Understanding Motivation of Students of Color in College Outdoor Programs

Christopher Bartram and Jennifer Iwerks

Appalachian State University
Abstract

With the continual racial diversification of our nation, outdoor recreation and education programs must learn to adapt in order to more effectively reach People of Color. Student involvement and engagement has proven to significantly increase retention rates for Students of Color. Outdoor programs has many benefits, including interpersonal and intrapersonal development, that could increase involvement and in turn retention of Students of Color on college campuses. Over the course of eight interviews with Students of Color on three college campuses, we discovered five main themes including compassion and community, motivations and gains, family and previous life experiences, international backgrounds, and climbing as an introduction to outdoor recreation.

Introduction

The population of the United States is becoming increasingly diverse, which correlates directly to significantly more racially diverse college campuses. The United States demographics show that 38% of the nation’s population identify as People of Color (United States Census Bureau, 2015). This increase in racial diversity is not represented in proportion in outdoor recreation programs; only 30% of those who recreate outdoors are People of Color (The Outdoor Foundation, 2014). This shows that outdoor recreation is doing a disservice to participants by not effectively adapting programming to the needs of the ever-changing population demographics. Although there are various ideas about what the term “outdoor recreation” means, professionals in field typically define it as “recreation experiences that result from recreation activities that occur in and depend on the natural environment,” (Moore & Driver, 2005, p. 11). For the purpose of this research, this definition is used to determine what activities are a part of outdoor recreation.
recreation. The outdoor industry is in need of creating an intentional cultural shift in operation to create more equitable access for People of Color and establish programming designed for a racially diverse population.

Many college outdoor programs are looking to make diversity a larger part of their culture and environment. There is significant data indicating that People of Color participate at a drastically lower level than other groups in outdoor pursuits (The Outdoor Foundation, 2014). This is a trend that is also true for college outdoor programs. The benefits of outdoor recreation are numerous and include enhanced personal development, as well as increased mental and physical health (California State Parks, 2005). For that reason, encouraging outdoor recreational activities is important for everyone. Given that importance, examining the motivations of Students of Color in their participation in outdoor programs and understanding how these students become involved could lead to further encouragement for more students to participate.

Students of Color are students that identify with races or ethnicities others than White - Black, Hispanic/Latino, Native American/Indigenous People, Asian, or multi-racial. These students are a minority population in predominantly White institutions - institutions with 50% or more students that identify as White (Brown and Dancy, 2010). As Students of Color, they have specific needs in order to feel supported on campus. Without the proper support and environment, these students will not persist at universities (Quaye & Harper, 2015). However, there is numerous research on the positive impact leadership and involvement can have on the college experiences of Students of Color, decreasing their chances of dropout and increasing the chance of graduation (Gloria, Robinson, Hamilton, & Wilson, 1999; Guiffrida, 2004; Quaye & Harper, 2015).
Most current research focuses on what barriers keep People of Color from outdoor recreation, and the typical findings include fear of accidents and personal harm, cost of activities, and lack of access to activities (Johnson, Bowker, & Cordell, 2001). These are barriers that all people may face, making these barriers less enlightening than originally anticipated. Current research asks People of Color that participate in outdoor recreation infrequently (once or twice yearly) why they are not more involved, instead of looking at what does inspire and motivate People of Color to get outdoors. Outdoor Recreation Participation Reports from the last several years have reported that People of Color participate in outdoor recreation less than their White counterparts; however, the People of Color that do participate spend more time outdoors than the White individuals that participate in outdoor recreation (The Outdoor Foundation, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014). This leads to our important questions: for individuals who identify as People of Color, what motivates them to participate in outdoor recreation? Do family and social relationships, as well as background culture (including socioeconomic status and racial makeup of childhood community), influence outdoor involvement? If so, does this differ by identified race?

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the motivations behind outdoor participation of Students of Color at predominantly White institutions of higher education in the Southeast. Through our research, we developed an understanding of the initial motivations of Students of Color to become involved in outdoor programs. This understanding could help college outdoor programs to further encourage Students of Color to become involved, which would help to create a more inclusive environment. Inclusive environments are recognized as spaces where all students feel safe, comfortable, welcomed, and supported, regardless of any identity they hold (Department of Multicultural Services at Texas A&M University). This is
something that many areas of college campuses are working to improve; outdoor programs is no exception.

Our research goal is to better understand how to encourage Students of Color to be involved in college outdoor programs. We explored this through in-depth interviews with students that are employed by or volunteer with college outdoor programs in Southeastern universities. We wanted to increase our awareness of the experiences that Students of Color have in college outdoor recreation as well as gain a more thorough understanding of their cultural background in terms of motivation for participation. The questions that shaped our research include: What are the motivations behind outdoor participation for Students of Color at predominantly White institutions in the Southeast? Do culture and the racial background of one’s home community influence outdoor involvement? What impact (if any) does socioeconomic status have on outdoor recreation participation at the college level? What do students perceive as personal gains through involvement in outdoor programs? By looking at these questions in the context of college students, college outdoor program professionals will be able to gain a better understanding of how Students of Color get involved in outdoor recreation. This, in turn, may inspire changes in college outdoor programs to include efforts that can successfully encourage Students of Color to be more involved in outdoor programs and outdoor recreation.

**Literature Review**

**Importance of Outdoor Recreation**

Outdoor recreation has a wide variety of benefits including but not limited to, the development of interpersonal, intrapersonal, ecosystemic, and ekistic relationships (Priest & Gass, 2005). This ecosystemic and ekistic growth allows an individual to develop a better understanding of nature and the human impact on the environment (Priest & Gass, 2005). The
interpersonal and intrapersonal benefits are crucial to the psychological development of an individual. Intrapersonal development gained through outdoor pursuits include confidence, self-concept, willingness to engage in risk, leadership, logical reasoning, and self-reflection. Interpersonal development involves increased cooperation, ability to trust others and to share decisions, enhance conflict resolution and problem solving, and development of leadership (Priest & Gass, 2005). Furthermore, outdoor recreation is said to improve interpersonal communication skills (Priest & Gass, 2005). Increasing diversity within college outdoor programs could further improve communication skills by including cross-cultural communication as a skill to be gained. The significant development possible from outdoor experiences is too important to leave any population underrepresented. Every person deserves the same opportunity for this crucial cognitive and psychosocial development; therefore college outdoor programs need to find ways to increase participation of Students of Color.

