Preconceived Notions About Poverty Held by Preservice Teachers

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Abstract

This study examined the preconceived notions of preservice teachers toward those from poverty backgrounds at a medium-sized public university in Pennsylvania, USA. Results of the study indicate that cultural stereotypes about those who are poor persist in preservice teachers and that these views differ significantly based on when, how and in what ways preservice teachers interact with those from poverty backgrounds. Suggestions for improving teacher education programs by incorporating meaningful experiences with those living in poverty are provided.

Key Words: Diversity, poverty, preservice teachers, socioeconomic status, stereotypes, teacher education

Introduction

Teachers today are challenged by increasing diversity within their classrooms. In a state-by-state analysis of changes in teacher and student diversity from 2011-2014, Boser (2014) found that "…the demographics of the teacher workforce have not kept up with student demographics" (p. 1). While diversity in race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status is expanding in US public classrooms, those who choose to become teachers are increasingly more often white, middle-class, and female (Amatea, Cholewa, & Mixon, 2012). From the 1999-2000 school year to the 2015-2016 school year, the percentage of female teachers has increased to 77%, with 80% of teachers now identifying as Caucasian, while the average teacher salary reached $55,120, more than double the 2016 federal poverty line of $25,100 for a family of four (McFarland et al., 2017).

Teacher education programs that wish to prepare future teachers for increasingly diverse classrooms need to ensure that their teacher educators are aware of the preconceived notions their students have about those from more diverse backgrounds. Additionally, teacher education programs must include meaningful and transformative experiences that expose their teacher candidates to those from backgrounds that are

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different from their own, including those who are poor. As Ullucci and Howard (2015) point out, "…keen attention needs to be paid to the knowledge, values, and perspectives preservice teachers are introduced to as they think about educating student from low-income backgrounds" (p. 172). When many hear the word "diversity," images of racial, ethnic or even gender diversity may spring to mind as they are often the easiest to identify visually. However, it is also important to keep in mind other types of diversity that are common but may be harder to see.

One common, but often not apparent type of diversity is differences in socioeconomic status. A considerable portion of children in public schools come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. In 2016, 41% of the approximately 72.4 million children living in the United States were members of low-income families (Koball & Jiang, 2018). Children living in poverty more often experience homelessness, health problems, display low academic achievement, developmental delays, as well as emotional and behavioral problems (Kim, 2013; Milner & Laughter, 2015). Stereotypes and misunderstandings about socioeconomic backgrounds, particularly when held by teachers of students from poverty backgrounds, can have substantive consequences for classroom achievement (Hughes, 2010; Ullucci & Howard, 2015). While it is important to note that in the United States a majority of poor children are white, "…but people of color are disproportionately poor" (Mundy & Leko, 2015, p. 5).

This study seeks to address issues related to socioeconomic diversity in the classroom, through an assessment of the preconceived notions held by preservice teachers toward those from poverty backgrounds. By better understanding how preservice teachers think and where such thoughts come from, meaningful suggestions for improvements to teacher education programs can occur that may result in future teachers that are more effective teachers of those from poverty backgrounds.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review
The consequences of teacher misconceptions

In the United States, high-poverty districts often have higher teacher turnover rates than low-poverty districts, and teachers in their first or second year of teaching are more likely to leave high-poverty schools than low-poverty schools (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2008; McFarland et al., 2017; Whipp & Geronime, 2017). Although these turnover rates are not solely the result of the demographic composition of a school, high-poverty schools are more likely to have poor working conditions that are exacerbated by the exodus of teachers (Bettini & Park, 2017; Whipp & Geronime, 2017). Teachers who do leave high-poverty schools often move to more affluent and less diverse schools (Bettini & Park, 2017). High teacher turnover rates negatively affect student achievement in English language arts and math, and diminish the capacity for high-poverty schools to provide equitable educational opportunities for their students (Bettini & Park, 2017; Whipp & Geronime, 2017).

Dominant cultural stereotypes about diverse students often disenfranchise and stigmatize students served by urban schools (Bettini & Park, 2017). Preservice teachers with limited knowledge of the experiences had by low-income and minority students often develop a deficit perspective toward their students (Amatea et al., 2012). Many teachers who do not have previous experiences with those from low-income backgrounds tend to resort to teaching basics, limiting exposure to advanced instruction, and give less wait time to those they perceive as low achievers (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2008). As a consequence of these practices, low-income students often are not, "…prepared for the complex thinking required in later grades and the contemporary job market" (Diamond et al., 2008, p. 89). Thus, misconceptions and lack of experiences with those from poverty backgrounds can significantly alter the effectiveness of instruction provided to students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

When misconceptions about those who are poor are addressed, teachers in diverse settings can instead shape a classroom experience that becomes more equitable for all students. Rather than seeing students living in poverty as those with deficits, teachers can begin to engage in a more culturally relevant pedagogy that focuses on the positive aspects that can result from living by limited means, such as the high levels of determination and resiliency present in low socioeconomic communities (Hill, Friedland, & Phelps, 2012; Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Additionally, though physical resources are often limited in poor communities, those from these communities often learn to maximize fully the resources that are available, which can easily take the form of advanced problem-solving in a classroom setting (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Finally, by better understanding how vocabulary can differ between socioeconomic classes, teachers can broaden the language use of all students in the classroom, rather than viewing a different vocabulary as a deficiency from normal that would need to be addressed in a remedial fashion (Hughes, 2010; Keengwe, 2010).

