BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF OUTDOOR EXPERIENCES OF BLACK TRANS PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF OUTDOOR EXPERIENCES OF BLACK TRANS PEOPLE

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Of the Black and biracial adult population in the US, 1.6%, or approximately 224,400 people, identify as transgender (Herman et al., 2022). Several studies have examined the experiences and barriers to outdoor participation for Black Americans (Dorwart et al., 2019; Powell, 2021; Stodolska et al., 2020) and Queer Americans (Heath et al., 2023; Heath & Duffy, 2023; Lundin & Bombaci, 2023; Oakleaf & Richmond, 2017), but no such study has looked specifically at the experiences of those who live at the intersection of Black and Queer. Despite the abundance of research on outdoor experiences, the lack of research exploring the experiences of Black trans individuals in outdoor settings underscored a critical gap in understanding the nuanced intersections of race, gender identity, and outdoor spaces. While affinity groups exist to provide representation in outdoor spaces, they lack the intentional intersection of race and gender/sexuality. This study focused on the experience of Black trans individuals who often face discrimination and barriers within their own communities, respectively, and nevertheless experience joy in unique ways in the outdoors. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to explore the lived experiences of Black trans individuals within outdoor spaces and/or programs. Narrative inquiry was the methodology for this study. Glover (2003) argued for using narrative

inquiry in leisure research as it helps us understand communities, the social dynamics of a leisure experience, and the role leisure plays in self-identity, along with providing a voice to the silenced. All participants self-identified as Black and trans and enjoy spending time in the outdoors. They were recruited using snowball sampling. Methods included narrative interviewing and co-constructed transcription. Participants engaged in a one-hour interview about their experiences in outdoor spaces and programs. Amplifying the voices and experiences of Black trans individuals in leisure literature is essential for fostering more equitable outdoor experiences and advancing social justice within outdoor recreation communities. My primary goal was to hold space for Black trans people to tell their stories. As Cairo (2021) reminds us, "When holding space, we need to be courageous not just for its own sake, but because we want to create a crack in what is established. We want to create a disruption in the status quo" (p. 212). The findings of the study include excerpts from participants' narratives, which highlight four ways Black trans people exist in and with nature: 1) Being Black and trans in nature, refers to identity salience and the idea of Blackness before transness 2) Being my authentic self, points to self-acceptance 3) Being in connection with nature, which explores a spiritual connection to nature and 4) Being alone in nature, speaks to the importance of spending time away from social demands.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“I’ll just pee in the water.” This is the most logical decision after googling about urine dilution and learning there were no facilities at the trailhead. This way, since there is no bathroom, I won't have to squat behind a tree, and people won’t question why I, a man, am squatting to pee.

“Should I take my shirt off? Will people notice my scars? Will they know what they are from? What will they think? What will I say if someone asks about them?” I had top surgery eight years ago, and I still ask myself these questions every time the opportunity to go shirtless presents itself. I do it anyways because “fuck it, I paid good money and waited a long time to be able to do this.”

"Am I walking too close?" I asked myself out of fear that my presence as a Black man was a threat to the white woman hiking in front of me. The wilderness has always welcomed me without judgment, but I cannot forget that some who walk these trails carry backpacks full of prejudice and bottles full of hate.

The constant planning around when I have to pee, what clothes I do (or do not) wear, and fear of discrimination often detracts from what should be an enjoyable experience outside. What I am really trying to discern through all the hypervigilance and analysis of people’s body language is, "Is this space safe for me?”

According to the most recent Gallup (2023) data, 7.6% of the United States population identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT); furthermore, Herman et al. (2022) estimated that there are approximately 1.3 million transgender adults in the United States. Among that 1.3 million, 16.8% identify as Black or biracial. Conversely, of the Black and

biracial adult population, only 1.6%, or approximately 224,400 people, identify as transgender. (Herman et al., 2022). I am one of those 224,400 people, and I share my story above because when I participate in outdoor activities, I want to feel safe and free, the same as the cisgender straight white men society tells us belong in the outdoors.

The Need for the Work

Barriers to Participation in Outdoor Recreation

When considering the small size of the Black trans population, one might question the importance of focusing on this marginalized group. In response, the words of the renowned poet Maya Angelou offer insight: "No one of us can be free until all of us are free" (CNN, 2013). Black trans people are under attack on the basis of their race and gender identity. At the time of this writing, there were 547 proposed anti-trans bills across the United States (Trans Legislator Tracker, 2024). The 2023 Outdoor Participation Trend Report also shows that Black people continue to have the lowest participation in outdoor activities (Outdoor Industry Association, 2023).

When we seek to find out why Black and queer people are underrepresented in outdoor spaces, we must look to current research. Dorwart (2019) found that personal fears, lack of companionship, and lack of socialization inhibited participation in outdoor recreation. Additionally, Scott and Lee (2018) found that socioeconomic resources, cultural factors, and discrimination were three limiting factors to Black people visiting National Parks. For queer people, things such as gendered activities (Oakleaf & Richmond, 2017), discrimination (Heath et al., 2023), and medical concerns (Lundin & Bombaci, 2023) prevent participation in outdoor activities.

Holding Space for Black Queer Voices

For years, there has been a call to increase diversity in our field, both academically and practically (Davis, 2019; Kisiel & Hibbler, 2020; Lee, 2024; Lundin & Bombaci, 2023; Powers et al., 2022; Vo, 2021). The following are some examples of scholars doing the work to include marginalized voices in leisure literature.

