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"When You Carry All of Your Baggage With You … You're Carrying All of Your Baggage With You": Identifying and Interrupting Equity Traps in Preservice Teachers' Narratives

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to identify common "equity traps" in the narrative accounts of White preservice teachers at Great Lakes University[1] (GLU). I outline common equity traps, or patterns of thinking, that serve to impede the achievement of equity in schooling. In addition to situating two specific equity traps within the narrative accounts of White preservice teachers, I outline possibilities for interrupting these traps. As a way to respond to inequitable schooling conditions, I argue that it is necessary to identify recurrent problematic perceptions held by preservice teachers and to root these perceptions institutionally as uncritical assumptions that privilege Whiteness. I conclude this paper with a discussion of the tasks for teachers and teacher educators who struggle to advance understandings about power, privilege, and prestige while destabilizing and eliminating equity traps.

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As a teacher educator who thrives on teaching and learning that bends “critical,” I was out of my seat with enthusiasm as preservice teachers in a recent literacy-across-the-curriculum course shared and reflected on issues related to the topics of censorship and critical literacy. Pulling the easel closer to the group and uncapping a new dry-erase marker, I scribbled onto the board some of the key tenets of critical literacy that could serve as a rubric for one’s teaching. I identified 4 tenets synthesized from over 30 years of research that helped to define critical literacy: (1) disrupting familiar routines, (2) considering multiple perspectives, (3) focusing on social and political issues, and (4) taking action to promote change (Lewison, Flynt, & Van Sluys, 2002). The students were taking notes and we were ruminating on recent events in schools and our course readings that seemed to help situate the tenets in meaningful ways.

I cued up a five-minute scene from a film documentary, *Monumental Myths* (Trinley, 2012), to highlight the interrelated nature of critical literacy tenets. The scene takes place at Mount Rushmore and follows the director, Tom Trinley, through a guided walking tour of the monument and park. Near the end of the tour, Trinley poses a question to the tour’s guide: “What is Gutzon Borglum’s affiliation with the Ku Klux Klan?” Borglum is the artist and sculptor credited with carving the famous monument into the hills of South Dakota.

The guide conceded that she had never read anything about the matter. Shortly thereafter, the director was accompanied by a park ranger at all times and asked to refrain from posing any further “controversial” questions to park staff. The film then provides a point/counterpoint on the Borglum issue (among other issues). That is, park visitors respond to whether the park’s “official” versions of Borglum and the controversy of sacred Sioux land are satisfactory, or if the narratives and monuments are in need of revisioning.

Several White visitors in the park’s parking lot did not feel misled. At least one visitor, a White, presumably working-class male, attributed Borglum’s background in the White supremacist Ku Klux Klan as an exercise of his freedom to hold such beliefs while still being accepted into the “melting pot” that is the United States. His companions (also White) seemed content with learning about superficial details, such as Borglum’s birthdate, but did not feel defrauded by not learning the more robust and “controversial” version of the past. Another park visitor, an African American male, expressed disbelief and indignation that the tour sweeps such details under the rug, especially given that we live in a democracy that “values diversity.”

As the film comes to a close, several historians, activists, and authors, including Howard Zinn, James Loewen, Lonnie Bunch, and Adam “Fortunate Eagle” Nordwall unpack many of the issues surrounding “monumental myths” present in textbooks, memorials, and other remembrances of historical events. I turned on the lights and the dialogue continued. Students noted that some key tenets of critical literacy were demonstrated in the film. One student, Taylor, a White, middle-class male, wondered aloud if we could be “critical” of the film. Specifically, he questioned, “Was it effective to show an angry Black male at the end of the film?”

A chorus of classmates began disrupting Taylor’s apparent misreading of the scene. They did not see “anger,” but instead saw concepts we had situated in class – diversity in language use and practice, regional dialects, variations of discourse – as being prominent in the scenes captured by the video camera. Some saw "passion" and "spiritedness," but there was an overwhelming re-routing of the notion that the film depicted an "angry Black male."

I begin with this anecdote as a way to situate a key term for this paper: *equity traps*. While I do not believe that Taylor had malicious intentions with his question – I think he was excited about the prospect of being given the task to be critical – his question is an example of an equity trap. Equity traps are patterns of thinking, whether implicitly held or explicitly articulated, that impede the achievement of equity in schools and society (Cohen, 2000; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). Taylor was "dysconsciously" (King, 1991) sustaining a social and cultural perspective that permeated his background and worldview as a middle-class, White male from a predominantly White, small community in a Midwestern state.

In terms of equity traps, Taylor was *employing the gaze* – focusing on the behaviors and language of a racial "Other" while deflecting any attention from the role of White supremacy in the "Mount Hushmore" controversies. Taylor's utterance offers an opportunity to explore the unearned privileges and benefits associated with whiteness and ways of disrupting these habits.[1]

Pondering this scene and others like it in teacher education courses engaging the topics of racism, classism, and sexism and the intersection of these oppressions with literacy, I wondered: What are the patterns of thinking that impede the pursuit of equity in schooling and society? And (how) might we interrupt these discourse practices?

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this paper is to identify common "equity traps" in the narrative accounts of preservice teachers from a predominantly White institution in a large, Midwestern state university's teacher education program. I examined 11 White preservice teachers' experiences with and perceptions of diversity, including their own Whiteness, while attending Great Lakes University (GLU). This study did not attempt to determine if preservice teachers of color can or do share the same susceptibility to equity traps.

This study is related to previous examinations of preservice and inservice teachers' articulations and understandings of Whiteness and racism (Johnson, 2002; Kailin, 1999; Landsman, 2005; Levine-Rasky, 2000; McIntyre, 1997, 2002; Picower, 2009; Sleeter, 1997, 1998; White, 2011). Unlike other investigations into Whiteness, this study consists of multiple interviews with individuals over time and analyzes nuanced equity traps articulated by secondary preservice teachers.

