"They Don't Want to Get It!"

Interaction between Minority and White Pre-Service Teachers in a Multicultural Education Class

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Students in public schools nationwide are becoming more diverse. By 2020, students of color will consist of 50% of the school population (Gollnick & Chin, 2009), while teachers will likely remain predominantly White and female. The cultural gap between students and teachers will continue to present numerous obstacles for students of color to succeed at school. As a result, teacher education programs have been requiring pre-service teachers to take a multicultural education class so that they are prepared to teach diverse students. Yet, it has been consistently documented that White pre-service teachers demonstrate resistance to these multicultural education courses (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

In contrast, research shows that pre-service students of color "bring a commitment to multicultural teaching, social justice, and providing children of color with an academically challenging curriculum" (Sleeter, 2001, p. 212). Ladson-Billings (1991) contends that pre-service students of color's commitment to multicultural teaching is higher than that of their White counterparts.

Despite minority pre-service teachers' strong commitment to creating more just schools and helping children of color academically, their experience in teacher education programs is not necessarily satisfactory. For example, Parker and Hood (1995) found that pre-service students of color could not extend what they already knew about multicultural pedagogy because the teacher education program was designed for White peers. Three Latino male pre-service teachers in Gomez, Rodriguez, and Agosto's (2008) study interpreted many experiences in the primar-

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ily White teacher education program as prejudicial and discriminatory. Su (1997) reported that pre-service students of color expressed frustration when their voices were repeatedly ignored. Several studies examined this silencing process. Agee (1998) illustrated the tension between an African American student teacher and her cooperating teachers and the culture of the school. Burant (1999) reported that one Latina lost her public voice after her White classmates expressed a lack of interest in multicultural and language issues.

As a faculty of color who teaches a multicultural education course in a predominantly White teacher education program, I have observed that the few minority pre-service teachers I have had in my classes in the past were either silent throughout the quarter or stopped speaking up in class as the term progressed. Several studies have focused on the silencing process in teacher education programs in general, yet, little is known about what minority pre-service teachers actually experience in a multicultural education class in particular.

Among the few studies, Sheets and Chew (2002) found that Chinese American teachers in a multicultural education class were disgusted, angered, and disturbed by comments made by White students and eventually became silent. If silence is generated by White students' comments in class, what types of comments disturb and anger minority pre-service teachers, leading to this silence? In addition, is what White students say in class all that matters? What about something not stated, but perceived?

Lewis, Chesler, and Forman (2000) argue that "there is little discussion of what is actually taking place between White students and students of color" (p. 75). Since interaction is a two-way communication, it is important to analyze how White students' ways of communication is received, reacted, and responded to by minority students and vice versa. The pur-

pose of this study was to investigate what kind of interaction takes place between minority and White pre-service teachers in a multicultural education class and how this interaction impacts minority pre-service teachers' participation in class.

Theoretical Framework: The Practice of Whiteness

Grover (1997) asserts that "Whiteness means dominant, and it stands to reason that if somebody's dominant, somebody else is down" (p. 34). Delgado and Stefancic (1997) define Whiteness as "transparent, and so remain blind to the racialized aspects of their identity" (p. 248).

Yet, is Whiteness assumed based on skin color? Does a mere existence of a White body produce dominance? When we ponder these questions, it is helpful to conceptualize Whiteness as "symbolic and political rather than in biological terms" (Levine-Rasky, 2000, p. 263) as race is a socio-historical construction by referring to different types of human bodies (Omi & Winant, 1994). Shome (1999) articulates this point as follows:

> Whiteness, thus, is not merely a discourse that is contained in societies inhabited by White people; it is not a phenomenon that is enacted only where White bodies exist. Whiteness is not just about bodies and skin color, but more about the discursive practices that, because of colonialism and neocolonialism, privilege and sustain the global dominance of White imperial subjects and Eurocentric worldviews. (p. 108)

The shift from the idea of "the body as a material, physical representation of race" (Warren, 2001, p. 185) to one as the body as a rhetorical construct of race enables us to pay attention to "everyday (as opposed to overt racist) representations and enactment of Whiteness" (Shome, 1999, p. 107). In other words, Whiteness manifests through discourse, such as embodied ac-

tions and spoken interaction (Warren, 2001) and by expressing, communicating, and sharing within the dominant White in-group (van Dijk, 1987).

