

Fostering Diversity in Outdoor and Recreation and Conservation Fields

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Some material included in this thesis project were previously submitted to meet the requirements
for the ICD courses:

Research for Social Change GLST 5153, Fieldwork GLST 5923, Integrative Project I GLST
6936, Social & Environmental Justice in Development GLST 6423, Peacemaking and
Reconciliation GLST 6383

Integrative Project II GLST 5973/5001

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10 March 2022

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Introduction

Biodiversity is a term many conservationists are very familiar with. Biodiversity refers to the variety of animals and species within an environment. If one pictures meandering rivers with beavers building dams, moose feeding on nearby shrubs and bears sauntering in the nearby prairie, this setting depicts a healthy, biodiverse environment. Generally, the higher variety of species and genetic variation, the more resilient a given environment becomes. Yet, while this biology term makes sense to many people who love the outdoors, there remains a problem with diversity in outdoor recreation and conservation fields. Many outdoors and conservation organizations are predominately white, especially in leadership (Mills). Some of the same people who champion causes for greater biodiversity are confused by the notion that outdoors and conservation organizations should be concerned about human diversity issues.

During the summer of 2021, I volunteered with the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation department as an intern with the goal of learning from their BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) program leaders. I am a white woman who has benefited from the privilege of my background, I still feel these white-led organizations needed to understand what can be done to address racism and inequity within environmental and recreation organizations. Following my summer in Saint Paul, I completed a project proposal to support BIPOC programming. The project was to implement a gear sharing and mentorship program that connects members of the BIPOC community to gear that is difficult to obtain or expensive to purchase. This program aims to remove barriers for the BIPOC community and get more people involved in recreational activities.

Although many people believe nature is a way to escape the politics of everyday life, my fieldwork this summer in Saint Paul, MN, demonstrated this assumption is not always true. One

of the reasons BIPOC community members cite to explain this underrepresentation is environmental racism (Hallmon and Tapps 44). Often marginalized people within a society find themselves living in unsafe environments. Simultaneously, it can be difficult for marginalized people to find safe places to spend time outdoors. Some organizations have recognized the disparity within their profession and made significant commitments towards diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Nevertheless, sometimes the same organizations are often confused or even surprised when they find that their efforts are not met with the enthusiasm they expected. We, in the recreation and conservation fields, need to avoid burdening a “diversity hire” to teach our organizations what we do wrong. To alleviate this burden, it is necessary to identify ways in which current programming may exclude people of specific backgrounds. We must also support work done by people from backgrounds the organization has determined it is currently underserving.

Research Context

As a state, Minnesota is becoming increasingly ethnically diverse, especially among the youth. Much of the growth in diversity is happening in urban areas (*Minnesota Compass*). In Minnesota, the increase in diversity can be attributed to primarily Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Based on the current census data, the Twin Cities region is still majority white (around 60%). “Black or African American” make up about 20% of the population, while “American Indian and Alaska Native,” “Asian,” “Hispanic or Latino,” and “Two or More Races” represent the rest of the population. Immigrants also comprise roughly 15% of the population (*U.S. Census Bureau*). Although these statistics generalize the complexity of cultural interactions in the Twin Cities, they are helpful when trying to understand change

Another essential contextual consideration is that the Twin Cities has been at the epicenter of race-related discussions globally since the murder of George Floyd in May of 2020.

The outcry of injustice has inspired many individuals and organizations to examine the historical influences of violence and racism. Left unexamined, these influences, either overtly or covertly, oppress and exclude specific races, creeds, sexual orientations, abilities, or genders.

The Saint Paul Parks and Recreation program has made a conscious effort to create programs that include BIPOC communities, groups of people typically underrepresented in outdoor programs (Hazzard). Asha Shoffner, Environmental and Outdoor Education Program Coordinator, told me that it is essential for BIPOC communities to have programs specifically geared toward them. She said there are not many opportunities to explore the outdoors safely, feeling free to express their whole self.

Overview of Fieldwork

Throughout my summer, I learned a significant amount personally and professionally from Shoffner. Shoffner is known within the Twin Cities BIPOC community as someone who is creating opportunities for members of the BIPOC community to thrive outdoors. Shoffner is intentional about making sure the programs she is involved in are inclusive in as many ways as possible. Her work was an excellent opportunity to engage in an appreciative inquiry process (AI). The appreciative inquiry follows the 5-D cycle outlined by Sue Annis Hammond practice in *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*: define, discover, dream, design, and deliver or destiny (26). I conducted this research as a “participant as observer,” which allowed me to participate in and sometimes lead activities but step aside as strictly an observer when necessary (Merriam and Tisdell 144). Hammond describes AI the saying, “the whole process is to look for core factors that give ‘life’ to the organization as well as asking what people value about themselves, their work and their organizations” (27). By approaching my learning from an AI perspective, I was naturally encouraged to recognize and appreciate great work already being done by BIPOC leaders. These leaders work hard to make sure more members of BIPOC communities have an

opportunity to learn from people who look like them. In an interview Shoffner stated why it was important to have programming specifically BIPOC focused saying, “I think just knowing it’s just a bunch of folks that look like you, and they also want to be outdoors, that goes a really long way.” Statements like these underscore the need for such programs.

The research I conducted is considered an ethnography which is the study of distinct cultures. Bonnie Stone Sunstein and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater state in *Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research* explain that ethnographic research is different than journalistic research by clarifying an ethnographer must “uncover many layers of cultural meanings” (14). Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell also state in their book *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* that ethnographic research requires “first-hand participation in some of the activities that take place there, and most critically, a deep reliance on the intensive work with a few informants drawn from the setting” (29). Therefore, this research relied heavily on qualitative data collected through observations and interviews instead of quantitative data, which relies heavily on numbers and statistics.

My fieldwork with the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation program focused on the following question: How can conservation and environmental organizations make their programs more equitable and inclusive? I examined this question by observing and talking to participants and program leaders of the Environmental and Outdoor Education Program and letting the following questions guide me in my appreciative inquiry:

1. What about the Saint Paul’s programs allows participants to feel included?
2. Why do participants come to the programs? Who is represented and who is not?
3. What do participants gain from the programs?

4. What does the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department gain by making its programs more equitable and inclusive?

I also expected that these questions might change as I collected data. This list was intended to guide the research, not to limit it.

I learned directly from Shoffner at activities such as a monthly family fishing activity and Youth Pride Festival. Also, I learned from program leaders that have worked closely with Shoffner while running BIPOC programming. Because I do not identify as BIPOC, I did not attend any of the BIPOC specific events. Still, many of the leaders and participants I spoke to believed that Shoffner's work organizing these activities is extremely valuable to the BIPOC community. The interviewees were open to sharing their experiences because Shoffner introduced me to them.

Shoffner is very active in the BIPOC community in the Twin Cities and tries to integrate inclusive practices into all her activities. She also considers LGBTQ+ and disabled or people of limited mobility, so they have safe spaces to enjoy the outdoors. Her background working with people with disabilities has given her an awareness of the many aspects many able-bodied people take for granted and may not realize, which may cause stress.