Following the lead of McIntyre (1997), I was interested in learning more about how White preservice teachers were "making meaning" of Whiteness in their own lives and in relation to their multiple positionalities. In a manner similar to White (2011), I interviewed several White preservice teachers who articulated a commitment to teaching for social justice throughout their final semesters of a teacher education program and into their student teaching. Further, in line with Chubbuck (2004), I sought opportunities to observe both the enactment and disruption of

Whiteness in the life stories of the participants.

While inquiries into preservice teachers' understandings of Whiteness exist, the language, grammar, and discourse of Whiteness is constantly evolving and dependent upon its many intersections with (to name a few) geography, ethnicity, gender, social class, and sexual preferences (Conley, 2000, 2001). Further, naming and defining Whiteness remains difficult and challenging as a result of collective silence on and aversion or resistance to topics of White privilege and White power (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001; Bonilla-Silva, 2002; Lund & Carr, 2012; Pollock, 2004; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2011; Sleeter, 1998; Tatum, 1994).

I studied the values, beliefs, and philosophies of the preservice teachers highlighted in this paper because they each expressed a desire to teach in ways that challenged the status quo. As teachers just beginning their journey into the profession, the participants were open to learning about how to identify and examine relations of power in their teaching and interactions with their students. A crucial goal for this study is to put a spotlight on equity traps operating in many preservice teachers, paying careful attention to the consequences of these traps if they are not interrupted.

Conceptual Framework

In their important work on equitable schooling, McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) describe four common equity traps held by educators working with diverse populations and students of color. McKenzie and Scheurich define equity traps as "conscious and unconscious thinking patterns and behaviors that trap teachers, administrators, and others" or "ways of thinking or assumptions that prevent educators from believing that their students of color can be successful learners" (pp. 601-602). These traps result in lowered expectations and negative views toward students' home language and culture, and foil the possibilities for equity in schooling.

Described as occurring individually and collectively, equity traps are "often reinforced … through formal and informal communication, assumptions, and beliefs" (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, p. 603). Equity traps lead to what King (1991) has coined as "dysconscious racism" or an "uncritical habit of mind" that gives justification to inequities. Identifying and interrupting equity traps holds considerable potential for helping educators "rethink assumptions that uncritically privilege Whiteness" (Copenhaver-Johnson, Bowman, & Johnson, 2007, p. 234).

McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) identify four constructs and provide strategies to help school leaders first understand, and then implement strategies to eliminate the habitual traps. Figure 1 (below) situates each of the four traps and provides a brief description of each trap. Importantly, each trap is not a stand-alone category and frequently there is overlap between the traps.

Equity Trap	Brief Description of Equity Trap
Deficit View	A way of identifying students' language, culture, and behavior as a liability and not a resource for schooling.
Racial Erasure	Refusing to "see color," taking a "colorblind" stance, and switching the conversation away from race to socioeconomics.
Avoidance and Employment of the Gaze	Avoiding the surveillance of White, middle-class parents and pressuring other White teachers to "fit in" with the norms established in a school.
Paralogical Beliefs and Behaviors	Shifting responsibility for one's own inappropriate behavior by blaming students.

Fig. 1. Description of Equity Traps

For this paper, I situate the first two equity traps outlined by McKenzie and Scheurich (2004): deficit view and racial erasure. Based on Valencia's (1997) deficit-thinking model, the first trap is the *deficit view* trap. According to this trap, **"**the student who fails in school does so principally because of internal deficits or deficiencies" (p. 2; in McKenzie & Scheurich, p. 607). In this view, students of color are regarded as having deficiencies attributed to linguistic limitations, inadequate intellectual capacity, unprincipled behaviors, and insufficient motivation. Also, student "deficiencies" are located within the student, as inherent or originating with the individual. Further, individuals express the *deficit view* trap by remarking on students' parents and communities as lacking in motivation, adequacy, or family stability and attributing this as a cultural and generational affliction.

McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) observed that in addition to blaming parents and individual students' lack of motivation, teachers and administrators held that the students and their families "did not value education" and that students "did not know how to behave properly" (pp. 608-609). Ultimately, the findings of this view indicate that the teachers in their study held "a strong belief that their children of color walked in the school door at 4 years old with built-in deficits that the teachers should not be expected to overcome" (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, p. 609).

The second trap explored here, *racial erasure*, is based in part on the work of hooks (1992) and refers to the process by which some people refuse "to see color," or take a "colorblind" stance toward all students of color (Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers, 2012; Thompson, 1999). In addition to "forget[ting] about race," the racial erasure equity trap tends to prioritize other factors, including socioeconomic class, as contributing to one's school performance. Teachers in McKenzie and Scheurich's

(2004) study indicated that a student's low performance had little to do with race and everything to do with economics or poverty. The authors conclude that the *racial erasure* or colorblind equity trap is "a rhetorical strategy to hide [individual] racism" (p. 615) and offer suggestions for eradicating the racial erasure equity trap.

All four of the equity traps identified by McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) and outlined in Figure 1 (above) were evident in this study. However, the first two equity traps, *deficit view* and *racial erasure* emerged with greater frequency than the latter two equity traps in the data I collected. As a result, I focus specifically on these two traps to highlight the consequences of these traps if they are not explicitly addressed in the context of a teacher education program. I next turn to a description of my research methodology, including an account for data collection and analyses.

Methodology

As a narrative inquiry study, I drew on the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) to explore how participants viewed race, including their own Whiteness, as the construct shaped their experiences as beginning teachers for several reasons. I found methods of narrative inquiry suitable to my research aims because, as Chubbuck (2004) notes, "teaching is best understood when contextualized in the identity of the teacher in the context of the larger life story rather than being reduced to specific classroom behaviors" (p. 312). Further, I found narrative inquiry as particularly useful in providing for a depth of complexity and nuance necessary to work in service to disrupt social and economic inequities.