Through the lens of LatCrit as a theoretical framework, Orozco et al. (2024) elevate the voices of Chicana/o men and women regarding their experiences with nature. By using *testimonios,* Joanna Orozco is "doing the work of decolonizing the academy" (p. 61) and making space for more diverse voices. Sharing a similar goal of holding space for diverse voices (and methodologically challenging the academy in the process), Schmidt et al. (2023) used the creative medium of art to highlight Black and Brown youths' conceptualization of nature. Furthermore, Schmidt and Bobilya (2022) argue for including youth in all stages of outdoor education programming and research. In a similar way, and focused on embodied knowledge, Joseph (2024) calls on scholars to listen more deeply to the stories of those who:

> Move their bodyminds for sport and recreation; those who move across borders and engage in sport; those whose movements are surveilled, measured, and mined for their athletic potential; those who align social and epistemic justice activist movements with their physical culture movements, and those whose (storytelling about) physical culture is central to their livingness. (p. 66)

Finally, exploring embodiments of queer recreation, Litwiller (2021) uses gender play workshops to explore the impact of recreation on queer youth. Litwiller et al. (2023) also contribute a critical discussion to leisure literature on how justice and inclusion intersect. This conversation in the leisure literature highlights that true inclusion goes beyond token representation and requires transforming power structures that exclude marginalized groups.

While the aforementioned studies focus on either race or gender what's missing from the outdoor and leisure literature is the voice of Black queer people, and more specifically, in the case of this study, Black trans people. Conner (2021) writes:

> W.E.B. DuBois coined the term double consciousness to describe the feeling of being Black in America, and it is just as relevant today to note the experience of departing in order to relax in nature while being keenly aware of how nature's seclusion has been used to disappear people like us: Black, queer, women, and any intersections of them. (para. 12)

For too long, the narrative of the outdoors as a space for cisgender white men has marginalized and excluded individuals from diverse backgrounds, perpetuating barriers to access and participation (Davis, 2019; Stodolska et al., 2020). Introducing Black feminist thought into the study of outdoor recreation enables us to examine how the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality shape the outdoor experiences of marginalized individuals. As Hill Collins (2000) asserts, Black feminist thought challenges dominant narratives by centering the voices and lived experiences of Black women and other marginalized groups, making it ideal for this study. By employing Black feminist thought as a theoretical lens, this research not only highlights the erasure of Black trans voices but also provides a guiding framework for creating inclusive outdoor spaces.

Recognizing and embracing the multifaceted identities and experiences of all people in outdoor recreation is not only a matter of social justice but also a means to enrich the outdoor community and experiences for everyone. Shifting away from this narrow narrative, cracks open the door to a more inclusive outdoor culture, and "not only are we meant to welcome the cracks, we might cause them on purpose and might Hold the Space as a posse for those who need to use

the cracks for their conversion" (Cairo, 2021, p.274).

Despite the abundance of research on outdoor experiences, the lack of research exploring the experiences of Black trans individuals in outdoor settings underscores a critical gap in understanding the nuanced intersections of race, gender identity, and outdoor spaces. Regardless of the growing recognition of trans issues and the importance of outdoor recreation for overall well-being, there remains a glaring absence of studies addressing the unique challenges faced by Black trans people in outdoor environments.

This gap limits our understanding of the diverse ways marginalized communities engage with nature and hinders efforts to promote inclusivity and accessibility within outdoor recreational spaces. Although affinity groups like Outdoor Afro and LGBT Outdoor exist to provide representation in outdoor spaces, they lack the intentional intersection of race and gender/sexuality. Amplifying the voices and experiences of Black trans individuals in scholarly discussions is essential for fostering more equitable outdoor experiences and advancing social justice within outdoor recreation communities.

Dr. Aminata Cairo (2021) talks about the love-work and courage involved in creating alternative spaces where people can just be, stating, "When holding space, we need to be courageous not just for its own sake, but because we want to create a crack in what is established. We want to create a disruption in the status quo" (p. 212). My primary goal of this research is to do what Cairo (2021) calls "holding space" for Black trans people to tell their stories of how they experience the outdoors. I want people like me to see themselves reflected in the research and to have their experiences validated. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to explore the lived experiences of Black trans individuals within outdoor spaces and/or programs. To do this, I will ask the following research questions:

1. How do Black transgender individuals navigate and experience the outdoors (outdoor spaces and/or programs)?
2. What elements of an outdoor experience lead to a positive experience for Black transgender individuals?

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

As previously noted, there is a gap in academic literature concerning the experiences of Black trans people in the outdoors. Therefore, we must turn to kindred literature as a foundational building block. First, I will provide definitions for terminology that will be common throughout this thesis. While some of these terms have varied definitions, I have chosen ones that best encapsulate the context in which I am using them. Then, this literature review will examine the current understanding of barriers to outdoor participation for Black people, queer people, and Black queer people. I will also discuss the intersectionality of race and sexual orientation or gender identity and the need for further research into this subgroup of the population. Furthermore, I will take a turn to a strength-based approach and examine what current research says regarding Black joy and queer joy. I conclude with an in-depth discussion of Black Feminist theory, the guiding theory for this study, and its connection to trans studies.

Terminology

For the purposes of this research, the term *Black* will be used to describe any person who self-identifies as Black. Cénat (2022) noted that the use of *African-American* "may exclude Black people of Caribbean and other origins and may include people who do not identify as Black, such as people from Northern or South Africa" (p. 948). The use of self-identification allows for including those with multiracial identities (e.g., Afro-Latina and biracial) and allows participants to decide for themselves how they identify.

Throughout this paper, the terms *LGBT* and *queer* may be used interchangeably. In the context of this paper, queer refers to:

> An umbrella term for a social/intellectual/political movement that seeks to encompass a broad range of sexual identities, behaviors, and expressions. It has also been reclaimed as a personal identity for some after its historical use as a homophobic and transphobic slur. However, not all individuals are comfortable with the reclamation of the word, and it should not be used to describe someone without their consent. It is sometimes used as a catch-all for the rainbow community and may or may not be seen to include trans people. (The Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity, n.d.)

In some literature, variations of the acronym, such as LGBTQ or LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, plus non-conforming identities) are used.

