

Staffing the Outdoors: What Experiences Do Women and 2SLGBTQ+ Individuals Have in the Field of Outdoor Education as Working Professionals?

by Kate Satira

Submitted to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Design in Inclusive Design

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2024

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Abstract

This study aimed to understand the experiences of women and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals working in the field of Outdoor Education. This study was approached from an inclusive design lens, allowing for the creation of suggestions for change in policy and practice in Outdoor Education organizations. This research was conducted through four semi-structured interviews, where participants shared their narratives, observations, and hopes regarding their roles and future roles in Outdoor Education. This study's findings showed a growing sense of acceptance and confidence among those in the field who hold marginalized identities when there is appropriate representation in the field. Participants of this study emphasized the need for diversity, equity, and inclusion training catered to individuals working in the field. As well, concern was raised by participants regarding toxic masculinity being prevalent in many organizations. They noted that staff members who demonstrated toxic masculinity were being recognized and put into leadership positions. The implications of this study can be used to inform future research to understand the experiences of women and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals working in the field of Outdoor Education. This study can be used to create space within the Outdoor Education industry to reassess how the culture can shift to one that is inclusive for all.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the best advisor I could ever ask for, Jess Mitchell. Thank you for supporting me and pushing me to be my best. Words cannot express how grateful I am.

To my incredible participants, who have added a wealth of knowledge to the industry, thank you for taking the time out of your day to contribute to this study.

Thank you to Dr. Michelle Wyndham West for supporting me through every question and concern. I appreciate it so much.

Thank you to my cousin and incredible naturalist, Nikki Satira. You introduced me to the magic of nature connection, and for that, I am forever grateful.

To KayLee, Phil, Norman, and Gucci, my second family: Thank you, KayLee and Phil, for your unwavering support. Also, thank you to Norman (the dog) for your great snuggles and Gucci (the cat) for showing up unprompted during all my video calls. I'll miss you forever.

Thank you to my parents for always supporting me and loving me for who I am. Of course, thank you, Mitzy, for being there for every milestone, including this one.

Finally, to my little family. Reid, thank you for being my rock; I could not have done this without you. Even though you will not read this, thank you, Rigatoni, for being the best cat I could ever ask for.

Dedication

This study is dedicated to my parents, who continuously support me and put up with my endless nature facts.

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Background

Outdoor Education in Ontario was developed through ecological, agricultural, environmental, and outdoor adventure education (Borland, 2011, pp. 32-33). Each type of education is taught in schools separately and is equally essential to developing a child's understanding of the natural world. So much so that "in 2007, the Ontario Ministry of Education (governed by the Ontario Liberal Party) identified outdoor education as essential" (Borland, 2011, p.33). Now being brought into schools across the province, Outdoor Education began to gain more traction. With its jump in popularity, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, Outdoor Education became integral to a child's learning journey in Ontario (Appia, 2020). At its core, Outdoor Education is a way for individuals to connect with the natural world and experience land-based learning opportunities.

Despite this, issues still exist in the industry. These issues are rooted in misogyny and our cultural views of the outdoors being associated with Western masculinity. These issues are prevalent because "Western cultures have promoted the idea of individualism, self-reliance, and autonomy, especially for men. Outdoor learning leaders often use these notions as a guide for program development and outcomes" (Warren et al., 2019, p.144). Since the development and outcomes of Outdoor Education programs focus on men, there continues to be a division in the industry. It is understood that "early gender socialization from institutions, family, and media contributes to the belief that women and men should behave differently in the outdoors and participate in specific activities approved within their expected gender roles" (McNiel et al., 2012, as cited in Warren et al., 2019, p.144). When this type of separation is the belief, it could affect the experiences of women and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals working in Outdoor Education. Removing gendered roles in the outdoors could significantly improve the experiences of these individuals and create a more inclusive environment.

Literature Review

What is Outdoor Education

The Public School System

Education is usually connected to a government-centred understanding of schooling. In Canada, schools fall under the jurisdiction of the Government of Canada where “school is mandatory for children from about the age of six years old to 18 years old” (Edu Canada, 2024). Each grade has a provincially mandated curriculum taught by a certified teacher (Government of Ontario, 2024). In Toronto, there is the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). The TDSB is the public school system in Toronto, Ontario, which has various learning institutions for children and youth across the city. The two main ones are their Elementary and High Schools. Children enter Elementary school at the age of four or five and High School at the age of twelve or thirteen (TDSB, 2024a). The TDSB also has specialized learning institutions that are categorized as Alternative Schools. These schools “are highly engaged, smaller school environments. These schools are characterized by community collaboration, choice, inclusivity, and flexibility” (TDSB, 2024b). The Alternative Schools “provide students with an opportunity to succeed in a different educational setting that emphasizes student-centred and differentiated methods in teaching and learning” (TDSB, 2024b). Using student-centred learning creates a school system where most students can succeed in their learning journey.

The TDSB has also started to include Outdoor Education as a part of its teaching methods. Outdoor Education, as defined by the TDSB, is “bring[ing] learning to life and connects students to the built and natural world around them” (TDSB, 2023). This form of Outdoor Education takes place within the traditional school system; therefore, “all activities are curriculum-based and customized to meet the different learning needs of students” (TDSB, 2023). The TDSB is “one of the few school boards in Ontario directly operating Outdoor Education Centres” (TDSB: Toronto Outdoor Education Schools (TOES), 2023). The Outdoor Education Centres are committed to allowing “all TDSB students have the opportunity to

participate in programs at both day and overnight centres at least once during their elementary school years through prioritizing day trips to students in grade 2 and 4, and an overnight trip in grade 6” (TDSB, TOES, 2023). On the curriculum side,

our highly qualified staff are united by a common goal: immersing students in safe, active, and enriching learning experiences in both natural and urban environments. From outdoor adventure and survival skills to ‘sense of place’ awareness, systems thinking and ecological literacy, students learn through curriculum-enriching direct experiences that cannot be duplicated within the walls of a classroom (TDSB, TOES 2023).

The TDSB recognizes the importance of the outdoors and nature in their students' learning journey. The active learning that is happening here is what can be referred to as "nature connection" which is an outcome that happens when spending time in the natural world.

What is Nature Connection?

As defined by The Nature Connection Handbook (2022), nature connection is

about our relationship with nature – how we think about, feel about, and experience nature. When we feel close to nature, we recognize ourselves as part of the natural world and value our relationship with it. We notice nature, seek it out, and feel happy in it (Richardson & Butler, 2022, p.5).

As previously stated, nature connection is one outcome of Outdoor Education. It has been known that "research shows that the closer we get to nature, the happier we are, the more worthwhile life seems, and the more we are willing to take action to help our wildlife and the environment. In the context of the problems our climate and wildlife are facing, closer relationships with nature are more necessary than ever before" (Richardson & Butler, 2022, p.3). When centring nature connection in an individual's learning journey, nature connection can create a positive impact on students. In the 1980s two psychologists noted that "nature

produces significant psychological benefits. Their 'attention restoration theory' (ART), as they termed it, hypothesized that elements of the natural world offer a restorative environment where people can retreat to recover from fatiguing tasks that require directed or voluntary attention" (Kaplan, 1995; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989 as cited in Kappan, 2017, p.22). Since Outdoor Education uses the natural world as a teaching tool, the impacts of being in nature could help prevent this fatigue.

