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**Lydia X.Z. Brown, E. Ashkenazy, & Morenike Giwa Onaiwu (eds.). (2017) *All The Weight of our Dreams: On Living Racialized Autism*.
Nebraska, USA: DragonBee Press.
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All The Weight of our Dreams: On Living Racialized Autism, is the first anthology of its kind to address the intersected realities of race and autism. It relays very personal and often hard truths with poise, creativity, honesty, and love. It is a valuable text for anyone living a racialized autism experience or supporting those who are.

This volume, edited by racialized autistic¹ advocates, contains a powerful collection of stories, poems, essays, visual art, and lived narratives from over 60 contributors globally. It is a collection intended for autistic people and the professionals or families who support them. It is divided into six parts relaying themes of neurodiverse experiences and/or the intersected oppressions produced by racism, ableism, and heteronormativity. Several stories are not for the faint of heart. Although the book includes messages of hope, acceptance, and self-love, many stories reveal harsh injustices faced by neurodiverse people of colour. For teachers, professionals, and families, this book provides an education into some very real lived-experiences that may resonate with the racialized autistic people they support. It is a book to be studied with intent and careful purpose. For autistic readers, this book provides an opportunity to relate intimately with the narratives. Readers may be triggered, soothed, and relieved by what

¹ The identity-first labels ‘autistic’ and ‘disabled’ are used intentionally to reflect the preference of many autistic self-advocates including the editors themselves. See: <https://autisticadvocacy.org/about-asan/identity-first-language/>

they experience within the pages. Indeed, the editorial team intends to share these realities without revisions that ‘white-wash’ their truth (Giwa Onaiwu, 2020).

This book can be read out of order and in small sections at a time. It is a book to savour over a lifetime- to be visited in times of soul searching and understanding. It can serve as a very useful text in classroom settings with young people on the spectrum and their classmates. If used in this way, follow-up discussions must allow for rich and meaningful processing of how racism and ableism impact young people’s lives. In today’s society, these intersections continue to be ignored as race and autism are treated as separate and disjointed entities.

Before the anthology begins, a short preface, forward, and introduction unveil the humility and humanity of the editors and their chosen authors. In *A Note on Process*, Brown acknowledges the violence that colonialized language has imposed on disabled people of colour who speak English as a second language, come from poverty, or have perceived lesser language abilities. For this reason, Brown notes that “...forced conformity to arbitrary standards of ‘better’ language ...” (p. viii), were discouraged. Instead, editors simply supported authors in deepening their ideas with an emphasis on clarity. This allowed for the inclusion of a range of genuinely diverse voices, which are often missed in society’s obsession with perfect and inspirational stories. This volume is introduced as a true embodiment of inclusion, which it proves to be from beginning to end.

As evidenced by their titles - *Laying the Groundwork*, *Neurodivergence in a Neurotypical World*, and *Intersected Identities* - parts one through three of the book effectively lay the groundwork for readers who may be new to the concepts of social justice, disability rights, and oppression as they relate to autism. For those familiar with the concepts, these sections offer relatable personal narratives to help deepen their understanding. Part one opens

with a letter addressed to ‘People at the Intersection of Autism and Race: “Dear readers, You are not alone”’. This short section continues to speak to autistic readers of colour, reminding them that they are worthy, beautiful, and deserving of love and self-worth. Part two begins to form what the reader can expect from the rest of the sections in the book; collections of 20 or more pieces of art, poems, personal narratives, essays, commentaries, and even social media posts.

There seem to be very few recognizable ‘rules’ to the pattern of these pieces. Yet, it is certain they were chosen with purpose and care to reflect experiences of dating, relationships, diversity, institutionalization, shame, bullying, abuse, wrongful criminalization, stereotypes, privilege, pride, and more. These first sections offer stories that jar readers into a critical reflection on norms so ingrained into the fabric of everyday reality that they are often left unquestioned. For instance, how does the traditional ‘Best Buddies’² model reinforce power dynamics and charity in schools? Why is it that so many more disabled people of colour are incarcerated compared to white people? How does society continue to shame the many identities of queer and non-binary autistic people?

Parts four through six continue these themes with an emphasis on racial oppression, politics, and advocacy. In *Our Personal is Our Political*, readers experience 25 pieces including comics, letters, poems, short stories, and personal narratives of religious faith, love, acceptance, adult diagnoses, childhood memories, abuse, pain, violence, school suspensions, supportive teachers, ‘passing’ as neurotypical, and much more. In part five, *Cultural Work and Movement Building*, readers delve into short fiction, Facebook posts, long narratives, poems, and essays that further unpack the harms of racism and violence including police brutality, in-fighting among

² Best Buddies is an international friendship club that pairs disabled people with non-disabled students in schools. See: <https://bestbuddies.ca/>

rights advocates, and even the highly ‘tabooed’ subject of filicide. Finally, the last section, *Autistry*, leaves readers with a visual closure through the inclusion of artful storyboards, abstract paintings, drawings, and photo essays that do not all necessarily reflect the themes of oppression and pain. Rather, this final collection seems to simply celebrate the creative and non-conforming expression of amazing autistic people of colour.

If readers are expecting a seamlessly edited structure of inspirational short stories and poems, they may be disappointed. The editors of this volume have chosen a wonderful array of diverse voices and expressions that defy colonially-imposed constructions of quality and perfection. With a multitude of mediums, including wonderful works of art seemingly unrelated to the themes within, this book permits readers to explore creativity and talents that are often rejected in supremely white, ableist, and heteronormative societies. Equally as admirable, this volume does not exclude voices with controversial terminology within rights-activist circles; ideas related to recovery and labels of Asperger’s Disorder were included, which are presently noted in activist circles to be controversial concepts relating to the medical model of disability and a history of Nazi Holocaust allegiance (Furfaro, 2018). In future volumes, more discussion on these concepts will, without a doubt, emerge as important themes. In short, this groundbreaking book is a must-have addition to any library intended for readers interested in educating themselves, or others, about the intersected realities of racialized autistic experiences.

References

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