Preservice teachers

Public education is dependent upon a steady stream of graduating preservice teachers to fill vacancies in the classroom. Overall, the teaching force in the United States is becoming increasingly white, middle-class and female when compared to students within the public school setting (Amatea et al., 2012; Castro, 2010; Feistritzer, 2011; Mundy & Leko, 2015), thus widening the diversity gap between teachers and their students. Once in the classroom, teachers' sense of responsibility for student performance is closely tied to their beliefs about their students (Diamond et al., 2008). Bettini and Park (2017) found that teachers often develop lower expectations and a deficit orientation toward diverse students as a consequence of this diversity gap. Teachers who possess such orientations may feel less accountable for student learning, increasingly focus on perceived student deficits, and set less rigorous goals for their students when they factor in knowledge of a student's race and/or social class (Diamond et al., 2008).

If such a perspective is taken, teachers may inadvertently perpetuate a pedagogy of poverty that can further widen learning gaps for diverse students (Castro, 2010).

Today's preservice teachers are more likely to teach students of diverse racial, socioeconomic, and linguistic backgrounds (Amatea et al., 2012); however, research suggests that these preservice teachers are often unprepared to teach students living in poverty, and are increasingly uncomfortable teaching children of color (Milner & Laughter, 2015). Because traditional teacher education programs focus more heavily on the academics of education rather than including more meaningful engagement with issues of diversity, preservice teachers who graduate from traditional teacher preparation programs are often unprepared to focus on the specific needs of students from diverse backgrounds, including those living in poverty (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Mundy & Leko, 2015).

Previous research indicates that preservice teachers often maintain overgeneralized and negative views of students living in poverty (Milner & Laughter, 2015; Mundy & Leko, 2015). While teacher education programs that engage with diversity in a meaningful way can overcome such misconceptions (Ullucci & Howard, 2015), unfortunately many preservice teachers from traditional education programs characterize students who are poor as being students of color, having poor overall health, and misbehaving in the classroom (Castro, 2010; Mundy & Leko, 2015). Sato and Lensmire (2009) note that teachers with negative views of students living in poverty tend to see these students as less capable, less cultured, and less worthy as learners. Mundy and Leko (2015) also found that many preservice teachers oversimplify poverty as a lack of resources and that doing so veils more complicated social issues that accompany lower socioeconomic status.

In traditional teacher preparation programs, preservice teachers without an adequate background in multicultural education may display a lack of understanding for the complexity, causes, and manifestations of poverty (Mundy & Leko, 2015). Counter to the typical notion of poverty being exclusively negative, Mundy and Leko (2015) note that poverty is not always detrimental to student achievement. In high-poverty schools where there exists strong school leadership that exhibits confidence and trust in their teachers, collaboration between teachers and support staff, and instructional approaches relevant to the lives of students – poor students frequently display high levels of achievement (Mundy & Leko, 2015).

Other images of poverty that may be held by preservice teachers can overlap with the limited and inaccurate stereotypes present in U.S. society (Kim, 2013). Amatea et al. (2012) further explored the beliefs of preservice teachers and note that they often can hold stereotyped views (e.g. lacking intelligence, causing discipline problems) about the capabilities of culturally diverse students. Furthermore, preservice teachers tend to describe stereotypical views of the homeless (e.g. dirty, adult male begging for money) that fail to include children (Kim, 2013). Counter to the stereotype

of the homeless as adult men, during the 2013-2014 school year 1,301,239 children and youths enrolled in public schools experienced homelessness, which is an increase over each of the two previous school years (Endres & Cidade, 2015; Mundy & Leko, 2015). When presented with the specific notion of homeless children, because preservice teachers may regard having a home as a criterion for normalcy, they might imagine homeless students as abnormal prior to working with them (Kim, 2013).

Preservice teachers also maintain beliefs about students that can transcend the confines of the classroom setting. Amatea et al. (2012) found that many preservice teachers use the norms of the dominant culture to form deficiency perspectives of families of low-income students. One possible expression of this perspective would be that parents who are poor may lack concern for their child's well-being and education (Kim, 2013) and that students living in poverty do not receive enough attention at home (Mundy & Leko, 2015). Mundy and Leko (2015) specifically identified the need to address the assumption that parents in poverty lack concern for their children's education. Because resources can be limited for a family living in poverty, a more nuanced understanding would be that parents in poverty typically must counterbalance caring for children with providing for the family, and that these choices look like a lack of care to those who are uninformed (Mundy & Leko, 2015).