Outdoor Education Outside the School System

The TDSB continues diversifying its learning opportunities as best as possible, but there are still barriers. These can include the cost of funding programs, liability when accessing programs, lack of government funding, and the need for qualified educators to run specialized programming. The TDSB's "annual operating budget is approximately \$3.4 billion, and we are committed to using these resources as responsibly and effectively as possible. However, the funding provided by the government does not fully meet the needs of students in Toronto" (TDSB, 2024c). With the funding not fully meeting students' needs and the TDSB's Outdoor Education centres prioritizing specific grades, it leaves gaps where diverse learning opportunities can exist. When looking at Outdoor Education, many opportunities exist to complement a student's learning journey. One opportunity that exists is Outdoor Schools, which are schools that "take place in any outdoor space, including urban green space, playgrounds, forests, creeks, prairies, mountains, shoreline, and tundra" (Child and Nature Alliance of Canada, 2024). Like schooling at the TDSB, Outdoor School "Is a sustained process of regular and repeated sessions" (Child and Nature Alliance of Canada, 2024). The only difference is that Outdoor School is "in the same outdoor space, supporting children to develop a reciprocal relationship with the Land and an understanding of themselves as a part of the natural world" (2024).

Outdoor School teaches a curriculum that complements the public school system from a naturalist perspective. This programming is based on the 8 Shields Model. This model “refers to a nature-based framework, created to organize a collection of design principles, practices and activities for deep nature connection and community building”(Cuthbertson, 2021, p.1). Many different individuals created the 8 Shields Model

between 1990 and 2000, Jon Young and other members of the 8 Shields Institute had a series of conversations with Jake Swamp, Judy Swamp, and Mike McDonald, members of The Tree of Peace Society and of the indigenous Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk) Nation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The 8 Shields Institute agreed to a treaty similar to that of the Two-Row Wampum treaty, which governs relations between Haudenosaunee people and non-indigenous people. 1 The three Peace Principles articulated in the treaty and adopted by the 8 Shields Institute are non-indigenous interpretations of concepts found in the traditional Haudenosaunee story of The Journey of the Peacemaker and the Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace. A fourth principle, inspired by the practice of ho'oponopono, was developed separately by Jon Young and other members of the 8 Shields Institute in consultation with Maka Io Kalani Keualani Souza, Mahealani Henry, Ipo Torio, Kamahalo Ka'uhane, Puna Dawson, and other traditional indigenous Hawaiian members of the Kanuikapono Charter School on Kaua'i (Cuthbertson, 2021, pp.1-2).

The 8 Shields Model can be integrated into most systems; it is used as a cyclical teaching tool in Outdoor Education. The model was adapted into the book *Coyotes Guide to Connecting With Nature* by Jon Young, Ellen Haas and Evan McGowan. This book acts as a field guide for mentors in Outdoor Education and has been designed as a tool (Young et al., 2016). The guiding practices that are taught in the Coyotes Guide and used within Outdoor School programming are called the “Core Routines of Nature Connection” (Young et al., 2016, p.35). Within the guide, “we describe thirteen Core Routines. Our list is not THE definitive Core

Routines of Nature Connection...We picked thirteen we all agree will be the most helpful”

(Young et al., 2016, p.36). The thirteen core routines listed in the guide are:

Sit Spot: One place in the natural world you can go to and get to know by sitting still and observing the world around you. Sit spots are a way to develop your connection with the natural world further. (Young et al. 2016, pp. 36-37)

Story of the Day: After a day in nature, reflect on what you experienced by telling the story of your day. Telling your story can be done verbally with others, through a journal, or even a drawing. The goal is to recount your day and become inspired by what you experienced. (Young et al. 2016, p.41)

Expanding Our Senses: This core routine is about expanding our senses differently than usual. The key is to pay attention to the natural world using as many senses as possible. When our senses are expanded, we have the opportunity to notice things we never would have before (Young et al. 2016, p.44).

Questioning and Tracking: Tracking can be associated with tracking animals. Tracking animals engages your entire body; it causes you to think like an animal and understand its patterns. It also causes you to question everything: the who, what, where, when, why, and how. Questioning and Tracking can apply to everything, for example, tracking your mood and asking why you feel that way. (Young et al. 2016, p.47)

Animal Forms: Taking on the form of an animal can tell us a lot about it. It can tell us about the animal’s behaviours, how they move, and even their personality. When we imitate an animal with our bodies, it lets us connect dynamically with the animal. Animal forms help us understand the animal in a way we would not if we were visually observing it (Young et al. 2016, pp.50-51).

Wandering: The act of wandering is an unstructured way to connect with the natural world. The goal of wandering is to go wherever your curiosity leads. Without a destination in mind, it leaves space for discoveries. (Young et al. 2016, p.53)

Mapping: Mapping at its core is about understanding the four cardinal directions (North, South, East, and West) and being able to orient yourself to them. Using mapping in nature connection creates an opportunity to understand what is around you. What birds have you seen or heard? What plants exist in the space you are in? What paths exist where you are? All these questions can be answered and added to a map. As you spend time in the space you are in, continue to add what you have observed to your map. As the map expands, your awareness of the place you are in will expand as well. (Young et al. 2016. p.58)

Exploring Field Guides: Field Guides are books that contain information on specific topics that guide the user in finding knowledge. For example, a field guide about plants can help the user identify and learn about an unknown plant they may come across. Field guides are essential for nature connection because they are in a transferable format. The knowledge about the world around us can be shared with many. Field guides are living documents of the collective work of many knowledgeable individuals that continue to be built upon. (Young et al. 2016, p.61)

Journaling: Journaling is the act of recounting thoughts, experiences, and details about anything and everything. In nature, connection journaling is a way to keep a record of the world around you. Making journaling a habit that will deepen your connection to nature is the key. (Young et al. 2016, p.63)

Survival Living: Using the knowledge you have gained, survival is about meeting basic human needs by using the land around you for survival. Survival living can teach us about the land around us and how we are part of it. It is essential to understand survival living, and an excellent tool is learning about the Indigenous people who were on the land first and how they see the world and use the land. (Young et al. 2016, p.67)

Mind's Eye Imagining: The key to Mind's Eye Imagining is using your senses to strengthen the knowledge you already have. This can look like seeing a new plant and then taking a second to try and recreate it in your mind with your eyes closed. Mind's Eye imagining helps solidify the senses you experience while in the moment with the plant. (Young et al. 2016, p.69)

Bird Language: Bird language consists of vocal and physical cues that can tell us a lot about the space we are in. Bird language can also be applied to other animals and even humans. Physical and vocal cues help us understand our situations by listening and watching for subtle signals that may alert us to something. For example, increased movement and noise in the forest could be an alert that a predator is nearby. (Young et al. 2016, p.71)

Thanksgiving: Thanksgiving is the act of giving thanks and expressing gratitude towards all aspects of nature. Expressing gratitude can help us see the positive even in hard times when added to a routine (Young et al. 2016, p.73).

Each core routine connects itself to nature as well as daily life. When using the core routines as a curriculum in Outdoor School, it is creating learning habits that are inherent things people do to learn about nature (Young et al., 2016, p.35).