Not only does outdoor recreation have positive effects on a person’s health, well-being, and social skills, research has also shown that outdoor recreation and leisure is directly correlated with environmental views. Ewert, Place, & Sibthorp (2005) found that if people are exposed at an early age to outdoor experiences they will have a more positive environmental view later in life. The following experiences were the most significantly identified through the study: direct experiences; formal education, media, negative environmental events; and involvement in outdoor organizations (Ewert, et al. 2005). These researchers coded the early-life outdoor recreation experiences that students describe into three categories: appreciative, mechanized (motorized), and consumptive (Ewert et al., 2005).

Additional research has also suggested a connection between childhood outdoor experiences and preferences to participate in outdoor recreation later in life. Childhood
experiences build an individual's experiential knowledge base and in turn develops appreciation and value for outdoor experiences (Szagun and Pavlov, 1995). Research by Bixler, Floyd, and Hammitt (2002) also demonstrates a clear relationship between childhood outdoor play and later preferences for outdoor recreation. Socialization, the process of learning social norms and values, happens throughout life, although is heavily influenced during childhood (O’Neil, 2011). If People of Color do not experience outdoor recreation or see other People of Color recreating outside, they could be socialized to believe that is not an activity they should participate in, based on their racial culture. The lack of early involvement in outdoor recreation that is apparent in People of Color could inhibit their motivations towards outdoor recreation later in life. The differences in culture based on race could influence the early outdoor experiences that People of Color have, and in turn could be part of the reason there is less involvement in outdoor recreation from People of Color. The process of socialization continues throughout life, and changes as status and roles change (O’Neil, 2011). College represents a time of status and role change, which could offer people a chance to change the norms they subscribe to. This is why college could be a time when students that were not previously involved in outdoor recreation choose to explore this type of activity.

**Benefits of Racial Diversity in Predominantly White Spaces**

Racial diversity has been unsuccessfully sought after within the world of outdoor education. The Association for Experiential Education (AEE), which is one of the most significant professional organizations for outdoor educators, has a 30-year history with racial diversity. Over the years, it has transitioned from concerns over the racial and cultural differences of leaders and participants, to diversity training, to how to combat tokenism and power dynamics within outdoor adventure groups (Warren, 2005). The changes and
improvements in the focus on diversity has been largely motivated by the desires of the members of AEE to see more diversity and social justice advocacy in the outdoor industry (Warren, 2005). The growth and development that occurs for participants in outdoor education and recreation parallels many of the benefits of an environment with increased racial diversity. Chang, Denson, Saenz, and Misa (2006) found that benefits of racial diversity include but are not limited to “enhanced self-confidence, motivation, intellectual and civic development, educational aspirations, cultural awareness, and commitment to racial equity” (p. 432). Additionally, many college outdoor programs are seated within the area of student development, and programs should recognize that increased cross-cultural interactions has proved to be one of the most effective avenues for student development. However, these educational benefits of diversity are not simply gained through increasing the presence of Students of Color in traditionally white spaces. In order to fully receive the benefits of diversity, programs must create a culture that values diversity and increases levels of engagement through intentionally focused activities. This culture should focus on facilitating an increased quality of cross-racial interaction, rather than basic interaction (Chang, et al., 2006).

While it is important to have diverse groups of people, and recognizing those differences is a step in the right direction, social justice takes diversity from recognition to advocacy. Social justice is defined in this study as the promotion of a just society by valuing diversity and equity for people of all identities (Robinson, 2016). This requires more than just inviting underrepresented populations on an outdoor adventure trip. Social justice involves education on and advocacy for the experiences, culture, discrimination, and history of groups that have been or are underrepresented populations to reach a place of equity for all. This takes time and energy, but ultimately can lead to an inclusive environment where people of all identities feel safe,
Some areas of social justice training and education include the use of inclusive language, cross-cultural communication skills, how to be an ally, social justice conflicts and conflict management, definitions of terms, effective listening, and unpacking privilege (Warren, 2002).

Although social justice in outdoor education is gaining popularity, many times the efforts taken by outdoor organizations are not critical enough of the privilege embedded in outdoor culture, and include shallow attempts to make changes with simple recognition of the need for diversity without really looking at the needs for these underrepresented populations (Warren et al., 2014).

Since outdoor education methods “cultivate a climate of safety and comfort, for people’s feelings to be heard and respected, to choose supported challenges, and for individual differences to be valued, they offer an excellent methodological fit with learning about social justice” (Warren, 2005, p. 95). These similarities in learning environments mean that by improving the social justice within the outdoor education field, there could be an ideal setting for social justice education for participants in outdoor recreation, and an improved experience for People of Color.

Although the outdoor education field is a great environment for social justice, there have not been large changes within the field to promote social justice education. One way to create a more diversity rich community is to intentionally employ People of Color. However, if a Person of Color does decide to work in the outdoor field, they would find very quickly that there is a lack of social justice education within the field. Social justice education leads to a feeling of inclusivity of all races. With a more socially conscious community, more Students of Color would feel comfortable participating in outdoor programming. Very few outdoor education programs, texts, or trainings have any information on social justice and working with people of diverse identities (Warren, 2002). The lack of education in social justice for outdoor
professionals and leaders contributes to the pervasiveness of White culture in outdoor recreation, something seen on a collegiate level as well. This affects the environment that People of Color are in as participants or as employees because their cultural needs are not represented in the field, leaving them with few reasons to participate.