Several studies note that preservice teachers tend to imagine teaching in districts that are primarily white, middle-class, and composed of high-achieving students (Amatea et al., 2012; Whipp & Geronime, 2017). When asked what they can do to help students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, preservice teachers often reflect middle-class values (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 2000; Ullucci & Howard, 2015), such as "any obstacle can be overcome if you work hard enough", "good pedagogy is good for all students equally", and that "all people are created equal and should have access to equal resources." While these attitudes are positive, they demonstrate a lack of nuanced understanding and experience with multicultural issues, white privilege, and the structural inequities that exist in U.S. society (Castro, 2010; Causey et al., 2000; Milner & Laughter, 2015). If traditional teacher education programs expose students to cultural diversity, without critical reflection on cultural backgrounds and beliefs, these programs can reinforce stereotypical thinking (Castro, 2010). When preservice teachers enter a traditional teacher education program that holds stereotypical views about those who are poor and fails to address these misconceptions adequately, they can form deficit views that cause them to develop a savior perspective. In turn, this can detrimentally impact their future students from poverty backgrounds. However, teacher education programs that engage in immersive experiences with diversity and infuse multicultural education and culturally relative pedagogy can help their preservice teachers to build awareness of their own beliefs, overcome deficit perspectives, and instead learn to create more equitable educational experiences for their future students (Hughes, 2010; Keengwe, 2010; Milner & Laughter, 2015; Ullucci & Howard, 2015).

Current practices in teacher education

Teacher education programs in the United States tend to fall into two categories; (1) those that address diversity in a "traditional" way, with one or two courses and a short field experience targeting diversity (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Mundy & Leko, 2015), and (2) those the engage in a more "immersive," multicultural approach that infuses culturally relative pedagogy and critical reflection with multiple diverse field experiences (Kumar & Hamer, 2012; Singer, Catapano, & Huisman, 2010; Whipp & Geronime, 2017). Though teacher education programs hold a critical role in the preparation of future teachers to teach effectively to diverse students, the overwhelming majority of teachers enter the field through traditional teacher preparation programs (Kumar & Hamer, 2012; Ullucci & Howard, 2015; Whipp & Geronime, 2017). The structure of traditional teacher education programs, with one or two courses specific to diversity and/or diverse field observation, often leaves the impression that issues of diversity are tangential to becoming a teacher (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Mundy & Leko, 2015). Several studies (Bennett, 2008; Causey et al., 2000; Kim, 2013; Milner & Laughter, 2015; Ullucci & Howard, 2015) indicate shortcomings in traditional teacher education programs related to preparing future teachers to teach to diverse students. Bennett (2008) examined deficiencies present in traditional teacher preparation programs and explained, "middle-class preservice teachers' lives rarely intersect with low-income students until they enter the classroom" (p. 252). In traditional programs, teacher education courses primarily tend to focus on teaching practices for content instruction and not on varying instruction to meet the needs of diverse cultures; therefore, many teacher education programs lack adequate attention to multicultural education and to the unique issues that face students who are poor (Bennett, 2008; Kim, 2013). As a consequence, in traditional teacher preparation programs many preservice teachers lack much more than stereotypical views of poverty and race and, therefore, cannot challenge, confront, or change issues stemming from these factors (Milner & Laughter, 2015).

More success in preparing culturally similar preservice teachers to teach effectively to diverse students often results from more immersive approaches to teaching and diversity. Within such an approach, in order to work toward countering cultural stereotypes, teachers receive training relating to poverty, as well as other types of diversity, that is grounded in practice and makes use of well-researched conclusions (Sato & Lensmire, 2009). Immersive teacher education programs are more successful when they include courses taught on-site in diverse pk-12 settings (Causey et al., 2000; Singer et al., 2010) and infuse experiences with diversity throughout the entirety of their education programming (Ullucci & Howard, 2015; Whipp & Geronime, 2017). When field experiences include models for collaboration between schools and families, they encourage preservice teachers to explore the perspectives held by diverse families (Amatea et al., 2012; Hill et al., 2012). Additionally, preservice teachers are

more able to provide nuanced and meaningful understandings of cultural diversity when their field experiences include opportunities for critical reflection on diversity (Castro, 2010; Causey et al., 2000; Hill et al., 2012). Accompanying field placements in diverse settings with built-in reflections, preservice teachers who previously lacked an understanding of poverty issues, tended to display more awareness and care for students from poverty backgrounds (Bennett, 2008).

Preparing to teach to those who are poor

Sato and Lensmire (2009) argued that teachers should focus on the cultural competencies and the intellect of poor students, rather than dwell on deficiencies reflective of stereotypical views. Many students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are quite successful, counter to the stereotypes often favored by society that depict those who are poor as needing someone to save them from the trappings of poverty (Milner & Laughter, 2015). Success with students from low socioeconomic backgrounds requires that teachers reject the role of savior (Sato & Lensmire, 2009). Teachers should also avoid a binary view that emphasizes a normal background as a fundamental element for success and a poverty background as abnormal (Milner & Laughter, 2015).