For example, Sleeter (1994) identified a communication style which Whites use about Whiteness and named it "White bonding." In White bonding, Whites express annoying but relatively seemingly harmless prejudice or ignorance in the form of "inserts into conversations, race-related 'asides' in conversations, strategic eye-contact, and jokes" (p. 8) and other comments that assert an 'us-them' boundary, but nevertheless this type of communication still exhibits their power to demarcate racial lines and allows their dominance.

In a comprehensive study of Whiteness among White teachers, McIntyre (1997) observed "White talk" which "serves to insulate White people from examining their/our individual and collective role(s) in the perpetuation of racism" (p. 45). White talk consists of "derailing the conversation, evading questions, dismissing counterarguments, withdrawing from the discussion, remaining silent, interrupting speakers and topics, and colluding with each other in creating a 'culture of niceness'" (McIntyre, 1997, p. 46). McIntyre (1997) warns that White talk "anesthetizes the White psyche, and serves to minimize White culpability for the existence of individual, institutional, and societal racism" (p. 78).

Whiteness, however, is manifested not only through speaking but also through "ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing" (Gee, 1996). Using discourse analysis, Haviland (2008) illuminated "White educational discourse" which is "a constellation of ways of speaking, interacting, and thinking in which White teachers gloss over issues of race, racism, and White supremacy in ways that reinforce the status quo, even when they have a stated desire to do the opposite" (p. 41). One of the non-verbal interactional styles in White educational discourse is silence.

For example, Haviland (2008) described a White female teacher gradually being silent in class with the following behavior: "her lowered head, frown, lack of eye contact, and arms crossed on her chest" (p. 47). Yet, this behavior clearly indicated that she was opposed to the discussion made in class. This is what Ladson-Billings (1996) called "silence as weapons." Another non-verbal interactional style is laughter, frequently used with jokes. According to Haviland (2008), the behavior of laughing interrupts "the flow of difficult discussions, diffusing tension, and pre-venting questions or challenges from being taken up" (p. 48). This enables a person to head off critique.

All of the studies above suggest that Whiteness being manifested by various interactional styles is "a discursively performative accomplishment" (Warren, 2001, p. 187) by which Whites reproduce racism in society every day.

Setting and Methods

The participants of this study consist of four minority pre-service teachers: Nancy, a Native American female in her late 30s, Susie, a Korean female in her early 20s (she was adopted by a White family when she was young), Lupe, a Mexican American female in her early 20s, and Sylvia, a biethnic female (her father is Mexican and her mother is White) in her early 20s.[1] All four of these students attended a predominantly White university in a rural area of the Pacific Northwest, were enrolled in the teacher education program majoring in elementary education, and took the researcher's multicultural education class as a requirement. This multicultural education class met for 80 minutes twice a week for nine weeks. There were six minority students in a class of 30 students; four of them were the participants of this study, plus one Samoan male and one Filipino male; and the rest of the students in the class were White. All of the participants' names are pseudonyms.

Purposefully selecting only a few participants in order to obtain information-rich data, qualitative inquiry techniques were used in this study. Glesne (2006) contends that "qualitative researchers neither work (usually) with populations large enough to make random sampling meaningful, nor is their purpose that of producing generalizations" (pp. 34). Since the purpose of this study is to elicit the participants' experiences, producing generalization with a large sample of participants would not have been meaningful.

The main data source of this study was interviews. At the end of the quarter, each participant was interviewed separately in a semi-structured format. The participants were asked to deeply reflect on how they felt and what they experienced in the multicultural education class. The researcher waited to interview the participants until the quarter was over so that they would be able to express their honest feelings without thinking about the possibility that what they say might affect their grade. All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed later. In addition, the researcher also kept a journal about her own class every time the class met. She recorded both the White and minority students' comments and their interaction patterns and jotted down observations related to the overall classroom atmosphere.

The interview transcriptions and the journal entries were coded by "line-by-line analysis" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 119) which involves close examination of data, phrase by phrase. This open coding process enabled the researcher to generate categories and subcategories surfacing from the data for use in organizing the findings.

Findings

During the data collection, three important themes emerged: frustration, despair, and fear. They are presented in that order.