**History and Constraints of People of Color in Outdoor Recreation**

People of Color have a long, complicated history in outdoor recreation that shapes our understanding of some of the motivations and barriers that may still be affecting participation today. Glave and Stove (2006) articulate the history of Blacks in outdoor recreation, suggesting that in the early 1900s “African Americans continued to believe that outdoor recreation in parks and wilderness served as a much-needed antidote to unhealthy life in the ghetto, especially the enervating vice and artificial commercialized leisure to which African American youths were disproportionately exposed,” (p. 74). Although Blacks saw outdoor recreation as beneficial and desirable, the racial tensions of America in the early and mid 1900s pushed Blacks from these activities.

Glave and Stoll (2006) use the example of Chicago in the 1900s as a compelling illustration of the many of the issues Blacks faced in outdoor recreation. Blacks in Chicago were continuously segregated during this time and due to the undesirable and unhealthy atmosphere of their neighborhoods, many retreated to outdoor recreation spaces. With the increase in the Black population in Chicago, the White individuals became defensive of their recreation spaces, including beaches, playgrounds, baseball diamonds, forest preserves, and wilderness parks, and restricted Black access to these areas (Glave & Stoll, 2006). Gangs of White youth worked with local politicians and park officials to enforce segregation, and assaulted any Black person for entering what they deemed as “White” recreation spaces. This segregation and racial tension rose
intensely, eventually culminating in a murder of a Black child at Lake Michigan and led to the 1919 Chicago race riot, which lasted a week and included the death and injury of hundreds of Black individuals (Glave & Stoll, 2006).

Historically Blacks did become involved in outdoor recreation, even after the intense racism and violence that occurred. Blacks in Chicago continued to develop a culture of outdoor recreation, eventually establishing 46 Black scout troops and several Black youth summer camps (Glave & Stoll, 2006). This history of racial discrimination and harm in outdoor recreation may have caused a distaste for many Blacks, leading them to pull away from the outdoors, despite these race-specific outdoor initiatives. With the development of the Ku Klux Klan the wilderness became an increasingly White environment. Photographs of People of Color being hung in the woods and stories of violence left a lasting impression on the community (Fletcher, 2014). These events are most likely still considered a constraint to People of Color becoming involved in outdoor recreation. Metcalf, Burns, & Greafe (2013) found in their research that, "one constraint item in the interpersonal domain, 'because of cultural reasons', was significantly more constraining for non-traditional users than for traditional users" (p. 36), showing that for People of Color that are not already involved in the outdoors, culture is part of the reason why.

The constraints People of Color face to participate in outdoor recreation are examined in current and previous research. This research is limited, and the constraints generally found are not usually different from constraints that all populations face. Johnson, Bowker, and Cordell (2001) found that People of Color that do not frequently participate in outdoor recreation view personal safety as a larger constraint than other people. Further research on constraints People of Color encounter towards outdoor recreation has been completed, however it focuses on people that do participate in the outdoor activities, leading to questions on the applicability of the
research (Metcalf et al., 2013). Studies that focus on the correlation of outdoor recreation and racial diversity within the university setting are extremely limited, which leaves collegiate programs with little information on how to increase participation from Students of Color. Past research has looked at underrepresented populations participation in college outdoor programs (Schwartz & Corkery, 2011), and while this data opens up the field to further investigations in this area, it lacks in-depth information regarding motivating factors. Additionally, Schwartz and Corkery’s (2011) research focuses on a single university, and limits its focus to the constraints of People of Color in outdoor recreation rather than the motivation and backgrounds of students that are involved in college outdoor programs.

Research completed by Metcalf et al. (2013) intended to understand obstacles that were leading People of Color to spend less time in the outdoors than Whites. By categorizing the obstacles into interpersonal, intrapersonal, and structural constraints, they give insight into how constraints are affecting People of Color: social barriers, personal barriers, or physical barriers. Some of the constraints that were rated highest for non-participation among People of Color were desiring other recreation opportunities (intrapersonal), wanting to spend more time with family (interpersonal), and prioritizing education and employment (structural). Overall the most significant constraints fell into the structural domain, which is particularly important for marketing and management strategies to serve a variety of populations. If outdoor recreation professionals understand motivations, barriers, highlights, and criticism of their own system they can effectively improve it to serve people of all racial backgrounds (Metcalf et al., 2013).

After assessing constraints, Metcalf et al. (2013) discussed negotiation strategies to gauge how individuals combat these constraints. Negotiation strategies were separated into four categories; time, skills, interpersonal, and financial. These negotiation strategies coincide with
understanding the constraints People of Color face. “. . . Constraints did not play as significant of a role. The most influencing factors were negotiation strategies and motivations” (Metcalf et al. 2013, p. 31). The most significant negotiation strategies were trying to plan ahead for recreation (time management) and finding people to recreate with (interpersonal). Developing this understanding of how to coordinate efforts to overcome constraints will help all outdoor programs to more effectively increase involvement of People of Color (Metcalf et al., 2013).

One factor that would help increase participation for People of Color is a rise in outdoor leaders of Color. Not only is there a lack of participation in outdoor recreation from People of Color, but there is also a lack of leadership in outdoor recreation and activities from People of Color. Most programs looking for outdoor leaders require expensive training and certifications for someone to be hired, and these positions are not considered high paying and rely on obtaining seasonal contracts. It would be difficult for someone from a low-income background to be able to pay the initial fees for the required training, let alone decide to pursue employment in a field that fails to provide consistent work (Warren, 2002). However, this lack of outdoor leadership from People of Color means that outdoor recreationalists who identify as People of Color have few role models in the outdoor world that they can relate to. This makes it difficult for someone to imagine pursuing leadership or a career in this field.