The pedagogy that the Coyotes Guide details is helpful as a framework for Outdoor Education but can still create barriers if used in its unchanged state. When looking at the practices of newly developed co-ed programs, "they did not critically examine their philosophies and pedagogies; they just opened enrollment for women into unchanged programs" (Warren et al., 2019, p.146). Opening enrollment for women without change creates a barrier because there was no analysis of whether these programs were suitable for women or not (Warren et al., 2019, p.146). The reality is that "white males are given a privileged, often exclusive, level of attention and significance" (Warren et al., 2019, p.147). Therefore, the unchanged programs continued to perpetuate the male-centred view.

Gender and Outdoor Education

The Reality of Man vs Nature

As programs continue to cater to men, the culture that surrounds the outdoors remains male-centred. Even though women and non-binary individuals continue to enter the field of Outdoor Education, it is still dominated by men (Lundin & Bombaci, 2022, pp.1-2). When looking at women in Outdoor Education,

the dualisms in the field have recently been reviewed to convey that women should still either: 1) act in a peripheral supporting role when it comes to outdoor or environmental leadership; or 2) be more like men, both in having heroic quests, or a masculine leadership style and approaches to outdoor environments. (Gray et al. 2017, p.2).

The heroic quests and masculine leadership style are “based on Western norms focused on upholding specific stereotypes about who belongs in the outdoors: typically white, male, and able-bodied” (Elep, 2023). When looking at how this is perpetuated, one can look at Outdoor Recreation as a starting point:

outdoor recreation is often framed as winning, accomplishing, and even conquering. This angle is similar to the war-like vocabulary and culture around sports in general, a norm that inevitably spills over into athletics that happen to be in nature. (Singletrack, 2022).

Conquering nature tends to “establish a value system that determines a hierarchy of what kind of outdoor recreation is most valuable and worthy of our time and attention” (Singletrack, 2022). The value system in Outdoor Recreation has similarities to Outdoor Education, where it is “inherently rooted in masculinity as the default and masculine traits as superior” (Singletrack, 2022). There have been continuous improvements within Outdoor Education (OE). “Whilst we [the authors] have contributed to the development of the OE profession, at times, we have felt marginalized, misunderstood and under-appreciated” (Gray et al., 2017, p.4). Even with these contributions, the change needed in Outdoor Education depends on the premise that women's ways of knowing and strengths have equitable value in mixed-gender courses” (Warren et al., 2019, p.144). If this value is perceived as necessary, then programming could shift away from the current male-centred views.

Women and Outdoor Education

The historical recordings of “Outdoor Education highlight the dominance of and focus on, traditional masculinized physicality in professions that require self-sufficiency in natural environments” (Gray et al., 2017, p.3). The traditionally masculine concept is that “to succeed in these often challenging and remote outdoor environments one must possess physical strength, expert technical skills, and a strong assertiveness coupled with independence” (Gray et al., 2017, p.3). There is currently little to no access for individuals in the industry who stray from this perceived character. The industry has a history of men starting and shaping the values and curriculum ingrained in Outdoor Education (Gray et al., 2017). Looking at a study by Warren et al. that involved 39 participants (21 females, 18 males), one can see what issues are being brought to light. Gray et al. explain in their research that:

Mitten and colleagues (2012) discovered that the OE profession continues to support and promote sexist beliefs and practices. Because this sexism is embedded in the curriculum, it is no wonder that men's and women's different contributions are assigned diverging values. In the OE professions, 'male' approaches or styles may be seen as often encouraging physicality, authoritarianism, and competitiveness, whereas the 'female' approaches or styles emphasize cooperation, consensus, and communication. (Gray et al., 2019, p.3).

What needs to be understood, too, is that even though these approaches are stylistically different, each individual's ability and skills vary from person to person. There is still the reality of “female teachers adopting a more masculine teaching style in order to garner respect from male students and avoid gendered harassment” (Smith, 2007, as cited in Kennedy & Russell, 2020, p.164). Tonia Gray is a professor at Western Sydney University in Australia and a professional in the field of Outdoor Education. Gray is no stranger to the bias her counterparts receive daily. Gray states that:

when I first entered the outdoor education (OE) profession in the mid-'80s, gender disparity was overwhelmingly apparent. The work environment was highly gendered and homogeneous in a range of ways: white, middle-class, and able-bodied. Attending the first New South Wales state conference in the early '90s, I could almost cut the testosterone in the air with a knife. I was one of two lonely women; we made up a tiny minority of the workforce due to extreme gender imbalance (Gray, 2016, p.26).

Gray continues to focus on the overall growth of women entering the OE field, which rose throughout the 1990s (Gray, 2016). This being said, "growth in our academic recognition and professional influence has stalled" (Gray, 2016, p.26). The growth of women entering the field does not erase the fact that "currently, we lag behind in professional status and are disproportionately underrepresented in leadership positions, in spite of the influx of gifted women" (Gray, 2016, p.26). This lack of representation challenges OE at the core.

ironically, the marked gender divide evident within our profession is at odds with a profession that, at its core, holds an unwavering social and equality mission statement. Irrespective of individual diversity, OE practitioners seek explicitly to be inclusive and respectful of all people. Yet, for over 30 years, the needs of many women have not been heard or addressed adequately (Gray, 2016, p.27).

It is not only the needs of women that have not been heard, but Outdoor Education programs also "have not historically been welcoming to marginalized communities, including the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and other diverse gender identities and sexual orientations (LGBTQ+) community" (Lundin & Bombaci, 2022, p.1).

LGBTQ+, Trans, and Gender Non-Conforming Individuals and Outdoor Education

When looking at Trans and Gender Non-Conforming (TGNC) individuals in the field of Outdoor Education, the amount of support specifically directed at them is little to none. Efforts

have been made to create a more inclusive field, yet "despite these efforts, many cultural and procedural changes are still needed to support the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ+) community" (Lundin & Bombaci, 2022, p.1). The cultural and procedural changes that still need to happen make it harder for the 2SLGBTQ+ community to enter the field of Outdoor Education. A trend in the industry is that "the leadership of most outdoor recreation and natural resource industries is predominantly white, cisgender, and heterosexual" (Lundin & Bombaci, 2022, pp.1-2). The divide becomes greater because often, the individual who is hiring for positions within the industry will be white, cisgender and heterosexual. There is now less representation of equally competent non-cis, non-white, and non-heterosexual individuals in leadership positions. "Although strides have been made to address barriers to participation in outdoor professions, especially by innovative women of colour, outdoor field experiences have traditionally not been welcoming of the LGBTQ+ community" (Lundin & Bombaci, 2022, p.2). The unwelcoming presence is not due to the lack of women and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals; it is the male-centred programming. "Women and gender nonconforming people do not need to be changed to fit into adventure programs; instead, the programs need to change to be accountable to values important to all genders rather than a codified male-centred outdoor identity" (Warren et al., 2019, p.144).

The outdoors are welcoming, but the culture surrounding the outdoors could be better. An article by Alex Roddie explains why this might be: "In recent years, I have seen more evidence that the world of 'the outdoors' seems to be gradually drifting away from that fundamental appreciation for nature" (Roddie, 2021). Without an appreciation for nature, there is now a divide. "We all know that scrambling on Great Gable counts as 'the outdoors,' but what about a gentle walk around a lowland nature reserve with an hour spent doing nothing but birdwatching? Is it on the same spectrum, or is it a different thing altogether" (Roddie, 2021). What makes these different is the culture. One defines the outdoors by how fast and strong you

are, while the natural world around you defines the other. The outdoors has slowly lost its meaning as a place and has taken on the definition of something that must be conquered. Roddie points out, "one of the most damaging ideas in history is that humans are above nature. However, we are not. The natural world is more than just a playground or a gym; it is a home for countless other creatures, and it's under threat as never before" (Roddie, 2021). This idea of humans being above nature creates the divide in Outdoor Education. It comes full circle as we see white, cis men in these leadership positions rather than marginalized individuals.