Frustration

The participants' experience in the multicultural education class was in unison: they were shocked and frustrated to witness their White peers' insensitivity to the issue of race and ethnicity. For example, at the beginning of the quarter, the class had a Native American female guest speaker. She discussed where the term 'redskin' came from, how derogatory it is to use the term as a football team's official name, and that was why Native Americans sued the team.

During the class discussion on this issue, a White male student yelled from the back of the large lecture room, with absolute confidence, "That's not true! Native Americans sued the team because they know they will get tons of money!" Some White students chuckled with his comment. Some nodded. Nancy, however, sitting in the first row of the room, looking very upset, immediately turned her head to him and gently advised, "It's all about an honor. Don't you get it?" Reflecting on the above incident, Nancy sighed deeply, paused for a while, and spoke sadly to the researcher:

> Our White peers have almost a joking attitude about race. They thought they were being funny making comments about redskins. They even thought it was okay to keep the name, redskin! Do they think what happened to the Jewish was appalling and horrible, but what happened to Native Americans was less horrible?

The White peers' joking attitude towards race was omnipresent throughout the

quarter, according to Nancy. She added, "When I said to them that I am actually a Native American, they grinned at me and joked, 'Are you one of those dirty little Indians from the Yakima reservation?'"

The White peers' unwitting but deeply insensitive comments about race and ethnicity made other participants upset as well. Susie mentioned that a White female in the class once approached her with a mischievous look and asked if she was a janitor's daughter because that janitor was Asian. Lupe was angry when a White male in the class stereotypically described all Mexicans having children one after another. Lupe was irate when she described her feelings:

> You can talk bad things about your own family, but no one else can talk bad things about other families. It's the same when you talk about someone else's race and ethnicity. I can say, or we Mexicans can say, that we have lots of babies. But when someone who doesn't know me or who doesn't know Mexicans says that, it pisses me off.

It seems that the participants' frustration was caused by two factors. First, although just a mere joking about a race issue doesn't make a person a racist, the impact of these kinds of jokes or joking attitude is significant to the side of a receiver, such as Nancy whose social group was joked about. As Blum (2002) insightfully notes, "It does bear on the user's moral responsibility for using or telling it" (p. 17).

Second, it displays the White peers' attitude that they know everything about minority groups, as conveyed by their comments on Native Americans just wanting money and Mexicans having many babies. This exhibited their power to interpret relatively unknown phenomena subjectively and present those biased interpretation as if they were true and valid.

It seems that the participants were irritated not only by the comments and jokes themselves but also the White peers' arrogance of displaying the comments in the presence of the participants, knowing that they may hurt the hearers' feeling. Indeed, Lupe admitted, "It hit me hard." Sylvia confessed that she "got tired of listening to them acting like they knew everything."

Nakayama and Krizek (1999) listed six rhetorical strategies of the discourse of Whiteness. Among the six strategies, the confusion of Whiteness with nationality and seeing their Whiteness in relation to European ancestry were apparent among the White students in this study. For example, when the students were asked what their ethnicity was in class, almost all White students looked perplexed about this question but "selected their ethnicity, much as one might try to accessorize a wardrobe" (Nakayama & Krizek, 1999, p. 102) from various European ethnic groups. One White male student proudly declared that his ethnicity should be Virginian because his ancestors were from the state of Virginia. Some went on to say that their ethnicity was American. As Nakayama and Krizek (1999) assert, "To conflate nationality and 'race' is an expression of power since it relegates those of other racial groups to a marginal role in national life" (p. 100).

This line of thinking manifested by the White peers infuriated Sylvia, who was biracial with lighter skin color and could have easily passed as White. Recalling the time when a White peer casually mentioned to her in class, "Oh, you don't look Mexican. You look American," clearly implying that Americans were only White, Sylvia burst into anger during the interview:

> Are you telling me that I completely ignore the fact that I am half Mexican? Are you telling me to act like that I don't have that part? I am American and White, but I don't deny the fact that I am half Mexican. You won't erase the part of yourself. I almost wanted to say, "You don't even get it."

The White peers' rhetorical expression of Whiteness suggests their belief of being just "normal," not ethnic. Their sense of being normal at the societal level, however, gives Whites institutionalized power and privileges (Giroux, 1997).