Experiences with poverty outside of the classroom also have a large impact on the preconceived notions held by preservice teachers. Several studies emphasize that preservice teachers develop perceptions of those living in poverty based on personal experiences (Amatea et al., 2012; Bennett, 2008; Castro, 2010; Causey et al., 2000; Mundy & Leko, 2015; Whipp & Geronime, 2017). Preservice teachers who have attended diverse schools, live in culturally diverse neighborhoods, have friends who are diverse from them, volunteer in the community, and/or work in multiracial settings, commonly show greater acceptance of cultural diversity and increased multicultural awareness (Castro, 2010; Whipp & Geronime, 2017). Specific to perceptions of poverty, preservice teachers whose experiences include volunteer work with low-income children and families frequently display greater levels of cultural awareness, responsiveness, and dedication to these children (Whipp & Geronime, 2017). Martinez, McMahon, Coker, and Keys (2016) found that more favorable student outcomes are present when teachers effectively manage instruction while remaining attentive to student behaviors and backgrounds.

Importance of this study

In order to attend to and enhance culturally relative teaching practices, it is important for those who prepare teachers to gain a better understanding of the preconceived notions about poverty that preservice teachers may bring to the classroom. "Indeed, while schools of education are beginning to address race and culture in more robust ways during teacher preparation, we suggest that a full vetting of class and the socioeconomic realities of communities needs to be equally addressed in teacher education"

(Ullucci & Howard, 2015, p. 188). As Hughes (2010) explains "…teacher preparation programs must be reformed to place greater emphasis on the concept of poverty and how it relates to education and academic achievements of students who live in poverty" (p. 62). Several previous studies have identified negative preconceived notions of those in poverty, held by preservice teachers (Cox, Watts, & Horton, 2012; Kumar & Hamer, 2012). As Cox at al. (2012) explain "…while teachers have an overwhelming influence on children in poverty, there is a disconnect between the teacher and the students, mostly due to the teachers' cultural background" (p. 142). This study is an effort to examine the preconceived notions of preservice teachers in a traditional education program to extend the research of Cox et al. (2012), and to draw further attention to a cultural disconnect that may exist between preservice teachers and many of their future students.

The research questions underpinning this study are:

1) How consistent are the views of preservice teachers at similar higher-education institutions that are separated across US state and regional boundaries?

2) How do the past experiences and beliefs of preservice teachers in western Pennsylvania influence their perceptions of individuals living in poverty?

Methodology
Research setting and participants
This study gathered the self-reported perceptions of preservice teachers, relating to preconceived notions of poverty, at a mid-sized (5,000 to 10,000 students) public university in Pennsylvania. This research is an effort to see if conclusions reached in previous research conducted at the University of Tenessee at Martin (Cox et al., 2012) are consistent between two mid-sized, public universities, separated by state and regional boundaries, that offer traditionally designed education programs. As such, this study compares findings with those of the earlier study to validate or refute the trends they noted. Additionally, this research extends the previous study by examining how the perceptions of preservice teachers may vary based on previous experiences with those who are poor. By analyzing both of these issues, possible suggestions for the improvement of traditional teacher education programs become apparent.

Research participants included 316 (84.5%) out of 374 preservice teachers who entered teacher education in a 1.5 year period of time. The vast majority of participants were students in their early 20s (18-22 = 70.3% 23-25 = 21.5%, 26-30 = 5.4%, 31+ = 2.2%). The study participants matched trends identified in previous research (Amatea et al., 2012; McFarland et al., 2017) toward an increasingly Caucasian ethnicity (Caucasian = 95.9%, African-American = 1.3%, Asian-Pacific Islander = 1.3%, Hispanic = 1.3%) and female gender (Female = 81%, Male = 18.7%) and primarily middle class, with only a small percentage (15.2%) of participants reporting that they were poor themselves. Of participants, 15.5% were PK-4 majors, 45.3% were PK-4/

Special Education dual majors, 4.1% were Middle Level (4-8) majors, 23.7% were Secondary Education (7-12), and 11.1% were Music, Physical Education or Foreign Language majors. As current student teachers, participants were selected because they are as educated about being a teacher as current programming at the institution allows, without being certified teachers yet. All of the study participants were exposed to traditional education programs within their majors that include one or two courses related to diversity as well as a single, 20-hour field experience specifically targeting diversity. While course assignments associated with the diversity classes specifically examined a broad range of diversity types, the reflections related to each preservice teacher's field experience were focused on ethnic diversity, rather than socioeconomic status or other types of diversity.