Culture can influence and further one's notion of what the outdoors is. A person's position within the world can define how they see nature. "Research has shown that regardless of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, early childhood experiences in nature significantly influence the development of lifelong environmental attitudes and values" (Strife, Downey, 2009, p.101). It is important to note what one defines as the outdoors and which populations currently lack access to the outdoors due to specific barriers (Strife & Downey, 2009). The root of this "lies at the heart of creating access: The potential for positive nature experience may exist, but if certain people are not able to realize that potential, they do not have access" (Langhans et al., 2023).

When looking at economic notions of the outdoors, one can look at the cost of gear as a barrier: "There's an assumption the great outdoors is where we can escape the hustle and bustle of daily life—a place that belongs to everyone. But the cost of outdoor gear tells another story" (Ng, 2021). Going outside has proven to be for the rich. "According to a 2018 recreation report from the Outdoor Foundation, expensive outdoor recreation equipment is the second biggest deterrent to getting outside, right behind busy personal schedules" (Ng, 2021). Those who have the means to purchase gear would most likely be able to access the outdoors. For those who cannot afford gear, this is a barrier. Capitalism has also woven itself into the outdoors: "Innovative, high-tech gear is certainly more useful and comforting to own, but the

problem arises when we're told we won't survive the trip if our tent can't fold up into the size of a napkin. If we didn't pay more for the Gore-Tex raincoat, it apparently won't protect us" (Ng, 2021). How gear is marketed leads to the distrust of other more affordable brands that may provide the same quality (Ng, 2021). One can picture this as a brand name item versus a generic brand at the grocery store; consumers tend to trust the brand names they know, the ones marketed towards them. The relation to the outdoors can be seen when "showcasing someone wearing Arc'teryx Black Diamond head-to-toe enforce an exclusive perception of who can be "outdoorsy," perpetuating a culture where wearing simpler gear is perceived as being illiterate and warranting judgement from others" (Ng, 2021). This is where these disparities still exist, even with the continuous push for equitable access. Gear can affect one's experiences working in Outdoor Education, as not having gear can result in the inability to participate.

Theoretical Framework

In this research, the guiding theoretical frameworks include Queer Theory and Feminist Theory. These frameworks are connected to the research through the lens of Inclusive Design. Queer theory is "the philosophical and political understanding of non-heteronormative gender identity and sexuality" (Nagoshi et al., 2013, p. 21). Feminism is "a wide range of political movements, ideologies and social movements that share a common goal to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal and social equality of sexes" (p.1 Javeed Ahmad Raina). This study will look at third-wave feminism, specifically the theory of intersectionality. This theory created by Kimberlé Crenshaw was originally

rooted in Black feminism and Critical Race Theory; intersectionality is a method and a disposition, a heuristic and analytic tool. In the 1989 landmark essay "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," Kimberlé

Crenshaw introduced the term to address the marginalization of Black women within not only anti-discrimination law but also in feminist and antiracist theory and politics (Crenshaw et al. 2014, p.303).

The use of the theory has begun to shift and helps understand all groups who hold marginalized identities. This shift can be seen

since the publications of "Demarginalizing" and "Mapping," scholars and activists have broadened intersectionality to engage a range of issues, social identities, power dynamics, legal and political systems, and discursive structures in the United States and beyond. This engagement has facilitated intersectionality's movement within and across disciplines, pushing against and transcending boundaries, while building interdisciplinary bridges, and prompting several theoretical and normative debates (Crenshaw et al., 2014, p.304).

As it relates to this research, these two theories support the understanding of how exclusion of both women and queer people is present within outdoor education. These theories highlight the pushback that women and LGBTQ+ individuals face when attempting to seek support and recognition within this traditionally male-dominated field. Both theories will be relevant for all individuals regardless of sexual or gender orientation. Women and LGBTQ+ people face similar ongoing intersecting barriers as staff within the outdoor education system. As it stands, "for the LGBTQ+ community to be fully supported in outdoor field experiences, outside of affinity trips and groups, many cultural and procedural changes are required" (Lundin, Bombaci 2022, p.1). These changes should only be made with the affected individuals involved as part of the process. Creating opportunities for women and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals to be part of the creation of policies and procedures that reflect their experiences in Outdoor Education will benefit the field. The theories presented in this study guide ideas for analyzing the data.

Data Collection and Methods

Inclusion Criteria

The field of Outdoor Education in Ontario continues to offer more opportunities each year. Although the field is still growing, the number of people eligible to participate in the study was small. When recruiting individuals to participate in this study, they had to meet the inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria were that the person had to have two or more years of experience in the field of Outdoor Education and self-identify as a woman and/or a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ Community. The lack of participants eligible for the pool aligns with the current state of Outdoor Education and the individuals we tend to see represented in the field. A study done by Mo Lundin and Sara Bombaci noted, "the limited scope of our sample suggests that many outdoor programs do not incorporate LGBTQ+ inclusive practices into their field experience" (Lundin & Bombaci, 2022). The hope of this inclusion criteria is to add to the already existing knowledge of the experiences of women and/or 2SLGBTQ+ individuals in the field of Outdoor Education.

Participant Risks

When conducting human-centred research, there will be risks as each person has a unique life experience. The Tri-Council Policy Statement cites, "respect for human dignity requires that research involving humans be conducted in a manner that is sensitive to the inherent worth of all human beings and the respect and consideration that they are due" (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2018). The pool of participants used in this study is small, and extra care had to be taken when identifying the risks. One risk presented as a social risk where participants may be identified from the study. The participants were given the choice to share their names and likenesses in the final study and if they wanted their quotes attributed to them. The participants were made aware of

the small recruitment pool and that what they share in the study may be identifiable even with anonymity. Alternative approaches were considered, but due to the small pool of participants, the semi-structured interviews suited the study. These alternative approaches included using co-design as a research method. Co-design was not chosen due to the current gaps in knowledge that lead to an overall understanding of Outdoor Education. It would be challenging to co-design a solution immediately without fully understanding the needs of individuals working in the field.

The second risk that was identified was a psychological risk. This psychological risk was explicitly categorized as an emotional risk. The data collection method of semi-structured interviews could incur emotional stress for the participants as they reflect on their own experiences. If any of these experiences were negative, then it could cause the participants to feel stronger emotions when reflecting. These negative experiences, along with emotions that they feel towards their held identity, could potentially cause emotional stress. This risk will be mitigated by allowing the participants to skip questions, stop the interview, and take breaks when needed.

Data Collection and Interpretation Methods

The method of data collection used in this study was semi-structured interviews. The participants were recruited through email correspondence and in-person recruitment. The interviews were conducted using the method chosen by the participant. These included synchronous and asynchronous options where participants were given the questions to review. The participants could choose to answer them via phone or video call synchronously or provide their answers asynchronously through voice notes or a written response. The synchronous video call option would take place on either Microsoft Teams or Zoom, depending on the participant's access to either platform.

