

Changing the Script: Race and disability in Lynn Manning's Weights

The [original paper](#) contains 12 sections, with 9 passages identified by our machine learning algorithms as central to this paper.

Paper Summary

SUMMARY PASSAGE 1

Section 1

In its unwavering adherence to a pathology-based model of disability, special education has foreclosed other ways of constructing meaning about disability. To challenge special education's reductionist understandings of disability, scholars in disability studies in education are drawing on a range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches, including humanities-based analyses of disability. In this paper, I explore the ways that counter-narratives, grounded in lived experience, can challenge oppressive ideologies of racism and ableism.

SUMMARY PASSAGE 2

Introduction: Scripting Difference

As such, we might ask why special education, which likes to posit itself as a 'service' in the best interests of students with disabilities, is more accountable to its own science than to students it purports to serve? Why, even in the face of criticism from within the disability community and from critical race scholars, has special education refused to acknowledge alternative knowledge claims? In response to this refusal, Code (1995, pp. 78-79) calls for a different kind of script -one that has the potential to 'unsettle and disrupt story lines that are apparently seamless' and that can serve as an 'irritant to the dominant paradigm of knowledge' about disability.

SUMMARY PASSAGE 3

Drawing On Other Disciplinary Traditions

One of the ways that scholars in DSE have begun to challenge the epistemic entrenchment of special education's reductionist understandings of disability is to infuse humanities-based approaches to disability (Linton, 1998; Paul, 2002; Ware, 2006), including disability performance art (Allan, 2005) in their scholarship and teaching. According to these scholars, shifting from a clinical to more transgressive or alternative sites of knowledge production, helps to destabilize the traditional deficit model of disability. Allan, for example, suggests that in their strategic deployment and playful flaunting of difference, disabled artists subvert and undermine norms, refuse assimilation, and rewrite the discourse of disability.

SUMMARY PASSAGE 4

'Like The Last Raisin In A Bowl Of Rice Pudding'

In *Weights* (2005), an autobiographical solo performance of poetry and spoken word, Lynn Manning recounts his experience of acquiring a disability after being shot in a bar at 23 years of age. Clearly claiming the margin as a 'space of radical openness' (hooks, 1990, p. 145), through his performance in *Weights*, Manning both challenges racist and ableist assumptions and explores the political and epistemic insights gained from marginality. Positioned at the intersections of race, gender, and disability, *Weights* is neither a solely a disability narrative nor a racial story, per se: rather, it is a story about the tangle that we call identity.

SUMMARY PASSAGE 5

Race And Disability In Lynn Manning'S *Weights* 501

You will go through it.' Assuming that there is some universal way that he's supposed to deal with an acquired disability, Manning is given no authority over his own experience. Justified by her authority and clinical experience, she knows how he is supposed to feel.

SUMMARY PASSAGE 6

Gaining Insight

Once he is accepted at the Braille Institute, he finds things are 'totally different.' Rather than expecting him to be obsessed with loss and grief like the doctors, rehabilitation specialists and even his mother expect him to be, Manning begins to learn acquire skills in Braille and learn strategies for daily living. And, after a few months, he starts Orientation and Mobility (O&M) training.

SUMMARY PASSAGE 7

'Pimp' Or 'Gimp'

One of the most compelling aspects of *Weights* is in its exploration of dual consciousness, informed by both racism and ableism. In an interview, Manning recounts how he came to see the connection between civil rights and disability rights. He explains: I was forced to become a Black Civil Rights activist when confronted with discrimination and low expectations.

SUMMARY PASSAGE 8

'You Have To Lift Weights'

Yet, this poem contains some coded foreshadowing. Like the candy in the poem that is both sour and sweet, Manning writes that 'you can't have light without dark'. Thus, in another radical departure from the typical overcoming script, *Weights* refuses any reading of Manning's life before he becomes disabled as idyllic (Sandahl, 2004).

SUMMARY PASSAGE 9

Conclusion

More often than not, these kinds of narratives leave students with problematic notions of disability as an individual tragedy or something that one needs to overcome at all costs. Such narratives provoke pity in non-disabled students, rather than challenge their stereotypes about disability and normalcy. Moreover, students can come away from a disability memoir thinking that rather than having examined one person's subjective experience that they instead have some universal understanding of disability.