Research design

This study makes use of a short survey, adapted from Cox et al. (2012), which includes 24 closed-ended questions. The survey was created by Cox et al. (2012) based on previous literature, as well as their expertise and experience. The 12 main questions within the survey are reflective of common stereotypes and biases that exist relating to those in poverty, and each is answered through a 5 point Likert-type scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. With the 12 questions taken together, the answers provided allow the researchers to determine to what degree these stereotypical views are held or rejected by preservice teachers (Cox et al., 2012). As an example, one question states, "people become poor by making bad choices and/or having an immoral lifestyle."

Additionally, demographic data were collected to allow the determination of correlations between the backgrounds of preservice teachers and their perceptions of those from poverty backgrounds. Finally, the remaining questions relate to previous experiences that preservice teachers have had with those in poverty, which allows inferences to be drawn relating to the ways in which those experiences may shape perceptions of those from poverty backgrounds. In the original study, the survey was administered over three consecutive semesters to 307 participants.

Data analysis

Within both studies, a participant answering each of the 12 questions with a neutral response would score a 36. Though Cox et al. (2012) considered a score of 24 or lower to indicate a positive attitude towards poverty, in this study, researchers believed that any total score below neutral (36) was reflective of a positive attitude (regardless of how small) and was less arbitrary than the original choice of 24 appeared to be. This change was of no consequence in the comparative aspects of the study as the two studies were compared through a statistical approach that did not weigh where cut off scores had been assigned. While the original study simply reported poverty attitudes,

this study took an additional descriptive step by developing correlations between poverty attitudes, demographics, and experiences. In these descriptive findings, having selected as a positive any number below 36 allowed for a more nuanced descriptive analysis to occur. In this study, mean (M) scores that fall below 36 (range 35-12) are representative of perceptions that are positive as they are counter to stereotypical views of poverty. Conversely, a mean score above 36 (range 37-60) represents negative perceptions of those in poverty as they reflect stereotypical views of those who are poor. In cases where two sets of data were compared, an unpaired t-test was used to test for significance, and when applicable Cohen's d was used to determine effect sizes with the range designations of $d > .02$ indicating a small effect, $d > .05$ indicating a medium effect, and $d > .08$ indicating a large effect (Cohen, 1988). In cases where there were three or more categories for comparison, ANOVA was used to test for significance, and when applicable Cohen's f was used to determine effect sizes with the range designations $f > .10$ indicating a small effect, $f > .25$ indicating a medium effect, and $f > .40$ indicating a large effect (Cohen, 1988).

Findings

Table 1.
Two Study Comparative Data

Study	Category	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation	Statistical Significance
Overall Comparison of Poverty Attitude Scores							
Cox et al. 2012	Overall	307	12	49	29.81	7.02	
Current	Overall	316	12	50	28.82	8.01	*p 0.1587*
Comparison of Poverty Attitude Scores by Age							
Cox et al. 2012	18-22	220	12	49	30.67	6.67	
	23-25	27	12	38	28.07	6.37	
	26-30	16	14	40	29.69	6.97	
	31+	29	12	39	25.98	7.82	
Current	18-22	222	12	50	28.98	7.78	*p 0.0146* *d 0.2332*
	23-25	68	13	45	29.68	8.06	*p 0.3557*
	26-30	17	12	45	24.94	10.02	*p 0.1263*
	31+	7	16	33	24.86	6.96	*p 0.7311*
Current							*p 0.0858* *f 0.1399*
Comparison of Poverty Attitude Scores by Ethnicity							
Cox et al. 2012	Caucasian	249	12	49	30.08	6.89	
	African American	43	12	42	27.79	7.40	
	Asia Pacific Isl.	2	37	38	37.50	.71	
	Hispanic	6	19	31	25.00	4.60	
	Native American	2	38	42	40.00	2.83	
Current	Caucasian	303	12	50	28.85	8.01	*p 0.0566* *d 0.1646*
	African American	4	16	33	25.25	8.10	*p 0.5175*
	Asia Pacific Isl.	4	24	38	34.5	7	*p 0.5989*
	Hispanic	4	17	26	22	3.74	*p 0.3110*
	Native American	-	-	-	-	-	
Current							*p 0.1262*
Comparison of Poverty Attitude Scores by Gender							
Cox et al. 2012	Female	-	-	-	-	-	
	Male	-	-	-	-	-	
Current	Female	256	12	50	29.23	8.00	
	Male	59	12	45	26.86	7.78	
Current							*p 0.0401* *d 0.3004*

No significant difference ($p > .10$) exists between the overall populations in the original Cox et al. (2012) study and those of the current study (see Table 1). In this case, their findings are confirmed by this study. However, when the scores are broken down by the age of the respondents, this study found that 18-22-year-old participants had a significantly ($p > .05$, d .23) more positive view than those found in the original Cox et al. (2012) study. Additionally, within this study, ANOVA does show a slight significant ($p < .10$, f .14) difference between each of the age groups. When the scores are broken down by the ethnicity of the respondents, once again a small difference is present between Caucasians in this study and those in the original Cox et al. (2012) study ($p < .10$, d .16). In both cases, only small effect sizes occur. Among the different ethnicities within this study, ANOVA does not show significant ($p > .10$) differences between each of the ethnicity groups, though this likely results from the relatively homogenous ethnic backgrounds of study participants. Because the original Cox et al. (2012, p. 140) indicated that "no gender differences were found in the survey based on gender," it was not possible to compare the original population of the Cox study to the participants in this study. However, within this study, males exhibited significantly ($p < .05$, d .30) more positive views (M = 26.86) toward those in poverty than their female counterparts (M = 29.23).