The White peer's embrace of color-blindness created another type of frustration among the participants. Nancy summarized in rage, "To not look at the color of students' skin? They have no idea how skin color affects everything." One time, the class discussed the under-representation of minority people in the media and school curriculum. One example of this under-representation was in the world of fashion dolls. Although Barbie, White, blond, and blue-eyed, has friends from diverse backgrounds, such as African American and Latina dolls, Barbie is always at the center with her so-called ethnic friends standing behind her in the advertisement.

When the class discussed why always Barbie is the center of attention, a White female (she happened to have blond hair and blue eyes) yelled sarcastically to the instructor from her seat, "It's just a doll! So, are you telling us that you want all the White females in this class to be seated in the back of the classroom?" When this White female student said this, according to Sylvia, "the whole class was with her!," showing support with such behaviors as nodding, eye-contacting with their heads turned towards this White female, and even clapping.

This kind of bonding behaviors among the White students made them feel comfortable and allowed them to successfully evade the challenging situation, but made the participants of this study feel dominated and rendered them powerless. All the participants could do at this moment was to sigh and silent themselves. Frank (2003) regards silence as a chosen behavior and "the safest way to respond in situations where hegemonic perspectives seem to dominate" (p. 715). Without dominance, Susie could have addressed in class, "Just a doll has a tremendous impact on minority girls, with regard to self-esteem."

Despair

If the participants' silence was caused by frustration and irritation by being dominated by their White peers, it 'was further aggravated by the White peer's naïveté. In class, Nancy always sat next to her White female friend, Courtney, who had many Mexican friends and at that time was living with a half-Mexican and half-White boyfriend. Courtney proudly announced that she could identify with Mexicans and that she could actually feel like a Mexican due to her friendship and interracial relationship with Mexicans.

This seemingly innocuous statement triggered anger among the participants, including Nancy herself. During the interview, Sylvia bluntly blurted out, "It's nice of her, but she doesn't know. How can she say that she can identify with Mexicans just because she has lots of Mexican friends? They don't identify with her. I don't identify with her. It's like, 'No way!'" Suzie simply responded with the admonishing tone, "No matter what she says and does, she's White. There's no way for her to know."

To Nancy, it was a devastating moment. She was distressed, "Courtney was exposed to Mexicans. She even dated some Mexicans, but that does not mean that she knows where they are coming from, how they were raised, and what their values really are." No participants in the study responded to Courtney's statement in class. Nancy confided that she put her head down and sighed many times at that

moment. Other participants looked upset but sat quietly in despair.

Silence caused by despair impacted the participants even more than silence caused by the feeling of being dominated and powerless. Delgado's (1996) concept of false empathy delineates the participants' anguish. According to Delgado (1996), well-intentioned Whites can actually do more harm than good without even realizing it:

> False empathy is worse than none at all, worse than indifference. It makes you overconfident, so that you can easily harm the intended beneficiary. You are apt to be paternalistic, thinking you know what the other really wants or needs. You can easily substitute your own goal for his. You can visualize what you would want if you were he, when your experiences and needs are radically different. (p. 31)

Courtney was surely not ill-intentioned and did indeed have some contacts with Mexicans. Yet, in order for a White person to truly identify with Mexicans, it was necessary that Courtney be vested with not only Mexican cultures but also their history of oppression and discrimination at the societal level. When Courtney proudly stated with a serious look, "I understand what it's like to be a minority. I sometimes feel discriminated whenever I am surrounded by Mexicans because I am White," it was apparent that her understanding of discrimination was delusionary. By relativizing her own experience with that of Mexicans, Courtney actually revealed her fundamental belief that people all share some core human experience.

Hytten and Warren (2003) call this kind of White discourse "the discourse of connections" in which "from their own experience or social positionality, they cite a parallel status to oppressed groups in an effort to show how their experiences are comparable" (p. 71). Yet, this kind of discourse gives the sense of despair to people of color since the White person in question is not in any way personally blameworthy for being well-intentioned, but his/her comment still angers them. To make the matter worse, there is nowhere for this anger to be directed. When anger cannot be released outward, it goes inward, leading to silence.

Although not saying anything in class, it was obvious that Courtney's remark deeply offended the participants. Lupe shared her anger during the interview:

> But Courtney has never been discriminated against like most Mexicans are in a real sense! She's never been put in a position where she was a minority. She thinks she was discriminated against because she is White and a minority in number among Mexicans? Let me tell you. The majority is Mexican at my high school, but the majority is White in the Homecoming court. Even if it was 90% Mexican and 10% White students, White students would still be more powerful. And they will be still teachers' favorites.

