OPTING-IN TO DIVERSITY: “BEING IN A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO ARE DIFFERENT IS PART OF NOT BEING AN A**HOLE”

A thesis submitted
To Kent State University in partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Art

By

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Table 1. List of Participants

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Michael Kreiter
INTRODUCTION

“Diversity” can mean almost anything to anyone. Diversity is an ideological construction rooted in pluralist multiculturalism that celebrates the differences between people. But at the same time, that ideology often disregards the structural inequalities that continue to marginalize groups. Therefore “diversity” as an ideology is as much a tool of oppression for those who only want to appear justice oriented as it is a means of equality. Diversity talk is a type of racial discourse (Berrey 2015), and racial discourses are the ideological expression of a racialized social structure (Bonilla-Silva 1997). Studying such discourse sheds light on how racialized social structures operate. At the macro level, we see the proliferation of diversity and multicultural rhetoric at the same time that there is continuing, and in some cases the increasing, racial inequality in the US and abroad (Winant 2000; Berrey 2015). But it is at the micro and meso level that social structures take shape, affecting people’s lives. According to Berrey (2015:41), “Formal organizations…are a key social domain in which race becomes meaningful, ideological, and consequential. In these contexts, racial boundaries are drawn and racial ideas gain authority through power relations, rules, routines, law, and formal structures.”

For this study, I interviewed parents and educators at an early childhood development center about their thoughts, opinions, and experiences with diversity. I name the setting the Learning Center. The setting is unique in that it is racially and culturally diverse, and it is located in Shaker Heights, Ohio, a racially diverse city with a reputation for early integration and a commitment to celebrating and maintaining its diversity. I wanted to see how people in such an
institutional setting talked about diversity. My research was driven by two central questions: How do people in this setting define the fluid concept of diversity, and how do they act on their definitions and beliefs about diversity? In this paper, I argue that the participants whom I interviewed represent people who “opt-in to diversity.” I define opting-in to diversity as a mindset that consciously thinks about diversity, values it as important, and takes actions to seek out diversity in one’s life. These are the people who self-select into living in diverse communities, enrolling their children in diverse learning centers, or choosing career paths based on their belief in the values of diversity. Before I share their stories, we must look at some of the different ways that researchers have made sense of the nebulous concept of diversity.
LITERATURE REVIEW

*Diversity Ideology as Part of Colorblind Racism*

Modern America was built on the racism of the past, from the dispossession of native lands, to African enslavement, to the slave-like conditions of Chinese railroad workers and beyond (Zinn 1980; Takaki 2008). That racial hierarchy continues to structure American society today (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Omi and Winant 2009). However, most whites who benefit from the privileges of racial inequality generally do not recognize its existence, and at the very least, do not see themselves as contributing to racism (Feagin, Vera and Batur 2001; Bonilla-Silva 2010). Alternatively, most people in marginalized racial groups can easily recognize racism and experience it frequently (Collins 1989; Feagin 1991; Berger 2009). Considerable work has addressed contemporary forms of racial oppression and has made important connections to issues of diversity and multiculturalism. Colorblind racism, a contemporary form of covert racism, instills whites with the belief that racial differences are only “skin deep,” blinding them to the unequal structures that advantage and disadvantage people based on skin color (Gallagher 2009; Guinier and Torres 2009). Under a colorblind ideology, talk about racial differences is considered racist because race is recognized as not biologically real. Therefore, colorblind ideology justifies whites’ ignorance of racial hierarchy (Guinier and Torres 2009; Bonilla-Silva 2010). As a result, racial inequalities that are observed are perceived by many whites as the consequence of “lethargic, incorrigible, and often pathological behavior of people who fail to take responsibility for their own lives” (Brown, Carnoy, Currie et al. 2003:6). In this way,
colorblindness engenders white blindness to the systems of racial inequality that permeate U.S. society, therefore making the struggle for racial justice more difficult.

Colorblind ideology does recognize race; however, it maintains that resulting inequalities are not structural, but about personal choice/agency and cultural practices (Bonilla-Silva 2010). Colorblindness therein embraces a shallow version of diversity which in turn serves to perpetuate racial hierarchy. For example, many modern businesses and their employees superficially embrace diversity as a business priority in the era of a multicultural economy (Zizek 1997). Nearly all major corporations have a diversity program as a way of marketing their supposed morality and importance in a multicultural economy. However, Embrick (2011) argues that diversity is an ideology, one that obscures the continuing inequalities of race and gender. Businesses brand themselves as “equal opportunity employers” that “care about diversity” (Embrick 2011:3), but most of the corporate human resource officers interviewed by Embrick could not explicitly state what their business’s diversity policy was. Rather than constructing diversity as something critical of the status quo, as an instrument of justice, diversity ideologies reinforce colorblind racism for most people.

*Early Childhood Education*

It is important to understand how diversity is constructed in early education classrooms because children are being socialized in ways that will shape what our future society may look like. Robinson and Jones Diaz (2005) state that the history of early childhood education is one based on a social binary that separates children from adults, meaning that children are perceived by adults as too young to understand discrimination, let alone engage in discriminatory practices. They found that the current use of diversity in most early education curriculums does not address social structural inequality. They argue that “when tolerance and acceptance of difference are emphasized at the expense of critiquing the relationships between difference, power and
inequity, our capacity to work towards a pedagogical agenda that addresses the various social inequities based on ‘difference’ is limited” (2005:71). Furthermore, they claim that “simplistic pluralistic notions about diversity do not give caregivers and teachers the necessary conceptual tools for analyzing and understanding how inequalities are constructed and perpetuated by individuals, social groups and social structures” (2005:72).

Many early childhood educators often perceive children as passive reflections of their parents when it comes to how they value difference (Robinson and Jones Diaz 2005). However, recent scholars have challenged this logic, arguing that childhood is a social construction that utilizes the available historical and cultural discourses (Grieshaber 2002; Robinson 2002; Cannella and Viruru 2004; Robinson 2005). Childhood is not a universal experience that can be generalized to all children. Arguing that childhood is a non-universal social construction directly critiques the universalizing work of Jean Piaget (1964), who argued that children’s learning is universal and depends on the successful passage through steps of cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, moral, and physical development. Piaget’s critics argue that his perspective is problematic because it denies the various experiences of children’s lives (Silin 1995). Even more problematic, according to Piaget’s critics, is that “discourses of developmentalism are largely informed by middle-class Eurocentric perspectives that promote a singular and linear view of childhood, based on biological determinism, with limited regard for the broader socio-cultural context which influences learning” (Robinson and Jones Diaz 2005:73). Accepting that children’s development is not universal and is culturally and historically contingent demands that researchers and educators understand the agency of children and question whether children really are ‘too young’ or ‘too innocent’ to comprehend issues of inequality.
Research suggests that children are active agents in shaping and perpetuating inequalities through their interactions with each other and with adults (Alloway 1995; Averhart and Bigler 1997; MacNaughton 2000; 2001; Grieshaber 2002). Toddlers and preschoolers develop negative or positive feelings about differences at the same time they are becoming aware of them (Glover 1991; Van Ausdale and Feagin 2001). For example, children develop racial awareness early, and at the same time, develop preferences for skin color in the social relationships they develop with other children (Doyle, Beaudet and Aboud 1988; Palmer 1990; Averhart and Bigler 1997; Quintana 1999). Based on social clues, or lack thereof, children form opinions about differences such as race, gender, ability, and language, and then they begin to act on those opinions.

Early childhood educators are ideally situated to shape how children approach and value difference. Robinson and Jones Diaz state that “early childhood educational institutions (like other educational institutions) are a microcosm of the broader society; they constitute and perpetuate many of the normalizing discourses that underpin social inequalities through educational programmes, educators’ pedagogies, and hidden curriculum of everyday interactions and practices” (2005:8). Pluralist multiculturalism, a celebration of many cultural differences, is a pedagogical approach used by many educators. Yet, it often reproduces the structural inequalities that the pluralist multiculturalism approach tries to overcome. bell hooks writes that “evocations of pluralism and diversity act to obscure differences arbitrarily imposed and maintained by white racist domination” (1997:166). Multicultural education focuses on teaching children about other cultures in an attempt to dispel racial prejudice and stereotypes (Rizvi 1993). However, multicultural education often ends up being a “tokenistic” approach with superficial respect for cultural differences, and no critical reflection on issues of inequality.
(Derman-Sparks 1989). Next, I look at how diversity ideology can be made more critical through some available pedagogical tools.

Critical Diversity

Recent research has suggested that a critical diversity is necessary to combat the colorblindness inherent in most uses of diversity. Herring and Henderson argue that without linking [diversity] to concerns about access, equity, parity, and opportunity, the usage of the term diversity is hollow…the very notion of diversity is meaningless because it cannot have boundaries and it can be used for any purpose – political, conservative, reactionary, racist, sexist, etc. – that anyone wants to use it for (2012:636).