Throughout the summer, while speaking to Shoffner and other members of the BIPOC community, I was told about catalytic moments where the people I talked to realized their passion for creating safe for other BIPOC people outdoors. I also experienced my own catalytic moments, which caused me to recognize some of this work was not mine but must be done within the BIPOC community. Yet, other aspects of creating an inclusive culture outdoors must be done by white people or anyone else who relates to having a significant amount of privilege.

There must also be enough psychological safety within these catalytic moments that the chaos does not entirely overwhelm our ability to reflect and reorganize ourselves. A catalytic event will either push us toward transformation or tighten our tether to preservation (Salter McNeil 57). John Paul Lederach describes the transformative process in *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* saying, “Transformation envisions the presenting problem as an opportunity to engage a broader context, to explore and understand the system of relationships and patterns that gave birth to the crisis” (30). These catalytic events connect people to the causes they care the most about.

Barriers to Park Recreation

To address the inequities within outdoor and recreation communities, we must first dispel the myth that people who don’t participate in outdoor activities don’t do so because they have no interest in the activities or the environment. I have personally been a part of conversations where people have cautioned against diversity initiatives because “those people” simply aren’t interested in the activities. Throughout my research and fieldwork, because of underlying racism and a lack of access, it can appear to be more likely that people who identify as part of the BIPOC community may be less likely to participate in outdoor and recreational activities. While there may certainly be people from particular backgrounds who are less likely to be involved in outdoor and recreation activities, we must be careful not to stereotype a whole group of people. This rule is especially true when we have not done the work to ask them why they may not participate.

Access

There are many reasons why the BIPOC community struggles to access park systems compared to their white counterparts. In the United States, in a practice known as redlining, many interstate and highway systems divided neighborhoods and cut through communities with low-income

levels (“Mapping the Legacy of Racism”). These neighborhoods frequently did not have the means to fight this development. *The Color of Law* by Richard Rothstein also addresses the issues of redlining and waste dumping affecting communities of color at a higher rate than predominately white neighborhoods (54-57). Racism did not only exclude people of color from easy access to parks, but also made environmental degradation more likely as people of color were pushed into less desirable parts of cities.

Redlining in the Twin Cities also cut off marginalized groups from resources such as parks. People living and working in nearby neighborhoods face literal barriers when searching for safe ways to spend time outdoors. Christian scholar Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda describes actions like these as structural racism, explaining, “Structures of exploitation persist and grow when people who benefit from them fail to recognize and resist them” (4). By recognizing the ways racism has played a significant role in how the cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul were shaped, communities can begin to find ways to make the cities’ park systems more accessible to all.

Individuals who can easily access parks may also face the barrier of expensive gear to participate in the outdoor activity of their choice. In addition:

A common idea that outdoor recreation activities were perceived as “White people” activities emerged from some participants’ interviews. Hiking, kayaking, camping, and trekking were all categorized as such. This supports a study reporting that some African American women have reservations about trying specific outdoor activities due to race-driven perceptions. (Dorwart et al. 183)

When a member of the BIPOC community decides that they wish to try a recreational activity despite the social barriers, they often run into roadblocks like how to obtain equipment. Canoes,

kayaks, skis, snowshoes, bikes, and other outdoor equipment can easily cost hundreds of dollars without considering the other gear, transportation, and proper clothing a person may need to participate in the activity. Dorwart et al. explain:

“Structural” constraints such as socioeconomic status, lack of transportation, lack of information, lack of time, poor structural design, and accessibility (proximity) have historically been some of the primary barriers preventing racial minorities from participating in outdoor recreation activities (174).

Without the proper connections or support, it can be easy to get discouraged by the technical aspects when taking up an outdoor recreational activity as a hobby.

The outdoors community must make outdoor recreational sports more accessible to new people, particularly people who did not grow up participating in the activity. Yet, access to quality gear is not the only barrier standing in the way of the BIPOC community spending time outdoors. Many members of the BIPOC community who are active in outdoor recreation and conservation activities often find themselves facing racism while participating in these activities. Microaggressions (subtle acts of exerting power over or excluding a person) can quickly sour an otherwise pleasant experience, while more severe microaggressions can pose serious physical and mental safety concerns. When racism becomes part of the consideration, encouraging members of the BIPOC community to join in on outdoor activities can become much more difficult.

Safety Concerns

Safety was a central theme that came up during my interviews, encompassing all meanings of the word. Physical safety, the safety of the community, and safety to show their true self were all concerns for people participating in these BIPOC programs and motivators for gaining support for the programs. Dorwart et al. highlighted this concern in their study “Just More Comfortable

in the Gym”, clarifying, most people were fearful of “external factors that were beyond the participants’ control” (10). These safety concerns cannot be mitigated by carrying a first aid kit or honing technical skills.

Furthermore, there are strong correlations between health and the environment. In children, outdoor experiences can result in a greater connectedness to nature, altruistic behavior, and desire for equity (Barrera-Hernández et al. 3). Time spent outdoors can also increase cognitive function (Berman et al. 5). Additionally, there is a correlation between spending time outdoors and feeling compassion for others (Pfattheicher et al.) However, while the benefits of outdoor recreation can benefit public health, they do not always represent the whole community in which they serve. Most outdoor and environmental organizations in the United States are run primarily by white people.

Racism

Instances of micro and macroaggressions can also turn people away from pursuing outdoor activities. Microaggressions refer to subtle ways a person may intentionally or unintentionally diminish a person based on their race, sex, sexual orientation, disability, mobility, or other characteristics. Groshong et al. explain in their research “Attitudes About Perceived Park Safety Among Residents in Low-Income and High Minority Kansas City, Missouri, Neighborhoods,” “ensuring equitable park access require attention to dimensions including not only park amenities and facilities but interpersonal factors such as park incivilities” (641). Instances of racism can keep a person away from a particular location or activity. Groshong et al. continue by stating, “Perceived and actual safety issues in and near parks limit the opportunity of people of color to actually use environmental amenities as parks, thus de facto reducing their access to parks” (641). As a real-life example, one person I interviewed told me about an instance where a

member of the BIPOC community had been invited to participate in a wildlife study. The white leaders of the study made it clear this person was not welcome on the excursion in various ways. The study location made it impossible for the person to exit the situation safely, so this person had to endure hours' worth of microaggressions in situation where they could not safely advocate for themselves. The experience left this person feeling disappointed and frustrated whenever they thought about it. Furthermore, it left the person feeling like they did not wish to participate in any further studies despite being initially very excited about the experience.

However, microaggressions are not the only concerns when it comes to safety outdoors. Macroaggressions, or overt acts of racism, can be much more explicit. Tamara Few and Quentin Ikuta, who work for the National Park Service at the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, recounted another traumatic event during their interviews. They took a BIPOC group (including children) to a park in Saint Paul only to be harassed by a large group of white people with whips and loud firecrackers.

This incident caused Few and Ikuta to ask many questions, including: *Should they encourage BIPOC community members to spend more time in parks?* Ikuta told me that one of the reasons he enjoyed being a part of BIPOC outdoors groups was that there is safety in numbers. After that incident, he began to have doubts about safety. Few told me, "I felt very responsible and guilty and that I couldn't actually keep [the event] safe." This event was shortly after police officer Derek Chauvin murdered George Floyd. Ikuta told me in his interview, "And if we would have done something like call the cops...I don't know, as a BIPOC group, we don't want [them there]. We don't. We can't trust the police right now."