Semi-structured interviews were used due to the nature of the study and the type of data needed to come to a conclusion. The collection method that was used “is an attempt to understand the world from the point of view of research subjects. The conversation is aimed to unfold the meaning of their experiences and to uncover their lived world” (Sewell, 2009, as cited in Mashuri et al., 2022, p.3). Participants were asked to share their experiences in the Outdoor Education Industry and any observations they noted during their time working. The participants were asked to detail their time working in Outdoor Education and if their held identities influenced their experiences working as well as how they saw women and/or 2SLGBTQ+ individuals represented. They were also asked to reflect on who they have seen in positions of power. The interview had no follow-up.

Participant Profiles

Participants were asked to provide their held identities and pronouns at the beginning of the interview. This is how the participants will be addressed within the findings. Here, you will see a brief introduction of each participant and their experiences in the field of Outdoor Education. Each participant gave a different level of consent; therefore, some participants consented to the use of their name while others did not.

Mairead Stewart (they/them) Queer, Trans/Non-Binary

- Mairead Stewart is a White Settler in Toronto, what is now Anishinaabe territory, specifically the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.
- They have over 14 years of experience volunteering and working in the field of Outdoor Education. Stewart has experienced positions both in overnight camps and Outdoor Schools.
- Their first experience in the field was at the age of 12, and they believe this was the catalyst for them continuing their Outdoor Education Journey.

- Stewart believes that their childhood experiences in nature led them to work in Outdoor Education.

Annick Read (she/her) Cisgender Woman

- Annick Read has over three years of experience in Outdoor Education. She entered the field as an adult through a school placement at an Independent Elementary Outdoor School. She worked with children from junior kindergarten through grade one.
- She then worked as an Outdoor School instructor at their summer day camp and year-round programs.
- Read developed her naturalist skills throughout her time in the field. She enjoyed learning from her co-workers and hopes to continue learning more.

Katelyn Fox (she/her) Cisgender Woman

- Katelyn Fox started her journey in Outdoor Education in Grade 10. She believes the experiences she had in her high school Outdoor Education program led her to pursue it as a career.
- Fox's experience in the field includes being an Outdoor Guide in Northern Ontario and a Camp Counsellor.
- In her position as an Outdoor Guide, she led activities such as sea kayaking, hiking, and canoeing.

Participant 1 (he/him) Cisgender Gay Man, BIPOC

- Participant 1 grew up in an area where he could access the outdoors daily. He pursued a BSc in Biology which led him to a job that combined his knowledge in biology and educating children.
- When he realized he could pursue teaching in an outdoor environment he entered the Outdoor Education field as an instructor at an outdoor school.

- Participant 1 has over two years of experience working in the field of Outdoor Education.

Data Analysis

This study examines the experiences of women and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals working in the field of Outdoor Education. The data was examined through the theoretical frameworks of Feminism and Queer Theory. These two frameworks helped guide the research and create succinct themes based on the participants' responses. The data was put through a first cycle of coding to form themes that appeared across the participants' shared experiences. After the first cycle was complete, three main themes appeared. The second coding cycle divided the data into sub-themes so that most of the participants' experiences could be noted. The themes were determined through a coding cycle that prioritized each participant's lived experiences, observations, and hopes for the future. Once the coding was completed, three main themes with sub-themes were presented. The three main themes are Community, Identity, and Representation.

Analysis of Themes

Theme: Community

How the participant's communities shaped their experiences working in the field of Outdoor Education.

Sub-Theme: Connection to the Field

The study participants were asked to describe in detail how they started working in Outdoor Education and their jobs in the field. Each participant's path into outdoor education varied depending on their life experiences. Participants noted that childhood influences, access to nature, and their interests were some of the driving factors for them to enter the field.

When looking at the data, two out of four participants identified that childhood influences were part of why they entered the field of Outdoor Education. One participant had familial

influence as well. The other two participants identified that they entered the Outdoor Education field through school-based experiences. These were programs through secondary and post-secondary schools where this Outdoor Education experience was part of the curriculum. Both participants continued to work in the field in their adult lives. All four participants noted having an overall positive experience during this time. One barrier that appeared was a program not running anymore due to budget cuts. The cancelled program could affect future students who may not otherwise be exposed to Outdoor Education. These first introductions into the field of Outdoor Education created the participants' first experiences and thoughts on the field.

A passion for the outdoors plays a large part in Stewart's connection to the field of Outdoor Education. They noted:

as a kid, I spent almost every weekend in a park, a beach, or a forest. I was also very involved in guides and scouts, where I got to camp all year round and learned outdoor skills such as knot tying, building campfires, setting up tents, etc. I have always been an outdoorsy kid, and I was very enthusiastic about being outdoors every chance I got (Stewart, 2024).

This theme continued to become present within Participant 1's response: "I grew up in [redacted], so I became fascinated with the natural world. After I got a BSc in Biology, I worked at [redacted] working with kids and education. It was then I realized I could combine the two" (Participant 1, 2024). Like Participant 1, Stewart used their love of the natural world and entered the field at a young age

my first experience as a leader in outdoor education was for a nature school run out of a repurposed lawn-bowling club near my house. I was 12 years old and needed something to do with my summer that would help me start to accumulate resume experience. While I had an amazing time, I remember my mom helping

me choose that particular experience because she knew how much I would like it (Stewart, 2024).

These experiences differed from Read and Fox's introduction to the field of Outdoor Education. Read noted that their experience started in post-secondary education: "While in school, I completed a placement at an outdoor school. I worked with children in JK-Grade 1, along with three other educators" (Read, 2024). This experience eventually led Read to continue working in Outdoor Education: "I wanted to continue working in the outdoor education field and was looking for job opportunities. I eventually started working with another outdoor school as a summer camp counsellor and later as an instructor during the school year" (Read, 2024). Fox was also exposed to Outdoor Education within traditional education; she stated, "I would say that the high school outdoor ed course I took in grade 10 is really what got me started in outdoor education. It was the Trailhead & Bronte Creek project based out of Halton, Ontario. It doesn't run anymore due to budget cuts, but it was awesome" (Fox, 2024). This first introduction to Outdoor Education could continue to shape future participant experiences.

Theme: Identity

Participants observed the various identities within the field of Outdoor Education. They noted their experiences with their own lived identities as well.

Sub-Theme: Diversity

When detailing their experiences working in the field of Outdoor Education, some participants noted that there was a lack of diversity. The issues raised pertained to race, class, gender identity, sexuality, and culture. Participants highlighted women, Indigenous individuals, disabled individuals, 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, and people of colour as lacking support and representation. Other participants noted a positive and diverse environment in their experience working in Outdoor Education. They cited feeling supported in their identity and saw others who reflected that. These were noted as both lived experiences and observations.

Within the participant responses, two out of four commented on Outdoor Education's lack of diversity and being white-dominated. One participant noted this and reflected on class inequality within the programs. As well, this participant noted that the staff they were surrounded by were almost entirely white and were uncomfortable speaking about race and disability. One participant also mentioned the lack of Indigenous knowledge keepers, citing that the program they worked for promoted Indigenous knowledge without paying an Indigenous knowledge keeper.

There was a difference in experiences between the other two participants. They cited experiencing a positive and diverse workplace, noting respect for gender identities and feeling a sense of comfort being surrounded by 2SLGBTQ+ individuals. One participant noted that there was freedom to share feelings about how the workplace is run.