The National Center for Transgender Equality (2023) defines *transgender* as "a broad term that can be used to describe people whose gender identity is different from the gender they were thought to be when they were born." The term *trans* as a shorthand for transgender will be used most often in this paper. However, when necessary, specific reference will be made to such identities as transgender, transwoman–someone who identifies as a woman, but was assigned male at birth, transman—someone who identifies as a man but was assigned female at birth, and non-binary—someone who does not identify as either gender regardless of their birth sex.

Importantly, since this research involves members of two marginalized communities, we must discuss *intersectionality*. Intersectionality is most often attributed to Kimberlee Crenshaw (1989) in her legal brief regarding discrimination against Black women. She argued that Black women face oppression both for being Black and being a woman, thus the intersection of race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989). For this paper, I will use Hill Collins' (2015) definition of intersectionality as "critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing

phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities" (p. 2). I chose this definition because of Hill Collins' work in Black Feminism, which is a guiding principle in this study.

Pertaining to the research question, it is necessary to differentiate between outdoor spaces and outdoor programs. I refer to *outdoor spaces* as public or publicly accessible areas in natural or semi-natural environments designed for recreational, leisure, or educational use. These spaces typically include:

- Parks (city, state, and national)
- Forests and nature preserves
- Lakes, rivers, and beaches
- Hiking and biking trails
- Playgrounds and sports fields
- Public gardens and green spaces
- Outdoor swimming pools and water parks
- Picnic areas and campgrounds

Private outdoor spaces, such as private land or bodies of water, are excluded from this research because of controlled access. These spaces are often limited to owners or members and are exempt from anti-discrimination laws if not open to the public (Back, 2020). Furthermore, as sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) and philosopher Judith Butler (2006) argue, people act differently in public than they do in private. Goffman's dramaturgical model of social interaction suggests that human behavior can be understood as a performance, with public and private spaces serving as the metaphorical stage and backstage. In private, or what Goffman refers to as backstage, people relax, let their guard down, and tend to act more authentically, free from the expectations of the audience. In contrast, public spaces function as the front stage, where

individuals manage their impressions to align with societal norms and expectations.

Butler (2006) asserts that gender is performative, and the ways in which we perform our gender is a survival strategy. Butler's framework helps us understand how transgender individuals must often engage in performing gender in ways that are recognizable and acceptable within existing social frameworks. The public thus becomes a complex stage where transgender people must navigate between authenticity and safety, often making strategic decisions about their gender presentation based on context and perceived risk. Therefore, this research focuses solely on public areas where participants are more likely to engage in interactions that exhibit the complexities of social behavior and gender performativity.

I define *outdoor programs* as structured activities or series of events conducted in outdoor settings, designed and led by organizations, clubs, or groups. These programs typically aim to provide participants with educational, recreational, or personal development experiences through engagement with nature and outdoor environments. Types of outdoor programs include:

- Wilderness safety and first aid courses
- Environmental education initiatives
- Adventure sports instruction and guided trips
- Outdoor leadership and skills training
- Nature-based workshops and classes
- Conservation and stewardship programs
- Team-building and personal development retreats
- Summer camps
- Community recreation center outdoor events and programs

These programs often combine skill development, safety training, environmental

awareness, and personal growth opportunities in various outdoor settings. It is crucial to differentiate between outdoor spaces and outdoor programs, as this highlights the distinct challenges and opportunities that Black trans people may face in freely accessing public natural areas versus participating in structured activities. This distinction may reveal unique barriers, safety concerns, or inclusive practices in each context. It is also worth noting that these terms are not universal, and what is or is not considered “the outdoors” or an outdoor activity depends on the context and your personal lens through which you view them.

Next, I will review pertinent literature, followed by an overview of the methodology and methods.

Black Outside

US public lands are just that, available to *the public*, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, etc. (though many argue that entrance fees for some US public lands make them inaccessible to low socioeconomic class). However, this has not always been the case. During the Jim Crow era, Black people were either barred from visiting public spaces, like national or state parks, or were forced into segregated and often inferior areas (e.g., segregated beaches) (Finney, 2014; Lee, 2024; Mowatt, 2019). Mowatt (2019) describes the racial roots of the backyard swimming pool. Prior to the 1960s, public pools were segregated. Upon the desegregation, white people flocked to private club pools in an attempt to control access to the pools. Eventually, those who could afford to, usually white people, built backyard pools "where each household could determine and control who swam, where, and when” (Mowatt, 2019, p. 9).

As the diversity of the US population continues to grow, "Black people continue to have the lowest overall participation rate in outdoor recreation" (Outdoor Industry Association, 2023). Scott and Lee (2018) were able to identify three main reasons why Black people represent the

lowest percentage of visitors to national parks: limited socioeconomic resources, cultural factors and boundary maintenance, and discrimination and white racial frames. I discuss each in detail below.

Cultural Factors

Several studies have explored the differences in leisure preferences between Black and white people. While white people tend to prefer naturalistic activities, Black people prefer sports or more organized activities (Floyd et al., 1994; Shinew et al., 2004). This preference can be attributed to factors such as socialization and representation (Martin, 2004; Shinew et al., 2004). More often than not, the faces seen in advertisements for outdoor activities are white faces (Martin, 2004). One participant in the study conducted by Dorwart et al. stated, “Obviously when I think of outdoor recreation, I see White females, White males. I don’t see a lot of people like me” (2019, p. 180). This lack of representation contributes to the idea of outdoor activities being “white people stuff” (Finney, 2014). However, as Lee (2024) asserts, the notion that Black people ‘under’ participate in outdoor recreation assumes that white participation levels are the standard.