They assert that diversity should be more than a celebration of cultural differences; it must also be linked to concerns about inequality between groups. As such, successful diversity programs should also include a redistribution of resources to the historically under-privileged and an attendant ideology. Robinson and Jones Diaz (2005) argue that a critical multiculturalism is needed in early education to combat the formation of racist ideologies, including colorblind ones. They suggest that schools give attention to social inequality, communicate that attention to parents and families, and have diverse committees that included voices from traditionally marginalized groups to shape policies. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) found that antibias curricula and “teaching tolerance” programs were effective at promoting antidiscrimination agendas in school classrooms. Antibias curricula involve addressing every instance of racial or other discrimination and not considering those instances to be a fleeting mistake made by an uninformed child. “Teaching tolerance” is a collection of teaching material and classes provided to educators across the United States by the Southern Poverty Law Center. Through these resources, teachers have better addressed inequality in their classrooms (Southern Poverty Law Center 2015), thereby shaping a critical diversity.
Research Importance

Studying diversity as an ideology is a specialized area of research under the umbrella of critical race theory. As an ideology, it makes the connection between social structure and individual agency. Scholarship in critical race theory has argued that it is social structure which leads to racist ideology (Omi and Winant 1994; Bonilla-Silva 1997), including colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2010). The dominant racial ideology in the United States could be referred to as a “white racial frame” (Feagin 2006; 2013), which justifies systemic racism and white supremacy, and can be adopted by people of any racial identity. Studying diversity is interesting because its non-specificity means that it can literally refer to anything, including other relations of powers. “Hegemonic masculinity” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) justifies gender inequality. “False consciousness” about class interests blurs the reality of class inequality (Marx and Engels [1845-49] 1970). Yet, when we study diversity at the individual level, we can see the particular variations that exist between people as they adopt dominant ideologies, adapt those ideologies to fit their social location, or reject those ideologies in favor of “counter frames” (Feagin 2013). Studying how people talk about diversity and how they act on those beliefs can enhance our understanding of the processes that connect social structure to individual beliefs, which can then shed light on how individual beliefs and actions affect social institutions, creating social change. For this study, I selected a setting that is not the norm in the United States: a racially and ethnically diverse early childhood school/daycare located in a city that is racially diverse and known for its history of nurturing that diversity. Would such a setting be more likely to create ideologies that reject versus adopt the dominant ideologies that justify inequalities? I describe the setting in more detail in the following section.
SETTING

My research was focused on an early education center in Shaker Heights, Ohio, a city with a national reputation of early racial integration and a continuing commitment to diversity. In 1950, the non-white population in Shaker Heights was less than 1% (Keating 1994). The city is now 53% white and 37% Black (Census 2010). Shaker Heights is just one of two suburbs of Cleveland to purposefully recruit Black families for housing opportunities and encourage white families to stay during integration. “Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights represent two of the most successful examples in the United States of suburbs undergoing racial transition that have voluntarily adopted prointegrative policies and have maintained them” (Keating 1994:75). These policies included developing and financially supporting effective fair housing agencies and a commitment to publicly subsidized housing. To prevent resegregation, the city and the school district offer voluntary school busing, magnet schools, and periodically redraw political districts.

The early education center in Shaker Heights enrolled about 300 children in the previous school year. Children are divided into two age groups: toddlers (18 months to 3 years) and preschoolers (3 years to about 5 years). My son was in the toddler program for the duration of my research project. For the remainder of this report, I will refer to the early education center at the “Learning Center” to protect the confidentiality of my research participants. That is also why I do not provide more specifics about the number of classrooms for each age group or the exact number of children enrolled at the Learning Center.
Like the city of Shaker Heights, the Learning Center has an emphasis on diversity. In the school’s most recent annual report to parents, the first section is titled “Diversity,” where it states that 25% of their families are below the 120% poverty level for their respective family sizes. An additional 20% are below the 400% poverty level. Both of which qualify for some external funding in the form of child subsidies. It also mentions that they serve children from 25 different countries. The annual report concludes by stating, “This diversity allows our children to experience traditions from many different cultures.” I was given this report about a month after enrolling my son at the school. Because of my interest in diversity and based on the text in this annual report, I chose to make the Learning Center the focus of this research project to explore how people in this setting define the fluid concept of diversity, and to explore how they act on their definitions and beliefs about diversity.
METHODS

Research methods are decided by the research questions. My questions are how do people in this setting define the fluid concept of diversity, and how do they act on their definitions and beliefs about diversity? Therefore, I needed a form of data collection that permitted participants the freedom to give meaning to the concept of diversity and expand upon their experiences with it. Thus, I collected data from teachers and parents at the Learning Center through qualitative semi-structured interviews (Weiss 1995; Lofland and Lofland 2006).

I had insider and outsider status as a researcher. I was an insider because I am the parent of a child enrolled at the school. However, when I started my research, my son had only been enrolled at the school for a couple months, and I felt very much like an outsider. I also shared the same racial identity with seven of the participants and gender identity with one as a white man. I cannot say that my “insider” status helped gain the trust and respect of the participants. Simplistic notions of the advantages of insider status are inconsistent with critical scholarship that argues that multiple relations of power intersect to shape people’s lives (McCorkel and Myers 2003; Sprague 2005:62-66). I could not assume to have insider status and instead relied upon a commonality of our experiences to enhance empathy and trust between participants and myself. Like me, all the participants were either parents or worked with young children. We share some of the same struggles of raising young children.

I was apprehensive about doing this research when it was time to start interviewing people. I initially thought that I would be judging my participants and labeling their opinions
about diversity as either hollow and vapid, as in colorblind racism, or substantive and critical, as
in critical diversity. I felt uncomfortable with this prospect. Thankfully my research went in a
slightly different direction. Instead, all my participants had something interesting and substantive
to say about diversity. I explore their opinions and stories as a group of people who are all
different from each other but have one big similarity, they opt-in to diversity. This commonality
among the participants likely results from how I chose to recruit participants.

I recruited participants by asking staff at the Learning Center to place flyers in the
classrooms and the mail cubbies of all the students. I was very explicit in the flyers that I wanted
to talk to people about their experiences and opinions regarding diversity. I left my cell phone
number and email. Most of the participants chose to email me. After their initial contact, we
worked to arrange times to conduct the interview. Only people who contacted me and expressed
an interest in participating in the research were interviewed. My target sample size was 30,
which is a common goal in qualitative social science because that is usually enough participant
to provide a “theoretical saturation” (Glaser and Strauss 1967) of different responses to interview
topics. I ended up with 11 participants, which limits me in some ways but also allows me to
approach the data in a more uncommon way, which I discuss later.

My research became much more about the people who opted-in to my project. Recruiting
in this way certainly led to a self-selection bias among the participants. For instance, no one in
my sample shared any negative opinions about diversity, which would be unlikely if I had a
representative sample of the wider population.

I created an initial draft of the interview guide based on the literature I had read at the
time. I relied on key sources that investigate diversity as an ideology (Embrick 2011; Berrey
2015). Based on these texts, one of my central questions was “when you hear the word diversity,
what does it mean to you?” Other research (Robinson and Jones Diaz 2005) provided the context necessary to create questions that examined diversity in the context of early education. This initial draft of the interview guide was revised with the help of my committee, colleagues and group discussions in a qualitative methods course. Many of the questions were context specific and used by me as a form of scaffolding for the interview, meaning that these questions built rapport between me and the participants and provided me with background information about the participants from which I could further probe later in the interview (Kvale 2008). These questions asked about the participants’ careers, family situation, where they lived now, where they grew up, and how they identify for demographic questions like race and gender. Without prompting, many of the participants answered by relating their life to diversity. For instance, some participants shared that where they grew up was not diverse in their minds, and thus they resolved to raise their families in places that are more diverse. I also asked questions specific to the Learning Center, such as “how would you describe the diversity in your/your child’s classroom; in what ways could the Learning Center better promote diversity; and how is diversity important in your child’s education?”

Interviews took place between April 2016 and January 2017, and most happened in May or June of 2016. In this timeframe, much of the national attention was focused on the 2016 presidential election. Primary races were just coming to an end in late spring, replaced by the general election race between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, which ended with the election of Trump in November and his inauguration in January 2017. Some of the participants brought the content and headlines from the election campaigns into the interviews. A few expressed their support for Bernie Sanders or Hillary Clinton; even more expressed their concerns about a potential president Trump or Cruz.
My longest interview was 90 minutes. My shortest was 28 minutes. The average interview lasted about 45 minutes. I interviewed participants at a nearby coffee shop, a restaurant, the Learning Center, and my home. Participants chose the location of the interview and were asked to select wherever they would feel most comfortable. I used the interview guide to ensure that we discussed all of my major questions, but I allowed the course of the conversations to flow as naturally as possible while staying close to the topic of diversity. I obtained written informed consent before conducting the interviews, and I recorded each interview with a digital voice recorder. I uploaded verbatim transcriptions of the interviews into NVivo 11, a qualitative data analysis software program, which aided me in coding and refining the data.

I used deductive and inductive approaches to analyze the interview transcripts (Elo and Kyngäs 2008). Deductively, I knew that I was interested in how people answered my question about what “diversity” means to them. I searched through the transcripts and coded their response as how they define diversity. Then I took an inductive approach by reading each transcript multiple times and open coding their statements. Open coding is “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data” (Strauss and Corbin 1990:61). After I felt I had coded all the content relevant to diversity, I read each transcript again while listening to the recorded interviews to check that inflection and tone of the participants’ voices matched what I thought was the meaning of the text in the transcript. Many of my initial codes were “in vivo” codes taken directly from the discourse of the participants (Charmaz 1996).

Once I had the interview transcripts coded, I grouped the codes into themes (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Charmaz 1996; Kvale 2008). I condensed the codes that I had into three themes for
this paper: the meaning of diversity, the importance of diversity, and acting on diversity. In some cases, such as the meaning of diversity theme, participants’ responses were in answer to specific questions. In other cases, such as the importance of diversity theme, I used an interpretive approach (Kvale 2008) to code the meaning behind what participants were saying. For instance, some participants shared why diversity was important to them in response to the question “how is diversity important in your child’s education?” However, others made it clear that diversity was important to them at other times in the interview without saying as much. I placed all such responses under the importance of diversity theme. Based on my literature review, I knew that the first theme would be central to my research. I recognized that the other two themes were important based on how the participants talked about them. Not only did they define diversity for me when I asked, they made it clear that diversity was important to them, and they shared with me ways that they acted upon this concept that was so important to them.