**Culture and Outdoor Recreation**

When assessing the reasoning behind participation in outdoor recreation, an important factor that is often overlooked is culture. For our research purposes, culture is seen as the way of life of a group of people, including behaviors, beliefs, symbols, motivations, and skills, that are passed down generation by generation (Texas A&M University). Carr and Williams (1993) explore this component in their research where they identify three major dimensions that
contribute to Hispanic participation in outdoor recreation. The first dimension is ancestral group membership, which assesses individual heritage and country of origin. The second dimension is generational status; this is correlated with socioeconomic status, education level, and amount of family members within the United States (Carr & Williams, 1993). The third dimension is acculturation, which encompasses the decrease in an individual's traditional cultural traits and acquisition of new cultural traits. Results from Carr and Williams (1993) show that regardless of ancestry, visitors chose to spend time in outdoor locations in order to spend time with their family. Additionally, site choice was often dependent on other users - if the Hispanic individual was more acculturated, they would be more willing to go to an outdoor area with more Whites, while less acculturated individuals would often chose a site with more Hispanic individuals (Carr & Williams, 1993).

The pressure to acculturate, or change one’s culture to adapt to the dominant culture, is a problem for Students of Color at predominantly White institutions and can cause more stress on these students (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Within the field of college student development, programs are designed to create a space where individuals can come together and be with others who have similar culture, traits, and interests as themselves, which can hopefully help an individual hold on to their unique culture and background in a predominantly White setting. Carr and Williams’ research shows that Hispanic families use outdoor recreation as a place to come together and appreciate their culture. Outdoor programs at universities could embrace this knowledge and find ways to pair with Students of Color organizations to establish programming that fits their needs. Our research expands on how People of Color use outdoor recreation within their culture - by learning about the background of Students of Color that are
involved in college outdoor programs, we found cultural background connections that may be used to improve college outdoor recreation to fit the cultural needs of these students.

These cultural connections could be a motivating factor for Students of Color to stay and continue their education at an institution. Research states that many Students of Color at predominantly White institutions perceive the environment to be unwelcoming and even hostile, and this racial tension has been shown to be an important factor in students’ decision to dropout or leave higher education (Gloria et al., 1999). One of the most successful ways to combat this is for Students of Color to create a social support group of friends, peers, and mentors (Griffin, 1991; Kimbrough, Molock, & Walton, 1996). This community can help students deal with and counteract the feelings of discomfort on campus by assisting students in becoming socially integrated in the college environment. Additional research found that many Students of Color pursue leadership and campus involvement not just for themselves, but also for the benefit of the group. Students of Color highlighted the importance of the team or group relying on one another (Arminio et al., 2000). From these studies, we can see that a supportive community that focuses on the reliability and interdependence of this community is important to the success and integration of Students of Color on predominantly White campuses.

While a supportive community is often a part of outdoor recreation, to outsiders this may not always be apparent. Frequently outdoor recreation has a focus on individual growth and competition. Outdoor recreation is grounded in theories of growth and development occurring when programs intentionally increase risk perception through adventure activities (Robinson, 1992). This method has proved to promote personal growth and develop physical and technical competence in hard skills such as backpacking (Gilbertson, Bates, McLaughlin, & Ewert, 2006). This risk taking process of growth and development may not be effective for all races. In Robert
Fletcher’s book *Romancing the Wild*, Fletcher (2014) argues that risk taking adventure sports are aligned with the cultural values of the White upper-middle class. These individuals often work in desk jobs that are mentally intensive, and they receive an escape from their sedentary lifestyle through these adventure experiences (Fletcher, 2014). Although many People of Color also work in similar settings, the concept of risk could be perceived differently, causing it to seem less desirable. For example, a Person of Color often will feel they engage in more risk due to daily discrimination and fear of harm. Therefore, many People of Color do not feel a desire to engage in any additional risk.

Current research is beginning to explore what risk and adventure look like in outdoor recreation, and what those ideas mean to People of Color. According to Rose and Paisley (2012), more recent research related to race and outdoor recreation, leisure, and experiential education has begun to look at the “symbolic and material systems that both privilege and oppress” (p. 141) racial groups in these outdoor settings. This includes hearing the experiences of People of Color as well as looking into the White culture that outdoor recreation is submerged in. Racial privilege is evident in outdoor recreation, even in the definition of adventure - struggling to find a place to sleep, food to eat, and a safe place to rest (Warren et al., 2014). “The archetypal adventure embodies three more essential characteristics: uncertainty, novelty, and suffering” (Fletcher, 2014, p. 33). Although affluent participants may see this as an adventure, people of lower socioeconomic status see this as an extension of their day-to-day risk. Warren et al. (2014) mentions that the lack of People of Color within leadership in outdoor recreation and education means that there are no mentors for participants of Color, but it also keeps their voice from the administrative roles, perhaps contributing to the lack of general understanding of other racial perspectives within outdoor recreation and its facilitation. Activities, questions and debriefings,
and locations of outdoor recreation all center around White culture and values, making it more difficult for People of Color to connect and feel comfortable in these experiences (Warren et al., 2014).

**Method**

We approached this research using a qualitative, case study methodology. We conducted in-depth interviews with all consenting student staff or volunteers that identify as People of Color at multiple universities’ outdoor programs. Our interviews centered around students’ experiences in the outdoors before college and since beginning college, motivations and gains from their outdoor involvement, and demographic information surrounding their culture, including race, nationality, and socioeconomic status.

Each institution included in this study has a strong outdoor program department. These institutions offer optional extended, outdoor orientation programs; weekend trips such as rock climbing, backpacking, canoeing, and stand-up paddle boarding; and instructor or leader development programs for students.