While the dominant narrative says that Black people are not outdoorsy, affinity groups such as Outdoor Afro, Vibe Tribe Adventures, and Melanin Base Camp discredit that narrative by working to reconnect Black people to the outdoors. Beginning as a race-based employee forum (Douglas, 2008), affinity groups are "a group of people linked by a common purpose, ideology, identity, or interest" (New York State Office of Cultural Education, n.d.). Race-based affinity groups exist to support individuals who experience institutional racism (Mosely, 2018), promote diversity, and act as advocates (Douglas, 2008)

Discrimination

Although discrimination based on race is now illegal, it is also very much alive in public and private outdoor spaces. As Powell (2021) mentions, when Black people are in the outdoors, they are often being surveilled. "Their presence is not considered to be normative, which rationalizes the constant policing in outdoor spaces and during leisure activities" (p. 127). We see evidence of this as fisherman Anthony Gibson documents each time a white neighbor confronts him about fishing in his neighborhood pond. Gibson reported being confronted by white residents four times in one day, asking for his address with the assumption that he did not live in the neighborhood (Bellamy, 2023). In more extreme circumstances, Ahmaud Arbery was confronted and killed by three white men while jogging through a suburban neighborhood (Levenson et al., 2022). These are just some examples of the type of harassment and surveillance that Black people face when recreating outdoors.

Despite the ever-present discrimination and surveillance, numerous organizations host events specifically to welcome Black people and other people of color to outdoor spaces. These events foster a sense of community, provide representation, and create a safe and supportive environment that encourages people to participate in outdoor recreational activities. A prime example of this is A Great Day in the Stoke, an annual event lauded as the largest gathering of Black surfers in the world (A Great Day in the Stoke, n.d.). During this event, there are surf competitions, wellness activities, and free surfing lessons, among other things. This event is also meant to bring attention to the population of Black surfers who are often ignored by both the professional and commercial surfing industries. As Black Americans' buying power is projected to grow to $1.98 trillion by 2025, more companies are realizing the importance of inclusion (The Nielsen Company, 2022).

Socioeconomics

According to the US Census Bureau (2023a), Black families have continually held the lowest median household income. Stodolaska et al. (2020) found that cost was the number one constraint to recreation among people of color. Outdoor activities can be extremely expensive when considering the cost of transportation, lessons, and gear. The current cost of a basic annual fishing license in North Carolina is $25 per person (*Fishing Licenses - North Carolina Fishing*, n.d.). The average household size in North Carolina is 2.48 people (US Census Bureau, n.d.), which means that in order to fish, a family of three would pay $75, not including the startup cost of gear, such as fishing poles, bait, and tackle.

In a literature review of 49 studies, Rigolon (2016) found that while minority communities often have more parks nearby, the quality and acreage of those parks are significantly decreased compared to white or wealthier areas. The National Recreation and Park Association (2018) reports that lack of funding and inadequate staffing are two primary barriers to making parks and recreation more inclusive. These barriers are both tied to socioeconomic status. Considering Black households make up 20.2% of those below the poverty line, yet only 13.2% of the population (US Census Bureau, 2023b), Black Americans are disproportionately affected by socioeconomic barriers. In an attempt to overcome such barriers, organizations like Sports Basement, Backpacking Light, and the National Recreation Foundation offer grants aimed at increasing access to the outdoors for underserved populations.

Out in the Outdoors

According to the Outdoor Industry Association (2023), LGBTQIA+ people "participate in outdoor recreation at higher rates than heterosexual cisgender Americans" (p. 6). This data may suggest a lack of barriers for LGBT people; however, that would be false. Much like those of the Black community, the queer community has a storied history of discrimination. It was not

until 2015 that same-sex marriage became legal in all states (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.). At the time of this paper, the American Civil Liberties Union (2024) is tracking 527 anti-LGBTQ bills. Approximately 76 of those bills are related to recreation and leisure activities. Some examples include Virginia House Bill 1229 (Elementary & Secondary Schools & Higher Educational Institutions; Student Participation in Sports, 2024), which regulates student participation in school sports based on biological sex assigned at birth, and West Virginia Senate Bills 195 and 252, which propose to protect minors from "transgender exposure" (Code of West Virginia, 2023; Code of West Virginia, 2024). These bills are direct attacks on trans people's ability to just simply live our lives.

Discrimination

As I demonstrated above, white cisgender heterosexual men traditionally dominate outdoor participation. Participating in outdoor activities often requires the subscription to and performance of heteronormative behavior or dress. Barnfield and Humberstone (2008) discussed several strategies in which gay and lesbian outdoor educators navigated heterosexism, including pretending to have an opposite-sex partner and dressing in a way that would not cause question (i.e., dressing or presenting as a hyper-masculine man to avoid suspicion about their sexuality).

For many queer people hiding their identity is necessitated by personal safety and discrimination (Heath et al., 2023). In the case study of Zach, who worked as a counselor in a wilderness therapy program, he was promptly removed from his job after sharing his identity as a transman (Heath & Duffy, 2023). This was made possible because only 33 out of 50 states offer employment protections based on gender identity (HRC Foundation, 2024). Oakleaf and Richmond (2017) identified risk management as a common theme among transgender individuals regarding public recreation. Some strategies mentioned were avoiding public pools or

locker rooms, refraining from drinking water to prevent urination, and hypervigilance (Oakleaf & Richmond, 2017). While these strategies may help trans people avoid potentially awkward or dangerous scenarios, they also severely hinder their experience of the outdoors.

Much like race-based affinity groups, queer affinity groups or queer organizations also exist to help foster or create a welcoming environment for queer people to experience the outdoors. One such organization is Camp Lost Boys, a summer camp-like experience exclusively for transgender men. During this camp, transmen participate in typical camp activities such as archery, swimming, and campfires, but in an environment that accepts, welcomes, and supports who they are without judgment and discrimination. In an article detailing his experience at Camp Lost Boys, Allen (2024) explains, "Here, none of us are having to do any of that wondering if we pass, wondering if we are safe, wondering if we are being clocked, wondering if we are man enough" (para. 20). Organizations like Camp Lost Boys are critical to creating safe and supportive outdoor spaces for queer people.