I consider my methods a modified approach to grounded theory (Charmaz 1996). Like most grounded theory approaches, I try to let my data speak for itself. Grounded theory is based on the development of analytic codes and categories that arise from the data and not preconceived notions (Strauss and Corbin 1990). I did this to an extent, but I knew from the beginning that one of my central themes was going to be how people define diversity. The other themes did arise from the data. I also deviate from grounded theory by focusing more on the participants as individuals then the emergent themes of their responses. This reporting strategy mimics Kathy Charmaz, who says “Unlike most other grounded theorists, I prefer to present many detailed interview quotes and examples in the body of my work. I do so to keep the human story in the forefront of the reader's mind and to make the conceptual analysis more accessible to a wider audience” (47). I ended up with a much smaller sample size than my original goal, which
limits the claims I can make based on this data. However, one big advantage is that it allows me the space to share and explore in-depth details about each and every participant, which provides rich or “thick” data (Geertz 1994). Next, I give more insight into who the participants are.
RESULTS

The Participants

The self-selection bias in my sample turned out to be a positive thing for my research. I ended up not examining how the Learning Center affects families directly. Nor did I end up looking at the range of opinions on diversity from a potentially large and diverse sample. Instead, I ended up with a small sample of people who have one very narrow commonality, they opt-in to diversity. Instead of being the focus of my research, the Learning Center became a stepping stone to finding people who have the predilection to opt-in. I cannot say if the range of responses from my participants is even representative of staff and parents at the Learning Center. But, given that I found repetition and saturation of responses in my small sample, I feel confident in saying that they are at least somewhat representative of people who generally opt-in to diversity. The participants were different in other ways. Some come from families making under $30,000 per year. Others come from families making over $300,000 per year. Some participants are Black, others are white. Some are women, others are men. Some come from politically conservative backgrounds, while others come from politically liberal backgrounds. I changed their names to protect their confidentiality, and I have omitted some identifying details from their responses.
Table 1. List of participants

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In sharing their responses, I chose to present my participants sequentially instead of grouping their responses by themes. The small sample size allows for this approach. I feel that this better represents the people who chose to participate in my research. Also, it helps the reader better connect a participants’ actions to their specific ideologies. The premise of my research is that everyone holds a different and unique definition for the concept of diversity. Given the individuality of defining diversity, it would be difficult for the reader to truly understand how the actions that a participant takes relate to her/his definition of diversity if they were separated into disparate themes in this paper. Instead, each participant’s section itself is grouped into three themes: how they define diversity, how it is important to them, and how they act on diversity. My research questions are how do people in this setting define the fluid concept of diversity, and how do they act on their definitions and beliefs about diversity? Next, I share their stories and start to explore how they answer my research questions.

Avery

Meaning of Diversity. Avery identifies as a white woman in her 30s. She works in publishing. She has two children, one of whom was still in the womb at the time of the interview.
Her other child is a girl enrolled at the Learning Center. I interviewed her in Spring of 2016.

When I asked Avery what diversity meant to her, she said:

The most obvious thing is people of different ethnicities. Ideally, I want other economic realities, too, family structures, and things like that, not always things you can tell off the bat, necessarily, but just a range, more indicative of the world in general.

I asked her if her ideas of diversity have changed over time, and she replied:

They've been brought to the fore, since moving here. I was a New Yorker, very diverse, and when I came here, Cleveland is not necessarily always…People seem to move to pockets where it's less that way, in a way that I'm not as familiar to me, just because it's not how I grew up. It's definitely been more on my mind since we've been here. We're staunchly like, "No, we want to be in the Heights. We're not moving out to Chagrin Falls." I grew up in Atlanta and South Carolina, which are pretty diverse cities. I've always lived in an urban environment. My dad who lives here in Cleveland, lives out in Chagrin Falls. When we go to visit them, it definitely feels like there's one economic reality – there's one ethnic reality out there. Obviously, that's an over-simplification, but in general, you walk around down there, it doesn't feel real to me. It feels like a fake…I have younger brothers who are in high school over there, and they're just not as aware or as sensitive that there's other people with different realities, regardless of what they look like.

Chagrin Falls is a mostly white suburb about half an hour’s drive from downtown Cleveland. The Heights is slang for cities that are adjacent to Cleveland, such as Cleveland Heights or Shaker Heights, which have a reputation for being diverse. For Avery, ethnicity comes to mind first when thinking about diversity. But she also makes the point that diversity is much more than that, including different family structures and economic situations. Her family moved from New York, and the differences between there and the Cleveland area caused her to think more about diversity. She made specific choices not to live in a place where there was not much diversity based on her definition of the concept.

Importance of Diversity. I asked Avery why diversity was so important to her. She replied:

Especially this year of all years, our country is pretty polarized, and there's a lot of fear-mongering and lack of understanding for different lifestyles or different people. There's
the political environment right now, obviously. Lots of talk about walls, and how much social support there should be for people. Unfortunately, it just brings out an ugly underbelly, which obviously, she's [Avery’s child] not picking up on now, but it's just all the more important that little ones grow up being friends with people who aren't just like them. That's important to me.

Avery hints at the Trump campaign’s promise to build a wall on the Mexican border. At the time of the interview, Trump had not secured the spot as the Republican nominee, let alone won the presidential election. For Avery, diversity is important to her because she wants her children to grow up making friends with people who are different from themselves.

*Acting on Diversity.* Not only does Avery have beliefs about the meaning and importance of diversity, but she acts on those beliefs. For instance, she factored diversity into important family decisions about where to live or where to enroll her child. She had this to say:

It's always been important to me to live in an environment where there's people who rent and don't own homes, or they might have one parent, not two, or parents of the same sex, or that speak a different language than you do, when they go home. Those kinds of things are important to me for [my child]. I want her to be in an environment like that, and I feel like [the Learning Center] is that. The classrooms are…When I walked into [my child’s] classroom, all the kids, there's a range. I like that about it.

*Dylan*

*Meaning of Diversity.* Dylan identifies as a white man in his 30s. He works in data analysis and business intelligence. He has two children, a daughter in kindergarten and a son enrolled at the Learning Center in a preschool classroom. I interviewed Dylan in the spring of 2016. When I asked Dylan what diversity meant to him, he had this to say:

I think most people jump to race, but you really can't talk about just race. There's really a lot more. I think about a lot of other variables that correlate to that. Income is usually a factor there and education. Typically, I'm thinking of race. The unfair advantages that come with the color of your skin. There's this guy, a science fiction writer that my wife reads. His name is John Scalzi. He makes the case that if you're born a white male you're basically playing life on the easy mode. If life were a video game you're playing that on easy mode. I don't know, maybe that's not a fair generalization. That's what I think of—unfair advantages. I'll give you another example. I went to pick up my tax return this morning from this place and the thought that crossed my mind this morning was I wondered what it would be like if I didn't look like myself. I wonder how I would be
treated if I were not an overweight white male. I look like the clients that they've had, their demographic of customers that they've probably had. That crossed my mind this morning.

Dylan first thinks of race, but not race by itself. Instead, he focuses on the “unfair advantages” based on skin color. He recognizes that he has privileges as a white male and that includes economic privileges.

*Importance of Diversity.* I asked Dylan why he thought he was sensitive in the way he was to “unfair advantages” and why diversity was important to him. He responded:

> I think Shaker has probably heightened that sense of awareness. I think about my in-laws a lot. I don't know if they're Trump supporters or what, or Cruz type people but you get the idea of where the mind is at. They live in what I would consider to be more of a bubble. I'm sure you could argue everybody lives in some sort of a bubble. I think a lot of it just boils down to exposure in general. There are people that they may not be racist themselves and they've never come across that way, but it's tough to have preconceived notions when your entire world is inside of this bubble of rural Ohio where the houses are very far spread apart; you go to a church that is 100% white blue collar type people. It's tough to even put yourself in somebody's shoes when you don't have any sense other than Fox News or some shows. That's your only exposure to people. Being surrounded by people is important. Hearing the types of conversations that they have, hearing what's going on in their daily lives.

Here Dylan speaks about diversity as the opposite of “bubbles,” which are made of similar worldviews and composed of people with similar backgrounds. He refers to his in-laws as supporters of Trump or Cruz as examples of people who live in such bubbles. While recognizing that everyone likely lives in a bubble of sorts, he sees exposure to people different than himself as a way to escape the “bubbles.”

*Acting on Diversity.* Dylan started the interview by telling me about his children. He shared the following:

> He's three, loves construction books which is weird. We were pretty aware of gender roles and tried not to enforce anything like that but he wears a dress every now and then because he really loves his My Little Pony dress. He wears that to ECEC occasionally, but he gravitated to construction books and loves playing around with his little tool set.
that he has. He likes to help outside. He's into that. My daughter is really into riding her bike right now. She just figured out how to ride without training wheels.

I asked Dylan to expand more on his thoughts about gender roles. I asked why he and his wife chose to explicitly try not to enforce gender norms when the opposite is true of so many parents (Lorber 1994). He responded with:

I think we just wanted them to be their own person. I don't know if I have a really strong reason, but I know it's a little difficult. In the back of your mind, you're like, “is he going to get mocked; what's going to happen?” He likes it. I don't ever want to push him a certain way just because there is some societal norms. I don't have a really good, strong reason for it. I feel like when I was a kid, my parents weren't as liberal as we are, but I remember wearing colored socks to school, and I remember getting mocked for it in third or fourth grade. Then immediately made the switch to wearing white socks. As subtle as that sounds, that's one of those things. I want him to be free to express himself however he wants to and especially before peer pressure sets in. He's very innocent and nobody really would question it, I think, or he certainly wouldn't care at this age.

During our interview, Dylan did not explicitly make the connection between his thoughts about gender roles and his ideas about people living in “bubbles.” However, it seems clear to me that Dylan’s desire to avoid having his children live in narrow-minded bubbles directly affects how he raises his children in regards to gender roles. He has made the conscious choice to allow his son to wear dresses to school knowing full well that it violates hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

In addition to his attempts to raise his children without expectations of gender norms, Dylan also wants his children to experience exposure to people different from themselves. Diversity was one of the things he and his wife looked for when purchasing a home. He told me about a day when his kindergartener daughter came home excited about a class activity in which children shared pictures of their homes and shared about who lived there. She told her parents about the many different family structures and living situations shared by students in her class. He then shared the following:
I loved telling people when we moved in we lived next to a mixed-race family. I think the lady was...I'm going to say the wrong word, but she was Asian and he was white. Then the family next to us is African-American and Muslim, too. Then across the street for a little while there were two gay guys who were living across the street. Having all that in this little neighborhood and people able to see that and having that be accepted as the norm. I didn't get to grow up with that; it was a very narrow view of the world. Just the exposure to all those different types of factors I think is great for [my daughter].

For both Dylan and his daughter, diversity is something to be celebrated. It is something they get excited about. Looking to experience diversity and sharing their excitement is a way for people to act on their ideas of diversity. As Dylan says:

I feel like we've made a commitment. At some point you decide because when you hear new parents talk about Shaker or people that are probably going to have kids, I think a lot of people prioritize differently. I think we could have easily moved a few miles down and paid less in property taxes at a decent community, but I think at some point you make the conscious decision that there is value in having diversity. Not just in race but in all these different factors.