Fear

The participants were also appalled with the White peers' reaction to the multicultural education class. They honestly said that the White peers were furious at both the class and the instructor. Nancy even warned the instructor, "Did you receive the student evaluation for this class already? Be ready. They were hard on you." Ahlquist (1991) observed that the White students in her multicultural foundation class expressed dissatisfaction with the class stating, "Are we going to learn something today, or are we just going to talk about all the problems in society?" (p. 160). Concurring with this, Susie vividly described what interaction was taking place outside the class:

> I knew a lot of students from other classes, so we talked about the class. They were saying, "So pointless! I don't get why we are here to take this class. Why doesn't she just teach me how to teach things multi-culturally?" or "Oh yeah, we have the privilege, so what? Are you just going to tell me what we already know?" They don't want to be told things like that, particularly from a minority instructor.

The participants also felt that whenever they tried to share their own experiences as a minority, their opinions were listened to, but never seriously taken. To the White peers, personal experiences were irrelevant and did not count at all because they could not be generalized. In a rare occasion, whenever the participants told their own personal stories in class, their stories were immediately dismissed by the White students with the remark: "Isn't it just an exception? I never heard such an experience," questioning the authenticity of the experiences. Hytten and Warren (2003) call this type of White discourse "the discourse of yes, but…" and explain that it is a subtle form of resistance that undermines the experiences of others and simultaneously authenticates their own experience.

To the participants, acknowledging the fact that inequality still exists was the starting point to becoming a multicultural teacher. Yet, they all agreed that none of their White peers wanted to acknowledge it and cited the very first book the class read (Gary Howard's *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know*) as a source of the origin of their resistance. On the day when the class discussed this book, a White male student glared at the instructor and angrily said, "I didn't come to college to read such a stupid book." A White female student yelled from her seat, appearing enraged, "There is no such a thing called White privilege if we don't talk about it. Am I supposed to tell my minority students in my future classroom that because of White privilege, they will not succeed?"

Reflecting on that day, Nancy stated, "They felt that the instructor was stereotyping all White people." Susie explained, "They thought the instructor and the book's author were attacking their Whiteness." The White students' reaction to the reality of White privilege clearly reveals that they were actually aware of its existence but did not want to admit it. Nancy summarized this point well: "It's not that they don't get it. They actually get it. That's why they don't want to get it."

Since the White students did not want to acknowledge their Whiteness, as Lupe quoted, "They needed to defend themselves." One very effective tactic for their defense was being argumentative. Susie actually called this "combative." This tactic was demonstrated frequently in class throughout the quarter by means of rallying responses, like in a tennis match, to the instructor and to the minority students, if they ever spoke up. In other words, as Susie effectively put it, "To everything the instructor said, they had something to counterattack." For instance, when the instructor told the class that she had never had a minority supervisor and all her supervisors in the past had been all White people, a White female student quickly rallied back to her:

> *A White female student*: "Isn't that just your experience? I had a Black supervisor before. You can't say that we find more White supervisors than minority supervisors."
>
> *The instructor*: "Oh, really? How many jobs did you have before? And how many Black or minority supervisors did you have before?"
>
> *WFS*: "Just one."
>
> *Instructor*: "Oh, just one out of many? But isn't it true that we tend to see more White people as supervisors?
>
> *WFS*: "There are more White people in the United States! But, if you go to a

Mexican supermarket, a supervisor will be definitely a Mexican."

Instructor: "That could be true, but why do we need to go all the way to a Mexican supermarket to find a Mexican supervisor? Why can't we find one at a local supermarket in town?"

WFS: "Forget it!"

Lupe's analysis on the above rally was insightful:

> They were naturally outspoken and said whatever they wanted to say. A lot of times, they would argue with the instructor, just got fed up with her, and just quit talking. I mean, it just got to a point where they weren't going to make her (the instructor) see things in their way, so they just said, "Forget it!" Even if I say something, they will keep arguing and arguing until they get the last word in.