**Research Site Information**

We interviewed college students located at three institutions in the Southeast. We conducted research at Appalachian State University as well as two additional schools in the Southeastern United States similar to Appalachian. The additional schools we conducted research at were selected by identifying schools similar to Appalachian in student population, racial demographics, and location. The schools we conducted research at were determined based on IRB approval and interested student staff that identified as People of Color. Over a month timeline, we had outdoor programs professionals send our marketing email to student employees
and student volunteers two times, and we sent a follow-up email to professionals to ensure students received our marketing emails.

Appalachian State University, the first research site, is located in the town of Boone, North Carolina. There is a vast array of outdoor activities in the area, making Outdoor Programs a thriving department at the university. Appalachian State is a predominately White institution with 17,932 students, 14% of which are People of Color (Appalachian State University). With People of Color making up such a small part of the population at Appalachian State, it is imperative that these students get involved and find a supportive community in order for them to be successful in college. By interviewing the Students of Color that are employed at Appalachian State’s Outdoor Programs, we explored what has makes this a community of support for these students, and how the community can improve to become more inclusive and supportive for Students of Color. It is important to create an inclusive environment to ensure that these students feel welcomed and supported. The lack of racial diversity on Appalachian State’s campus makes this difficult at the outset, and without talking with students to discover what their needs are, Outdoor Programs will have even more trouble creating a racially inclusive space for students.

George Mason University, the second research site, is primarily located in the town of Fairfax, Virginia. George Mason is approximately an hour and a half outside of Shenandoah National Park providing the university access to a wide variety of outdoor activities. George Mason is a predominantly White university with 32,562 students (George Mason University).

University of North Carolina at Charlotte, the final research site, is located in the urban setting of Charlotte, North Carolina. The Charlotte campus is two hours away from the Blue Ridge Mountains and an hour away from smaller programming areas such as Crowders Mountain. University of North Carolina at Charlotte has a student population of 27,983, 60% of
which identify as White, categorizing the university as a predominantly White institution (University of North Carolina at Charlotte).

**Recruitment**

In order to answer our research questions, we interviewed students who identify as People of Color and are employed or volunteer at their institution's outdoor programs. We received IRB approval from seven institutions in the Southeast to conduct research with their students; however survey contact indicated that only three of the seven institutions had interested Students of Color in their outdoor programs department. In fact, two institutions that we contacted with our survey responded that they currently had no Students of Color on staff at their outdoor programs department. With this information in mind, we interviewed eight student staff in total. We used a purposeful sample technique by locating participants through contact with outdoor programs at our research institutions and inquiring about their student staff population who identify as People of Color. We requested to have our advertising materials sent out to the entire student staff at their outdoor program, asking for students that identify as a Person of Color to contact us about our research and to set up an interview (see Appendix C for email advertisement). Students interested in talking with us completed a survey, identifying their availability and confirming their involvement with outdoor programs and racial identity. Based on student responses to the survey, we contacted students via email to set up in-person interviews. We awarded a $20 Visa gift card to each participant as an incentive to increase student participation.

**Materials**

We conducted individual interviews based on an interview protocol when asking students about their experiences. We used a semi-structured interview protocol. Our questions were open-
ended but directed towards our research interest (Creswell, 2012). Using interviews allowed us to explore the central phenomenon of issues involving the motivations of Students of Color to participate in college outdoor programs. Additionally, using open-ended interviews allowed us to obtain more in-depth information guided by these students’ experiences (Creswell, 2012).

Our interview questions aligned with the elements shown to affect outdoor recreation represented in our literature review. These questions centered around the background of students, including their family’s racial makeup and culture, previous involvement with outdoor recreation, and hometown environment; their motivation behind being involved with their college outdoor program; and their experiences through being involved with college outdoor programs. The interview protocol was vetted by a panel of professionals who work as researchers and practitioners in student development, education, recreation, outdoor programs, and diversity in higher education.

In addition to our interview questions in the interview protocol (Appendix B), we used an email advertisement (Appendix C) and an informed consent form (Appendix A) during our research. We also used $20 Visa gift cards as incentives for students to participate. Each student that was interviewed received a gift card.

Procedure

The first step in our research process was to obtain institutional IRB. We received our IRB approval from Appalachian State University with exemption status based on the fact that there is minimal risk in our study and we are conducting anonymous interviews. Our next step was to reach out to other institutions about cooperation. This involved contacting the IRB office at seven other institutions in the Southeast. Once receiving IRB approval from those institutions, we contacted professionals in their outdoor programs with our marketing materials. Two of the
seven institutions indicated not having Students of Color on their outdoor program staff, and of the other five, three had students respond to our interest survey. We set up in-person interviews with the students that included both researchers, and for each interview had students complete the informed consent form. Each interview lasted between 15 and 45 minutes. We audio recorded the interviews with informed consent (Appendix A). Once the interviews were completed, the recordings were transcribed verbatim. After interviewing students, we conducted a member check with the students by sending participants the themes pulled from transcriptions to check for accuracy. This increases the validity of this research. Participants are ensured anonymity through the use of pseudonyms.

Consent forms were kept in a secure locked office, separate from other data. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim within a reasonable time and destroyed. The transcriptions were also kept in a locked office. Since there are a limited number of Students of Color who are staff at each university, there is potential for connection between the students interviewed and the school they are attending. For this reason, we did not publish the name of students in our study to limit any attempts to connect students to their institutions. We also did not give exact profiles of students interviewed in an attempt to give students more anonymity.