Peg

Meaning of Diversity. Peg identifies as a white woman in her 30s. She works in human resources and marketing for a medical organization. She has one child, a son who is enrolled at the Learning Center. I interviewed Peg in early summer 2016. Diversity is a topic that she had thought about a lot in her life. When asked Peg what diversity meant to her, she replied:

I kind of cringe. That's my first reaction. It's just...It's overused. It's become devoid of meaning, and it also can be harmful and lead to tokenism and all that kind of stuff, and so I don't generally have a positive reaction when I hear that word immediately. I hear it in context and understand the intent behind it, then I think, 'Okay, well, at least people give a shit.' (laughs)

I asked her why she thought diversity was overused and devoid of meaning. She told me:

I don't know. Especially having worked a lot with HR communications, it's just a necessity. It's like we have to do this so we don't look bad or get sued. Then it becomes a box checked, instead of...It also represents equity instead of justice. Do you know what I mean? Like, let's just get everybody in the same room and everything will be okay, and that's...Like I said, it's important. That's part of the reason that we send [my son] to [the school], is because being in a group of people who are different is part of not being an asshole, you know?
For Peg, the context in which diversity is discussed is important to her understanding of the concept. She sees diversity as something that has been devalued by corporate policies that use it as a way to not get sued. Her opinion is in line with research showing that corporations that have any kind of diversity policy, even if their own HR personnel cannot state what it is, are less likely to be sued for discrimination (Embrick and Rice 2010; Embrick 2011). She does not like the tokenism that diversity is often reduced down to, but admits that it is the first step in having diversity.

Peg’s opinions about diversity and what it means to her have changed dramatically from her time growing up in Virginia. She shared with me her transformation in college:

Frankly, I grew up really racist. I had a rebel flag in my bedroom as a teenager. That's what I thought was normal and that's what I was taught. Of course, you have friends that are black because they're...I don't know, if you're in an environment, like my mom worked with a lot of people of color, but it's just so ingrained that you don't understand. Then I get to college and start taking rhetoric and communication classes or like racism and literature classes, and realize what an idiot I am. It interested me that I could be generally an upstanding citizen, but have these abhorrent views that I thought were just part of my life. I knew really good people who would give you the shirt off their back if you were white. My interest was, how do I take people who don't have the privilege of spending their time in school...How do I get them to have access to the kind of information that helped me undergo the transformation from racist to at least conscious of trying not to be? That was...Most of my classes kind of centered around that. Then when I went to graduate school I had a great advisor who does a lot on Lincoln and public address and race. That was what I had become interested in in undergrad. I did a paper on meth production and white spaces and the difference between how we characterize a crack epidemic versus how we characterize a meth epidemic and heroin and all that kind of stuff. For grad school it was more focused on like textual analysis, but I did take a PhD race relations seminar and did my paper for that class on Race Traitor, so I could explore some more of what I had originally intended to do, which was get these messages that require you to have a certain level of education to understand to people who are good people but don't have access to those messages that could help them be less racist. [Michael: did you come up with anything?] No.

No one else I interviewed had such a drastic transformation that they shared with me. Peg made a point of owning up to her own racism and white privilege. Exposure to other ways of thinking in college led her to change the way she thought about race and diversity in general. In
graduate school, where she studied rhetoric and communication, she was interested in finding ways to help people without access to higher education to have transformations of thought like she had. She was not able to come up with anything effective.

Importance of Diversity. In further discussing time spent in meetings in the corporate health world, Peg spoke to the importance of diversity:

Now, it was pretty cool when we started taking on this unconscious bias. In healthcare, there's clinical statistics and research that shows that these unconscious biases lead to unequal outcomes, and that's a huge concern for doctors and patients. I think healthcare might be one of the places where we actually might start to get something other than corporate diversity, some unconscious bias training for healthcare providers, because we can so easily show that this is actually an issue, whereas in many other situations it's just kind of like you know it or you don't. I don't know.

One way that Peg sees diversity as important has to do with unconscious bias, which is assumptions that people hold about categorical groups of people without recognizing that they have such assumptions (Green, Carney, Pallin et al. 2007). Recognizing the results of research on unconscious bias in the medical field might lead to healthcare moving beyond “devoid of meaning” corporate diversity to something more substantive in Peg’s opinion.

Acting on Diversity. Like others, Peg specifically factored in diversity when choosing a place to live and deciding where to enroll her son in day care. For her, diversity was a very important factor. She explained her decision to move to Shaker Heights:

Part of the reason why we moved to Shaker [was] because we had read that they were one of the earliest suburbs to purposefully integrate. I think they might have been the earliest, I don't know, but I don't know, that was important to us because we grew up in a very segregated environment.

Just like choosing a place to live, diversity was important to Peg in choosing a preschool for her son:

We looked at a lot of preschools. We looked at [option 1], we looked at even [expensive option 2], because those places are expensive, but they're not that much more expensive than [the Learning Center] when you look at it. We felt like anywhere else he went would
be just kind of white-washed. Socioeconomically as well, because I grew up working
class and I went to a school where...I went to University of [location] for undergrad,
which is like kids have their own Porsche that they drive. They complain about how it's
last year's model, and I'm like...I grew up in trailers. I know what it's...When you don't
have that kind of exposure, you kind of have that little bit of a shock. That was part of it
for us. Most of the other places I looked were just a bunch of rich kids. They didn't have
the USDA program, they didn't accept vouchers. When I went to [the Learning Center] I
saw parents getting out of the car in their scrubs, and then I saw parents whose cars
looked like they were 20 years old. It's hard as a parent because you have all of these
ideals and then you think...Thinking about sending [my son] to [the local elementary
school], which is the school that [the author’s son] would go to too. I hear all these
things, like it's not a good school anymore. Those are just...That's white people scared of
an integrated school, but then I hear it from my neighbors who are Black and from
Brooklyn, but they didn't send their kids to school there. My mom always tells me, don't
try and make a political point with your kid. If you think there's a better environment for
him, send him to that better environment, regardless of the socioeconomic environment,
you know? I think we're lucky with [the Learning Center] because they have lots of
enrichment along with the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity. I had to prove to
my parents that [the Learning Center] was a good place to send [my son] and that I wasn't
just doing it because it's progressive. I mean, I didn't have to, but they questioned it.

Peg was very explicit in how diversity was a necessity when choosing a preschool for her
son. She also feels lucky that the school she chose is also a very good school in general in
addition to being diverse. She had to prove to her family that it was a good school and that she
was not just making a political point with her child. In Peg’s opinion, she is the outcast of her
family because her views are not politically conservative like the rest of her family’s.

**Jolene**

**Meaning of Diversity.** Jolene identifies as a Black woman in her 60s. She has two fully
grown children. She works at the Learning Center as a teacher and has over 20 years of
diversity meant to her, and she replied:

I thought it just meant different races. Then, I had to take a class to try see about diversity
and it's different religion, it could be on the way people think about politics. It's just all
kinds of things that I didn’t know about until I took that class. It's not just color.
For Jolene, her initial ideas of diversity centered on race or color. But, during her training, she took a course on diversity and chose to adopt some of how it presented diversity, which included a variety of categorical differences, such as religion or politics.

Our conversation moved into a discussion of what the diversity at the Learning Center is like. She discussed how the children are or are not aware of diversity in her opinion, and she shared about her childhood and her awareness of race:

[The Learning Center] embraces diversity, and in my opinion, I don’t know what they do in the office, but it seems like they purposely divide and make each classroom with its teachers and students diverse, making sure it's kind of like a mixture of everything. Our kids don’t know…They're comfortable with each other. They can sit next to each other, touch each other, play with each other's hair. There's no difference. They don’t know any difference about anything. They don’t recognize color. She's black, she's white. They don’t recognize that and me, myself, I didn’t know I was black until I was in the 8th grade.

I was shocked that a Black child growing up in the 1960s would not be aware of her own race. “Really?” I asked. She replied:

Right, because my mom and dad didn’t ever point it out and we'd lived on a mixed street with mixed races, but I didn’t know. We didn’t. I was just such as mister such and such, miss such and such. We didn’t…It was no division and my mom just a few years ago told me, I didn’t know what color your teacher were until I came to school. I was like, "Why is that? I don’t understand." She said, "Because we never asked you so what do you think about your teacher?" "Oh, she's mean. Oh, she has a brown skirt. She wears this." We never was brought up that way. Colored people are people and that's how we were brought up.

I asked her what changed in 8th grade that caused her to become aware of her race. She said:

Dr. Martin Luther King got killed, and when he was killed then that's when everything happened, and I looked at myself in the mirror and I was like, "What color am I?" I couldn’t see. I didn’t…I couldn’t even see the color because I didn’t understand it so that's when I found out. Yeah, because…Well, my best friend was very light skinned and she had green eyes but she wasn’t biracial. Her mom was black and her dad was black. As a matter of fact, her dad was like, I learned at his funeral, he was the first black firefighter in Cleveland which I didn’t know because he was just Mr. Reed. He looks mean and he's a firefighter. That was it. The kids were angry and upset and it was a black-white thing going on, and see, these are older kids because it was 9th grade probably, and they came, she came to me crying and said they we're getting ready to beat
her up and I was like, "Why?" She said, "Because they said that I’m white." I was like, "I
don’t understand." I was confused. She said, "Just tell them. Just tell them what my dad
looks like." I said, "Okay. Her mom is light skinned and her dad is dark skinned." They
left her alone but I didn’t understand. That still didn’t compute. I didn’t understand why
they would want to fight her because of how she looked. That was deep, wasn’t it for 8th
grade? Look how long I…I was, kind of, maybe guarded or protected, but it still kept me
open to people. It's being just people.

For Jolene, part of diversity is seeing people for simply the people they are; “it’s being
just people.” This conception of diversity is similar to a colorblind ideology; however, for
Jolene, it is an alternative to the overt racism that she and others experienced after the death of
Dr. Martin Luther King.

*Importance of Diversity.* Jolene believes deeply that the children she teaches simply
accept one another as “just people” because that is how the teachers treat them. I asked her how
long the children will hold such a view of others. She told me:

I think it will last forever because it starts when they're in toddlers and it continues in
preschool and that's where it's set. That's why those first 5 years are excellent…They
learn all these things and they're stuck in there. They're stuck. Why not pour all that into
them, right now?

Jolene points to the fact that children learn so much about the world in their early years. Having
a structured environment where they learn to accept others and not focus on differences is
important to Jolene.