As echoed in all of the interviews I conducted, the BIPOC community wants to have safe spaces where they are free to be who they are without being on guard against microaggressions

of naïve ignorance of particular cultures. Similarly, they want to explore outdoor areas freely, but recent news stories such as Amy Cooper calling the cops on a black birdwatcher or Ahmaud Arbery being shot to death while on a jog indicate that the outdoors are not safe for all people. These instances are reminders that “The environmental justice movement arose because of the urgent need to make connections between racism, discrimination, equity, justice, and the environment” (“Dorceta E. Taylor on Environmental Justice 2). BIPOC groups often feel without recourse when incidents like these events occur because complaining could close the door to future opportunities for themselves and other people.

Personal Impact

I grew up in Montana, where there is easy access to recreational activities of all kinds. From a young age, I was proficient at hiking, horseback riding, backpacking, mountain biking, alpine skiing, cross country skiing, canoeing, kayaking, and many other outdoor activities. These activities gave me the confidence to test out new skills and explore new areas as I became an adult. My location, paired with the reality that many of my friends and family also participated in these activities, also made it easier for me to try new activities. I often had a nearby friend or family member who had the skills and equipment to get me started.

Nevertheless, it still took me a long time to recognize how privileged I was to have had these opportunities early in life. Once I realized the inequities within the activities and causes I cared so much about, I began doing a significant amount of inner work. This work required being willing to put myself in uncomfortable places and seriously consider the ways I have benefited from privilege. Parker J. Palmer describes inner work this way:

Inner work, though it is a deeply personal matter, is not necessarily a private matter: inner work can be helped along in community. Indeed, doing inner work

together is a vital counterpoint to doing it alone. Left to our own devices, we may delude ourselves in ways that others can help correct us. (92)

Palmer's perspective is helpful because he encourages the reader to wrestle with our hardships in community. He reminds the reader that correction is not to be feared.

Opportunity

The single most influential way I was inspired to pursue outdoor activities was by joining my parents as they pursued outdoor activities. However, even in Montana, where large areas of public land are made accessible to a majority of its citizens and visitors, I noticed that I benefited from certain privileges that some of my peers did not. I often benefited from the older children of my parents' friends who passed down the equipment and gear their children had grown out of. My family could also afford to support my outdoor hobbies as I began to focus on the activities, I enjoyed the most.

When I moved outside of Montana to Minneapolis, I realized how unique my upbringing was. Most of my new friends, even if they were interested in the outdoors, did not have as many opportunities as I did for the reasons I have previously mentioned. Louise Chawla states in her study "Life Paths Into Effective Environmental Action" that "the influence of family members and time outdoors in natural areas is predominately associated with childhood" (9). Clearly my association with the environment gave me an advantage as I began my career in recreation and conservation.

Around this time, I began working retail jobs at outdoor gear stores. Even in Minneapolis, I was disappointed to find that a disproportionate number of the employees were white. I had assumed that moving to a more diverse area meant I would interact with a diverse group of people in all areas of my life. However, I noticed this trend continue as I began researching job opportunities at conservation organizations in and around the Twin Cities.

Although the organization I work for today is no different, it has committed to identifying and addressing ways the organization may contribute to upholding a system that seems to favor whiteness.

Pride and Microaggressions

Many people who are active outdoors have a competitive nature. By itself, this competitiveness is not necessarily bad. Most people who know anyone who enjoys fishing can laugh at the stereotype of the fisherman whose prized fish seems to get larger each time he retells the story. The worst result of these fibs may be that the fisherman's friends may decide he's not the most reliable person to count on for measurements. This competitiveness demonstrated in these stories have minimal consequences.

However, there are times when a competitive nature can become harmful. I can admit contributing to creating an unwelcoming environment for beginning outdoors enthusiasts. Two lies are perpetuated frequently by those who enjoy the outdoors: first, you must have a significant amount of knowledge about a place or activity before exploring, and second, you must have the best gear you can afford to participate. To clarify, there can be significant safety concerns that must be considered when learning a new activity or planning a trip. The need for this kind of knowledge is why the mentor and gear sharing program (proposed in the Appendix) is vital for Saint Paul. Yet, this level of nuance rarely comes up in the conversations I am critiquing.

A significant amount of bragging takes place among recreationists and conservationists. As someone very comfortable interacting with these kinds of people, I have still had moments where I felt uncomfortable because someone made me feel intimidated, made fun of my gear choice, or belittled me for a minor mistake or misunderstanding. These are examples of microaggressions. Many people groups can be subject to microaggressions. Members of the

LGBTQ+ community, people with disabilities, immigrants, people with limited mobility, women and many others are also at a heightened risk of being affected by microaggressions.

In examples from my own life some of the people who made me feel uncomfortable did so intentionally, while others likely never realized the weight of their words. Here are a few examples from my own experience:

- Being corrected to use the more technical term “alpine skiing” instead of the colloquial “downhill skiing” during a job interview, despite already establishing I had many more years of “downhill skiing” experience than the interviewer.
- Being made fun of at ski competitions for not wearing the typical (and expensive) tight-fitting race suit. Also, feeling out of place because my family could only afford one pair of skis instead of multiple pairs of skis for different conditions.
- Being laughed at by a customer when I said malaria was caused by mosquitos instead of clarifying the illness was caused was a parasite spread by mosquitos.
- Being asked in front of a group how I thought that day’s climbing activity related to Thoreau’s writing, despite making it clear in an earlier conversation, I was not familiar with much of Thoreau’s writing.

As I remember these experiences, I do not wish to equate my discomfort with the experience of racism. I cannot speak to the experience of a person of color, but as a woman, there are safety considerations I make outdoors that many of my male counterparts do not. For example, if I cannot find a friend to explore with me, as a companion, my dog tags along and my phone stays charged. I do not stay out past dark if I can avoid it. I tend to stick to areas I know. I always tell someone where I am going and when to expect me back.

While some of the choices I make would be characterized by some as "just being smart", they are also restrictive. Often men are characterized as risk-takers, but I tend to be more adventurous than most men I know. Yet, I do not feel the same freedom to venture on my own as they do because as a woman, I assume more risks. While this hesitancy is not the same as weighing risks of the likelihood of a racist incident, it is an experience that all women can relate to, and hopefully make the risk calculation weighed by many people of color before participating in an outdoor activity relatable to more people.

Identifying these moments has helped identify some of the same systemic problems that impact the BIPOC community. The places where I experienced the discomfort from these situations were all places where I felt like I belonged, yet these attitudes still made me question whether I did. Even more sobering to me is the thought that I'm confident I've caused the same feeling of doubt in others. It can feel good to demonstrate how much I know about an activity, place, or topic I am passionate about. Yet, I can recall instances where I likely made someone feel like it's not worth participating in an activity unless they have a particular piece of gear, made my view of a specific conservation issue sound like the only acceptable solution, or criticized someone for not knowing better when they are new to an activity. Since outdoor spaces can be risky for anyone, it can be tempting to justify prideful comments as identifying safety risks. Still, we must be cautious to help people grow into their own confidence instead of tearing them down for not understanding where the knowledge gaps are because they are new.