Table 2.
Descriptive Data

Category	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation	Statistical Significance
Poverty Attitudes Based on Personal Period of Encounter with the Poor						
Child	126	12	46	27.56	7.95	*p 0.0000*
Youth	102	12	49	30.68	7.65	*f 0.2657*
Adult	34	18	46	31.82	6.34	
Personally Poor	48	12	44	25.33	7.79	
Never	5	22	39	34	11.73	
Poverty Attitudes Based on Location of Encounter with the Poor						
Work/School	137	12	46	27.97	7.59	*p 0.0415*
Church	20	12	40	30.70	7.33	*f 0.1789*
Leisure Area	10	16	44	30.2	9.03	
Public Spaces	123	12	50	29.98	8.45	Work/School vs. Public Spaces
Other	24	13	38	25.42	7.07	*p 0.0444*
						d 0.2503
Poverty Attitudes Based on Duration of Encounters with the Poor						
Brief	205	12	50	29.99	7.63	*p 0.0001*
Extended	109	12	46	26.41	8.14	*d 0.4538*
Poverty Attitudes Based on Picturing the Ethnicity of the Poor						
Caucasians	105	12	44	26.25	7.57	*p 0.0001*
African Americans	172	12	50	30.68	8.11	*f 0.1466*
Hispanics	31	15	39	27.52	6.47	
Asians	1	29	29	29	-	
Poverty Attitudes Based on Picturing Groups that are Poor						
Men	125	12	50	30.51	7.68	*p 0.0000*
Women	70	13	46	30.67	7.70	*f 0.3158*
Children	100	12	45	26.45	7.70	
Peers	18	12	38	22.67	7.62	
Poverty Attitudes Based on Perceived Factors that Contribute to Being Poor						
Income	181	12	49	27.54	7.65	*p 0.0024*
Behavior	88	12	46	30.55	7.87	*f 0.2292*
Morals	14	20	46	34	7.91	
Intelligence/ Abilities	26	12	50	29.62	9.21	
Knowledge	6	17	33	25	6.81	
Poverty Attitudes Based on Source of Information about the Poor						
Parents/Family	142	12	49	28.92	8.32	*p 0.4509*
Friend/Coworker	33	12	42	26.76	8.85	
Teacher	48	16	46	30.06	6.44	
Preacher	1	33	33	33	-	
Media	90	13	50	28.58	7.98	
Poverty Attitudes Based on Perception of General Public's View of the Poor						
Like us	17	12	45	27.24	11.18	*p 0.0061*
Avoid	198	12	50	28.53	8.03	*f 0.2236*
Embrace	4	22	29	27	3.37	
Fear	23	16	37	24.65	6.15	
Help	73	15	45	31.27	7.10	

Moving beyond the comparison of the two studies, within this study significant differences (p <.01, f .27) in preservice teachers' perceptions of those in poverty occur depending on when they first encountered people who are poor (see Table 2). Though the study did not ask about the socioeconomic class of participants as a demographic question, participants were able to self-indicate as being from poverty backgrounds when they answered that their first encounter with people who are poor was "being poor themselves." Evidence indicates that for preservice teachers, being poor themselves (M = 25.33), or being exposed to people who are poor as a child (M =27.56), resulted in a more positive perception of those in poverty. This positive perception lessens when the exposure to people who are poor comes later in life, from youth (M =30.58) to adulthood (M = 31.82).

Significant differences (p <.05, f .18) occur regarding where preservice teachers first encounter people who are poor and how that may impact their perceptions. These differences suggest that the context of encounters matters to preservice teachers' perceptions. If we focus in on and compare the two locations of encounter with the largest number of respondents, "work/school" (N=137) with those who answered "public spaces" (N=123), a significant (p <.05, d .25) difference is apparent. Those who interact with people who are poor in contexts relating to either work or school have a more positive perception (M = 27.97) of those who are poor than those who encounter people who are poor in public spaces (M = 29.98).

Preservice teachers who had extended encounters with people who are poor also had significantly (p <.01, d .45) more favorable perceptions (M = 26.41) of those who live in poverty, when compared to the perceptions (M = 29.99) of those who characterized the duration of their encounters with people who are poor as brief (see table 2).