*Acting on Diversity.* Jolene shared a lot about her students with me. It was obvious that
she cares for them very deeply. Some of what she shared included where some of her students’
families come from, such as Russia, China, India, and Romania. I shared my surprise that she
had families from all over the world. She replied:

All over the world. We had a map…and we asked the parents to put where they had been
because they go everywhere. One mother went to Paris and whenever she goes
somewhere out of town, she will bring us something from Venice, from Paris. They just
travel a lot. We're blessed I think to have this diversity and it's on-purpose diversity. I
think people, like you when you look online to find out where you wanted to move to,
you wanted some place that was diverse and people come here to this community. Once you get here, you fit into this realm. I’ll tell you.

By having a map in her classroom, Jolene and the other teacher were able to engage with the families of their students in a way that celebrated the diversity in their classroom. Parents from other regions, many of whom could not speak English or had thick accents, did not have to feel excluded because of a language barrier but were instead included in a fun way.

Susan

Meaning of Diversity. Susan identifies as a white woman in her 40s. She works in education. She has one child, a daughter enrolled at the Learning Center. I interviewed Susan in late spring 2016. When I asked her what diversity meant to her, she had this to say:

It means that you have a cross-section of the population, so it's not going to be a whole one race or another. I'd like to see multi-racial, multi-ethnicity, a wide diversity of income and that's what I see when I look at [the Learning Center]. You've got everything from people with homes on the other side of Van Aken [a road that forms a dividing line in Shaker Heights in regards to home values] to those who are on this side of Van Aken, and I think it's a good mixture.

For Susan, diversity means including a “cross-section of the population.” She references race, ethnicity, and home location as a proxy for economic status. To be a diverse setting, a place would need to have people that come from all over these different spectrums.

Importance of Diversity. Susan later told me why diversity was important to her in regards to how it affects her daughter. By putting her daughter in situations that are purposefully diverse, her daughter will learn…

Tolerance, flexibility, world view, knowing that your little narrow point of view is not everyone's. I think learning to work with others. I think that in today's global economy if you add that into it then you have to know ... a person in the 21st century skills has to know that their little viewpoint is not the only one out there. It's really important to me that she's able to work well without it. I think that this experience has really provided her with that idea. She doesn't see color. She's got friends of multi-races and it doesn't occur to her that one religion or race is superior over another and that's exactly what I would want for my child. To not have this central view of the world.
Susan seems to blend two ideologies about diversity together in explaining why it is important. One, she claims that her daughter does not see color, which is a classic trope of colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2010). But what Susan means seems to be more closely aligned with a second diversity ideology that is based on egalitarianism, that no category is superior to another, such as when she says that her daughter does not see “one religion or race [as] superior over another.” Of course, to see categorical groups, such as two or more races, as equal, one must first “see color.” Herein lies a problem faced by people who care deeply about diversity; there are few rhetorical tools available to talk about diversity. Instead, the discourse is dominated by colorblind ideology.

*Acting on Diversity.* The decisions that Susan makes with her family reflect how she defines diversity and its importance. She told me:

> When we lived in [different state], we choose [neighborhood] because it wasn't all one race or another, it was diverse. It wasn't all income or another, so we felt that that's really important. We're currently considering a move after next year, so she's do kindergarten at Shaker, and we're thinking about moving to have a little bit more space. One of the challenges – I don't know if Ohio is specific to this – we didn't feel it as much in [different state], it seems that if you move out of the inner ring suburbs, it's almost all white, and we really don't want that to be her experience. Simply because she's growing up in such diverse communities, to move from that to something like [suburb], which is mostly white, I just don't feel like it's going to give her the full range of experience that she would get otherwise.

Susan discusses the difficulty of choosing a place to live that meets the multiple expectations she has for her family. She wants to live in a place that has “more space,” which would force homebuyers to look outside of Shaker Heights because the lots are small and most homes are 50 to 80 years old, meaning they are not open concept. Yet, moving farther out into the suburbs would mean sacrificing the diverse experience she wants for her daughter’s childhood. People like Susan want to seek out diversity, but structural barriers like the legacy of residential segregation (Keating 1994) force them to choose between homes that fit their physical desires or neighborhoods that meet their desire for diversity.
Melissa

Meaning of Diversity. Melissa identifies as a white woman in her 30s. She works in social work and public health. She has two children, one of whom is enrolled at the Learning Center. I interviewed Melissa in early summer 2016. She said that she wanted to meet with me after seeing my recruitment letter because, as she said, “issues of race, and issues of diversity, and things like that are very near and dear for me because of my work, and just in general of being a good human.” I asked her what diversity meant to her and she replied:

It's interesting. I think for a long time, I felt like having a minority presence was diversity, that there was representation ... I remember years ago, when I first started getting interested in issues of race and different things, it was being mindful of where am I, where there's only white people, right? If I go to a restaurant and there's only white people, like, "Why are there only white people here? What does that mean?" That kind of stuff. Then, as that ... I remember being at the grocery store and noticing there's Black people here, and there's ... It's not white people. That was diversity to me, in terms of that was minority presence, I guess I would say. Then, at Cleveland Heights, it's very ... Demographically, it's very Black. There's a lot of black people and white people. That's probably the extent of the diversity. My family would say, "You know there's more to it than just black people." It's not just – I think moving to [adjacent suburb] has developed my appreciation more so of what diversity is, in terms of what kind of different people. In my son's classroom, there's not a white majority. There's a ton of Asian kids, there's Middle Eastern kids, there's Jewish kids, there's Black kids. There's different...That expanded my...What diversity is. The different religions, different races, different ethnicities, different countries, and different things like that. A parent can then ... Last week they taught them about Malaysia, where they're from. Then two weeks ago, we talked about Korea, where they're from. That shifting away from focusing on African Americans, and this is what diversity is, and being more expanding. Even with [my son’s] room, there's families that speak Spanish as a first language, whatever. Opening my eyes to...It's not just Black people are there, which, I knew that.

Initially, Melissa thought of diversity in terms of Black and white, meaning that the presence of both Black and white people was enough for her to label something as diverse. Now she considers diversity to be inclusive of a range of categories, such as national origin, race, and religion.

Importance of Diversity. To explain the importance of diversity to me, Susan spoke a lot about her work. I redacted some of her account to protect her confidentiality. After speaking with
her for a long time on many issues, I asked her why she was so passionate about diversity. She replied:

Why do I care so much? I think probably because of the work that I've done. I've been doing [social work]. People are people, and you learn very quickly that the stereotypes that people promote about people that live in poverty or people that are black or whatever – most of my friends were black – are not true. People are people. I remember the first time…One of my first clients, one of the first families I worked with lived in the projects, and one of the worst projects in the city, which have since been torn down. It was like, "Oh, this is so scary. You're going to this place and whatever." The thing that was most notable for me going there was how strong the sense of community was, and how much people looked out for each, and that it was like having a family live next door, next door, next door. It was a very ... It was not at all what people make the projects out to be. I think having those experiences in terms of ... A mother's love for their child looks the same whether you're rich, poor, white, black, whatever. These are all things that we struggle with...When I had my son, I was like, "There's no ... He has all this privilege heaped upon him at birth based on his race and his gender." He didn't do anything to deserve that. There's nothing special about – obviously, he's special, but there's nothing that makes him more special then these babies that are being born [with specific negative health outcome]...I've met too many people and been in too many people's lives that I care about very much, and that get the short end of the stick by virtue of circumstance. It's not their fault they go to terrible schools. It's not their fault that their parents didn't get a good education and don't have good job. It's not their fault...Yeah, I think that's the big thing, the unfairness of it, and why do I have all this privilege? Did I work hard? I don't think so. I followed the path that I was meant to be on, because that's what I was born into. My parents both have master’s degrees...My sister has a master’s degree. This is what we do. It was not hard. There was no work involved. Right? This is where I got to, because this is the path. That other babies are born on paths that don't look like mine is really an injustice to me. It's not fair, and it's not as much choice. I think a lot of people tend to think that being poor is a choice, or a series of bad decisions or something. You understand why people make the decisions that they do when you're in their homes and working with them and whatever. It becomes, "I demonize you because you spent your welfare check on that TV," which doesn't even happen, but whatever.

For Melissa, diversity is very much about social justice. She is reflective about her own privilege and the privileges that her children will receive. Diversity is important because, as she said when we first met, it is part of “being a good human.”

*Acting on Diversity.* When she was explaining why diversity was important to her, Melissa also told me about an interaction she had with her older child. One way that she acted on
her ideas about diversity was by discussing her fears about Donald Trump with her six-year-old son.

I want [my children] to understand that different people experience the world in different ways, and even the harsh reality of people are treated different because of their differences, or whatever, and treated badly because of that. I want them to be aware of what that looks like and what that is, hopefully in the effort to build some empathy with them. As an example, my older son somehow – we don't talk about politics at home, but somehow he got wind of his great uncle saying that he was smarter than Donald Trump, that my son, my 6 year old is smarter than Donald Trump. When I took [my older son] to go vote with me, he asked me if I was voting for Donald Trump, and I said, "No." I wasn't going to go on my rampage about it, but I said no. He had lots of questions. "Why aren't you voting for Donald Trump," and whatever. I'm trying to – I'm very much on they can inform themselves and make their own decisions. I'm not going to force my opinions on them. I just said, "I think he has a lot of bad ideas." He said, "Like what?" I said, "Well, he wants to build a wall between the United States and Mexico, so Mexican people can't get into our country." His eyes got humongous, and he started shaking his head, "No. No. No. That's not okay." I don't think he knows anybody from Mexico. I don't think there's anybody from Mexico in his school. Then we talked about [how] he doesn't want people from the Middle East to be able to move to this country. He gets tears in his eyes, and he's like, "Mom, my friend [name] at school just moved here from Saudi Arabia. Do you mean he wouldn't be able to come into this country?" I was like, "Yes, that's what I mean. That's what it means." It was very real for him that he can – It's not just this random thing, we're not going to let Middle Eastern people into this country. It's your friend would not be able to be in that hits home. He gets it. We talk about, "We treat everybody the same," and, "We are nice to people," and whatever, and we talk about that in theory. It's in your face. You can put a person to it.