Why is this work important?

Addressing Inequities

Inequities that start in childhood impact people of color as they become professionals. Carolyn Finney urges organizations in *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors*, "environmental organizations need to find ways of

incorporating African American historical images in political, social, and environmental memory” (91). For example, Taylor Bland is a wildlife biologist and guide in Yellowstone National Park and serves on the board for the conservation organization where I work. Bland is a woman of color and expressed in an interview that she is surprised when she sees other black people in Yellowstone. She also explained that her career choices were limited in the zoology field until she became a guide in Yellowstone because she had no outdoor experience. Her lack of outdoor experiences made her hesitant to pursue positions that required fieldwork. As Bland’s story indicates, individuals from families that do not spend extended periods recreating outdoors are less likely to apply for field-based jobs because they do not have the life experiences they feel make them qualified. Shoffner similarly noted that if a person of color does not see anyone who looks like them already represented within the organization, they are less likely to apply.

However, fixing a poor recruitment strategy does not solve the inequities that contribute to whether a person is qualified to apply for a position in the first place. Members of the BIPOC community are less likely to have access to parks, recreation equipment, finances, and other opportunities that lead to rich outdoor experiences and job opportunities in outdoor recreation or conservation fields. Some of these barriers are first realized in childhood as affluent families can pay to send their children to expensive summer camps where the children are exposed to profound outdoor experiences.

Failure to desegregate outdoor organizations and industries will likely have a similar effect on children as education inequities in schools. Many conservation and outdoor organizations do not fully understand how diversity and inclusion are relevant to their work. Parker J. Palmer writes, “If we do not understand the enemy is within, we will find a thousand ways of making someone ‘out there’ into the enemy, becoming leaders who oppress rather than

liberate others” (80). Maintaining the status quo supports structures of inequality (Hagerman 32). I view the work of committing to diversity, equity, and inclusion as a social justice issue within outdoor and conservation fields.

Moe-Lobeda describes social struggles influenced by generations of cultural influence with the term “hegemonic vision.” Hegemonic vision is a presentation of how the world should be that socially rewards supporters of the view even if it negatively affects their financial, physical, or mental health (Moe-Lobeda 87-90). It reinforces the position of those in power. It can serve as a social form of gaslighting where the people who question the systems that oppress them are blamed and sometimes punished for their situation. Miles A. Powell discusses the hegemonic vision of westward expansion in *Vanishing America: Species Extinction, Racial Peril, and the Origins of Conservation*, explaining that America’s picture of wilderness has been shaped by a racist push to erase pre-Colombian American history. Racism is so engrained within the culture of recreation and conservationism that many people fail to realize the pervasiveness of the problem.

Nevertheless, conservation and outdoor organizations have enormous potential to become the building blocks of deeply rooted community development. The Sphere project from 2004 outlines human rights principles, and the first of those principles is the right to life with dignity. In *Disaster and Development* Andrew Collins explains, “The right to life with dignity means respecting cultures, gender and different ways of doing things, as well as making sure people have what they need to stay alive” (241). Conservation and outdoor activities contribute to the mental well-being of communities and often encourage participants to adopt a holistic perspective about how their decisions impact the world around them. For instance, abusing parks and trails by misuse, litter, and other harmful activities, could result in the closure or sale of a

piece of land, which is then developed. People who use outdoor spaces want to see the area maintained for their benefit and are invested in ensuring proper care is maintained in the future for the health of their community.

Sustainability

The most relevant word to describe the need for diversity is one that many outdoors people and conservationists will be familiar with: sustainability. At its core, the work of diversifying outdoor and conservation organizations is ethically the right thing to do. Furthermore, there are many business-based reasons for addressing this issue.

In the context of environmental justice, Katie Willis highlights the term ‘sustainable development,’ which builds upon the idea that to meet current needs, it is not worth compromising the needs of future generations (178-179). Additionally, Simone P. Joyaux writes in *Strategic Fund Development: Building Profitable Relationships That Last* that to build a sustainable organization, there must be buy-in from all stakeholders of an organization, “And those who are not engaged by the values, mission, and vision then leave” (165). An organization must maintain representation from as many parts of the community as possible, lest a particular group begin to believe they can no longer see themselves in the values, mission, and vision. Similarly, Thomas L. Friedman states in *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist’s Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations*, “When you are an owner, you care, you pay attention, you build stewardship, and you think about the future” (350). Sustainability in terms of relevancy and conservation both require a diversity of backgrounds, life skills, experiences, and ideas to achieve.

David Bornstein and Susan Davis are professionals in the social entrepreneurship field who have written a book entitled *Social Entrepreneurship: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Many principles of social entrepreneurship can apply to nonprofits and other mission-driven

organizations. They emphasize sustainability goes beyond lowering the carbon footprint of an organization, stating, “While most organizations give considerable thought to the question of how to scale up directly, many fail to consider how to effect change beyond their immediate reach” (Bornstein and Davis 69). For many outdoor and conservation organizations, they are still trying to figure out how diversity fits with their mission. Organizations that have taken the time to understand how their reach is limited by failing to incorporate diverse perspectives into their work tend to discover they need to be more intentional about including more voices in all aspects of their work.

As the United States continues to become more racially diverse, it is essential to ensure conservation messages reach and impact everyone. Flanagan et al. conclude in their study “The Environmental Commons in Urban Communities: The Potential of Place-Based Education,” “Perhaps the most urgent issue of the 21st century is how people will adapt to changes in the earth’s natural environment that humans have created. Educating younger generations about human interdependence with nature and nurture a sense of vigilance about that delicate balance” (10). Organizations must identify ways to reach the younger generations to stay relevant, which cannot be done without reconciling with systemic injustices.

One method of achieving greater diversity within these organizations is to seek ways to implement projects of copowerment. Forrest Inslee describes copowerment as a situation in which “Each side freely and confidently offers power (empowers) the other in collaborative interdependence” (slide 24). While copowerment is not a widely recognized term, it is a necessary component of partnership needed to address the centuries of pain and injustice caused by conservation movements in the United States.

Relevancy of the Gear Sharing and Mentorship Project

After my interview with Quentin Ikuta, he asked me a pointed question, “As a white woman, why do you think it’s important for you to be the one doing this work?” It was a great question. One I had wrestled over many times while choosing a research topic. My answer has evolved throughout my research while meeting and speaking to the BIPOC outdoors community members from Saint Paul. I had considered a similar question when I began the project when I realized I would not be able to participate in these BIPOC events because they were not meant for me.

Ultimately, I realized many members of the BIPOC community are doing fantastic work to make outdoor activities accessible to more people. I was not going to become a savior to the BIPOC community by doing this research. However, I realized that many people like me care about making our organizations more welcoming but don’t understand where to start addressing the issues, yet many organizations fail to search for opportunities to collaborate with BIPOC led groups.