There are issues present within the data that have been affecting the participant's experiences working in the field of Outdoor Education. One has been an overall lack of diversity of both staff and participants. Most staff and program participants were noted as being white and of middle to upper class. The other issue present is programs not sharing Indigenous knowledge properly. The participant noted that the program they worked for was based upon Indigenous knowledge that a non-indigenous man taught. This can cause a barrier in Outdoor Education due to knowledge being shared without the accurate sources being credited.

Fox noted that the industry is "very white-dominated," and they said, "I think it would be great to start to see more diversity in the industry as a whole" (Fox, 2024). Stewart echoed this observation in their response: "The staff were exclusively white, and most of the kids were white as well. This program, like many outdoor ed programs, targeted middle-class to upper-middle class families with kids who were very familiar with having access to these kinds of programs." And "while I worked at the camp, I watched the almost entirely white staff experience discomfort

talking about race and disability. While I was not aware of anyone saying anything outright wrong, the staff certainly had limited understandings of how to stand in solidarity with anyone who didn't hold their specific identities" (Stewart, 2024). Stewart also added in observations around accessibility, "I also don't remember any conversation around accessibility or any staff or children with visible disabilities" (Stewart, 2024). They then continued to touch on Indigenous knowledge keepers:

The one thing this program did not do well on at all was their respect and reciprocity for Indigenous communities. The program states that they use nature connection and Indigenous knowledge in part through the mentorship and teachings of a non-Indigenous man who learned from an Indigenous man. Despite this, I don't know of any long-term elders or knowledge-keepers who are paid by the program's management (Stewart, 2024).

There were also positive observations of diversity in the workplace. Participant 1 explained, "I love that in this job, I am surrounded by other staff who are also members of the 2SLGBTQ Community. At least three are nonbinary, and at least three are cis-gendered gay or bisexual, including myself" (Participant 1, 2024). Read touched on the fact that "the workplaces also promote the freedom to share your feelings about how things are run and how to continuously improve this subject. The workplaces also asked that everyone respect each other's genders and identities" (Read, 2024). Noting both the negative and positive experiences of participants is essential to understanding the experiences participants had further.

Sub-Theme: 2SLGBTQ+

The study participants addressed feelings of acceptance and confidence in working in Outdoor Education when there was representation of others within their organization who held similar identities. This is where the sub-theme of 2SLGBTQ+ identities appeared. The participants also noted that they wanted to see more 2SLGBTQ+ individuals holding positions of

power within the field. There were also instances where participants hoped to learn more about 2SLGBTQ+ identities to support both staff and program participants better.

Within the data, two out of four participants noted similar experiences pertaining to their own identity and the comfort they felt in Outdoor Education. One participant cited a need to hide his queerness among kids and their caregivers due to the stigma surrounding queer educators. He also noted this being a systemic issue that needs to be addressed. The other participant found comfort when their camp director came out as lesbian. They noted that this even brought conversations about sexuality out in the open.

These two participants also spoke about their positive experiences in Outdoor Education regarding gender and sexuality. They noted a workplace that was very open to queer identities and staff that were comfortable having conversations about it. Along with this open dialogue, one participant noted wanting more education to better care for 2SLGBTQ+ staff and participants.

The barriers noted by participants can be collectively categorized as barriers within the system. These include the stigma that still exists surrounding 2SLGBTQ+ educators, as well as a possible need for more training to include 2SLGBTQ+ staff and participants. Participant 1 noted, "I find myself needing to hide my queerness among kids and their caregivers, for example, referring to my fiancé as 'my friend.' There is this systemic fear of a caregiver potentially dropping their kid out of the program because of how a staff identifies may make them feel uncomfortable" (Participant 1, 2024). This theme continued "I just feel like for outdoor education, or any education environment, from a systemic perspective needs to be improved. This includes the stigma around queer educators holding positions of power over children and how the caregivers may respond" (Participant 1, 2024).

Stewart noted another experience they had that was different than the previous “the nature school in [redacted] I worked at from 2020 to 2023 was very inclusive to queer people. Many staff members were non-binary and queer and felt comfortable talking about it” (Stewart, 2024). This was also reflected by Read where she noted “my only limitation is my lack of knowledge of individuals with other gender or sexuality identities. With more self-education, I can better support all individuals in my care” (Read, 2024). Participant 1 noted that “seeing more nonbinary folks in roles of power would be great. I feel like it would also help normalize gender-neutral language usage” (Participant 1, 2024). Having more non-binary individuals in power could aid in the education Read pointed out.

Sub-Theme: Patriarchy

Within the theme of identity, the sub-theme of patriarchy appeared, with participants citing the work environment allowing for toxic masculinity. It was noted that participants saw the representation of men in the field of Outdoor Education as being even with the number of women and/or 2SLGBTQ+ individuals in the field or greater. The participants acknowledged where they wanted to see change within the field of Outdoor Education, with many wanting to see change in positions of power.

Three out of the four participants noted that men often hold roles of power within Outdoor Education. One participant reflected on typical teaching positions, which she noticed are held mainly by women. One participant cited some Outdoor Education settings having a toxic masculine environment. Another participant recounted the times she had experienced this type of environment firsthand. There was also a need to see power dynamics within Outdoor Education changing.

Patriarchal culture continues to affect professionals within the field of Outdoor Education. One participant cited gendered roles being assigned even though everyone could do the tasks. The unchanged power dynamics create barriers for non-men wanting to enter the field because

they may not feel welcome in a space like the ones mentioned. The outcome of this data also creates an opportunity for men within the industry to reflect on their innate power just by being men. As well as how they portray themselves in the field to ensure it creates an inclusive environment rather than an exclusive one. The industry can also reflect on these participants' experiences to make sure there is no toxic masculine environment.

Read noticed that "in my experience, I find most of the roles of power are held by men or male-identifying individuals" (Read, 2024). Read went on to note "at my current workplace, many of the roles of power are held by male-identifying individuals" (Read, 2024). She then continued to reflect on typical education settings "this is different than typical teaching positions, traditionally held by females" (Read, 2024). Fox also noted this theme: "When I got into guiding, it was mostly cis men. More women and 2SLGBTQ people are entering the field, but it's still male-dominated"(Fox, 2024).

Stewart also reflected on this: "Some outdoor ed spaces can have a toxic masculine environment that pushes staff to always be proving their strength" (Stewart, 2024). Fox noted an experience in this kind of environment: "The guys are always chosen to do maintenance even though we're all very fit people from guiding all year. I've been told before it was because the men 'were not as smart as the women and wouldn't clean the rooms as well'. I feel like it is not that difficult to mop a floor" (Fox, 2024). This continued to be perpetuated when Fox stated, "I have found that when guiding adults especially they always look to the male guide for help first"(Fox, 2024). Fox also found herself dealing with said clients: "I've also dealt with a lot of inappropriate comments from clients asking me to take my top off or go for a swim so they can watch (in this situation, they did not make any similar comments to the male guide)" (Fox, 2024). Stewart noted their experience in Outdoor Education: "From my experience, white settlers, often from middle-class families, hold the most power in outdoor education" (Stewart, 2024). They also noted, "I want to see power dynamics changing so others can enjoy the same experiences

I have had in outdoor education" (Stewart, 2024). Understanding where the power dynamics need to shift will aid in the overall change in the industry.

Theme: Representation

The participants noted the space that women and/or 2SLGBTQ+ have held in the field of Outdoor Education. They noted that seeing representation in the field was important for both staff and program participants.