Medical Concerns

Special consideration must be given to trans and non-binary individuals who receive hormone replacement therapy (HRT). According to the University of California, San Francisco (n.d.), taking HRT places trans and non-binary individuals at an increased risk for blood clotting, heart attack, and stroke. Individuals who bind their chests are at risk for rib and skin injuries as well as shortness of breath, overheating, and back or shoulder pain (Peitzmeier et al., 2017). As stated in Oakleaf and Richmond (2017), several participants refrained from drinking water to avoid using the restroom. This places them at an increased risk for dehydration and heat injuries. The above risks all present barriers for trans and non-binary individuals to participate in outdoor activities.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality was a term first coined by Crenshaw (1989) to describe the ways in which Black women face discrimination based on both their race and gender. However, I will be using Hill Collins' definition, which is grounded in Black feminist theory and encompasses other marginalized identities, such as those related to religion, age, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, etc. In this study, I will be focusing on the intersection of race and gender identity, specifically Black and transgender.

What Intersectionality Means for Black Queer People

Historically the Black community has not been the most accepting of those in the queer community. Much of Black culture is centered around the Black church. Thus, religion carries a strong influence on the morality of Black people. Douglas (1999) makes the point that the Bible has been used as a tool of oppression both against and by Black people. Furthermore, Douglas (1999) explains that some view homosexuality (and inevitably all things queer) as a white people thing therefore a threat to the Black community. This argument is formed on the basis of historic racialized sexual exploitation of Black people. As Black people continue to be overly sexualized and seen as sexually deviant, homophobia in the Black community is seen as a way to distance Black people from the perversions of sexuality. This tension between racial and sexual/gender identities creates a unique complexity for Black trans people who must navigate outdoor spaces.

As previously discussed, both groups, Black and queer, often face discrimination and barriers to participation in outdoor activities. However, little literature addresses how the intersection of those identities might present unique challenges to outdoor participants. Some inferences can be made based on literature from other disciplines. For example, Conron et al. (2023) found that twice as many LGBT people of color faced anti-LGBT harassment at school

compared to their white counterparts. This suggests that their race was also a factor. A study by Velez et al. (2019) found that “heterosexist discrimination, racist discrimination, internalized heterosexism, and internalized racism each yielded positive correlations with psychological distress and negative correlations with psychological well-being” (pp. 145–146).

In their analysis of 101 qualitative studies that examine the experiences of oppression and liberation among Black queer people, Mosley et al. (2021) identified two subthemes in the literature: identity salience and multiplying oppression. *Identity Salience* refers to how Black queer people perform their identities in spaces that are connected to their wellness. They often place one identity over the other. In 1952, Fanon observed, "The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man. A Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question” (Fanon, 2023, p. 355). This observation is still relevant today in particular for Black trans people who must navigate both their racial and gender identities. Similarly, what Hunter (2010) calls “up-down identities” refers to participants who identify as Black-then-gay or gay-then-Black, with one participant expressing, “I am Black first and always. That’s what people see, and that’s what I deal with. The gay thing is something else. It’s not that I locate it elsewhere, or don’t identify with it. But I choose Black first” (p. 87).

Multiplying oppression refers to how Black queer individuals not only experience oppression based on their race and gender identity/sexual orientation but also other social factors such as age and weight. This can be seen displayed in the hateful social media comments in response to Calvin Klein’s inclusion of Jari Jones, a self-identified fat Black transwoman. One person wrote, “@IAmJariJones I only see a Big Fat Ugly and N*gga boy with shit in the brain” ([@profemamadowski], 2020).

In a study of 22 trans people of color, 100% of participants reported negative healthcare experiences because of their racial and/or gender identity (Howard et al., 2019). These examples show proof that people of multiple marginalized identities, such as Black and queer, experience discrimination and oppression at higher rates compared to their counterparts of either identity, but they don't tell the whole story.

Black Joy, Gender Euphoria

Research on minorities, especially queer people of color, is overwhelmingly produced from a deficit model. Black bodies and queer bodies are poked, prodded, and medicalized, and academia often focuses on deficits, barriers, discrimination, and negative aspects of Black queer life. This is also true in the leisure literature, where there is a depth of literature on barriers to Black people in the outdoors (e.g. Schwartz & Corkery, 2011; Scott & Lee, 2018; Stodolska et al., 2020) and queer people in the outdoors (e.g. Heath et al., 2023; Heath & Duffy, 2023; Mosley et al., 2021; Oakleaf & Richmond, 2017) but not much celebrating Black joy (for exceptions, see Outley et al., 2021; Tichavakunda, 2021) and queer/trans joy (for exceptions, see Flynn et al., 2024; Shuster & Westbrook, 2024; Westbrook & Shuster, 2023) in leisure spaces. Despite this, we exist, we play, we laugh, we love, and we experience joy. We can lay our burdens down and simply *be* in spaces where we feel safe to be ourselves.

We must hold space in our field for minority and marginalized communities to share the whole story—the deficits and the strengths. It is critical that we hold space in our field to hear the whole story, the barriers, and the joy. In her TED talk, Chimamanda Adichie (2009) speaks about the danger of a "single story". Stereotypes, like the misconception that Black people aren't outdoorsy, are examples of single stories we often tell about groups of people. These stories are shared from a position of power as "power is the ability not just to tell the story of another

person, but to make it the definitive story of that person" (Adichie, 2009, 10:03). So, we must instead use our power to share the *many* stories. In order to do that, we must do what Cairo (2021) calls "holding space."

When we hold space for others to share their stories, we create alternative spaces "where people can be just to be, just for who they are, just because they breathe" (Cairo, 2021, p. 304). By sharing diverse narratives, our shared humanity emerges, and we may begin to cultivate spaces that work to shift the dominant narrative. Below, I detail three ways in which the single story of discrimination and deficit is interrupted by authenticity and safety, relaxation, and enjoyment.