Collaboration is an essential component of addressing inequities in recreation and conservation because it recognizes the BIPOC community as valuable partners instead of perpetuating a white savior narrative. Petra Kuenkel states in *The Art of Leading Collectively: Co-Creating a Sustainable, Socially Just Future* “A well-organized network creates a feeling of unity and inspires contribution from its members...Networks are not about command and control, but connectivity and creativity” (228). Specific to the field, Patricia Winter, in her paper “Equity in Outdoor Recreation,” she states that information must come from trusted sources “as a leverage point for change in addressing inequities” (12). The mentorship and gear sharing program was a creative idea of Shoffner’s that emphasized networking within the community.

The program encourages commitment to community and makes many outdoor activities more accessible.

There may be a temptation to read these conclusions and have the main takeaway be only that outdoor and conservation organizations need to diversify. While this is true, it is even more important to understand that there are many people within the BIPOC community that are already making progress in their communities. Organizations should not be compelled to poach BIPOC leaders from the communities where they are needed but to invest and collaborate with the communities that are often underfunded and understaffed. It will take time to establish trust, and the process of building trust will create a safer environment for BIPOC outdoors people to explore opportunities.

Many studies, papers, presentations, podcasts, etc., address what a typical business can do to address racism, discrimination, and biases in the workplace. Yet, the outdoor industry has struggled to diversify. This lack of diversity is likely because of many historical and cultural barriers that have not been addressed. Brenda Salter McNeil says, “We need someone or something to push us out of our comfort zones and the isolated social enclaves that keep us alienated from other people and their differing perspectives” (46). If those who are already a part of outdoor and conservation organizations are willing to put in hard work to make the organization more inclusive, it will lighten the burden for BIPOC leaders who already have their plates full with other projects. The stress should be put on organizations to stretch and change, not for a “diversity hire” to do that work for the organization.

Yet, even if all conservation and outdoors organizations were able to eliminate all internal issues of racism and bias, the industry will continue to struggle to foster diverse communities because the systemic impacts of racism will remain.

Reconciliation and Hope

Many of the issues facing the United States today can be traced back to instances of classism and racism that predate the United States as a country. The U.S.'s extreme polarization is clear between political parties, where policy is accepted or rejected based on its party of origin rather than for the benefit or protection of the country. Since the pandemic, political affiliation appears to predict more than who a person votes for on their ballot, but also what healthcare procedures are appropriate, what media is consumed, and sometimes even with which family members a person still communicates. Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice warn against this kind of thinking in *Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace and Healing* by saying, "When we live by a posture of seizing and grabbing in an attempt to be in control of our destinies, we lose the gifts of harmony and peace" (63). According to these words, it is clear that all American communities must be more intentional about pursuing reconciliation to create a better future. The outdoors community is no exception.

Principles of peacemaking and conflict transformation will be an essential component of building strong communities. It will take a significant amount of time and effort from all community members. Collins points out that "even an unresolved tension over cultural or religious difference can result in an enormous breakdown of trust and security between cultures" (99). Lederach states that conflict transformation "sees conflict as embedded in the web and system of relational patterns" (30). Reorientation is a necessary step in resolving conflict, according to Salter McNeil (62). Outdoor groups must reorient the culture away from competitiveness and towards inclusivity to move forward.

About reconciliation, Salter McNeil states, "One cannot reconcile those who have never enjoyed a conciliatory relationship in the first place" (24). Forgiveness can be a critical component of recognizing the humanity of both sides of a conflict. Part of the human experience

is making and learning from mistakes. As Lederach explains, “if we are serious about the human experience of deep humiliation and harm, we will have to be engaged in finding ways to restore dignity” (27). Forgiveness can restore dignity to both sides of a conflict. However, these words may be simple, yet many events that lead to peacemaking efforts require a much longer reconciliation process.

Encouragingly, Anthony Smith and Brenda Salter McNeil see storytelling as a path forward in pursuing racial justice. Slater McNeil motivates her readers, stating, “We can shift into a preservation mode, or we can accept the challenge in front of us to be transformed by taking on new stories and metaphors” (80). On a similar note, Smith sees hope for the future. Smith argues that to progress past the dark past of racial oppression, society must hear the stories of the oppressed. Smith states, “Our restricted table of language used to narrate North American history in a prophetic way is deeply impoverished when our dominant storytellers come exclusively from among the privileged” (106). For those of us who should identify as privileged in these conversations, we have been trained to deflect from uncomfortable situations. Still, we must learn to recognize our discomfort for what it is: the voice of oppression. This voice has conditioned the privileged to turn away from moments that might teach us to cast it out of our lives and society.

While widespread, environmental racism can be addressed with intentionality and perseverance. It can be daunting to combat inequities that are hundreds of years old. Yet, Moe-Lobeda urges others to action by stating, “Facing the structural evil in which one is implicated is dangerous and defeating unless one also explores ways to resist it and dismantle it” (3). Similarly, Tom and David Kelley in their book *Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential within Us All* encourage others by saying, “What would have been nearly impossible to

accomplish in one giant leap became manageable in small steps” (43). Moe-Lobeda also has an affirming vision for communities. She believes that people should care about the earth, understanding that we are all connected. The Christian command of love thy neighbor means, “if I am proximate enough to join in taking another person’s land, water, or livelihood (through collective actions), I am proximate enough to be neighbor” (177). These writers, among others, remind people that complex problems are rarely solved quickly.

With a strong sense of neighborly love, outdoor communities will learn to thrive within Saint Paul, MN. Drawing from Milstein et al., Flores and Kuhn conclude in their paper “Latino Outdoors: Using Storytelling and Social Media to Increase Diversity on Public Lands,”

Public-land managers can include programming through which participants are open to sharing familial connections, communicating, using their own language, developing professional networking, and, most importantly, telling their stories of the outdoors, to create a broader communal sense of self or “sense of self-in-place.” (58)

This work should not be left only to land managers. Julie Clawson in *Everyday Justice: The Global Impact of Our Daily Choices* similarly urges all Christians to action stating, “We have scarred the earth and its people with our abuse of resources, and we should do our part to bring healing to those wounds” (77).

In the globalized world we live in, our actions are closely tied to the welfare of our neighbors. David Pellow points out in *Resisting Global Toxics: Transnational Movements for Environmental Justice*, “environmental harm will follow the path of least resistance from one location to the next” (236). In ignoring the injustice of our neighbors, whether it be inequity in

access to resources, experiences of racism, or other ways in which the evils of environmental racism can affect vulnerable groups, we are ignoring some of our most sacred responsibilities.

The immediate answer to how to make outdoor and conservation organizations more inclusive is to give the BIPOC community space to heal and be themselves. They know what they need and how to serve each other best. It is not helpful when white people (even well-intentioned ones) intrude on events intended for the BIPOC community. These spaces are not meant to be exclusionary. They are intended to create an encouraging space for people who often feel singled out in outdoor areas that tend to be dominated by white people (Shoffner).

It can be tempting for white outdoors people who care about social justice issues to become overenthusiastic and want to make personal connections with the BIPOC community by showing up at BIPOC events, yet this can be damaging. Many members of the BIPOC community say that the BIPOC events they attend outside are something they didn't know they needed until they had experienced it (Few, Ikuta, Shoffner, and Walton).