Data Generation and Collection

For this project, I collected multiple types of information to aid in data triangulation: documents, interviews, and observations (Creswell, 2007). To begin, I interviewed 11 prospective teachers from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds on three occasions.[2] The semistructured interview protocol encouraged participants to narrate their schooling experiences and was flexible enough to pursue individual story threads. The protocol encouraged participants to narrate their experiences in a teacher education program advocating a philosophical and pedagogical mission of teaching for social justice through multicultural teaching (Grant & Sleeter, 2007) and critical reflection (Zeichner & Liston, 1996) (see Appendix A for protocol questions). In addition to individual interviews, seven participants took part in a two-hour focus group interview. I audio-recorded and transcribed all interviews.

Data Analyses

I began the analyses of preservice teacher narratives by creating "interim texts" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The interim texts became amalgamated sites of different genres (interview transcripts, field notes, course assignments) on one canvass. Creating the interim texts encompassed a process of crafting a portrait out of the words (spoken and written), stories, and intent of the participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). One goal of the interim text was to situate the participants in the social, cultural, and personal contexts out from which their histories appeared to unfold as told (and retold) through select stories. The interim text task enabled me to condense, abbreviate, summarize, rearrange, and reinterpret texts generated throughout the length of the study.

I utilized both inductive and deductive methods of reasoning. Inductively, I labeled recurring themes and equity traps from stories that were narrated by the prospective teachers and from my observations of participants' narratives. For instance, themes related to talking about one's self as raced, classed, or gendered (or not), attending to diversity in teaching and learning settings (or not), and developing cultural competencies emerged as categories in initial coding (see Appendix B for additional themes). Deductively, I connected themes from the professional literature related to White teachers talking about (or avoiding talk about) race and McKenzie and Scheurich's (2004) descriptions of "equity traps" within the stories narrated by the prospective teachers in this study. Specifically, I employed McKenzie and Scheurich's (2004) "deficit views" and "racial erasure" as deductive categories for analysis.

Context and Setting

At Great Lakes University (GLU), approximately 85 percent of the student body (over 30,000 students) identify as White, 7 percent identify as Asian American, 5 percent identify as African American, 3 percent identify as Latino, and about 1.5 percent of the total student body identify as Native American. Out of 31 students in a course I taught on diversity, 29 students self-identified as White. Such numbers are reflective of previous and current cohort demographics in GLU's elementary and secondary education programs.

All participants grew up in the state where GLU is located. According to the U.S. Census (2010), nearly 90 percent of the state's 5 million inhabitants identify as White, less than 7 percent identify as African American or Black, just over 6 percent of the population identify as Latino/a, and fewer than 3 percent of the population identify as Asian. At the time of this writing, at least one secondary school in the state was the center of a "controversy" regarding an un-named White parent's objection to her 17-year-old son's learning about White privilege in a high school class titled "The American Dream" (Starnes, 2013).

According to the U.S. Census (2010), over 230,000 people populate the city of Great Lakes, where the research was conducted. Approximately 79 percent of the city identify as white (U.S. Census, 2010). In contrast to city demographics, the school district's demographics provide a different snapshot of the city's racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity, as 50 percent of the district's 25,000 students are White, 24 percent are African American, 15 percent are Hispanic American, 10 percent are Asian American, and 1 percent are Native American (District Website, Introduction to the District). Teachers of color account for less than 10 percent of the district's teachers, and district administrators are predominantly White. Historically, students of color in the district have struggled to receive equitable teaching and learning experiences. In recent times, addressing the graduation rates for African American males (approximately 50 percent graduate) and Latinos (fewer than 60 percent graduate) and "closing the racial achievement gap" between students of color and their White and Asian counterparts has become a focal point in the district's search to hire a new superintendent.

Beginning in the fall of 2011, another relevant situation – one that had been simmering for some time – occurred on campus that further helps to contextualize this study. The controversy centered on

GLU's diversity initiatives and the university's holistic admissions approach. A conservative think tank, the Center for Equal Opportunity (CEO), released a report that stated "severe discrimination" related to race and ethnicity was occurring in the school's admissions. Specifically, the CEO group charged that White and Asian students were discriminated against in the admissions process, while African Americans and Latino/as had a greater chance of being admitted. While this public debate occurred after the conclusion of this study, the situation underscores the racial tension that continues to permeate the social, cultural, and institutional contexts in which data was collected.

Participants

As for the 11 participants in this study, 4 students grew up in mostly rural contexts. Six of the participants grew up in suburban settings, and one participant grew up in the metropolitan city of Great Lakes. Nine of the participants described their elementary upbringing as predominantly White in terms of their peers and teachers. Few participants had a teacher or school leader of color in their K-12 schooling experience. All participants described their school's curriculum as Eurocentric, and only in high school did some participants encounter classes focused on multiple perspectives of issues of power and privilege. Seven of the participants in the study were enrolled in "talented and gifted" programs or in advanced placement or honors courses during their K-12 school. Accordingly, this situation lessened their likelihood of interacting with racial, cultural and linguistic "Others" in their school.

I began collecting data for this study in the spring of 2010 and continued data collection through the summer, 2011. The participants all were 21 to 24 years old, born between 1986 and 1990. All were at the same stage of GLU's two-year teacher education program through the duration of this study. I followed the participants through their second (spring 2010), third (fall 2010), and fourth/final (spring 2011) semester of GLU's secondary teacher education program. Students complete their liberal studies and minor requirements before applying to GLU's secondary teacher education program and they progress sequentially through the program in consecutive semesters within one of two cohorts (n≈25-30).