Authenticity and Safety

Based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the minority stress model (Meyer, 2003), safety is a foundational requirement for positive experiences. For Black trans people, who may face heightened risks of discrimination or violence, a safe outdoor environment is vital for reducing hypervigilance and allowing engagement with nature. When looking at elements of Black joy, Tichavakunda (2021) suggests that cultivating spaces and practices that incorporate Black culture leads to Black joy. This might look like organized events or spaces specifically designed for Black trans people, where we can present ourselves authentically without the constraints of fear or judgment.

Some examples that can provide the foundational framework include the trans and non-binary swim group studied by Caudwell (2020) and the various LGBTQ youth residential camps that exist throughout the United States. Two organizations in particular that serve queer people of color are the previously mentioned Camp Lost Boys and Wild Diversity (which has since discontinued its community programming). Camp Lost Boys, founded by two transmen of color,

is committed to the inclusion of transmen of color as both participants and staff, with an average of 35-45% of its participants being men of color (*FAQ*, n.d.). Wild Diversity was a nonprofit organization whose mission was "to welcome and create a sense of belonging in the outdoors for the BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, people of color] & LGBTQ2S+ [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Two-Spirit] communities" (2023, p. 4). In the 2023 impact report from Wild Diversity, 98% of their participants reported having more confidence in their ability to go on outdoor adventures (2023).

In a study of a four-day LGBTQ youth residential camp, Litwiller (2018) found that the inclusive camp created a positive environment where the youth experienced positive identity development, social inclusion, and an increased sense of belonging. The creation of these spaces specifically for trans people of color is critical to creating a sense of belonging and contributing to the resilience necessary to survive the everyday life of a marginalized individual (Pulice-Farrow et al., 2023).

Relaxation

Stress reduction theory suggests that natural environments have inherent restorative properties (Ulrich et al., 1991). When describing her healing journey through nature, Wynn-Grant (2022) writes, "Slowly but surely I found rest, inner peace, and renewed self-confidence. My healing was directly facilitated by nature" (p. 180). For transgender individuals dealing with minority stress, relaxation in outdoor spaces can provide a crucial counterbalance to daily stressors and promote mental health. It is worth noting that although all participants in Herraiz's (2019) study were white trans people, several reported feeling relaxed, free, and less stressed when experiencing the outdoors. These feelings are supported by quantitative data showing a reduction in cortisol (stress hormone) levels after visiting a natural environment (Ewert et al.,

2016). While this biological response demonstrates nature's stress-reducing capabilities, it also paves the way for more positive emotional experiences.

Enjoyment

Academic narratives often focus on the struggles of minority communities, yet our lived experiences encompass a full spectrum of emotions, including abundant joy. Despite its challenges, there is joy in being a member of marginalized communities (Breslow et al., 2015; Flynn et al., 2024; Shuster & Westbrook, 2024; Westbrook & Shuster, 2023). Finney (2022) describes joy as "a multidimensional feeling that expands and contracts as it responds to pain, emerges in healing, and is expressed in the day-to-day experience of being in relationship to our world" (p. 168). As a culture of marginalized individuals, we are taking the turn to place our collective joy at the forefront with the creation of social media hashtags such as #BlackBoyJoy, #BlackGirlMagic, and #transisbeautiful. Love (2019) recognized that while joy is necessary for justice, Black joy, specifically, is how we survive in white spaces. She writes:

> Black joy is to embrace your full humanity, as the world tells you that you are disposable and that you do not matter. Black joy is a celebration of taking back your identity as a person of color and signaling to the world that your darkness is what makes you strong and beautiful. Black joy is finding your homeplace and creating homeplaces for others. Black joy is understanding and recognizing that as a dark person you come with grit and zest because you come from survivors who pushed their bodies and minds to the limits for you to one day thrive. (pp. 138–139)

Our joy is not despite our race or skin color but rather because of it.

Gender euphoria is a relatively new term used by the trans and non-binary community to describe the generally positive and joyful feeling created by the affirmation of a person's

identified gender identity or expression (Kai & Devor, 2022). For some, this can include acknowledgment of pronouns, "passing," or acceptance into their chosen community (Beischel et al., 2021). I find gender euphoria in the small moments, like when an elderly woman compliments my beard or I find an occasion to put on a suit (my idea of dapper). It is easy to get bogged down by the constant hostile rhetoric about trans people, but these moments of euphoria breathe life into the resilience required to survive our everyday lives in a society that actively tries to erase our existence.

Theoretical Framework

Ellison et al. (2017) ask the question, "Is Black feminism an interrogation of gender or an attachment to the category of 'Black woman'?" While at its core, Black feminism centers around the experiences of Black women, its principles of intersectionality and the dismantling of hegemonic masculinity speak to those of other identities, such as trans. Black feminism has a long history of being tied to queer oppression. In 1989, bell hooks (2015) called on Black feminists to examine and challenge the nature of homophobia. Chaudhry (2019) argues for creating *trans/coalitional love-politics*, "a reading practice and critical orientation that grapples with the complicated relationship between blackness and transness" (p. 523). He further suggests that this incorporation of Black feminism in trans studies is necessary if we are going to see a future of racialized gender justice. This connection rejects single-use politics and explores the possibility of reconstructing the meaning of gender rather than the expansion and inclusion by giving attention to the ways in which Black bodies have been used as ungendered commodities.

Black Feminism

Although Black women have a storied history of oppression dating back centuries, Black feminist theory was born in the civil rights era in response to the civil rights exclusion of women

and mainstream feminism's exclusion of Black women. Camped in the theory of intersectionality, Black feminist thought explores the unique challenges Black women face due to their intersectional identities (e.g., race, sex) (Hill Collins, 2000). Hill Collins (2000) insists that “Black feminist thought aims to empower African-American women within the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions” (p. 22). bell hooks (2015) argues for making Black feminist theory more accessible and experiential, stating, “Such theory emerges only from a context in which there is either an integration of critical thinking and concrete experience or a recognition of the way in which critical ideas, abstractly formulated, will impact on everyday life experience” (p. 39).