While the BIPOC community works on their healing, ideally, organizations led by majority white leadership should commit to transforming as well. The work of inclusion should not be left to a recruiter and a new hire, new volunteer, or new member. Instead, organizations should commit to fostering communities where all people can feel like they belong. Charles Vogl suggests in *The Art of Community* to identify the following aspects of a community: boundary, initiation, ritual, temple (or space), stories, symbols, and inner rings (or gaining leadership opportunities) (31). The organization *Love is King*, spells out the following items as a part of the "Guardians Creed" aiming to foster a safer environment for BIPOC people outdoors:

We believe in the strength of diversity in humanity and nature. We believe that discomfort and confusion are part of our journey towards equality and equity for

people of color. We believe in the adage of “safety in numbers.” People of Color are not in this alone. We believe that being present side by side with people of color in nature is a powerful symbol and sends a powerful nonverbal message of solidarity. We’re committed to be present in a calm mind, body and spirit at all times. We look for commonalities. We believe that people aren’t to blame. We don’t point fingers. We believe we can reframe the negative narratives and stereotypes of the past into positive affirmations today.

This framework can be helpful to white allies because many have not had the experience of fearing outdoor experiences because of choices made by other human beings.

Still, there is an inherent level of risk associated with most outdoor recreational activities. On a hike, miles away from Services or cell phone service, an injury or medical emergency, suddenly becomes a much more severe issue that if it had occurred in the city. The activities themselves often assume risks of drowning, falling, open wounds, hypothermia, dehydration, heat stroke, and other maladies. Failing to incorporate all people into outdoor programming means that certain knowledge and expertise are restricted from particular groups of people. This knowledge and expertise goes beyond enhancing the outdoor experience, but in certain situations could impact the severity of a bad condition. Furthermore, assuming all skill level and equipment are equal, in a given situation, this does not mean the same outdoor location in similar conditions is equally safe for all people.

If organizations are able to commit time and resources to foster the kind of community that welcomes and supports new people by giving them the opportunity to learn in a safe environment, all people in the organization will benefit as a result. Dorceta E. Taylor states, “The future of environmental justice is one in which people of color are recognized as equal partners

in environmental affairs, and it is one in which people of color can realize the adage coined at the outset of the environmental justice movement: ‘We speak for ourselves’” (Environmental Justice 4). Her words demonstrate the frustration many members of the BIPOC community feel around outdoor activities, yet also offer a vision where people of color are not only seen as equals but can demonstrate authority in their area of expertise.

Conclusion

Environmentalism and human welfare are inextricably linked. Pellow declares, “the ideological, cultural, psychological, and physical harm visited on people of color was supported and made possible by a system that did the same to nature” (38). The work of BIPOC leadership has made outdoor places a more welcoming place to be for the BIPOC community. If the outdoors community becomes more diverse, it will be due to the hard work these leaders and the community have done to create a safe space. Organizations can encourage the development of these safe spaces by seeking opportunities of copowerment with BIPOC leaders within their organizations and communities and ensuring enough investment is channeled towards the training and development of BIPOC leaders and programs. Yet, simply having BIPOC programs and leadership will not disappear the issues the community faces.

Finally, white-led organizations must do as much work internally as possible. As their organizations become more diverse, the right tools should be in place to support BIPOC employees and the unique struggles they may face. We cannot lean on the BIPOC community to do the work to address racism and inequities within our organizations. These issues are problems white-led organizations must look inward to address. If the environmental and outdoors community truly wishes to welcome all people, it must demonstrate a willingness to learn and change.

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APPENDIX

Proposal for a Mentorship and Gear Sharing Program Coordinated by the Saint Paul Parks and
Recreation Program

Madison McGeffers

Integrative Project I GLST 6936/5008

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Introduction

In 2020 Minneapolis and Saint Paul became the focus of social justice movements around the globe after the murder of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin. As a result, many organizations began examining how their work may contribute to systemic racism. Recreation and outdoor organizations were not exempt from this work. Environmentalism has contributed to racism and discrimination within the outdoors (Gosalvez). Many in the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) community have been excluded from outdoor groups and have faced overt racism.

White-dominated organizations must dismantle racist aspects of their organizations, commit to hiring BIPOC leaders, and support existing programs to address these issues. This proposal focuses on the last item. With an investment in the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation BIPOC programming, the Twin Cities will see a rise in BIPOC leaders who will understand best how to reach and integrate their community into the work of environmental organizations. In *Thank You for Being Late*, Thomas L. Friedman states, “As for embracing diversity, it is more vital than ever today for creating resilience in a changing environment” (343). It is critical to invest in these leaders to involve the next generation of environmentalists.

Executive Summary

The following proposal is for a new mentorship and gear sharing program to support BIPOC programs run through the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department. The program was designed to fulfill a need expressed by Asha Shoffner, the Environmental and Outdoor Education Program Coordinator with the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department.

The writer of this proposal is a white cis-gender female. She did not participate directly in the BIPOC programs but learned from interviewing program leaders and participants. She also

learned by teaching and volunteering at public outdoor events run through Saint Paul Parks and Recreation.

Impact of Racism Outdoors

In 2020 George Floyd pleaded the words, “I can’t breathe,” while white police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on his neck for over nine minutes. His recorded plea was heard worldwide as people filled the streets protesting for racial justice. For marginalized groups worldwide, these words represented more than police brutality. “I can’t breathe” spoke to the heart of the impacts of environmental racism (Friedman and Rosen).

One of the impacts of environmental racism is that outdoor spaces are not equally welcoming to all people. George Floyd’s death replays in the minds of many in the BIPOC community, especially within Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Safety becomes a significant concern in outdoor spaces where few people look like them. Yet, BIPOC participation and leadership are underrepresented within recreation and conservation spaces. The roots of this underrepresentation go back hundreds of years and result from a whitewashed version of American history.

Most Americans are familiar with stories of the American West. Students learn about Lewis and Clark, Daniel Boone, Davy Crocket, and other frontiersmen in elementary school. The history of environmentalism has often been told through a white masculine lens, leaving women and BIPOC stories in secondary or supporting roles or not shared at all. However, BIPOC leaders in the outdoors have been present throughout history.

As previously mentioned, Lewis and Clark are important figures in most American history textbooks. Yet, few students know the central role that Sacagawea or York, Clark’s slave, played in the expedition. Dorceta E. Taylor reminds her readers of this forgotten history in *The*

Rise of the American Conservation Movement. Taylor criticizes how conservationists idolize John Muir as the founder of conservationism, saying:

However, conservationists and preservationists have not similarly recognized and celebrated the journeys of Harriet Tubman, York, Biddy Mason, Sacagawea, Sara Winnemucca, or other people of color who undertook feats similar to or exceeding that of Muir's" (135).

The omission of BIPOC stories within U.S. history has resulted in a common impression that the outdoors is not a space where BIPOC groups belong, creating legitimate safety concerns that discourage members of the BIPOC community from accessing green spaces in the outdoors. BIPOC communities must see themselves represented in the history of environmental work and as leaders within the community.

However, due to the long history of racism and distrust perpetuated by many environmentally focused organizations, it is unreasonable to suddenly expect the BIPOC community to feel welcome within outdoor recreation. BIPOC-only spaces have been created, maintained, and supported to foster growth within a safe and supportive environment.