Researcher's Positions and Reflexivity

My own subjectivities as a researcher play into the conclusions drawn and limitations of this study. As an instructor/supervisor to the participants, my role as the researcher was not as one in traditionally or clinically defined terms. It is difficult for me to claim objectivity as the researcher. In addition to my status as an instructor, which I do believe tempered the stories narrated by participants as much as their perceptions of the study's audience(s), other aspects of my identity and socialization as a White, middle-class male have conceivably limited, altered, and/or constrained the interpretations I make.

Equity Traps in Preservice Teacher Narratives

Deficit View Equity Trap

According to the *deficit view* equity trap, students of color and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds do not perform as well as White, middle-class peers due to inherent deficiencies related to their social, cultural, and racial upbringings. The trap is expressed in beliefs about students' "improper" language use, inappropriate behaviors, and lack of motivation as factors that contribute to a lack of success in schooling. In addition to locating "deficiencies" within individual students, the view places blame on parents who do not value education or who are unsupportive or said to be uninterested in their children's school lives.

Miranda Heistand, a secondary preservice mathematics teacher, attended a predominantly White Catholic elementary school. As an honors student in secondary school, she had little interaction with students of color in high school. The deficit view equity trap emerges in her recollection of an occurrence at the middle school where she did her student teaching. Miranda described the following scene,

> *[T]here was one [African American] girl who was talking about how she was going to get in a fight with this other girl because she had to like stand her ground … which I don't get at all. I was like, "Why would you fight?" Like, "Why?" She was like, "Well, I'm going to fight this girl. I'm gonna do it." Why would you do that? … I don't get it. I still don't. It's one of those things I don't get. And, maybe it's because of her upbringing, or where she grew up, or who she – the kinds of people she was around when she grew up around. But this sense that everything can be solved through fighting is something that I see a lot. … They are always talking about it. And it's probably over something stupid, like a boy. It's just, I don't get it.*

Miranda begins by describing an individual female student as having inappropriate conflict resolution skills. However, by the end of the anecdote, she has attributed the unbecoming behavior to a group of individuals ("they"), presumably African American females, all of whom "are always talking about" fighting. As Miranda stated, she did "not get it," that is, she did not "get" the behavior of the student, but she did have some ideas about where the student learned such unseemly aggressive behavior. Miranda attributed the students' behaviors to their "upbringing," "where she grew up," and "the kinds of people she was around." In other words, Miranda perceived the student's misbehavior as emanating from the student's home life.

In a second example, Elaine Merchant, a secondary English major who attended K-12 schools in her predominantly White suburban hometown, attributed student behaviors at school as related to students' "really rough home lives." Elaine described the students in her practicum placement at a Great Lakes high school as "predominantly people of color in a special education core." In Elaine's schooling experiences, she had never witnessed skirmishes in the hallway or a police presence in her school. She explained, "I had never experienced a fight in the middle of the hallway or … numerous people being arrested [in school]." However, at the high school of her practicum, she said, "I experienced it numerous times throughout the course I was there." Elaine explained that such experiences had "never happened" in her hometown, so witnessing such actions and behaviors as a practicum student caused dissonance. In her words,

> *I have never experienced that. … And so it just really opened my eyes to the populations of people that I was working with and the backgrounds that they were coming*

> *from and allowed me to kind of look at that and say, "Okay, this group of students is kind of from a really rough place. A lot of them are coming from a really rough place and from really rough home lives. How am I going to make what I am doing relevant to them?"*

In a new environment, Elaine focused on individual student behavior as attributable to students' "really rough home lives." Instead of questioning the school's disciplinary policies and procedures and in lieu of inquiring into the effect of low teacher expectations and zero-tolerance policies on students who have been historically marginalized (Christensen, 2012;Fuentes, 2012), Elaine ascribed students' lack of achievement to the "really rough place[s]" in which the students grew up. Like Miranda, Elaine located student "deficiencies" as rooted in students' social and cultural backgrounds and communities.

In addition to positioning students as having deficiencies related to their behaviors, home lives, and language use, while overlooking structural factors as crucial to understandings of the achievement of *all* students, several participants located student achievement in school as correlated to their parents' involvement (or perceived lack thereof) in their children's educations.

Eric Van de Kamp, a secondary preservice mathematics teacher from a rural, predominantly White (K-6 Catholic grade school) schooling background, described what he saw as "a general disengagement from school" in another example of the deficit view equity trap. Eric related such "disengagement" to the alignment of a student's and her/his parents' attitudes and levels of (dis)engagement. According to Eric,

> *[S]ome of the parents who haven't received as much schooling, maybe don't quite value it as much or see the importance of it, and because they are not directly paying for [their child's education] ... they are forgetting about like where that money is actually coming from. And it also allows them to be a little bit less engaged with their child's learning. And because there [are] two disengaged people on education in that household now, they are going to come to school and they are going to not be as willing to engage in the learning.*

For Eric, student success in school is dependent upon factors related to their home lives. According to Eric, parents who did not "value" or "see the importance" of education contributed to student disengagement from school. This disengagement was described as compounding in a household where multiple generations live together and uphold a tradition of devaluing a free education. Underlying Eric's sentiment is his belief in a "meritocratic society" where the maxim "equal opportunity for all" is skewed by a conviction that we all depart from the same concourse or that we all embark from the same port (McNamee & Miller, 2009).