We addressed potential ethical issues through several considerations. Both interviewers identify as White, which can make interviewees less comfortable answering difficult questions about race. In addition, it can be challenging for the White interviewers to understand the perspectives of the Students of Color. We combated these challenges by addressing our race to participants early on, and requesting the interviewees approval of our transcription to ensure our understanding of their perspective. One researcher also has a vested interest in outdoor programs and the growth of the outdoor industry as a whole. Therefore, inherent bias may play a role in
interpreting interviews and categorizing student thought. One research is not heavily involved in outdoor programs, and by independently analyzing and coding transcripts first, bias was limited. We protected the identities of the low number of participants in our study by coding participant names in our research. We conducted interviews in a private location, outside of the student's workplace, where we could ensure complete privacy and no disturbance of the site (Creswell, 2014). While we looked at racial identity and experience, we recognize that all participants have intersecting identities, some of which may include other underrepresented identities in the outdoor industry. This will change their experiences. We considered this while constructing our interview questions, and while we know you cannot separate identities and experiences fully, we focused specifically on experiences related to racial identity.

Analysis

Once transcribed, we conducted a content analysis to determine themes. Our first look through for themes was conducted individually - each researcher independently reviewed each interview transcript for themes or common concepts. Common concepts were searched for by using common words. Common wording or experiences were then classified as themes. After the initial reading, researchers consulted together to determine themes. Researchers then used these themes and patterns to find commonalities between student experiences discussed in interviews. Once themes were determined, they were compared to previous research represented in our literature review to determine connections between this study and past work.

Once interviews were transcribed, the analysis process revealed five major themes. These themes were determined based on the codes represented in Table 1. Codes were created based on common wording or phrases found in interviews, and these codes were grouped by relations to create common themes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Codes Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Compassion and Community                    | ➢ Compassion and Caring for People  
 ➢ Community                                                               |
| Family and Previous Outdoor Experience      | ➢ Recreated with Family and Friends Outdoors  
 ➢ Comfort with Outdoors  
 ➢ White Parental Influence  
 ➢ Early Childhood Experience  
 ➢ High School Outdoor Experience            |
| Motivations and Gains                       | ➢ Mentorship  
 ➢ Education and Skill Building  
 ➢ Professional Development  
 ➢ Challenging Oneself  
 ➢ Introspective Learning  
 ➢ Personal Growth  
 ➢ Physical and Mental Health                |
| International Culture                       | ➢ International Parents  
 ➢ International Childhood                                                |
| Onset of Involvement                        | ➢ Onset of Involvement                                                    |
Results

Demographics

As stated above, we were able to interview eight students at three different institutions. These participants represented seven different racial identities, three different nationalities, and eight different fields of study. Their age ranged from 19 to 25, and half of participants identified as female and half identified as male. This information is completely self-reported from participants, as is displayed in Table 2. We recorded all demographic information as worded by the participants - meaning that any category such a race or nationality is in the wording of the participants and was not re-categorized to fit a specific standard such as the United States Census.
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Participants Interviewed at Universities</th>
<th>Racial Identities of Participants</th>
<th>Nationalities of Participants</th>
<th>Age Range of Participants</th>
<th>Gender of Participants</th>
<th>Major of Participants</th>
<th>Social Class</th>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appalachian State University (4)</td>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>American (6)</td>
<td>19 - 25</td>
<td>Male (4)</td>
<td>Civil Engineering</td>
<td>Low and then Middle</td>
<td>Suburban (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Mason University (2)</td>
<td>Indian (2)</td>
<td>Japanese and American</td>
<td>Female (4)</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Middle (4)</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of North Carolina at Charlotte (2)</td>
<td>Half-Arab, Half-Japanese</td>
<td>Kenyan and American</td>
<td>International Studies</td>
<td>International Studies</td>
<td>Upper Middle Class</td>
<td>Urban/Urban Sprawl (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East African</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Psychology (3)</td>
<td>Middle and then High (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rican, Italian, African American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Management Information Systems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black and White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White and Filipino</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Recreation Management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Exercise Science</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After transcribing and individually coding interviews, we worked together to determine five major themes in our research. These themes represent connections between the students interviewed, and are supported by the literature review. The five themes identified are compassion and community, family and previous outdoor experience, motivations and gains, international culture, and onset of involvement.

**Compassion and Community**

When conducting interviews, we continuously noticed a theme of individuals joining outdoor programs because of the community it provided. While coding our interviews we discovered that every participant interviewed emphasized the importance of community in their rationale for being a part of outdoor programs. In addition, many of the participants articulated that the outdoor community was especially authentic, welcoming, and kind. When asked about biggest personal gains from outdoor programs, one participant was quick to answer "meeting so many great people" (Participant C), and another said "definitely the word community is like the first thing that comes to mind. I think that the community is very very cool" (Participant H). Students explained that being in the outdoors fosters a deeper connection with their peers which helps enhance the community in outdoor programs. One participant mentioned “it was just nice to see that everyone could get together regardless of how different everyone was on the trip and have fun. I think that’s probably why I stuck around, that positive energy” (Participant G).

Five of the eight participants interviewed also described the caring nature of people in the outdoor community, and that much of their excitement for being involved was their ability to provide care and compassion to other students. One research participant, when discussing why they became a trip leader in their institution's outdoor programs, stated “I wanted to start again and be a better role model and leader that people can learn from and be someone that can give
back to the community and that's what I saw in this group” (Participant B). Another participant who worked as a trip leader for an outdoor orientation program through outdoor programs mentioned their most positive experience as "developing a relationship with the students . . .
knowing them outside the classroom environment helped me connect more with them” (Participant D).

**Family and Previous Outdoor Experience**

Throughout our interviews we identified five codes that were contributing factors to the socialization of participants in our research - all of which fall under the theme of family and previous outdoor experience. One of the contributing pieces to our theme was family involvement in the outdoors. We discovered that seven of the eight interviewees both participated in some form of outdoor recreation with their families as a child, ranging from nature walks, bike rides, and dancing to camping, surfing, and backpacking. These early childhood experiences develop a sense of comfort in the outdoors, which multiple students identified as an important factor in having a positive outdoor experience. One participant in particular, when articulating his most positive experience in outdoor programs, mentioned a climbing trip. When asked what made that trip so positive, they said “that was like the first time I was like used to climbing a lot. And the trip went really smooth” (Participant G).