Sub-Theme: Women in Outdoor Education

The participants whose identities aligned with this theme noted both the appreciation of more women entering the field and the continuous underrepresentation of women in the field of Outdoor Education. The participants noted wanting to see more women in positions of power. Some participants commented on how they are starting to see more women represented in the field of Outdoor Education. They also discussed how femininity is represented in the field and even sometimes the lack of gender roles.

One participant noted that, overall, more men were represented in Outdoor Education, but many women were also entering leadership roles. Another participant also noted an increase in women and non-binary individuals beginning to work in the field. One out of four participants talked about the training they received and how they saw the culture within Outdoor Education slowly changing and becoming more diverse. This same participant raised a point about gender presentation in the field and how it is not as enforced for women in Outdoor Education. They noticed women in more gender-neutral clothing and focusing on comfort and practicality versus gendered clothing.

The issues that stand out in the data reflect the responses participants had within the sub-theme of patriarchy. There are still individuals who disregard a woman's knowledge. One

participant noted that clients would listen to her male co-guide over her, even when both guides gave the same advice. This creates a barrier regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion not being practiced in the field of Outdoor Education. Without this practice, it could contribute to a less diverse field.

Read noticed a shift in Outdoor Education: "I feel there is an increasing amount of female-identifying individuals or non-gendered individuals beginning to work in the outdoor education field" (Read, 2024). Fox also commented on this change and noted who they saw represented in the field: "I would say mostly men (within summer camp directors, that is likely true), but there are a lot of amazing women out there who are in these roles now. There have been many changes over the last decade (with room for improvement)" (Fox, 2024). This improvement can be seen through an experience Stewart had "I did appreciate training workshops, acknowledgements, and more diverse hiring practices taken on by the program in the later years I worked there. I could slowly see that culture changing" (Stewart, 2024). As culture begins to change Fox brought up an instance she still deals with

having clients disregard your advice and then listen to the same advice from your co-guide can be pretty frustrating. I've guided a lot of older men who seem to find it hard to take instruction from a young woman. I understand that it could be a big culture shock for many of them but it can make it hard to keep people safe in the field (Fox, 2024).

Stewart raised a point about gender presentation in Outdoor Education, noting that "I have noticed that gender presentation is not as enforced for women in outdoor education spaces" (Stewart, 2024). When gender presentation is seen as fluid, it creates a more inclusive industry.

Sub-Theme: Inclusion

Participants agreed that creating inclusive spaces is extremely important, especially in an environment like Outdoor Education. They agreed that when a space is inclusive to all individuals, it creates a more positive and meaningful work environment. It was also noted that when the participants were involved in inclusion-based training, they were able to incorporate it more into their work.

Two out of four participants noted inclusive workplaces. One participant cited that staff had a voice to contribute to the organization's collective goals. Another participant noticed a shift in the culture of their workplace, which became more open and inclusive as time went on. One participant even mentioned specific training aimed at welcoming girls into programming because they are a smaller demographic in Outdoor Education.

One participant detailed how she wants to see the industry become more inclusive and diverse and how that could happen with earlier exposure to Outdoor Education. She mentioned that in her experience, many Outdoor Education professionals started working in the industry because of their childhood experiences. Trying to target inclusivity in Outdoor Education programs from a young age could transition into a more inclusive workplace due to the culture shift that would take place.

Participant 1 reflected on the organization: "I feel from an organizational point of view that the environment allows all folks to have a voice and to contribute to the collective goals of outdoor education" (Participant 1, 2024). He noted where this support came from: "There has been past inclusion training led by both third-party guests and from fellow internal 2SLGBTQ staff. We have also received training sessions on supporting female youth participants as they tend to be a lower demographic" (Participant 1, 2024). Stewart noted, "the longer I worked at the camp, the more inclusive it became. It seemed to me that staff were seeing a change in how

the broader culture in in-person and online spaces was changing to be more positive about queer people” (Stewart, 2024).

Fox detailed their thoughts on inclusion in the industry: "I think it would be great to start to see more diversity in the industry as a whole. For one thing, it is very white-dominated" (Fox, 2024). She noted that this could happen "with more people having access to outdoor learning opportunities from a young age and eventually going on to work in the industry. Summer camps are very expensive, and that is where a lot of this passion-building takes place at a young age"(Fox, 2024). Fox even saw this as accurate: "Most of the people that I know who work in the industry now started by going to some kind of camp and then working there as a teenager" (Fox, 2024). Drawing upon one's passion can lead to more individuals entering the Outdoor Education field.

Critical Analysis

This study aims to find out what experiences women and/or 2SLGBTQ+ individuals have while working in the field of Outdoor Education. When looking at the participant responses within each theme, there was a clear focus on community, identity, and representation within the field. This research was conducted through semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to share their own lived experiences, observations, and hopes for the future of the field. The findings of this research suggest that changes are being made within the field of Outdoor Education, but there is further room for improvement to empower diverse employees.

Connection to Literature

When looking at the greater knowledge base, participants' responses reflected existing literature but also allowed for new observations, such as women feeling comfortable in their identity in the field and observing an increase in the field of those who identify as 2SLGBTQ+. Despite these new findings, the data reflected previous research that recognized male dominance within the field. Participants in this research noted the over-representation of men

within the field, creating a sense of toxic masculinity heightened by the work environment.

These findings reflect the following quote:

women participating and/or working in adventure education programs are taught that the field was created by and still better suited to men and that if they are to participate in adventure education they are to do so in a way 'appropriate' for women—for example, being a nurturing follower instead of taking a leadership position (Haines et al., 2016). Thus, when women are expected to use their interpersonal skills, and men are expected to rely on physical skills, a double bind is created because physical skills are more highly valued in adventure education programs (Warren et al., 2019).

Further, participants indicated a lack of diversity within the field of Outdoor Education.

Participants cited seeing less diverse hiring practices, a disregard for Indigenous Knowledge, and not giving credit to Indigenous knowledge keepers. There is also an observed class divide regarding who can access outdoor education, reflected in the literature; minorities may also face economic, accessibility, and social barriers that prevent them from pursuing more intense outdoor activities such as mountaineering or mountain biking. Those barriers can increase with the intensity of activity as the cost of gear, access and acquiring essential skills also increase (CBC News, 2018).

Participants cited the field of Outdoor Education becoming more inclusive as time goes on. They specifically mentioned how Outdoor Education has become more inclusive to the 2SLGBTQ+ community. These inclusive practices stem from organizational-level changes, like the inclusion of training sessions primarily focused on 2SLGBTQ+ participants and staff. As reflected in a study by Mo Lundin and Sara Bombaci, there are still ways this inclusion can be implemented in the field of Outdoor Education.

For the LGBTQ+ community to be fully welcomed and accepted in outdoor field experiences, outdoor programs must make cultural and procedural changes explicitly

related to LGBTQ+ inclusion and accessibility. Our survey suggests that some outdoor organizations have already adopted many actions to promote LGBTQ+ inclusion identified herein, including using gender-inclusive language, gender-neutral gear, and gender-inclusive facilities and developing LGBTQ+ competency among leadership and participants. However, our findings are limited to the nine managers of outdoor leadership programs that responded to our survey. The limited scope of our sample suggests that many outdoor programs do not incorporate LGBTQ+ inclusive practices into their field experiences. Indeed, a recent survey focused on diversity more broadly found that only 15% of 88 field programs provided diversity and inclusion training to students or mentors, and less than half provided access to diverse mentors (Lundin, Bombaci, 2022).