In the final instance of the *deficit view* equity trap examined here, Eric attributes negative outcomes of a student of color to an inescapable condition. Eric illustrated this trap through the following anecdote:

> *[T]here was a student of mine when I was at [Great Lakes Middle School], a young African American male, [and] he moved from [another city] because he was in a gang there. And*

> *his mom … obviously [did not] want that kind of life for him, [so she] moved him out … and they both came over here, and very quickly he found a new gang. … started right where he left off. And yeah the mom … she wants good things for him, but because they are in a way like bringing their problems over … picking up and moving is not the answer. You know, it may help, but, it's – when you carry all of your baggage with you … you're carrying all of your baggage with you.*

The metaphor of "carrying" one's baggage implicitly calls for an "unpacking" of sorts regarding this illustrative story that Eric told. Using a deficit lens, Eric refers to a student's "baggage" (e.g., "gang" affiliation) as following the student wherever he moves. An assets-based lens might instead identify traits and characteristics of this student and his mother in a more redeeming manner (e.g., charisma, leadership potential, intrapersonal skills). Further unpacking Eric's depiction of problems springing from, or preceding from, a student's social, cultural, and racial origin, reveals an underlying belief in endogenous or inherent "problems" as braided into the DNA of various cultural groups. Of course, such a perspective is the result of uncritical, or unmindful, consideration of the role that antecedent historical conditions and institutionalized forms of racism play in the maintenance of contemporary inequities (Schmidt, 2005).

Racial Erasure Equity Trap

A common (mis)conception in the United States maintains that having elected and re-elected an African American president, the nation has moved "beyond race" (and its legacy of racism) and entered an era as a "post-racial nation" (Bonilla-Silva, 2009). The stance holds that the United States and its people have moved beyond, or rather overcome, various forms of racism, mostly conceived as individual acts of hate to the exclusion of other forms of racism, including cultural and institutional. While comforting to many, such beliefs must be examined and interrupted given the social stratification that continues to exist along racial and ethnic lines in contemporary society. Examples of the stratification can be observed in health care and poverty statistics, arrest and conviction rates, graduation and employment rates, zero-tolerance occurrences and repercussions, overrepresentation of students of color in special education and disproportionality of students of color in "talented and gifted" programs, and further exist in areas related to residential housing and segregated schooling (Gamoran, 2001; Green, 2010; Lipman, 2004; Winn, 2010). In other words, racism is embedded in social, cultural, and economic practices and policies. People refusing "to see color" as part of an effort to "forget about race" (hooks, 1992) perpetuate racism, even if this is not their intention.

As McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) discovered, even when people profess to "erase race" as a meaningful category providing structure (or not) to their interactions with others, they still refer to race through subtle phrases or code words that indicate that they do "see" race. To no avail, assertions of color-blind or racial erasure discourses attempt to "hide racism." Through silence(s), pretending not to see consequential identity markers, and shifting the conversation to socioeconomics, the *racial erasure* equity trap serves the interests of Whites, who benefit socially, economically, and culturally from the un-naming of race. Such views serve the

(White) self by perhaps freeing one from guilt or responsibility, yet the same view conveniently overlooks existing realities and possibilities for collective action toward a more justice-oriented society.

In the first instance of the racial erasure equity trap, a preservice secondary English teacher from a predominantly White suburban K-12 schooling experience, David Jones, held firmly to his beliefs in a colorblind and meritocratic society. David questioned whether race or skin color was consequential or not: "I always viewed it as: Does the color of their skin really matter? Is that just sort of an incidental thing? Deep down, we're all humans, so we should all be treated as such." While many may read David's belief that one's race or skin color is "incidental" as an insult, under the illusion of a colorless society – a society where one's race has no bearing on interactions with cultural "Others" – such discourse is both tolerated and presumed.

David's poetic, "we're all humans," can be seen as an attempt to "erase race" as a factor in schooling and as a factor in his daily performances (instructional style, dress, gestures, expectations, reading and writing assignments, and assessments) in schools with students from diverse cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. Considering himself a skeptic of the critical race theory tenet that racism is a normative aspect, a "permanent fixture" to life in America (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2009), David did not agree, despite claims to the contrary, "that there necessarily is that deep-seated racism" in the United States.

In the case of Miranda Heistand (mathematics teacher introduced above), she did not think about herself as having a race until attending college at GLU. Living in a predominantly White setting, race had been erased from her upbringing through a silence on and avoidance of the topic at home and in schools. Miranda "didn't see it [race] as an issue at home," and stated, "it wasn't something you had to deal [with]." In this view, race is something that people who are not White have to "deal" with. While Miranda was surrounded by friends and family who were White, she did not perceive her surroundings to be permeated with race. According to Miranda, race

> *was hard to come into contact with. I mean if we go into [urban center] ... that makes sense ... but it was just something that was not dealt with on a daily basis. You know? If you don't see it, you don't think about it kind of thing.*

Miranda's socialization in a predominantly White setting led her to believe that race is something that is "dealt with on a daily basis" by colored "Others," but that Whites did not have to "think about it" because they were not in possession of a race.

The racial erasure equity trap also was visible in some of the experiences that Miranda detailed from her experiences working in diverse schools throughout GLU. Miranda prefaced her story with a disclaimer, "I don't want this to come out negatively," before continuing, "but I think sometimes [students of color] use [the race card] when I'm not ever trying … to act in a negative light toward them." Miranda recalled instances while working with students of color when the students felt "slighted" for one reason or another by the instruction or attention they were receiving (or not) from the teacher.

The students in these instances ascribed the perceived rebuffing as attributable to their race. In response, Miranda was quick to erase race as a factor in the instance, telling the students, “It’s not because it’s a racial thing, it’s because what you are doing is wrong, and that’s why I am talking to you.” When students in these instances “flip into” a mode of raising the issue of race, even though Miranda was not intentionally paying attention to her own or the students’ race as she interrupts “inappropriate” behavior, Miranda stated, “I feel like you have to handle [such instances] lightly.” In other words, Miranda was in favor of dismissing students’ claims of unfairness as not legitimate because she was not acting “in a negative light toward them” or singling students out for their race, but for their unsuitable behaviors.