Nancy analyzed, "When they felt that their way had lost, they just wouldn't listen any more. They shut themselves into their own little world." Silence by the White students, however, was not an indication of their defeat. Rather, it was purposefully elected as "a weapon or way to defy and deny the legitimacy of the teacher and/or the knowledge" (Ladson-Billings, 1996, p. 82) after a verbal rally failed to produce a result in their favor.

The participants also noticed a contradiction in the above White female students' rally: she firmly addressed that her own personal experience of having a Black supervisor mattered, while when the minority students did the same, their personal experiences did not deserve to be attended to simply because they were too personal. Gay and Kirkland (2003) assert that Whites "do not question the validity, accuracy, and authenticity of their countering argument" (p. 183) although they do when people of color speak.

In conclusion, Lupe honestly put it, "The White peers came in and left the class at the same level. The class probably didn't give them any impact in terms of being multicultural teachers." Nancy agreed, "I'm sure they did a wonderful job at all of their schools, but as far as actually benefiting or truly getting anything from this class, I don't think so." This conclusion resembles Hood and Parker's (1994) finding that the teacher education program left too many White students' biases intact.

The White peers' resistance, however, had a much stronger and lingering impact on the participants: they were fearful. What were they fearful of? First, in a classroom where White students outnumbered minority students by a 1-5 ratio, it became almost impossible to argue against them. Since their opinions were almost bipolar, as Sylvia predicted, "If I had said something, that would have been me against the whole class!" This hypothesized situation was scary to the participants. Lupe simply asked the researcher, "What were the chances of them going to back me up even if I had spoken up? How was I supposed to change their perception?" According to Nancy, the White students were just like, "No! This is how it is! It was okay for them to state their opinions, but it wasn't okay for the instructor to state hers." In this obviously White dominant context, a minority person would have needed great courage to speak up against the majority.

The sense of fear was also generated by witnessing how the minority instructor was treated by the White students. The tension between White students and minority professors at a predominantly White institution has been researched (Dixson & Dingus, 2007) and it was reported that a minority professor becomes an easy prey of White students. Witnessing the White students' hostility towards the minority instructor and the process of being preyed upon, the participants were fearful for their own safety. Sylvia admitted, "After seeing them arguing so much with the instructor, I just thought that I needed to keep my mouth shut, to be safe." Nancy pointed out, "They were pretty mad at the instructor. I am sure that they would have been pretty mad at me if I had said something. I could just feel the tension in class." To Susie, this fear became a terror as she explained below:

> If I had said anything, they would have all turned around and glared at me. For example, when they got into an argument with the instructor, I felt like, "Oh, I had better not say anything. Maybe I am going to be attacked. They treat us like an enemy." Scary!

Susie's above comment exemplifies trepidation. Rogers and Mosley (2006), in their racial literacy research in a second-grade classroom, caught an African American boy, Alex, making an insightful comment about the pervasive nature of racism, but in a low tone and with trepidation of sharing it with the entire class. Similar to this boy, the participants were fearful of frankly expressing their opinions in class due to the perceived attack or retaliation, both verbally and physically, by their White peers. As Kornfield (1999) summarized, "It was far less risky to just stop talking" (p. 26). The silence generated by this type of fear is similar to Ladson-Billings's (1996) observation, "The body language and the silence of the other students was used as a powerful silencer against a student who chose to be an active participant in the class" (p. 81).

What was most fearful, however, was the possibility of being seen by the White students as an ally of the minority instructor. This reminds us of Ahlquist's (1991) students who tended to agree with her in her multicultural foundation class gradually withdrawing from discussion when "they felt their classmates saw them as taking sides with the teacher" (p. 165).

Susie confessed:

> I was afraid. Whatever I had said, they might have thought, "She is just agreeing with the teacher or sucking up to the teacher." Or I was afraid the White students would think that the instructor would favor us. That would have been dangerous.

This type of silence was necessary because unfortunately their odyssey continued even outside the class. As students in the teacher education program, the participants had many opportunities to take the same courses as the White peers in the multicultural education class. As a result, the participants were afraid of the possibility of taking the same classes as the White peers in the future and then being remembered as the student who spoke up in the multicultural education class. Susie illustrated this fear:

> You try to speak up in class, then you become obviously the one everyone will remember. They have something to say about you like, "Oh, she is the one in my multicultural education class who said something annoying and who sided with the instructor."