This study continues to build on the findings already published regarding the experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ and/or women in the field of Outdoor Education. With continued research, more gaps in knowledge will be filled.

Connection to Theory

This study drew upon Queer Theory and Feminist Theory to support the understanding of how the exclusion of women and queer people is present within the field of Outdoor Education. Drawing upon Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, it is clear that the issues present within Outdoor Education intersect with the participant's held identities. One participant noted that her identity as a woman was not taken seriously by patrons in the industry. This issue is present due to the intersection of her identity and what is currently a male-dominated field. Another participant noted the fear that their identity could cause a participant to drop out. This example is the intersection of the participant's held identity and the systems in place in Outdoor Education.

Implications of Research

This study can inform future research to understand the experiences of women and 2SLGBT+ individuals working in the field of Outdoor Education. The study participants provided insight into their experiences in the field and what they observed. With more participant support, there is an opportunity to gain more knowledge to support the growth of the Outdoor Education system. As the Outdoor Education industry continues to grow, there will be new opportunities to fill the knowledge gaps left by this and other studies. Specifically, this study can inform practice in the field of Outdoor Education through the lens of Inclusive Design.

Implications For the Field

When looking at the participant's responses throughout each theme various concerns and recommendations were noted. These create opportunities to advance the field of Outdoor Education in an accessible and inclusive manner.

"The workplace environment from an organizational perspective is great, I just feel like outdoor education, or any education environment, from a systemic perspective needs to be improved. This includes the stigma around queer educators holding positions of power over children and how the caregivers may respond. Also, it is possible that most caregivers I work with are accepting and understanding, and just care that their child had a good time; it's just this innate systemic mindset we as 2SLGBTQ educators automatically assume in our roles" (Participant 1, 2024).

Outdoor Education is part of the education system; therefore, these systemic issues, as mentioned by Participant 1, still arise. Participant 1 mentions the "innate systemic mindset we as 2SLGBTQ+ educators automatically assume in our roles" (Participant 1, 2024). Staff and participants should not have to hide their 2SLGBTQ+ identity to feel safe and accepted within an education role. Another experience Stewart noted that the majority of change they saw happen within the industry was staff-led versus management-led.

Recommendation: Nurturing a safe and inclusive space for 2SLGBTQ+ individuals through organization-level changes.

Barriers

- Each Outdoor Education organization operates in their own way. The proposed solution may not fit each organization perfectly.
- Even if change is to happen, the innate systemic mindset that 2SLGBTQ+ individuals have may remain. This is about how organizations can continue to be accountable.

Proposed Approaches

As stated previously, the proposed solution will occur at an organizational level. This solution can differ among organizations but can start with training. Implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training specific to Outdoor Education could help change the current system. This could look like understanding what gaps exist within the organizations in relation to DEI and addressing how organizational change can be made. Another approach could be to implement new policies and procedures that have clear expectations for staff, participants, and participant's caregivers. There should be no tolerance for any kind of hateful behaviour towards 2SLGBTQ+ individuals in the workplace. Implementing new training and concrete policies could give 2SLGBTQ+ individuals working in the field something to support them better.

“Some outdoor ed spaces can have a toxic masculine environment that pushes staff to always be proving their strength” (Stewart, 2024).

"In my experience, I find most of the roles of power are held by men or male-identifying individuals. This is different than typical teaching positions, traditionally held by females. At my current workplace, many of the roles of power are held by male-identifying individuals" (Read, 2024).

Participants raised concerns about how men hold most roles of power in Outdoor Education. Read compared this to traditional teaching positions held by women. Stewart cited that some Outdoor Education spaces have a toxic masculine environment, which could also contribute to this.

Recommendation: reassess who holds positions of power in Outdoor Education settings and see where changes can be made. Future hiring opportunities would focus on inclusion and hiring qualified people who meet the inclusion criteria.

Barriers

- There is a belief that only men have the strength and experience to hold said roles. However, this has proven not to be the case.

Proposed Approaches

As participants have stated previously, they have noted that men hold most positions of power in Outdoor Education. The recommendation is for organizations to reassess who holds positions of power in Outdoor Education within their organization. Due to the toxic masculine environment that exists within this industry, there is a possibility that an utterly qualified individual may still feel as though they should not be in a leadership role. Organizations have the opportunity to create a more inclusive work environment. They ensure that all staff are treated equally and are allowed to grow. If organizations continue to foster a toxic masculine environment, it will continue to impact the experiences of non-men within their organization negatively.

“While I worked at the camp, I watched the almost entirely white staff experience discomfort talking about race and disability. While I wasn’t aware of anyone saying anything outright wrong, staff certainly had limited understandings of how to stand in solidarity with anyone who didn’t hold their specific identities” (Stewart, 2024).

When trying to respectfully engage and understand an identity that does not reflect your own, there tends to be this feeling of discomfort. There is discomfort due to possibly making a mistake or offending someone; this discomfort can be a good thing. It creates an opportunity to learn about new identities and engage with new individuals.

Recommendation: Engage staff members in conversations around race, disability, sexuality, and gender to create a more inclusive and well-rounded staff team.

Barriers

One barrier pertains to the amount of effort the staff members put into learning about the different identities. If no effort is made to respect and understand these identities, then these conversations may not be as effective.

Proposed Approaches

The participant's responses made it clear that the demographic of Outdoor Education is currently primarily white. Time needs to be taken to understand and be educated on these marginalized communities when they are not represented equally. Organizations are responsible for educating their staff on race, gender, sexuality, and disability. Inviting outside speakers with lived experience can be positive, but this should not be the only intervention. Staff must understand marginalized identities before bringing in an outside guest speaker. These guest speakers are learning guides and should not be expected to bear the weight of an entire staff team's knowledge of their identity. It is not their responsibility to do so.

Limitations

The limitations that impacted the study include the small pool of participants and the data collection method. Due to the small pool of participants, there are gaps in the knowledge. Although it was not a large pool, the data collected was significant, and each participant's

contribution mattered. Understanding other individuals' experiences is crucial to maintaining and improving the field.

The other limitation that impacted this study was the method of data collection. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the participants. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to inform the research with their own lived experiences. The reason this was a limitation is due to the number of questions that can be asked in the time the interview takes place. There is only so much information that can be shared in a short amount of time; therefore, it limits the amount of data. In future, a follow-up interview will be conducted.

Conclusion

This study aimed to understand the experiences of women and/or 2SLGBTQ+ individuals as they are working in the field of Outdoor Education. Data was collected via semi-structured interviews with four individuals with two or more years of experience working in the field of Outdoor Education. The four participants shared their lived experiences, observations, and hopes for the future regarding Outdoor Education. The data was then coded through two rounds of coding to determine themes and sub-themes drawn from the participant's own words. Participants' concerns, observations, and hopes were then analyzed from an Inclusive Design perspective. Each issue was given a recommendation on how the Outdoor Education industry could start addressing the concerns brought up by participants. The recommendations were followed by the barriers that could still be in place and a summary of the proposed approaches organizations could take.

Understanding women and/or 2SLGBTQ+ individuals' experiences working in the field of Outdoor Education is crucial to improving diversity, equity, and inclusion within the field. Representation matters, especially in a male-dominated field like Outdoor Education.

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