Miranda stated that in situations when students “play the race card,” she finds it “hard as a White teacher” and conceded that she “was somewhat at a loss for things.” What made these situations so difficult for Miranda? She explained, “Because I can’t really, I’m not an African American. I have no idea what your life has been like or how people treat you. … I can guess at it, but not having those experiences, I can’t relate.” Growing up in a society in which she was never made mindfully aware of her racialized status as a White person, Miranda was “at a loss” for how to empathize or “relate” to her students of color, specifically African American students, who it can be presumed were made aware of their status as “raced” early on in life. In the same way that Miranda did not “see it” –that is, race – growing up in a predominantly White setting, she seemed unable or unwilling to “see” that her expectations, beliefs about behavior, and interactions with students and staff continue to be saturated with race and power.

Elaine Merchant (secondary English teacher introduced above), echoes many of the sentiments of Miranda as she narrates interactions with racial “Others” that were “not at all in relation into race.” Elaine worked in a supervisory role in the dormitories on the campus at GLU. During her junior year, Elaine reported an African American resident assistant (RA) to her supervisor about an incident related to poor work performance. Elaine stated that she “didn’t necessarily get along with” her supervisee, but that this detail was “not at all in relation to race but more in relation to how she performed her job. ...”

Like Miranda, Elaine did not categorize her expectations and assessments of others’ behaviors or accomplishments as having anything to do with race, yet the case could be made that the situations actually had everything to do with race. In both Miranda’s and Elaine’s narratives, they are in positions of power as a result of many centripetal forces, race being prominent among the coagulants.

Elaine described the situation with the African American RA as follows:

> *[I]t came down to me kind of overseeing this whole series of events, and me feeling like she hadn’t upheld – there were numerous individuals who hadn’t upheld their responsibilities in taking part in these events – and I then had to report to my supervisor about, okay, “No these things weren’t done, and these were the people that were responsible for them.” And so she [the African American RA] sat me down to have a conversation where she felt like I had targeted her as a result of her race. Which was something that absolutely floored me because it was never at all in relation to her race.*

In this instance, Elaine was "absolutely floored" by the suggestion that race may have played a factor in her targeting someone for disciplinary action. That is, Elaine was perplexed by the allegation that race played a factor in reporting sub-par performance. Due to the racial erasure trap, Elaine maintained a colorblind stance, which holds that individual interactions are completely unstructured by socially constructed categories including race. When confronted by the African American RA with her impression that she was unfairly targeted due to her race, Elaine maintained her belief that she was targeting unacceptable behavior, and not the RA's race. The racial erasure trap, thus, allows individuals to perpetuate an outlook that simplifies individual interactions by taking race, and other social constructs, out of the equation. Making race irrelevant, or at least setting it aside when it becomes inconvenient, serves to keep intact White privilege and ultimately upholds White supremacy.

Discussion

In this inquiry project, using a lens that accounts for equity traps has revealed some of the discursive ways that preservice White teachers reinscribe or rearticulate existing scripts that diminish the significance or interrogation of Whiteness. Through the *deficit view* equity trap, students' language, abilities, behaviors, and family/home lives were conceived as liabilities that resulted in lowered expectations from the preservice White teachers in this study. The deficit view equity trap rendered students of color and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds as not performing as well as White, middle-class peers due to deficits related to their social, cultural, and racial upbringings. Frequently, this trap allowed preservice teachers to place blame on students and their parents, all the while concealing institutional factors, including White supremacy, as contributing to the plight of students of color and low-income students.

Instead of attributing the designation of African American students in a "special education core" as the result of an institutional fault or flaw, Elaine Merchant situated her students' predicament to the students' "rough home lives." That is, while Elaine could have questioned the school's culture and its role in disproportionally placing students of color in special education classes, she chose instead to blame the students' cultures as leading to their lack of access to a fair education.

The *deficit view* equity trap tripped up Eric Van de Kamp when he located "gaps" in achievement in family structures and cultural "baggage." For Eric, student disengagement in school was compounded at home, where students' parents were also "disengaged" from the process of schooling. Instead of examining the structures and institutions of school and society as out-of-step with the needs of students of color and low-income students, Eric found students' and parents' conditions and expectations as in conflict or incompatible with the credibility of the school.

The *racial erasure* equity trap captured discursive attempts to diminish the importance of race by claiming some variation of (a) we're all members of the human race, (b) everyone is equal, and (c) I judge others by the content of their character, not the color of their skin. Such views obscure and trivialize lived experiences and ignore and deny social, economic, cultural, and historical facts that speak to existence of oppression(s) then *and* now. Contrary to the subtext of being colorblind, race still matters (West, 2001). A critical analysis of race, class, and gender disrupts notions that the United States has lived up to its promises or that there exists a level playing field or common starting place for all peoples in the country (Andersen & Collins, 2010).

Despite David's marginalization of race as something "incidental," for many students of color, race is far from a peripheral identity marker in terms of their family, history, and culture. Further, race also is important to Whites. Even if Whites choose not to reflect on the histories of oppressed groups, these histories exact consequences on the descendants of both the oppressed and the oppressors (Goodman, 2011).

When it comes to teaching, it is not possible to avoid teaching or talking about race, privilege, and power. Race is embedded in the institution of schooling – from the construction and sustaining of the building(s) and social networks to the expectations, "norms," values, standards, and priorities emphasized in brick-and-mortar and virtual schools. The seduction of "erasing race" allows many well-intentioned Whites to avoid the necessary dissonance associated with having a role in the maintenance of White supremacy. Meaningful analyses of privilege, power, and equity traps – though destabilizing as it may be for powerful groups – cannot be absent if the end goal is equity. In other words, White preservice teachers should have "to deal with" their Whiteness. Whiteness is a space that Whites inhabit 100 percent of the time (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

Conclusion and Implications

In this research, I have examined the stories of White preservice secondary teachers as they articulated their experiences and beliefs about learning to teach in environments that differed widely (at least demographically and culturally) from the environments in which they were schooled. By sharing valuable lessons that I have gleaned from my analysis of preservice teachers' narratives, it is my hope that conversations on equity traps and other obstacles to achieving equity move others to action beyond the four walls of the classroom. In addition to discerning equity traps from one's own and others' vernacular, it is important for teacher educators to offer direction and counsel for problematizing existing structures and our places within them (Foss, 2002).

