortable whether consciously or subconsciously. This disruption in identity comes from the idea that once an individual becomes disabled, their life becomes extremely limited. This narrow-minded belief restrains an individual from discovering the abject is not something that needs to be avoided or feared. I would argue that abstaining from things that are abject causes an individual to miss out on things that have the possibility of bringing them pleasure and joy.

The avoidance of things abject is something that I was unknowingly buying into, and recently, my subconscious avoidance of this was challenged when I was invited by a group of paraplegics to spend the evening with them in a wheelchair connected to an electric wheel. The electric wheel, also known as a "front-drive," is a cyborg device that aids those in wheelchairs to manoeuvre around quicker. My connection and invitation from this group, also known as the Krips of Liions, came from my uncle, who has been paralyzed since 2008. I had been invited to go front driving with this group in the past, but I always declined due to my discomfort with the abject. Unknowingly, I was giving in to society's attempt to avoid things that challenged my identity and comfort, or things labelled as abject. I did not want to place myself in a situation where I knew I would feel uncomfortable. In declining these offers, I had no idea that I was denying myself an extremely joyful experience. After many invitations from my uncle and a class project that required me to place my body outside its comfort zone, I agreed to spend the evening in a wheelchair with my uncle and his friends. Through spending the day with the Krips of Liions, my discomfort was challenged. By the end of the night, I was amazed at how my discomfort also brought so much pleasure.

The Krips of Liions set some guidelines for me to follow, so that I was able to experience the reality of life in a chair. These guidelines forced me outside of my comfort and allowed me to learn new things which, in turn, led me into a new area of enjoyment that I had not experienced before. Some of these experiences included learning how to connect and properly use a front drive and using ramps, which proved to be more difficult than I had anticipated. One particular event that sticks out from that evening was learning how to open doors while in a wheelchair. The group encouraged me to be the one to open the door for everyone, so I could experience the difficulties of doing so while in a chair. This door was heavy, swung in, and when I tried to push, the wheelchair I was sitting in would roll backward. It would have been easier to ask a more experienced wheelchair user for physical assistance. I am thankful that was not an option, as the Krips of Liions wanted me to have the full experience. Instead, I received so much encouragement and tips from the Krips of Liions on how to most effectively open the door. After a lot of struggling and embarrassment (and probably a push from behind), I was finally able to open the door. Such a seemingly trivial thing brought me so much gratification. Not only this but to be celebrated and embraced by the Krips of Liions is something that I never would have experienced if I had chosen to stay in my comfort zone. By the end of the night, I was amazed at how quickly something that brought me so much discomfort became something that gave me so

much joy. Finding enjoyment in my discomfort was not something I expected to experience that evening. Looking back, I am thankful for my uncle's persistence and the class project that forced me out of my comfort zone. I only look back on this experience with fond memories and a new sense of how pleasure can be achieved.

When the evening ended, I decided to paint something to depict the night and what I had learned. In creating this piece, my goal was to produce something that showed my preconceived beliefs going into the evening, and how they evolved into something different. I wanted to somehow show that the discomfort that I felt transformed into pleasure. I started with a black and grey in the middle to show the narrow-minded belief that life in a wheelchair is restricting and bleak. I wanted to make sure that this was not a large portion of the painting as I did not want this to be the main focus. Instead, I used bright colours around the black and greys to show the joy and pleasure that is experienced by those in wheelchairs, despite societal attitudes towards what is often perceived as a constricted life. I intentionally made these colours stand out because the purpose of the painting was to challenge preconceived notions that able-bodied people have about those in chairs. When painting, I wanted to make sure that the shapes were fluid. This was intentional to show that life in a wheelchair is not restricting in the way society understands it. Instead, one just has to learn how to be creative in tasks that are not seemingly made for those in chairs. I also wanted to incorporate blacks and greys into the rest of the painting to remember that there are unfavourable moments, just as there are for those in able bodies. This needed to be part of the piece, but again, was not the main focus. Lastly, is the wheelchair connected to a front-drive with the skeleton hand in the middle. The skeleton hand is a logo that the Krips of Liions use. It is specific to the paraplegic community, as many with spinal cord injuries cannot extend their thumb. Instead, there is a slight bend to the digit which is displayed in the painting. I wanted to ensure that the paraplegic thumbs up made it into my painting in some way to show the community and joy of the Krips of Liions. The Krips of Liions were a crucial part of challenging and redefining how I experience pleasure and joy. They taught me to push the bounds of my comfort zone and to embrace the uncomfortable moments. Somehow while doing all of this, joy seeps through. Overall, this painting challenges the view that those in able bodies subconsciously have towards those in wheelchairs. Living life in a wheelchair gives people an opportunity to be creative in finding a way to live in a world made for able bodies. In doing this, it creates an opportunity to experience pleasure in a way that you never thought would be enjoyable. Surprisingly, as I have learned through my evening with the Krips of Liions, there is so much pleasure hidden within the discomfort.