Owing to the intersectionality of ethnicity and socioeconomic status, significant differences (p <.01, f .15) exist when participants picture those who are poor as coming from different ethnic groups. In this study, when preservice teachers see those who are poor as Caucasian, their perceptions of them are more favorable (M = 26.25) than when preservice teachers view them as Hispanic (M = 27.52) followed by a least favorable view when they are seen as African American (M = 30.68). Only one preservice teacher responded that they viewed those who are poor as Asian (see Table 2), which also highlights a stereotype of those who are Asian as being more successful than other ethnicities.

Preservice teachers in this study showed significant (p <.01, f .32) differences in how they viewed people who are poor based on their perceptions of those who are poor as either adults or children (see Table 2). When viewed as children, preservice teachers had a more favorable view (M = 26.45) of those who are poor than when they are instead viewed as either adult men (M = 30.51) or adult women (M = 30.67).

When preservice teachers were asked to think about how poor people became poor, significant differences (p <.01, f .23) exist (see Table 2). Those preservice teach-

ers that perceive people who are poor as associated with income showed more positive attitudes (M = 27.54) toward people who are poor than those who associate poverty with behavior (M = 30.55), morals (M = 34) or intelligence/abilities (M = 29.62).

Preservice teachers do not appear to differ significantly ($p > .10$) in their perceptions of people who are poor based on where they primarily learn about these people (see Table 2). Although significant differences exist regarding the ways in which study participants believed the public views the poor, the differences are inconsistent across positive views ("Like us" M = 27.24, "Embrace" M = 27, "Help" M = 31.27) versus negative views ("Avoid" M = 28.53, and "Fear" M = 24.65).

Discussion

This study found similarities between the perceptions of preservice teachers enrolled in traditional teacher education programs at a mid-sized public university in Pennsylvania and a mid-sized public university in Tennessee, thus indicating that the conclusions reached by Cox et al. (2012) are relatively consistent across state and regional boundaries with only slight differences occurring when subject groups are broken down by age or ethnicity. Furthermore, this study demographic reflects previous research indicating that pre-service teachers are increasingly Caucasian, female, and middle class (Amatea et al., 2012; Castro, 2010; Feistritzer, 2011; Mundy & Leko, 2015).

In their previous study, Cox et al. (2012) noted no clear differences between the poverty attitudes between males and females. In contrast, a gender bias appears to exist between male and female preservice teachers in this study. Both groups displayed favorable views of individuals living in poverty; however, males held more favorable views than their female counterparts. Nevertheless, the vast majority of study participants were female (81%), and such a difference could lessen if the study included more males.

The current study also aims to extend the Cox et al. (2012) study to understand better how the beliefs and experiences of preservice teachers, enrolled in a traditional education program, impact their perception of individuals from poverty backgrounds. Previous research has indicated that preservice teachers often use their personal experiences when developing perceptions of students living in poverty (Amatea et al., 2012; Bennett, 2008; Castro, 2010; Causey et al., 2000; Mundy & Leko, 2015; Whipp & Geronime, 2017). Individuals who are unfamiliar with the perspectives of those from poverty backgrounds can lack a nuanced understanding of poverty (Amatea et al., 2012). Within this study, preservice teachers whose encounters with people who are poor occurred earlier in their life tended to develop more positive perceptions than those whose experiences occurred later in their life, confirming findings from previous research (Mundy & Leko, 2015; Whipp & Geronime, 2017).

Additionally, this study indicates more positive views of individuals living in

poverty when interactions occur in a work and/or school context, while less positive views are present when interactions occur randomly in public spaces. Encounters in public spaces are more susceptible to stereotypes perpetuated by the dominant culture that stigmatize people from poverty backgrounds (Kim, 2013). Preservice teachers who have extended experiences with people who are poor (e.g., living in culturally diverse areas, having a diverse friend group, volunteering in diverse settings) are more accepting of cultural diversity (Castro, 2010; Whipp & Geronime, 2017). This study confirmed research in previous studies (Amatea et al., 2012; Mundy & Leko, 2015) which found that individuals who report having extended encounters with those who are poor had more favorable attitudes while those who report only brief encounters with people who are poor had less positive views. Thus, previous experiences and their duration may influence preconceived notions preservice teachers have of individuals from poverty backgrounds.

In this study, preservice teachers displayed less positive views of individuals living in poverty when preservice teachers imagined these individuals as being African American or Hispanic. More favorable views are present when the individual appears to be Caucasian. These results suggest an intersectionality between negative stereotypes of those from African American or Hispanic descent with those in poverty (Keengwe, 2010). Furthermore, only one preservice teacher in this study responded that they view people who are poor as Asian, highlighting another stereotypical perception of those from Asian backgrounds as being more economically successful. These findings are consistent with research conducted by Diamond et al. (2008) that concluded that preservice teachers develop lower expectations for students when considering the student's race and/or social class background.