This narrative inquiry into the experiences and understandings of preservice secondary school teachers from a predominantly White institution in the Midwest holds several implications for teacher educators. Central to the task of unsettling the settled is working toward a mass of teachers and preservice teachers in various stages of developing and refining a "critical stance" (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008). A critical stance is an outlook, an attitude, a way to think, and a way to teach (Pennycook, 1999). A critical stance allows students and teachers to question authority and "to stand their ground, to develop opinions that are consistent with deeply held values, and, when conscience requires it, to act against consensus or the crowd" (Kohl, 1995, p. 18). Such a stance subverts the traditional model of teacher-as-transmitter or disseminator of knowledge, positioning practitioners as learners and inquirers. A critical stance requires interrogations into equity traps or patterns of thinking that decelerate the possibilities for equity in schooling.

It would be a fault to address, through teaching and assessment, the skills and abilities necessary for one's proficiency as a teacher while disregarding the values that we must be working toward as well (democracy, justice, equity). Enacting such values, programmatically and individually, however, cannot be a comfortable space for everyone at all times. The topics of privilege and equity traps make many preservice teachers (and teacher educators), particularly Whites, uncomfortable and vulnerable (Dozier, Johnston, & Rogers, 2006; Leonardo & Porter, 2010). However, individual growth is only possible if we experience discomfort.

While the task of questioning one's own privilege, equity traps, and role in maintaining dominance is uneasy and uncomfortable, all changes require one to experience dissonance. This dissonance should not be avoided, but rather attended to. Indeed, if we do not experience discomfort – and many of the preservice teachers we teach have always been successful in *doing* school – we can expect our teachers to replicate the conditions under which they thrived. If teachers are to go against the status quo, we must equip them with tools for recognizing and acting on unfairness in its discrete and indiscrete packaging.

To address the *deficit view*, teacher educators must "reframe" preservice teachers' perspectives from a deficit-based to an assets-based way of thinking about students, parents, and communities of color (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). Dignifying students' cultures by recognizing students' "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, Gonzalez, 1992) or abilities, ideas, and strategies brought from home/community to school is one way to validate and support students. The neighborhood walk or home visit strategy is one way for teachers to establish rapport and get to know their students and families on a deeper level. Community oral history projects and even three-way conferencing (teacher-parent-student) have also been identified as strategies for transforming the deficit view equity trap (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). It is important to be mindful, however, that such practices, when done without critical reflection, have a tendency to reinforce existing stereotypes or beliefs, rather than disrupting or challenging them.

In order to interrupt the *racial erasure* equity trap, one strategy to shed light on the ways that Whites view and talk about racial "Others" is to create book study groups that facilitate such conversations. Another powerful tool for creating conversation on the inequities within a school or district relates to the "equity audit" (Groenke, 2010; Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004). An equity audit provides school leaders and even future teachers the means to disaggregate school data by race in order to identify problematic areas and to make plans for equalizing inequities. For instance, through an equity audit, school leaders are likely to find that students of color are underrepresented in advanced placement (AP) and honors track courses and overrepresented in special education when compared to their White peers (Artiles, 2009; Waitoller, Artiles, & Cheney, 2010). As well, the audit may point out inequities in terms of which students are taught by the most- and least-experienced teachers in the school. The cycle of the audit – "analyze the data, discuss its meaning, and devise solutions" (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, p. 618) – allows educators to focus on the ways in which schools produce inequities along racial boundaries and invites teachers to "see" systemic inequities and have a hand in dissolving them.

As Gomez, Allen, and Clinton (2004) posit, "[t]here are no recipes for how one might replace an existing set of cultural models and practices with other, 'better' ones" (p. 487). However, teacher education programs can explicitly outline and interrupt discursive representations of equity traps in large group settings. Examining a variety of beliefs, values, and assumptions in a reflective manner is one way for preservice teachers to critically review and question the ways in which particular worldviews enable and constrain a more equitable and just society[3]. Further, teacher education programs must encourage the development of critical perspectives through attunement to institutional inequities resulting from the intersections of privileged positions.

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[1] Having introduced the concepts of *equity traps* and *privilege*, I must exercise caution in order to avoid conflating the two terms. The two terms appear to be intimately related and compatible with one another; that is, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Specifically, privilege (acknowledged or not) appears to enable, foster, and perpetuate equity traps. The inverse also appears to be true: equity traps maintain systems of privilege.

