In this article, members of the Midwest Critical Whiteness Collective argue that Peggy McIntosh’s seminal “knapsack” article acts as a synecdoche, or as a stand-in, for all the antiracist work to be done in teacher education and that this limits our understanding and possibilities for action. The authors develop this argument by questioning the lack of critique of McIntosh’s 1988 classic “invisible knapsack” article and sharing two narratives by members of their collective that illustrate problems with both the acceptance and the rejection of McIntosh’s conception of white privilege. This discussion illuminates how white privilege pedagogy demands confession and how confession is a dead end for antiracist action. The authors also explore how McIntosh’s ideas can lead to dangerous misreadings of student resistance. Acknowledging the initial fruitfulness of McIntosh’s ideas, it is time for us to move to more complex treatments of working with white people on questions of race, white supremacy, and antiracism.
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