In her book *Black Feminist Thought*, Hill Collins (2000) distinguishes Black feminism as a theory concerned with other social justice projects, recognizing that “Black women’s struggles are part of a wider struggle for human dignity, empowerment, and social justice” (p.41). This concept necessitates what she calls “dual dimensions” of Black women’s activism. First, struggles for group survival, while not directly or overtly challenging power dynamics, work to undermine oppressive structures. Second, struggles for institutional transformation rely on relationships and connections to directly challenge systems of oppression. This research falls under the first dynamic as it attempts to resist the hegemonic culture that exists in the outdoors by undermining the stereotypes of Black people in nature.

Why Not Queer Theory?

Although much of the community, myself included, camp “trans” under the queer umbrella, Stryker (2004) makes a valid point that queer is often synonymous with "gay or lesbian". Although queer theory and trans studies emerged of the same feminist and sexuality parentage, they are not homogenous, as Stryker (2004) considers trans studies to be "queer

theory's evil twin". Both queer and trans studies concern themselves with the social construction of identity; trans studies focuses on nonnormative gender (Keegan, 2020a). Moreso, Keegan (2020b) makes the argument that trans studies are, in fact, “against queer theory” by giving claim to the subjective nature of gender embodiment and departing from queer theory’s value of deconstruction.

Despite the understanding that sexuality and gender are separate, we must also acknowledge that the two are inextricably linked. It is through the recognition of gender and gender expression that sexuality exists. As a simplistic example of this principle, it is a self-identified man's attraction to what he recognizes as men that deems him "gay." According to Stryker (2006), trans studies:

> Disrupts, denaturalizes, rearticulates, and makes visible the normative linkages we generally assume to exist between the biological specificity of the sexually differentiated body, the social roles and statuses that a particular form of body is expected to occupy, the subjectively experienced relationship between a gendered sense of self and social expectations of gender-role performance, and the cultural mechanisms that work to sustain or thwart specific configurations of gendered personhood. (p. 68)

A core component of trans studies is the focus on the *embodiment* of trans people as producers of self-knowledge (Keegan, 2020a). The philosophy of trans studies works to validate the lived and felt experiences of trans people, and it is the acknowledgment of trans people as experts of their own stories that form the basis of this research. This embodied experience takes on particular significance in natural spaces, where:

> Wilderness can allow participants to experience their bodies without the social constraints of gender. With the presence of nature and without surveillance, we are better

> able to be in our bodies and to feel our bodies moving, sensing, reacting, and interacting. Without judgment and patrol, people find refuge and belonging in wilderness away from the constructs of society; away from prescribed and idealized ways we use and present our bodies; and away from the predatory eyes of oppression. (Meyer & Borrie, 2013, p. 314)

However, I would be remiss not to mention the significant difference in the experiences across the trans spectrum. Transwomen, more specifically Black transwomen are more likely to be victims of violence. Since 2013 the Human Rights Campaign (2024) reports that 61% of trans or non-binary victims of fatal hate crimes were Black transwomen. Serano (2016) makes the argument that this is a result of *trans-misogyny*, which stems from transphobia and misogyny. Trans-misogyny is frequently seen in the media as the hyper-sexualization of transwomen as sex workers, the assumption of fraudulence (i.e. men in dresses), and the increased violence against transwomen.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, transmen are often invisible, assumed to be either butch lesbians or cis men (Toze, 2021). This phenomenon, too, can be attributed to trans-misogyny as this idea values masculinity over femininity. Under this guise transmen are required to distance themselves from their femininity. The reward for displaying such masculinity is access into male spaces, however, this assimilation can also mean being overlooked amongst the queer community.

More research is necessary to explore the experience of Black trans individuals as the focus of a strength-based approach. We deserve to have our stories centered rather than as a subsection in relation to our white cisgender peers. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to explore the lived experiences of Black trans individuals within outdoor spaces and/or programs.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

The purpose of this research was to explore the lived experiences of Black trans individuals within outdoor spaces and/or programs. To do that, I chose narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) as my methodology because it focuses on individuals' stories of lived experiences. I chose to use narrative interviewing (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016) and co-constructed transcription (Nasheeda et al., 2019) as methods that center the voice of the participant throughout the research. Below, I unpack the methodology, methods, participants, and data analysis technique in detail. Throughout, I tie in Black feminism theory as the theoretical framework for this study.

Methodology: Narrative Inquiry

bell hooks (2015) said it best, writing, "Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible" (p.9). In order to do this (give voice to the silenced) I chose narrative inquiry as my methodology. Narrative inquiry "embraces narrative as both the method and phenomena of study" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 5). Czarniawska (2004) defined narrative as “a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected” (p. 27). Stemming from John Dewey’s theory on experience, narrative inquiry is a collaborative approach between the researcher and participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This approach uses the power of storytelling to understand experiences (Clandinin, 2007). Glover (2003) argues for using narrative inquiry in leisure research as it helps us understand communities, the social dynamics of a leisure experience, and the role leisure plays in self-identity, along with providing a voice to

the silenced. “People are looked at as embodiments of lived stories ... composing lives that shape and are shaped by social and cultural narratives” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 43). Additionally, Mankowski and Rappaport (2000) argued that narratives can amplify the voices of those outside the dominant.

Narrative inquiry has been used in leisure literature to explore the experiences of individuals in the outdoors. Health et al. (2023) used critical narrative inquiry to explore the experiences of six LGBTQ+ individuals pursuing outdoor professions. Researchers used interviews to “uncover stories of power, privilege, and oppression” (p. 6), finding that an opportunity gap continues to exist for LGBTQ+ individuals in outdoor professions. In 2010, Endo et al. used narrative inquiry to examine the lived experience of six gay and lesbian teachers stating, “In our study, without exception, our queer teachers' personal stories serve as the central resource for exploring what it is like to be a queer teacher in the Midwest region of the USA” (p. 1025). Given the focus on stories and the goal of my research to hold space for Black trans people, narrative inquiry is a suitable methodology for this study. Next, I will discuss Rosiek’s (2007) three dimensions of narrative inquiry: temporality, sociality, and place.