[2] I first met each of the participants in this study through a 3-credit, 15-week course I taught during the spring of 2010. The class was focused on teaching diverse learners and consisted of 31 preservice secondary students from each of the core subject areas (English, Math, Science, Social Studies) of the Great Lakes University (GLU) secondary education program. Following the course, I recruited students in the class to participate in the narrative inquiry project in which we met every three to four months over the course of their final semesters of student teaching to discuss the role of Whiteness in relation to the encouragements and constraints of enacting multicultural education, teaching for social justice, and equitable teaching practices.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol Questions

Interview 1: Background/Family

1. What were some important characteristics of your neighborhood(s) growing up?
2. If you were aware of your family's socioeconomic status, how were you aware of this?
3. What, if any, challenges did you or your family face with discrimination of any kind (racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, gender, sexual orientation, etc.)?
4. Did you have friends or family members of other races growing up?
5. Who (or what) would you say has had an influence on you and your beliefs about race?
6. How would you define racism?
7. Sometimes people act in ways that are interpreted as "racist." Have the ways you have acted ever been interpreted as racist? Please describe.
8. When did you first realize you were White?
9. Can you remember a time when you were treated differently because of your Whiteness? What happened?
10. As a child, were you exposed to situations where people from different social classes mixed? Please explain the circumstances.
11. Growing up, how did your identity as a White, gendered person affect your relationships with people from other races, genders, and/or social backgrounds?
12. How were you perceived by people in your community as a White person?
13. Do you think being White has made any difference in your life?
14. What are your thoughts on Affirmative Action?
15. Can you describe any relevant, salient, or critical moments from our class this past semester? What were some important readings, conversations, activities, discussions, or disagreements that you can recall? Why do think these things stand out?

Interview 2: Elementary, Middle, and Secondary Schooling

1. What were you like as a student? Describe your strengths, weaknesses, and tendencies.
2. How would you describe your peer makeup throughout schooling?
3. How would you describe the diversity of the students and teachers in your school district?
4. Did you ever observe teachers or students treating students of color as different from White students?
5. Do recall being instructed in or learning about any languages other than English in your schooling?
6. How were students who spoke other language(s) than English looked upon or treated?
7. Did you ever learn about or experience White privilege in school?
8. How did multiculturalism, or the promotion of understanding, appreciation, and acceptance of cultural diversity, present itself in your schools' curriculums? Please describe the efforts made by your teachers and schools.
9. In what ways did you examine social justice, injustice, culture, and/or diversity in the world or your community as a student in school?
10. Are there any other experiences from your schooling years that seem pertinent to this study on Whiteness? Can you elaborate?

College Experience (Winter 2010/2011)

1. How have you experienced diversity on campus? Have your experiences been encouraged or constrained?
2. Are you involved in any organizations or extra-curricular activities on campus? How are the topics of race, privilege, or social justice discussed or talked about?
3. As a student at GLU, have you observed – in dormitories, in classrooms, or on campus — instances of injustice that you would attribute to a person's race or class?
4. Describe any experiences in which your race or social class was given prominence or emphasized as privileged.
5. How has your background as a White person impacted your experience as a college student at GLU? Do you think you have benefitted from or been constrained in any way(s) due to your Whiteness?
6. How would you describe your identity as a student at this university? How has this identity developed over the past few years?

Interview 3: Teacher Education

1. How would you describe the evolution of your relationship(s) to your peers in your cohort? In what ways do you consider yourself different from or similar to your peers?
2. In what ways have you developed an awareness as a prospective teacher who believes in teaching for social justice?
3. How has your course work or field work influenced your thinking about social justice? Can you elaborate upon what you mean or provide an example?
4. Have you witnessed schools or teachers interrupting injustice(s)? What have you observed in schools related to social justice?
5. Think back to an experience as a tutor, practicum participant, or student teacher. Can you describe a lesson or time in which you intentionally tried to impress upon students the importance of cultural differences? Were you successful or not in terms of your intended outcomes?
6. What experiences or critical moments have had the most significant impact on how you think of yourself and your role as a multicultural, antiracist, socially just-minded practitioner?
7. In what ways have you had to question your own experiences – in terms of race and class – as a prospective teacher?
8. What does “teaching for social justice” mean to you? How does it play into (or not) your future role as a teacher?
9. Do you think Whiteness, or any teacher’s race, plays a role in the methods a teacher uses to teach a class, the curriculum, or his or her effectiveness with difference populations?
10. What have you learned about yourself and your Whiteness through your experiences in the teacher education program?
11. How has participating in these interviews impacted your thinking about race and class, if at all?

Appendix B

Table 1
Data Themes Generated

Time	Data Collected	Themes Generated
Spring 2010 (Jan.-May)	Course syllabus, lesson plans, instructor field notes	"Critical" moments in class Relationships among students Initial impressions of individual participants
Summer 2010 (June-August)	Course assignments (Reading response papers, teaching story, action research project) retroactively collected	Positionalities in terms of race, class, and gender (Dis)agreement(s) with course readings Biographical details
	Initial interviews conducted with 11 participants from various disciplinary backgrounds (Math, Social Studies, and English) (focus: Personal background)	Characteristics of home community/ies Academic accomplishments and academic literacies "Eye-opening" experiences Realizations of race and social class Definitions of (individual) racism Influential models for thinking about race, class, and gender
Fall 2010 (Sept. – Dec.)	3 observations of secondary English teachers (collection of lesson plans, reflections, observation field notes)	Student teaching placement context Lesson reflection themes Patterns of classroom discourse Teacher and student roles in classroom
Spring 2011 (Jan- May)	2nd round of interviews conducted with each participant (focus: K-12 schooling and college)	Comfort/discomfort in race dialogue Identities as a student Signature moves as a teacher Family politics "Forced" conversations on diversity

	3 observations of secondary English teachers (collection of lesson plans, reflections, observation field notes)	Critical literacy in lessons Ideological and autonomous models of literacy Ways of reading Disrupting the Western Canon
	2-hour focus group meeting with 7 participants	Discourses on Whiteness (e.g., individualism, meritocratic thinking, colorblindness) Equity traps (e.g., racial erasure, deficit view)
Summer 2011	3rd round of interviews conducted with each participant (focus: Teacher education program and student teaching)	Struggles with learning to teach for social justice Observations on social injustices in schools (e.g., disproportionality and overrepresentation of students of color in special education) “Saying” versus “Doing” social justice work “Critical” teaching and learning incidents Benefits/Constraints of Whiteness Multicultural issues (e.g., multicultural awareness, growing multiculturally) Decision(s) to become a teacher