The fear of ostracism by their White peers made the participants silent. What they wanted was a peaceful friendship with the White peers in the predominantly White teacher education program and silence was the only means to that end. Nancy, in particular, was in a painful dilemma on this matter. Since she wanted to maintain a non-conflictive friendship with her White friend, Courtney, she needed to "bite her tongue and just say Okay" to Courtney's appalling and racist comments after class.

The participants became intentionally silent, present but not seen. And this silencing process ultimately did the work of securing the dominant position of the White students (Lewis, 2003). Although

silent in class, the participants admitted that they did discuss the multicultural education class frequently whenever and wherever they felt safe, such as among each other and with those whom they trusted. Lupe commented, "I went home and talked about the class with my Mexican roommate a lot. Like, 'I can't believe the White students said that!'" Susie added, "We just kind of hung around together and discussed whatever happened that day. We'd be like, 'Yeah, that's what I was thinking about.' But it's just stuff we wouldn't say in class, you know."

The participants also admitted that they had discussed the possibility of speaking up in class. As Sylvia confessed, "We should have stood up and said something in class. If we had stood up together and united, it would have made a difference because what could the White students have done to us?" Yet, this never happened. Lewis, Chesler, and Forman (2000) indicated that minority students carry an extra burden of mental and emotional stress since they need to use so much of their mental energy when talking about the issues of race and ethnicity. The participants were not the exception. Susie concluded, "We were frustrated, scared, and most of all extremely tired."

Discussion

This study indicates that the minority students had difficulty positioning themselves among the overwhelming silencing power of Whiteness in a multicultural education class. The participants had a lot to say about the topics discussed in class, but were dominated by their White peers, lost hope witnessing the White peers' naïveté, and were fearful of retaliation and ostracism. All of these factors contributed to their silence.

As Greene (1993) once stated, "There are ways of speaking and telling that construct silences" (p. 216), and the White students' discourse styles negatively influenced the participants' participation in class. What is most disturbing in this silencing process is that White discourse seems to generate perceived fear among people of color even when the discourse is not specifically directed to them, making it a powerful silencer.

For example, although the participants witnessed how hostile their White peers were towards the minority instructor, the hostility was not directed towards the participants in this study. Nevertheless, this witnessing gave the participants

fear of possible retaliation and effectively controlled their behavior. Hostility was only perceived and projected by the participants, but the action was taken accordingly, similar to how implicature works in our everyday conversation. In this sense, Whiteness is indeed a communicative and performative accomplishment.

This study also pinpoints the importance of considering the context where silencing occurs. In a predominantly White classroom on a predominantly White campus, students of color are forced to learn when to fight and when not to in order to avoid any unnecessary conflict and argument with White students. One uncomfortable and confrontational experience with White students in one class, in this context, most likely will transfer to another, making it difficult for students of color to express themselves free from constraints since they will be surrounded by White students wherever they go.

In other words, students of color are already silenced to some extent as soon as they physically step onto a predominantly White campus or into a predominately White classroom, even before they are silenced by the overwhelming silencing power of White discourse. In order to survive in the never-ending silencing condition, students of color need to be careful about how to position themselves in front of White students, but simultaneously maintain their self-esteem behind their back. This is a daunting situation with which White students do not need to contend, but students of color need to struggle with constantly.

Another contextual factor that needs to be seriously considered is the teaching effectiveness of the instructor in a multicultural education class. Reflecting upon her own teaching, Frank (2003) shares her feeling as "I question my ability to establish a learning environment that will be safe for them to share their unique understandings of privilege and the consequences of it that are embedded in our society and control our educational systems" (p. 715).

The findings of this study do question whether or not I, as the instructor, was able to create a safe classroom space for the participants. Had I not engaged myself in arguing so much with the White students, had I not focused on the pervasive nature of White privilege so forcefully, or had I presented the topics more inclusively without making the White students feel like they were being imposed upon, the participants may not have felt so much

pressure to conform to their White peers.

As Ahlquist (1991) taught us in the past, White students resist both the content as well as the methodology of an instructor's teaching in a multicultural education class. It is reasonable to believe that my teaching may have led me to some pedagogical pitfalls and consequently aggravated the participants' silence. Silencing cannot be avoided, yet good teaching can reduce or alleviate the process.

Note

[1] Student names are pseudonyms to protect privacy.

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