This discussion made the threats to egalitarian diversity very real for her young son. By enrolling in a diverse early learning center (which Melissa told me was one of the top reasons they chose the Learning Center) her son had experiences with many children who come from different backgrounds. If enacted, Trump’s campaign promises are a direct threat to the friendships that Melissa’s son has formed.

Holly

*Meaning of Diversity.* Holly identifies as a white woman in her 40s. She works as a consultant advising companies on various projects. She has one child who is enrolled at the
Learning Center. I interviewed her in early summer 2016. I asked Holly what diversity means to her, and she replied:

I think it means – well, I mean, I think the first thing that comes to mind is just it represents – it's a word that represents the fact that people bring totally different experiences, different cultures, different approaches. For me, it's a positive term where I think it represents all that could be in terms of things not being homogeneous but having a little bit more variety in terms of people, the experiences and the approaches and perspectives that people bring.

I asked Holly if her views have changed over time. She responded:

I think that they probably have because I think that my experience has changed over time. I grew up in a pretty non-diverse space, so I didn't really even have the perspective as even I was coming out of college and when I went to an undergrad college where I didn't have a lot of experience with different cultures or different races or anything, different religions. I went to a religious school so it was pretty much Catholic. It's changed as I built an awareness of that over time.

Holly takes a broad approach to defining diversity, speaking abstractly about how it is the variety of “experiences and the approaches and perspectives that people bring.” Yet, when I asked if these views have changed, she talks more specifically about her change in experiences and environments. She does not consider her upbringing very diverse, but, as she mentions later, she moved to a racially diverse area. She includes culture, race, and religion in defining her “non-diverse space,” which suggests that there are different categorical markers for how she understands diversity.

**Importance of Diversity.** Holly related the conversation to her son when explaining why diversity was important to her. She said:

Because having not had it [diversity] myself, I feel like I missed out on that aspect, and I had to figure that out as an adult. I also think that there is the flip side of it where for a lot of people that don't value it in this world, in this city, and in this community or whatever, and so I want to make sure that I instill in him the value of it and that he sees it for something as positive as opposed to negative. Because I think there is a lot in the media and just in what's going on that is making it difficult to do that or it's opposed to the attitude I want to take on that.
Holly later told me that she was referring to the republican primaries that were being dominated by news of the Trump campaign at the time of the interview. Holly considers diversity important because she wants her child to experience something that she did not, but she is also cautious because exposure is not enough. She does not want him to develop a negative attitude about diversity but to rather see it as something of value.

*Acting on Diversity.* Having done several interviews and recognizing that the emergent theme of acting on diversity, I asked Holly if she ever had considered diversity when making important decisions in her life. She responded:

> Definitely where I chose to live as an adult. Twenty-five, I bought a house in Cleveland Heights. Cleveland Heights is the epicenter for “let's bring different people together and figure out how to appreciate that and value that.” I think where I chose to live, definitely my career, working with literally hundreds and hundreds of organizations over the course of my career, because I've always been in this career where I've worked with organizations. I come into contact with so many different types of people. I think that's played a role too. Now I have a completely different perspective of it [diversity] because I have a son. Having a son…and really starting to think about how do I teach him about these things and see, view that, and understand that in his space is really important to me.

Holly made the conscious effort to pick a place to live that is more diverse. Cleveland Heights has a reputation for being diverse, much like Shaker Heights. She also credits her career with bringing her into contact with many different people, exposing her to more diversity.

*Amelia*

*Meaning of Diversity.* Amelia identifies as a white woman in her 30s. She works in marketing and has two children, one of whom is enrolled at the Learning Center. I interviewed Amelia in spring 2016. When I asked her what diversity meant to her, she said:

> I mean, a couple of things. I think the most basic is literally race and culture. When you dig a little bit deeper, it's just mindset and exposure to different way of life. It's not necessarily a race issue.

I asked her if this perspective has changed over time. She replied,
I think it's probably changed over time. I mean, when I – like I said, I grew up in a – it's pretty much 99 percent White. When I heard of diversity, I think, I immediately thought race, but then as you mature and you become professional, you are exposed to a lot more things so race, certainly, but I think mindset is pretty huge too. I mean, the street that we live on, we have white, Black, Asian, Indian family across the street from us, so it's definitely – it's like a little cultural mix right on one street… I think Shaker certainly has something to do with it. [And] travels, for sure. Then, yeah, being in the world of marketing, 100 percent, you always have to think about it.

According to Amelia, she grew up in a white community. As such, she constructed the idea of diversity in terms of race and culture. However, she claims that age and experience have exposed her to other forms of diversity. Her ideas of diversity have changed because she lives in Shaker Heights, with more diverse neighbors, because she “travels” across the world frequently (which we discussed earlier in the interview), and because of her career in marketing. She now considers diversity to also be about mindset and ways of life in addition to race and culture.

**Importance of Diversity.** When Amelia and I talked about her initial impressions of the Learning Center and why she chose to enroll her child there, she also spoke about how important diversity is to her. Of the Learning Center, she said:

I honestly did appreciate that it wasn't a classroom of the same people. I was just impressed just literally walking up and down the halls hearing other languages. That was something I personally want to expose our children to and to hear so many families speaking different languages. I don't know them, but I'm assuming that's where they grew up.

I followed up by asking Amelia why she wanted that kind of exposure to diversity for her child. She responded:

I think, a lot of it is – so my husband and I before kids, we traveled a lot throughout the year. Clearly, my husband is from a different country, so not being US-centric is just part of who we are. Part of that is exposure to different languages and cultures. The earlier grade you do that, always the better.

For Amelia, exposing her children to diversity is a process of socializing her children into the values that she and her husband shared before they had children. Her husband grew up
outside of the United States. Together they traveled around the world quite often. Diversity for her children is important because Amelia wants them to have more than a “US-centric” focus.

*Acting on Diversity.* Amelia acts on diversity in many ways. As mentioned in her earlier quotes, she travels frequently to other countries, she chose to live in Shaker Heights knowing its reputation for being diverse, and she enrolled her child at the Learning Center because of the diversity of families. Another way that she acts on diversity could be the “constructive criticism” that she has regarding the Learning Center’s approach to holidays.

There's a line and sometimes, I think, they're too careful when they are, when we're all at Thanksgiving time. For whatever reason, the teachers won't reference Thanksgiving…It was like the “Day of the Feast” or it was all about the feast and the dinner which is true. There's nothing wrong with referencing Thanksgiving. So, that would be my only – when I think about constructive criticism, sometimes, I think, it's a negative to be so politically correct because everyone celebrates holidays differently and I think it's better to just talk about it, and if one family doesn't celebrate it, that's fine. Celebrate that, you know, if they celebrate something different. That would be one thing. On one hand, I appreciate that they don't overly celebrate one holiday but I would prefer that they talk more about all the different holidays.

Amelia’s critique is in line with how she constructs the meaning of diversity and its importance. She considers race, culture, mindset, and ways of life when she thinks about diversity. When it comes to holidays, she thinks that it would be better to celebrate as many as possible instead of being “politically correct” and not referencing a holiday, like Thanksgiving. Celebrating many holidays at the Learning Center would be another method of exposing her children to many cultures, mindsets, and ways of life, which she considers important.

*Sarena*

*Meaning of Diversity.* Sarena identifies as a Black woman in her 30s who works in education. She has one child, who is enrolled at the Learning Center. I interviewed Sarena in spring 2016. When I asked what diversity means to her, she had this to say:
To me it just means people of different backgrounds. Whether it be culturally, spiritually. That everybody is different. Diversity is just different to me. When I think about it and hear about it, that's what I think.

I asked her how long she has held these ideas of diversity. She replied:

Forever. I think living here in this district alone, we don't know anything other than everybody is different but everybody is okay. You get along with everybody, you are friends of your friends, and that's it. You don't worry about a race. I've been bar mitzvahs, bat mitzvahs. I've been to Passover dinners. I've done everything. You just don't worry about it. Those are your friends.

When Sarena talks about diversity, she mentions culture, spirituality/religion, and race. She also refers to diversity in its simplest form – difference. This should not be misconstrued as a version of a colorblind approach to diversity. She does not say that everyone is different and therefore nothing needs to be done to enhance diversity. Rather, she is saying that everyone is different, and everyone is important. She sees value in bringing people together in a community, such as attending Jewish events with her neighbors when she herself is not Jewish.

Importance of Diversity. Sarena, like many of the parents I spoke with, related issues of diversity to the impact it would have on her child. I asked her why diversity was important to her. She said:

Looking at the world as a global approach, not just sitting in the local. They need to start thinking global. I think these kids need to be more exposed to differences; religious differences, class differences, whatever. They need to be exposed well because I don't think – In today's society, these kids are not accepting of differences, and I think that's where a lot of the problems are coming from, and that's what I don't want for [my daughter]. I want her to go and be free to date whoever and their parents not care that she's black. Actually, her dad's mixed. I don't want her to find that approach because I remember it in one particular incident, it was somebody I had known all of my life, and I was asked if I was in a gang, and I have known you my entire life. When would I ever be in a gang? Because I'm walking down the street the street with my two best friends, and I had my hair tied back with a pink rag on my head, and I was asked if I was in a gang! I couldn't be in a gang if it was the last thing. I have never even been suspended. I'm terrified to be in trouble. You want me to associate myself with something like that? Again, was it because I'm black and you are white and you see me walking with two black kids that we have on the same colors, so automatically I'm associated with that stereotype? I don't get that, and I don't wish for anybody to feel like that for any reason. I would be the furthest
thing from a gang member in my life. I just want the younger generations to understand they've got to accept differences. Just because you see somebody doing something or looking differently, then you are, "That's not a bad thing."

Sarena argues that exposure to diversity is a way to encourage children to be more accepting of others and of difference. She shares a story from her youth where she was stereotyped as a gang member because of her race and a hair tie. By proactively encouraging diversity in children’s lives, they may be less likely to see others through lenses of stereotypes.