In addition, all eight of the students interviewed participated in outdoor recreation prior to coming to college. Their experience levels varied, but all articulated spending time outdoors as either young children or in high school. One student articulated the lack of socialization for most People of Color in relation to the outdoors through their statement, “if it wasn’t so looked at as a White people thing or like a um, other people thing, just not my people thing. If it was, it was more encouraged. I feel like a lot more people would participate” (Participant D). This clearly
demonstrates the idea that some People of Color feel as though outdoor recreation is not a racially inclusive space, and that keeps them from outdoor recreation.

Motivations and Gains

Personal development was articulated by participants as a motivation and benefit of involvement in college outdoor programs. The majority of participants attributed personal growth and pushing themselves as a motivation for their continued involvement in outdoor programs. One participant explained their personal gains by stating, “I learn a lot about myself introspectively in terms of like how far I can push myself” (Participant E) and another said “people would push me to keep going and I would keep going and I would get there before I knew it. I was able. I’d never realized that I can reach outside my boundary and potential as much as I can” (Participant G). Someone else mentioned their most positive experience as something that “really pushed me out of my comfort zone in a good way” (Participant H) and another stated that their involvement in outdoor programs was motivated by the thought “let’s give this a shot, I think this is something that can really help me grow as a person” (Participant B).

International Culture

Of the eight participants interviewed, seven articulated having parents that immigrated to the United States. One of those participants described their racial background as having one parent that is a Person of Color and one parent that is White. Two other participants also spent memorable parts of their childhood in countries other than the United States. Both of these participants described spending time with family in the outdoors when they were growing up in other countries. One, when asked about any childhood outdoor recreation, stated “in Kenya, it’s
like oh if you’re inside you’re sleeping, cooking, or cleaning; if you’re outside you’re having fun. That’s usually the way to go as a kid” (Participant D).

**Onset of Involvement**

When asked about how participants became initially involved in outdoor programs, four of the eight interviewed described rock climbing as their first activity of interest. Of those interested in rock climbing, three specifically stated getting involved via the indoor rock wall. Another noteworthy observation is that one of the intuitions that we interviewed two participants at does not have an indoor rock wall – meaning this was not an option to be their initial involvement in outdoor programs. Other ways included taking a different type of trip, such as backpacking or caving, or looking at general ways to be involved on campus and finding outdoor programs.

**Discussion**

The theme of outdoor programs being a place that students are able to create a welcoming community through care and compassion directly relates to Arminio’s (2000) rationale for student involvement on college campuses. Armino explained that Students of Color want to be a part of a team that relies on each other, and that Students of Color are more attracted to leadership that serves other populations, which is one reason why outdoor programs could be a beneficial community for Students of Color (Arminio et al., 2000). Our interviews showed Students of Color that are finding supportive communities and a way to serve and help others in outdoor programs. We also found findings that a majority of students recreated outdoors in some way with their families growing up. These findings are supported by Bixler, Floyd, and Hammitt’s (2005) research, which demonstrated a direct relationship between childhood outdoor play and preferences for outdoor recreation later in life. The motivations and gain that our
participants demonstrated suggested personal growth and improvement were important reasons they were involved in outdoor programs. Previous research states that interpersonal and intrapersonal benefits of outdoor recreation are exemplified through the significant psychological development of an individual through participation (Priest & Gass, 2005). Our findings show that Students of Color receive similar interpersonal and intrapersonal gains from involvement in the outdoors as seen in Priest and Gass’ work.

Implications

The strong focus on community building that our participants articulated, and documentation that research supports this, is both important to retention of Student of Color and to Student leaders of Color could be a factor professionals consider when planning outdoor programs events and trips. Outdoor programs trips and programs specifically designed to help students build community may be more enticing to Students of Color. Advertising that demonstrates this focus could also be key to getting Students of Color involvement in outdoor programs.

The fact that this research found that all participants had some level of outdoor experience before college demonstrates that previous experience in the outdoors could be a crucial part of encouraging Students of Color to become involved in outdoor recreation. That experience in the outdoors could help create a comfort level that increases positive experience for participants. In addition, this research saw half the participants that joined outdoor programs for the indoor rock wall. Perhaps rock walls seem to be safer, or an easier step into outdoor recreation because it starts indoors. If there is a connection between Students of Color and indoor wall rocks, perhaps rock wall events tailored to community development or Students of Color would be of interest to Students of Color.
Finally, the strong theme of international cultural could have some impact on students’ desire to be involved with outdoor programs, or their previous outdoor experience. Previous work points out that the history of People of Color and outdoor recreation in the United States is dangerous and disturbing. Perhaps international cultures do not have the same perceptions of outdoor recreation, which leads to more outdoor recreation in their culture and with their families. The fact that seven of the eight students interviewed have international families suggests their experiences may differ from those who face a culture of oppression and who historically battled slavery in the United States.

The theme of family and previous outdoor experience stresses the importance of family involvement in outdoor recreation for People of Color. Every participant interviewed mentioned spending time in the outdoors with their family or parents as a child. Three of these participants mentioned having a parental figure that identified as White, and two of the participants explicitly stated spending significant time outdoors with their White parental figure. There could have been an impact on these students’ experiences based on one of their parents not being a Person of Color. This could support the idea that racial socialization could impact people's interest in outdoor recreation.

**Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study. Both of the researchers identify as White, which could impact participants comfort and honesty in interviews. One researcher works in outdoor programs at one of the research institutions, which could have an effect on interviews with participants at that institution. The large percentage of students who identify as international in our study is an additional limitation. This limits our perspective to Students of Color who likely do not face the same barriers as People of Color who experience the discrimination that
results from slavery in the United States. The students interviewed most often grew up in a suburban neighborhood, and were supported by middle class families. Therefore, many of their barriers differ from a large population of People of Color in the United States that live in a lower socioeconomic status, and our study is limited to only those experiences. The number of Students of Color that participate in college outdoor programs is small, and the number of Students of Color that are employed or volunteer with outdoor programs is even smaller. For this reason, the population to sample from was very smaller. This was made even smaller by limited in research time and travel radius. The small sample size in this study is a limitation that could have affected results.