Connected to a widening diversity gap between teachers and their students, teachers often develop lower expectations and a deficit orientation toward culturally diverse students, including those from poverty backgrounds (Amatea et al., 2012; Bettini & Park, 2017; Ullucci & Howard, 2015). When imagining factors that contribute to being poor, participants in this study had a more positive view of people who are poor if they imagined that a lack of income resulted in their poverty. However, when participants viewed poverty as stemming from cultural attributes a person can control (e.g. behavior, morals), views were less positive. This is reflective of a culture of poverty perspective that holds that those who are poor as also those of lower cultural value (Amatea et al., 2012).

Societal stereotypes frequently connect poverty with images of homeless, dirty, ill, adult men occupying public spaces (Kim, 2013). When these views are applied to children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, the notion is that they need someone to save them (Milner & Laughter, 2015), which may be reflective of a savior perspective, in which preservice teachers view themselves as having to save children from poverty backgrounds. When study participants pictured the age of individuals living in

poverty, they viewed children more favorably than adults. Age is not a choice someone can make for themselves, and children may be viewed here as victims of their parents' choices. These types of views are consistent with a savior perspective.

Conclusion

Traditional teacher education programs have gains to make in addressing how preservice teachers are being prepared to teach students from poverty backgrounds. This study confirms the national trends that show the teaching force is predominantly Caucasian, female and middle-class (Amatea et al., 2012; Mundy & Leko, 2015), and that this narrow background creates meaningful differences in the way preservice teachers view students from diverse backgrounds. Although the intersection of race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status cannot be ignored, students from low socioeconomic status are more common and harder to identify by visual attributes for preservice teachers. Furthermore, although teacher education programs have made gains in educating preservice teachers to teach to a more racially/ethnically diverse bodies of students, these gains have not been realized in the preparation of preservice teachers to teach to those who are poor (Hughes, 2010; Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Being an effective and engaging teacher for students who are poor requires that teacher education programs engage in a more sustained and substantial approach to issues affecting this group of students.

Though teacher education programs cannot retroactively alter the backgrounds and previous experiences of their teacher candidates, these programs can engage in a more immersive and meaningful exposure to those from poverty backgrounds to disrupt stereotypical perceptions and empower future teachers to have a greater capacity to connect with students of low socioeconomic status. Such an effort would allow teacher educators to more meaningfully address the flight of effective teachers from high-poverty urban districts (Bettini & Park, 2017). To this end, teacher education programs should include more encounters with those who are poor, not just in school settings but in the communities in which they live. Whether it be in the local food bank, serving in a homeless shelter, or any myriad of other community-engaged experiences, exposure to those in poverty outside of random public encounters begins the process of breaking down preconceived notions about people who are poor.

These experiences should be extended in nature, rather than just one-or two-day exposures. Moreover, these experiences should be accompanied by critical reflection directed toward the positive stories that exist in these communities. Research indicates that those who are provided with opportunities for critical reflection following experiences with diversity are often able to provide a more critical and nuanced understanding of cultural diversity (Castro, 2010; Causey et al., 2000). Directing the preservice teachers away from deficit thinking models (Amatea et al., 2012) and toward a recognition of the complexity of poverty will help them to connect with those from diverse backgrounds. This, in turn, will allow them to reframe their future encounters with

students of low socioeconomic status as opportunities for mutual success, rather than taking on the role of savior of those who are poor (Sato & Lensmire, 2009).

Finally, to counteract the negative stereotypes that persist for many preservice teachers (Castro, 2010), teacher education programs should increase the exposure of preservice teachers to images of those in poverty that conflict with traditional views. These images should accurately portray the complexities of living in poverty and of those who are poor, and create space for success to be viewed in more than just economic terms (Hughes, 2010; Sato & Lensmire, 2009; Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Stereotypical thinking about those who are poor needs to be addressed explicitly, more extensively, and in an immersive fashion or teacher education programs risk graduating future educators who see poverty through a narrow-minded and fatalistic lens, who flee from high-poverty school districts, and who fail to connect meaningfully with many of their future students.

Limitations and directions for further research

This study is specific to a traditional model of teacher education at a single medium-sized public higher education institution in western Pennsylvania, USA. Although the education program in the current context mirrors a common traditional approach (Kumar & Hamer, 2012; Ullucci & Howard, 2015), there are alternative programs of education in the US that offer a more immersive approach to diversity. An immersive approach to diversity could yield different results.

Another limitation of this study, which is reflective of trends found in the literature, is the dominance of middle-class, female, Caucasian participants. A more diverse group of preservice teachers may view those who are poor in different ways.

Future research should examine groups that are not representative of the majority of preservice teachers in more depth to determine similarities and differences that may exist between these groups. Additional research should also focus on how teacher preparation programs that include a more immersive approach can address issues of poverty and preconceived notions held by preservice teachers.

Furthermore, although this survey and the Cox et al. (2012) study examined the preconceptions of preservice teachers, it would be meaningful in future research to determine how these views change or remain stable with classroom experience.

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