Beyond the Binary: A Nexus of Disability

Mika Howard

An invitation and suggestion for interaction: In your hands, hold the circular frame which captures the tiny, white, delicate threads you see before you. Gently place your fingertips on the threads. Do you see patterns? Trace them. Carefully poke your fingers through the exposed holes. Feel how the threads move with you and resist your gentle manipulation.
Artist Statement

Through Beyond the Binary: A Disability Nexus, I invite you to imagine a nexus of disability. I invite you to imagine beyond the two spheres of disabled and non-disabled, beyond a spectrum from one extreme to another. I invite you to imagine a complex nexus of disability exploring (in)tangible fragments of connection. In a disability nexus, identity lines cross, liminal spaces flourish, and the complexities of one’s experiences are recognized and celebrated. A disability nexus is a space of transformation and possibility, not of entrapment and death. A disability nexus resists concrete description as much as it yearns for recognition.

In reimagining disability as a nexus, that is, as a complex web of interactions, relations and identities, I challenge the dominant understanding of disability as a binary between disabled and non-disabled. I do not intend to disavow the importance of identifying as disabled (Linton 2006), but aim to recognize and welcome the existence of liminal space(s) in relation to disability. Liminal spaces or “in-betweens” are often made invisible. Streamlining liminal narratives of disability erase and invisibilize those who inhabit the spaces between. To move beyond a static binary of disabled and non-disabled, it is necessary to recognize and interact with the knots, hubs, and tangles that enmesh experiences and understandings of disability.

In form, Beyond the Binary: A Disability Nexus is reminiscent of a spider’s web. There are many connecting threads, both leading into and away from central hubs. Spider webs are neatly organized through the action of the body of a single spider. The spider web is bound within a fixed space, a window pane, the space between two broken branches. Like a spider’s web, Beyond the Binary exists within a fixed frame; we are all bound within certain physical boundaries. But, unlike a spider web where an unsuspecting fly is captured within the sticky formation and eventually dies, Beyond the Binary is a voluntary space, where you are invited to touch but not forced to participate and can leave the web at any time. The disability nexus is a space of possibility and transformation, not a spider’s web of entrapment and death.
As a spider, spinning my nexus of disability, I invite you to imagine worlds that exist beyond the binary. Spin your webs and let’s explore new connections together.

References

Artist Bio
Entering her final year of undergraduate study at the University of Toronto St. George campus, Mika Howard is a double major in Equity Studies and Sexual Diversity Studies. Within Equity Studies, Mika has enjoyed taking multiple courses in the disability studies stream and works to integrate crip critiques into her research, writing, and community work. This past year, Mika has been serving as the Executive Director of the Sexual Education Centre at the University of Toronto St. George campus and has recently returned to Toronto after completing a summer student exchange to UC Berkeley. Mika would like to thank her teachers, femmes, and family.