*Acting on Diversity.* As someone who is deeply committed to diversity and personally values it, she has taken many actions based on her beliefs about diversity. She conducted research in pursuit of an advanced degree that connected race to mental health in children and school disciplinary actions. I will not share more about her fascinating research to protect her identity. She also chose to live in the Shaker Heights area because of the diversity and the *International Baccalaureate* program (Shaker Heights Schools 2017) that the schools have, which emphasize more than standard curriculum, focusing on international perspectives and experience. She also had this to say about the Learning Center and why she chose to enroll her child:

I love it. One of the things is the diversity. I don't want my child to just be around one type of person. I've never been around one specific type of person all my life. Actually, my first boyfriend was Jewish. You want your kids to have that exposure. Between that and the programs, the education piece behind it is not just sitting your kid in front of home day care watching TV. It's actually doing something, and that's what I needed for her. That was the biggest reason.

Sarena chose to enroll her daughter at the Learning Center, in part, because of its diversity. She mentioned earlier that diversity is important for children so that they receive exposure to different types of people and, hopefully, stereotype others less. She is acting on her beliefs by putting her daughter in a setting that she sees as very diverse.
Meaning of Diversity. Stella identifies as a white and Native American woman in her 30s who works in healthcare. She has two children, one of whom is enrolled at the Learning Center. I interviewed Stella at the start of 2017. When I asked what diversity meant to her, she replied:

The most superficial meaning to me is just different races. But, I think it means more than that. I think just diversity can be any kind of difference. Like difference in beliefs or cultures. Diversity of religion. Even just diversity in opinion.

I followed up by asking why her idea of diversity went beyond what she considers the “superficial meaning.” She said:

I think I've lived in a lot of different areas and I think it's given me a little bit of a greater perspective of the country, maybe. I can see how where I grew up and the life that most of my family lead is lacking in diversity. And, I don't like that their idea of diversity is just all contained in one box. You're either Black or you're white or you're Latino. So, for me, I think diversity needs to be more complex than that because people are more complex than that.

I asked Stella how it makes her feel that her view of diversity is so different from her family’s. She said:

Ummm, it makes me sad. I feel like I'm not sure how to relate with them, or I feel like I'm, I'm no longer the same as them – like I'm in a different diversity group almost. If you consider, you know, differences in political opinion to be diversity, I am more diverse than my family. So, that just kind of makes me feel like more of an outsider.

For Stella, diversity means something beyond just differences in race. When giving examples of the other meanings, she includes beliefs, cultures, religions, and opinions, stating that any difference is diversity. She contrasts her view of diversity with that of her family, who she says only view it as a racial difference. Holding her particular views is emotionally costly for Stella. She feels alienated from her family, like an “outsider,” which causes feelings of sadness.

Importance of Diversity. Despite feeling like an outsider from her family in regards to opinions about diversity, Stella was committed to her beliefs. I asked her why diversity was so important to her. She said:
I think it just makes people more well-rounded. You know, being able to experience something outside of just what you know I think makes you a better person. It makes you look outside of yourself more and have a better concept of other people or just maybe even makes you more empathetic to differences in people. Whether it be races or religion or gender.

Later, our conversation turned to politics when Stella brought up the impact of Donald Trump winning the presidency. My interview with Stella took place after the inauguration of Trump. I asked what impact the election had had on her. She responded:

I think it has maybe helped broaden my definition of diversity, and maybe brought it more to the forefront of my mind. I just see how closed off Trump is, or seems to be, about everything. “Let’s build a wall, let’s” – you know, I just feel like he's anti-, anti-everything that's not white Christian American. And so, with that mentality, it's really made me more empathetic to everyone that does not fit into that tiny little box. That's really grown my opinion of what diversity is.

Stella sees value in diversity in its ability to make someone a “better person.” She focuses on how diversity makes her empathetic to others. Given the current political climate, including the election of Donald Trump as president, issues of diversity have been brought to the “forefront of [her] mind.” She feels an increase in empathy for others who face discrimination, i.e. those that do “not fit into that tiny little box” of “white Christian American.”

**Acting on Diversity.** I asked Stella in what ways she has sought out diversity in her life and for her children. She mentioned moving away from her family as well as enrolling her child in the Learning Center.

I would say leaving [home state] and moving to Ohio definitely. I don't that it was actively seeking diversity, but that's definitely helped. I think as far as trying to make sure [my son] gets diversity, I just try to make sure that he interacts with everyone in his class equally and, you know, I just try not to even bring up the way the kids in the class look or any differences of opinion. I always try to, you know, describe kids by their names, and I let him decide how he chooses to categorize the kids in his class. The [Learning Center] just does a great job of ensuring that, you know, people from different economic backgrounds can enroll and they just do a good job of making sure that there's a good balance of kids in each class. They're not segregating the kids at all, other than by age. And, I think what I like a lot about the [Learning Center] is they're not just assuming that everyone is Christian. So, they don't like go out of their way to celebrate Christmas or,
you know, the more Christian holidays. They just kind of skim over them actually, which I know a lot of people probably wouldn't agree with, but I like that they're not just assuming that everyone has the same religion.

Stella and her family moved away from where she grew up for work. While explicitly seeking out diversity was not the objective of the move, she values the new experiences and people with whom she interacts. For her son enrolled at the Learning Center, she encourages him to play and interact with all children, which includes children from different economic situations, with different religions, and of different races. And Stella actively supports the Learning Center’s approach to holidays, which is to avoid a Christian-centric focus.

Tamicka

Meaning of Diversity. Tamicka identifies as a Black Caribbean African American woman in her 30s. She works as a diversity consultant for businesses, and she works in the health care field. She has two children, one of whom is enrolled at the Learning Center. I interviewed Tamicka in summer 2016. When I asked what diversity meant to her, she said:

I look at diversity through a different lens, probably than most people. For me, it's not just cultural or racial, but again disability, age, gender, those things are all inclusive to me. Also, in terms of people's skill set and language as well, I would say, would encompass what my overall perspective is of the word diversity.

As a follow up, I asked her what the most difficult thing for people to understand about diversity when she was providing consultation at a business. She replied:

Sometimes people think that they know everything when it comes to diversity. They tend to look at that in terms of one dimension instead of expanding their overall perception of what diversity includes. I think what my primary goal is through the diversity training for, for example in the business sector, is to help individuals to realize that diversity can add value to their business. It can bring innovation because people who come from different walks of life bring different values, different skill sets to the table, different ideas that can make businesses thrive. If I was dealing with individuals from the education sector, diversity would be in terms of the approach to classroom instruction. For example, figuring out universal designs for learning. One shoe doesn't always fit all. Also, I'm a proponent for culturally relevant pedagogy. I think that that is an important implementation in classroom instruction because combining the experiences of kids,
cultural experiences at home and making those linkages to the classroom environment can be really effective in terms of teaching methodologies.

Since diversity is a major focus of Tamicka’s career, she has reflected often on what it means to her as a concept. She acknowledges that most people likely think in terms of race or culture, but she sees diversity as something that is all-inclusive; diversity is also about ability, age, gender, skill sets, and language.

**Importance of Diversity.** From an early age, Tamicka valued diversity as important. She shared with me details from her life that influenced her to become a diversity consultant:

I've always been passionate about diversity. I think more so, when I was younger, my grandfather used to be an engineer for the Cleveland Clinic, and they would travel a lot to Argentina. Sometimes when doctors would come here from other countries, they would always request to stay with my grandparents because he would always go to help establish new technologies or things in other countries. We had a couple of people that would come from Argentina and South America to stay with us and it was so frustrating that I could never communicate with them. I used to say, "When I go to college I'm going to learn Spanish and I'm going to be able to communicate with people." Just having that exposure really sparked my interest. I took Spanish all through high school. I read, write and speak fluently. Like I said, that led me to go abroad, and ever since then I've just been passionate about learning about culture, learning about being able to be – One thing people always say, "You're able to fit in with people no matter what type of background they're from." I'm like, "Bingo, that's my goal."

When the conversation turned to a discussion about diversity at the Learning Center, I asked what she was hoping for her son to get out of the diverse experience that she had placed him in. She said:

I hope that it sets a strong foundation for them to be leaders in the world and to be able to be advocates and voices for people who are not just under represented but all people. Kids from other countries that come here to the States from school already have a competitive advantage because they've been raised to think globally. In the US, we tend to be a little behind because we have access to the things we need. We can stay in our little comfortable silos and not really have to engage with people outside of the States or outside of our neighborhoods. My goal is that [my son] will welcome that because he's had that type of exposure at a young age.
Tamicka sees diversity as important because it helps people “fit in with [other] people no matter what type of background they’re from.” Diversity is important to her in regards to children because the exposure will help them become “leaders” and “advocates” for all people. She believes that in the United States, exposure to diversity helps children think globally.

*Acting on Diversity.* There are many possible examples that demonstrate how Tamicka takes action based on her beliefs about diversity, including her career choice, her choice to study abroad, her degree choices, and more. In her most detailed response, she shares her decision-making process about where to enroll her son for toddler age child care.

Of course, we were trying to make a decision about where to place our son. Do we want something that is close to work, in the area that we work in, or something closer to home? In researching, just because I'm that type of person and because of my background, we wanted him to be in an environment that was an inclusive environment. We wanted him to be exposed to diverse backgrounds. Shaker Heights is a community that is known for their diversity in their community, somewhat of a more affluent community maybe than where we live. We live in a pretty decent suburb but Shaker Heights is probably a step up in terms of demographics, median incomes, access to resources. One of the reasons why I chose [the Learning Center]…it was important for us that our child had exposure to people from different walks of life. Had we chosen a facility that was maybe closer to home, maybe he wouldn't have had individuals from different racial backgrounds in his class. Also, in terms of equity in education, I understand that location does matter. Even though we are not residents of Shaker Heights, kids who are residents have benefits from the school system, things that [my son] wouldn't necessarily be entitled to from the school district where we live. We had to really be proactive about finding a suitable program where he could get that type of exposure to different types of activities that he would not otherwise get from programs that were in our neighborhood.