**Conclusion**

College outdoor programs present an incredible opportunity for students of all experience levels to become involved in outdoor recreation. The personal growth and development that can take place within outdoor recreation is significant, and college outdoor programs offer a way for people previously uninvolved to learn about the outdoors as well as experienced recreationalists to continue their pursuits outdoors. These programs also serve as a place for students to build a supportive community and challenge themselves through this personal development and new experiences. With our in-depth interviews and analysis, we gained a better understanding of the recreation desires of Students of Color. Diverse communities have been shown to increase cognitive and educational ability, build cross-cultural interpersonal skills, as well as increase intrapersonal development by increased self-confidence, critical thinking skills, and acceptance of diversity (Chang, et al., 2006). These benefits would significantly enhance the quality of outdoor programs, while creating an environment that is more developmentally rich and inclusive to all students. Ultimately, this research showed correlations between family culture,
and previous experience, and as well as correlations between personal gains, community building, and motivation to participate in outdoor programs.

Future research could include methods that involved interviewing people who identify as White and People of Color, allowing to compare the motivations of all groups of people. Further research could include gathering more demographic information through a national search with more participants and more areas, making the study more generalizable. In addition, a more extensive future study could seek to understand motivations of People of Color who grew up in an urban setting and have families with a history within the United States.
References

Appalachian State University. (n.d.). *Overall university profile*. Retrieved from:
https://public.tableau.com/views/OverallProfile/UniversityProfile?:embed=y&:display_count=no&:showVizHome=no


ASU Outdoor Programs. (n.d.). *Outdoor programs: mission and values*. Retrieved from:
https://op.appstate.edu/mission


Appendix A: Informed Consent

**Interviewee Consent Form**

I agree to participate as an interviewee in this research project, focusing on investigating the motivations, backgrounds, and experiences of Students of Color who are staffed by University outdoor programs and programs.

I understand that my comments will be audio recorded, transcribed, and used for class research and publication purposes to be conducted by Christopher Bartram and Jennifer Iwerks in the College Student Development Department at Appalachian State University. The interview will occur one time, and last approximately one hour in duration unless approved by the interviewee. I understand that there are minimum foreseeable risks associated with my participation. I also know that this study may contribute to changes within the outdoor programs departments and encouraged community on higher education campuses.

I give Christopher Bartram and Jennifer Iwerks ownership of the tapes and transcripts from the interview(s) they conduct with me and understand that tapes and transcripts will be kept in the researchers’ possession. I understand that information or quotations from tapes and/or transcripts will be published following my review and approval. I understand I will receive no compensation for the interview.

I understand that the interview is voluntary and I can end it at any time without consequence. I also understand that if I have questions about this research project, I can call Christopher Bartram at (203) 428-5391, Jennifer Iwerks at (910) 876-5622, Dr. Diane Waryold at waryolddm@appstate.edu, or contact Appalachian State University’s Office of Research Protections at (828) 262-7981 or irb@appstate.edu.

☐ I request that my name not be used in connection with tapes, transcripts, or publications resulting from this interview.

☐ I request that my name be used in connection with tapes, transcripts, or publications resulting from this interview.

_____________________________    ______________________________
Name of Interviewer (printed)    Name of Interviewee (printed)

_____________________________    ______________________________
Signature of Interviewer      Signature of Interviewee

_____________________________ Date(s) of Interview (s)
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

1. Did you participate in outdoor recreation as a child, if so which activities?
   a. Did you participate in outdoor recreation alone as a child?
   b. Did your family or friends participate in outdoor recreation activities as a child?
   c. If not, when did you begin participating in outdoor recreation?
   d. Has outdoor recreation been a part of your formal education at any age?

2. Motivations for Involvement
   a. Please describe your position involvement with college outdoor programs.
   b. What led to your involvement in college outdoor programs?
   c. What are your personal motivations for being involved in college outdoor programs?
   d. What are your biggest gains through your involvement in outdoor programs?

3. Experiences at University outdoor programs/Programs
   a. What has been one of your most positive experiences in college outdoor programs?
      i. Why?
   b. Have you had negative experiences in college outdoor programs?
      i. What has been one of your most negative experiences in college outdoor programs?
   c. What could improve your experiences?

4. Background Information
   a. What is your age, year in school, and major?
b. What race or ethnicity do you identify as?

c. What nationality do you and your parents identify with?

d. What gender do you identify with?

e. What was your socioeconomic status growing up?

f. Where did you grow up?
   i. What type of location was this?
   ii. What were the racial and socioeconomic demographics in your community like growing up?
Appendix C: Email Recruitment

*Primary Investigators:* Christopher Bartram and Jennifer Iwerks, graduate students in the Masters of College Student Development Program at Appalachian State University

*Purpose:* The purpose of this qualitative study will be to explore the motivations behind outdoor participation for Students of Color at predominantly White institutions of higher education in the Southeast.

*Procedure:* As a participant in this research, you will email the researchers to set up an interview with them. The interview will include both researchers and one participant at a time, and questions will center around your previous experiences in the outdoors, motivations and experiences in working with your college outdoor program, and your family’s culture as it relates to outdoor recreation.

To participate in this study, you need to be a college undergraduate student, that is 18 years of age, employed by your college’s outdoor program that identifies as a Person of Color.

*Duration:* Interviews should take approximately one hour to complete.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Christopher Bartram (Bartramc@appstate.edu) or Jennifer Iwerks (Iwerksjl@appstate.edu)