BIPOC program leaders and participants

The leaders of BIPOC programs in Saint Paul emphasize empowerment and inclusivity. In the book *Creative Confidence*, Tom and David Kelly write, "Leaders can't dictate culture, but they can nurture it" (200). The instructors of the BIPOC outdoors group in Saint Paul certainly embody this leadership style. Activities are started with introductions and land acknowledgments. These decisions are intended to set the stage for a welcoming atmosphere (Shoffner).

Anyone who is a part of the BIPOC programs can lead a program. Shoffner encourages creativity and leadership within the programs and uses grant money to pay folks since "BIPOC

folks have been asked to do free labor for far too long.” (Shoffner). She would like to see more of the BIPOC community represented as leaders in activities and organizations throughout the Twin Cities. Outdoor opportunities range from fishing, hiking, spoon carving, kayaking, skiing, climbing, and many more activities. These programs give people a chance to test out programs with a supportive group without worrying about microaggressions and overt racism (Few and Walton).

Most of the people interviewed as part of the research for this project said that they continued to come back to the BIPOC programs because of the community. Quentin Ikuta, a community leader, and participant said, “what truly made it accepting was the diversity. And that’s something that I didn’t know I needed in my life until I came back to the cities. And now I have that community.” Kim Zest similarly said that she did not know she would find such value in a BIPOC group until she became a part of it. Now she considers it an essential aspect of her life.

All of the people interviewed as participants or leaders of these BIPOC programs named safety a key reason they continued to return to these programs. However, they all had stories to share about a traumatic experience that occurred to them or a close friend while recreating outdoors. One traumatic event within Saint Paul made some leaders question if it was ethical to bring BIPOC groups into these parks, but each leader was encouraged by the growth of BIPOC outdoors groups within the Twin Cities. Finding ways to ensure the BIPOC community has safe and affordable access to outdoor activities is top of mind.

Project Proposal

To make outdoor experiences more accessible and address disparities within outdoor spaces in Saint Paul, MN, the following proposal outlines two programs for the Saint Paul Parks

and Recreation Department. The first program is a mentorship program, and the second is a gear sharing program. Asha Shoffner, the Environmental and Outdoor Education Program Coordinator, will manage both programs.

Shoffner focuses her work on inclusion (Shoffner). Shoffner identifies as a queer East Indian woman. She is passionate about getting people outside and trying new activities in a way that works well for them and their bodies. When asked, Shoffner stated, “the foundation of my work is still making sure it’s meaningful, accessible, and sustainable, and empowering.”

Goals and objectives

The goal of the mentorship and gear sharing program is to provide a resource to the BIPOC community to make outdoor recreation as accessible and sustainable as possible. Mentorships will ensure that knowledge is shared throughout the community without a staff person to create, promote and instruct formal programs. Patricia Winter, in her paper “Equity in Outdoor Recreation,” clearly outlines the need for these programs, stating:

Use of social networks again suggests the importance of understanding recreation patterns among known individuals and associates with whom one may recreate or share an experience, but more broadly, with one who may share information about places to go and likely enjoyable activities. Information from trusted sources is important as a leverage point for change in addressing inequities, where, for example, the desire to recreate with similar others may hinge in part on these others being aware of opportunities. (12)

These mentorships will build upon the strengths of the BIPOC community at times and locations convenient for the mentor and mentee. Meanwhile, the database of gear to check out within the community will lower financial and social barriers that often restrict

people from participating in recreational activities due to the inability to purchase or rent expensive equipment.

Mentoring

Informal mentorships have been a critical component of the BIPOC community in Saint Paul.

However, much of the investment has been from Shoffner and a few other key individuals. The time and energy commitment it takes to invest in the lives of others can lead to burnout. To create a sustainable method for sharing knowledge and skills among the community, it will be beneficial to add some structure to mentorship and provide an opportunity for many people to reinvest into this community. Hallmon et al. conclude in their study that formalized mentorships can help recruit women and people of color into the recreation field (44). Hall explains that among Native American communities, mentorships have been a part of the culture for a long time:

Native communities had an organized system for educating young people, based on generations of accumulated knowledge about the natural world. A complete experiential process, which included learning by doing, watching, listening, and experimenting under the caring mentorship of elders and extended family members, was well developed. (14)

The genocide of Native Americans and their culture in North America has made these traditions challenging to maintain. However, these values can be appreciated and reincorporated into mentorships. Upholding cultural values will be an essential part of building successful mentorships within this program.

Activities

The initial activities for the mentorship program would not look very different from what the program looks like today. The structure of the programs appears to be working well,

and survey results from the events report high satisfaction (Saint Paul Parks and Recreation). Current participants in BIPOC programming can be invited to be mentors. The opportunity will also be promoted through like-minded organizations and Facebook.

Once mentors have been selected, they may recruit their mentees or be matched with a mentee based on forms collected through the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Program (See Appendix B). Depending on schedules, mentors will be encouraged to meet with their mentees monthly or bi-monthly. They will also be encouraged to attend relevant programs or meet with other mentor pairs.

Timeline

Although mentoring has already taken place informally, a formal process will allow participants to focus on specific skills they are competent at or desire to learn. Depending on their schedule and interest in the program, they may be both a mentor and a mentee.

Collections of interest forms may start immediately, but the initial interest will likely be from people wanting to be mentored in a skill. If this is the case, program leaders may need to recruit mentors from some of their programs to sign up to become mentors. Because of the staff time it may take to match mentors and mentees, it may take one to three months for the program to gain traction. Once a mentee becomes proficient in a specific skill, they should also be encouraged to sign up to be a mentor so that the program has a steady influx of new mentors.

Evaluation Plan

With a single staff person to oversee this program, there is not much capacity to spend ample time on thorough evaluations. An open line of communication should be kept between mentors and mentees. Ideally, feedback should be given in person, and the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department should be consulted when issues arise. A survey will be sent quarterly to

mentors and mentees via SurveyMonkey to monitor the program's progress. Appendix B shows the hard copy interest form, but this form will also be made available online to expedite the data entry process. It is expected that most entries will be received online.

Gear Sharing

Gear Sharing is designed to make high-quality outdoor gear available to BIPOC groups at low or no cost. This opportunity will reduce barriers for people to participate in outdoor activities. In addition to financial barriers, it can be stressful when BIPOC individuals have to go through white gatekeepers to obtain the skills or equipment they need. Vanessa Walton, who leads nature-based BIPOC spoon carving workshops, spoke about how competitive white recreation groups can be during her interview. She said this competitiveness could make recreational groups feel unwelcoming because if someone doesn't have the best gear, experience, or knowledge, they are made to feel like they don't belong. Gear sharing is not meant to feed into this competitive culture but rather to provide access to gear that does not require stepping into stores that may overwhelm someone new to an activity or expose a person to microaggressions or overt racism.

Staff will not have significant time to devote to managing this program. Therefore, highly individualized items or items that require frequent maintenance, such as bikes, have not been included in the gear list. These items should be selected based on need, cost, and maintainability. Appendix C shows the hard copy of the gear exchange intake form, but this form will also be made available online to expedite the data entry process.