With her husband, Tamicka carefully evaluated the options for child care not only based on proximity or educational program but also based on the degree of diversity to which their son would be exposed. They decided that the Learning Center was their best option for providing the diversity to their son that they deeply value.
DISCUSSION

The Meaning of Diversity

Every person that I interviewed said that diversity means more to them than just race. Some gave examples of culture, religion, economic background, politics, opinions, and more. Others said that any kind of difference in experience or background is diversity. Many did both, giving specific examples and saying that any difference is diverse. Elsewhere I argue that the process of broadening the meaning of diversity to such an extent that everything is considered diverse is a form of “snowflake diversity” (Kreiter and Scarritt forthcoming). I would not, however, say that participants in this study were engaging in the processes of snowflake diversity, which functions to undermine the claims of categorical inequalities like race, ethnicity, or gender. Rather, I would argue that most of the participants are utilizing an intersectional approach to diversity, some more consciously than others, recognizing the “matrix of oppression” (Collins 2009). Many participants spoke about “unfair advantages” (Dylan) or “inclusiveness” (Tamicka). The participants did not extend their meaning of diversity to a broad set of categories to nullify the claims of racial inequality. Rather, they saw that inequality does exist, especially in race relations, but also across other dimensions, like religion, nationality, gender, class, and more.

Several of the participants I spoke with claim that the definition of diversity that they held is similar to their family’s beliefs. However, others drew a distinction between their own
beliefs and their families’ beliefs. Stella said that she feels sad that her family has such narrow views on diversity. Dylan says that his in-laws live in a “bubble” that is not diverse and who “don’t have any sense other than Fox News.” Peg describes how she “had to prove to [her] parents that [the Learning Center] was a good place to send [her son] and that [she] wasn't just doing it because it's progressive.” The participants who drew distinctions between themselves and their families point to exposure to diversity and exposure to different ways of thinking as a reason for the beliefs that they currently hold. Stella identifies living in multiple places as a reason why she has a different view of diversity. Dylan says that he and his wife developed their views in college. Peg also identifies college as the reason for her drastic transformation from growing up “really racist” to be someone very interested in racial justice. The common theme is that exposure to diversity in terms of people or thinking can cause a change in what diversity means to people.

Importance of Diversity

All the participants said that diversity was important to them in one way or another. Some said that diversity is an important part of being a good person; as Peg said, “being in a group of people who are different is part of not being an asshole.” There is evidence that simply being around people of a different race is enough to change people’s thinking and make them more considerate of others’ experiences (Sommers 2006). Others stated that diversity was important because they wanted their children to see value in all other people. For example, Holly says that she did not grow up in a very diverse setting, and wants her child to have what she feels she “missed out on.” Many of the participants talk about the value of diversity in ways that seem to imply that diversity has an innate value that contributes to a more meaningful life.

All the participants seem to hold what Robinson and Jones Diaz (2005) claim is a false binary where children are perceived as distinct from adults in that they are “too young” to
understand inequality. Thus, the parents and teachers that I spoke with focus on the value that diversity has for such young children in terms of exposure. All participants want to see children playing and interacting with children of different backgrounds so that they will value all people. I am personally committed to teaching my children about inequality early in life, but I, like the participants I interviewed, question the fruitfulness of teaching my child about the inequalities of race, class, gender, and more when he barely knows the alphabet. If ideologies truly shaped social structure, I would be very optimistic about the future of race, class, and gender relations based on my time at the Learning Center. I, along the with the parents and teachers I interviewed, see a setting where there is more diversity than most spaces and children play with others across all boundaries. However, Bonilla-Silva (1997) argues that unequal structures come first, such as a racialized social system, then come the prejudiced ideologies that support those unequal structures. If nothing is done to change the structures of race, class, and gender inequality in the larger society, the value of enrolling children in the diverse Learning Center will likely be wasted. On the other hand, it might be these very children who use their agency to change the social structures that perpetuate inequality.

A number of participants spoke about the importance of diversity in regards to politics. The majority of participants were interviewed while the 2016 presidential primaries were still underway. A few spoke about their fears of a potential president Trump. I am currently writing this when Donald Trump has been president for only four weeks, and I worry that those fears might be coming to fruition. For example, Melissa shared a conversation she had with her six-year-old son about how she was not voting for Trump: “He gets tears in his eyes, and he’s like, ‘Mom, my friend [name] at school just moved here from Saudi Arabia. Do you mean he wouldn’t be able to come into this country?’” While Saudi Arabia is not part of Trump’s current
contested executive order placing travel bans on seven majority-Muslim countries, the potential for further bans is very real. People like Melissa, Stella, Dylan, and others who worry about the consequences of the Trump presidency put even more importance on diversity because they fear that they and their children will lose the diversity that they value so dearly. In fact, in a recent conversation I had with Peg, she took her son to the women’s march in Washington D.C. the day after Trump’s inauguration because she wants to socialize him to value diversity the way she does.

Acting on Diversity

Because the participants I interviewed are members of what I call people who opt-in to diversity, they all actively act on their notions of diversity. They represent those who seek out diversity in their lives. There is one theme that unites them all; they integrate themselves and their families in spaces that they perceive as diverse based on their meaning of diversity. There were a few common strategies that they shared for integrating into diversity. Many chose where they lived, in part based on the diversity of the neighborhood. Others participated in religious festivities of friends and neighbors that were not of their own religion. Many parents spoke about how they heavily considered the diversity of education/day care centers before enrolling their children in the Learning Center. Others, like Melissa or Tamicka, have made diversity a part of their career choices. There are many possible actions that a person could take to act on diversity, but the central theme is clear: those who opt-in to diversity do take actions to seek out diversity that aligns with the meanings that they give to diversity. These actions distinguish them from persons beholden to colorblind ideology, who may say they value diversity, but do so in order to not have to take actions in regards to diversity.
Limitations, Strengths, and Future Research

This study is obviously limited by the small sample size. I cannot claim to have found all the meanings that people give diversity, the importance they ascribe to it, or the range of actions they take to seek out diversity. But the fact that I found so much in common among my small sample speaks volumes about the value of the themes that I did uncover. This study is also limited by my own positionality as a white, middle-class, heterosexual, cis-gendered man. It is very possible participants did not share as many details about their thoughts or experiences as they would have had my positionality been different. I might be blinded to particular themes that are apparent in what they did share with me. Or I may not have asked the right questions to elicit answers that differ from the themes I have elaborated because of my positionality. As a white man from the United States, I am more likely to minimize or misunderstand racism faced by the participants undermining the validity of my analysis (Warren 2000; McCorkel and Myers 2003). I do not know if my research was limited by these factors.

I described that when I started the research, I felt like a partial insider and a partial outsider. I was an insider because I also enrolled my son at the Learning Center. I felt like an outsider because I was new to the Learning Center. Nearly all the participants were strangers to me when I interviewed them. However, since starting this research, my experience has made me feel very much like an insider. My son has been enrolled at the Learning Center for over a year. I see some of the participants quite regularly when I drop off my son. Some of them brought their children to my son’s recent birthday party, which is a potential problem. I am most likely biased against evaluating any of the participants negatively. It would be difficult for me to say that the opinions of anyone I interviewed are really colorblind racism. I was conscious of this limitation throughout the interview and analysis phases. I tried my best to consider alternatives to my
analyses, but it is impossible for any researcher to completely rid themselves of their own biases. All I can do is be reflective and share these limitations with the reader.

There are certain strengths of this research that I see as giving legitimacy to the findings that I detailed. For instance, the small sample size permitted me space to really highlight the responses of every participant within their own sections of the paper. This does a few things. First, since particular meanings of diversity are so personal, the reader can better connect a participant’s action to their individual meanings and importance given to diversity when they are presented together. Second, the small sample size allowed for larger and more in-depth quotes from all the participants. This, in part, overcomes the limitations I listed earlier. The reader gets a more intimate understanding of each participant. The large quotes give the reader the option of seeing through the biases that might blind my interpretations. Third, and most important to me, presenting the participants the way I did gives them more of the humanity that they deserve. Instead of being represented as disembodied quotes used to support the themes I found, I present them, as best I can, as complete people, who have thoughts, emotions, opinions, and take actions that are all intertwined within who they are as a person.

Future research in this area should continue to explore the diversity ideologies of people. I found my pool of participants at the Learning Center, which ended up being one of the ways that many of them acted upon their ideas of diversity. Future research should find other spaces that could serve as a way that people seek out diversity, then similarly compare meanings, importance, and actions of diversity. Also, it was interesting that exposure to diversity, such as attending college or by moving away from family, led some participants to develop meanings of diversity that were markedly different from that of their families. Future research should examine this process of dramatically changing one’s meaning of diversity. This study helps build a
foundation for future research in the area of diversity. I found that those who opt-in to diversity all have an understanding of inequality, to different degrees, which in turn gives diversity an elevated importance, which then engenders actions that integrate a person or their family into spaces that they see as diverse or actions that seek out exposure to people that they consider diverse from themselves.
CONCLUSION

People who opt in to diversity have different levels of awareness regarding inequality, but they all do recognize that inequality exists, which becomes a part of how they give meaning to the concept of diversity. Even though their meanings of diversity can themselves be very diverse, the common element recognizing inequality gives diversity a level of importance to them that is likely greater than for members of the larger society. Diversity is imbued with a moral requirement; it is part of being a good person. These meanings combined with the elevated level of importance drive actions. The common theme in the actions that participants took was a focus on integration and exposure to others that they considered diverse.

Based on my conversations with the participants, it is clear that social structure can influence ideology, by affecting how people think of diversity. Sometimes, entering into a different social institution can dramatically alter one’s diversity ideology. Peg was the clearest example of this. She stated that she grew up holding very racist beliefs and that those were the result of her upbringing. In college, her beliefs were challenged, and in a few short years she devoted much of life to the study and the cause of anti-racism. Others also expressed how college altered their beliefs about diversity. How the Learning Center or the city of Shaker Heights affected participants’ meanings of diversity is less clear due to the fact that most participants formed their current beliefs before moving to the area or enrolling their children in the school or getting a job at the school.
What is clear is that this setting functions as an outlet for action. As people who opt-in to diversity, the participants actively sought places and institutions that align with their ideals of diversity. Several of the participants talked about the decision to purchase a home in the Shaker Heights area because of its reputation for being diverse. Likewise, many of the participants enrolled their children or chose to work at the Learning Center because they felt it was truly a diverse and inclusive setting. By joining diverse institutions like the Learning Center, by choosing to raise their children in a diverse community, people who opt in to diversity are participating in a process of transferring their ideologies to the next generation. They implicitly recognize that the institutions that children interact with will shape those children’s future ideologies. By choosing a setting that is outside the norm for the United States, they are giving their children the structural support to construct “counter frames” (Feagin 2006) against the dominant ideologies that support inequalities.
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