Activities

The gear sharing program has three main activities: check-out, check-in, and maintenance. Once the gear database is uploaded, individuals will sign up to check-in and out gear on a rolling basis. The borrower will need to provide exact dates for equipment to maintain a calendar. Check-in

and Check-out will be arranged at specific times to make this work easier on staff and lenders. An online sign-up program such as SignUpGenius.com should be used to manage the equipment. The gear will also be inspected regularly to ensure repairs are made, keeping the gear in good condition for the next borrower.

Timeline

The Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department has a small gear library available to check out. These items can immediately be logged into a spreadsheet and made available. Once additional funds become available, equipment will need to be purchased, logged, then made available for check-out. Most items will take about a month from the order date to become available. Gear that people are willing to loan within the community will also be added to the spreadsheet.

Budget

As demonstrated in Appendix A, figures one and two are an initial budget of gear requests. Figure one is a request for gear to start the program. The investment of about \$10,000 will provide a variety of equipment anticipated to get frequent use. The first list is also expected to be stored in a small indoor space.

Figure two lists items that would get frequent use but would not be practical to add initially because of a lack of storage. Once the initial gear list is purchased and the check-out process runs smoothly, items from figure two should also be considered. This investment will be a second phase of the project the following year. Renting a storage locker (included in the chart) should be considered, with proximity to the Parks and Recreation office having a high priority.

Evaluation Plan

A log will be kept for each item to track how often items are checked out and any issues or repairs needed when each item is returned. Quarterly, staff will check in with loaned their

equipment through the program to see what kind of equipment is getting used, how often and troubleshoot any issues that may arise.

Conclusion

While many white outdoors people believe that the outdoors is a place where all people can be themselves and explore what nature has to offer, for the BIPOC community, this feeling is not always shared. The stress of navigating unpredictable and sometimes dangerous experiences while deflecting microaggressions (or macroaggressions) can be significant barriers for those who identify as BIPOC and want to participate in outdoor activities.

While some organizations are doing their best to dismantle the racist structures within their organizations, there is still a significant amount of work within the outdoor recreational field to make the outdoors accessible for all people. Trust will not be built overnight. Shoffner suggests, “One really great way for outdoor orgs to support BIPOC communities is to give them money and resources to lead their own outdoor programming in their own communities.”

Supporting the mentorship and gear program with the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department is a good first step in supporting these communities.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Recommended Budgets for Gear

Figure 1

Requested Gear				
Item	Number	Est. Cost per piece	Est. Total Cost	Purpose
Backpacking packs	5	\$ 300.00	\$ 1,500.00	Packs of various brands and sizes for backcountry camping
Bivys	3	\$ 150.00	\$ 450.00	Single-person tents for light-weight camping
Three person tent	2	\$ 300.00	\$ 600.00	Lightweight backpacking tent for 1-2 people
Five person tent	2	\$ 450.00	\$ 900.00	Lightweight backpacking tent for 2-3 people
5+ person tent	1	\$ 600.00	\$ 600.00	Tent for camping with larger groups
Winter tent	1	\$ 500.00	\$ 500.00	Winter campint tent
Youth sleeping bags	4	\$ 200.00	\$ 800.00	Light-weight sleeping bags for younger campers
Women's sleeping bags	2	\$ 250.00	\$ 500.00	Lightweight sleeping bags for women
Mens sleeping bags	2	\$ 250.00	\$ 500.00	Lightweight sleeping bags for men
Hiking poles	4	\$ 100.00	\$ 400.00	Hiking poles for long steep hikes or anyone who may feel less stable on rough terrain
Tarps	4	\$ 45.00	\$ 180.00	Ground cover for day trips, tents, shade or for tarp shelters
Reflective paracord	10	\$ 20.00	\$ 200.00	Paracord for hanging tarps, drying clothing, or hanging hammock accessories; reflective so it can
Hammocks	5	\$ 80.00	\$ 400.00	Hammocks for day trips or backpacking
Tree straps	8	\$ 50.00	\$ 400.00	Tree-friendly straps for hanging hammocks
bug nets	3	\$ 1.00	\$ 3.00	Hammocks for overnight trips
Bike racks	2	\$ 100.00	\$ 200.00	Lightweight adaptable bike racks for transporting bikes
Life straw	5	\$ 80.00	\$ 400.00	Single person water filtration system
Gravity filter	2	\$ 150.00	\$ 300.00	Water filtration system for groups
Water proof bags of various sizes	10	\$ 25.00	\$ 250.00	Bags for water recreation activities or keeping sleeping bags dry during backpacking trips
stove	2	\$ 50.00	\$ 100.00	Single-person stove for backpacking
stove	1	\$ 100.00	\$ 100.00	Large backpacking stove
Coleman camp stove	1	\$ 150.00	\$ 150.00	Multi-burner stove for car camping
Total			\$ 9,433.00	

Figure 2

Future Investment				
Item	Number	Est. Cost per piece	Est. Total Cost	Purpose
Storage locker	12	\$ 250.00	\$ 3,000.00	Monthly and annual cost for one off-site storage locker for larger gear
Kayaks	4	\$ 800.00	\$ 3,200.00	2 river kyaks, 2 lake kyaks with paddles
Canoe	2	\$ 1,200.00	\$ 2,400.00	Light-weight canoes with paddles
Portage pack	1	\$ 300.00	\$ 300.00	
Total			\$ 8,900.00	

Appendix B: Mentor/Mentee Interest Form



Mentor/Mentee Interest Form

First Name:

Last Name:

I am interested in becoming a...

- Mentor (I would like to share my skills and knowledge.)
- Mentee (I would like to learn from/improve my skills in the following activity/activities)

Skills I can share (Check all that apply):

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Camping | <input type="checkbox"/> Hiking | <input type="checkbox"/> Sailing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fire Building | <input type="checkbox"/> Fishing | <input type="checkbox"/> Gardening |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shelter Building | <input type="checkbox"/> Winter Camping | <input type="checkbox"/> Trail maintenance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Climbing (top rope) | <input type="checkbox"/> Hammocking | <input type="checkbox"/> Birding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bouldering | <input type="checkbox"/> Biking | <input type="checkbox"/> Photography |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kayaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Horseback riding | <input type="checkbox"/> Skiing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Canoeing | <input type="checkbox"/> Hunting | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

Skills I would like to be mentored in (Check 1-3):

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Camping | <input type="checkbox"/> Hiking | <input type="checkbox"/> Sailing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fire Building | <input type="checkbox"/> Fishing | <input type="checkbox"/> Gardening |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shelter Building | <input type="checkbox"/> Winter Camping | <input type="checkbox"/> Trail maintenance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Climbing (top rope) | <input type="checkbox"/> Hammocking | <input type="checkbox"/> Birding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bouldering | <input type="checkbox"/> Biking | <input type="checkbox"/> Photography |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kayaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Horseback riding | <input type="checkbox"/> Skiing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Canoeing | <input type="checkbox"/> Hunting | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

Appendix C: Gear Exchange Intake Form



Gear Exchange Intake Form

First Name:

Last Name:

Best method of contact:

Email

Phone (call)

Text

Email

Phone

What item would you like to contribute to the community?

Are you requesting a fee for the use of this item?

Yes

No

If yes, what is the rate? \$ _____ **per** (Circle one): hour day week

Do you have any specific requests or requirements if your equipment is checked out?

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