Temporality

Temporality refers to the time in which an experience occurs and how those stories are carried into the present and future. How does the current time in which we live affect the participants’ stories? As previously mentioned, in 2024, 527 anti-LGBTQ bills have been considered across state and federal governments, which is almost three times the 186 anti-trans bills proposed in 2021 (Trans Legislator Tracker, 2024). Along with these anti-trans bills, we have witnessed attacks on all minority communities, such as the rollback of LGBT protections, the repeal of *Roe v. Wade*, the reversal of Affirmative Action, and the ban on Diversity, Equity,

and Inclusion programs across the United States.

In the aftermath of the 2024 US presidential election, the risk of being identified as other remains at a critical level as the president has signed executive orders to remove all mention of trans and non-binary people from the government and formally recognize only two genders (see EO 14201, EO 14187, and EO 14168). Price et al. (2021) found that the 2016 election and Donald Trump's subsequent presidency had a negative impact on trans and gender-diverse people, with feelings of hopelessness, betrayal, and fear commonly mentioned among participants. The aftermath of the 2024 US election has already yielded similar outcomes, as political polarization and policy threats continue to shape the experiences of marginalized communities. Since participant interviews took place shortly after the election, it is crucial to recognize how the political climate has influenced participants' willingness to share certain narratives or their framing of lived experiences.

Sociality

Sociality refers to the relationship between the participant and the researcher. My primary goal is to amplify the voices of my community members, ensuring their narratives are shared accurately and thoughtfully rather than exploited. I reassured participants that their experiences would be portrayed in a way that honors their truth and preserves their dignity by working with participants to co-construct a transcript they feel comfortable with. As a member of the community I am researching, I was able to build genuine trust and rapport with the participants by sharing aspects of my own story, creating a space of mutual vulnerability and authenticity. Rosenberg and Tilley (2021) found that trans-led research "provides more in-depth data, builds more constructive rapport with community members, and produces more effective research than the norm of purely outsider research in the field" (p. 923). Trans participants in studies focusing

on transgender experiences report more positive interactions when the researcher is also transgender, citing increased trust, greater transparency, deeper understanding, improved accuracy in representation, enhanced authenticity in communication, and a stronger sense of support throughout the research process (Rosenberg & Tilley, 2021).

Place

Place refers to both where the experience and the inquiry take place. When conducting an interview, especially where intimate and private things may be discussed, it is imperative that participants feel comfortable and safe in the space. Location profoundly shapes the lived experiences and narratives of trans individuals, influencing not only how they navigate daily life but also how they express and share their identities.

Abelson's study of 66 transgender men revealed a geographic pattern in perceived safety and tolerance. The participants generally considered the western United States to be the most accepting and secure region for trans individuals (2019). In contrast, they viewed the southern United States as the least tolerant area. Rogers' research supported these findings, highlighting that the fear of transphobic incidents significantly impacted trans men's daily lives. Importantly, Rogers noted that this fear altered behavior regardless of whether the individuals had personally experienced discrimination or violence (2020). This suggests that perceptions of regional attitudes can profoundly influence how trans people navigate their environments and make life choices.

In more accepting environments, trans people may feel empowered to live openly, contributing to vibrant, visible communities and sharing diverse stories that enrich local culture. Conversely, in less tolerant areas, many trans individuals face the challenge of balancing authenticity with safety. This often leads to more guarded expressions of identity, with stories

shared cautiously or sometimes silenced altogether. Hill Collins emphasizes the importance of safe spaces as "prime locations for resisting objectification as the Other" (2000, p. 101) and empowering resistance against dominant ideology.

Participant Selection

The target population for this study was self-identifying Black trans adults (18+) who spend time in the outdoors. The use of "self-identifying" is meant to further empower participants as it rejects the power dynamics of externally defining who is Black and trans (Hill Collins, 2000). Participants for the study were recruited using snowball sampling. In a recent study of 51 trans men, Rogers (2020) used snowball sampling to recruit participants. I used two of the same recruitment strategies in that study. I first reached out via text and phone to my personal contacts within the trans and queer community for participation and/or recommendations for other participants. Secondly, I reached out via email to affinity groups or organizations like Wild Diversity, Camp Lost Boys, and The Venture Out Project. My recruitment materials are found in the appendices (appendix A-C).

Snowball sampling is an effective sampling method for this study due to the somewhat exclusive nature of the trans community. Browne (2005) describes the word-of-mouth assurance displayed in snowball sampling as critical to research of a sensitive nature, notably where participants reveal details of their personal lives. The ideal sample size was 6-10 participants, based on a sample size of similar studies (Anderson et al., 2020; Endo et al., 2010; Mather & McWhirter, 2023), allowing for sufficient data collection but maintaining a manageable sample size. Due to time constraints the study was limited to five participants: one transwoman, one non-binary transmasculine person, and three transmen.

Name	Pronouns	Race/Ethnicity	Location
Maia	She/They	Black	Indiana

Rey	He/They	Afro-Latino	Illinois
Kato	He/Him	Black & Latino	Oregon
Jalyn	He/Him	Black	Washington
Etienne	He/Him	Black	Illinois

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Methods

Narrative Interviewing

The method I chose was narrative interviewing (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Narrative interviewing uses open-ended questions to elicit stories or narratives from participants. Unlike semi-structured interviews, which also include open-ended questions, narrative interviewing is guided by the participant without the researcher's influence toward a specific predetermined topic. In narrative interviewing, the researcher serves primarily as a listener and less as a guide, and the questions are structured in such a way as to elicit narratives or stories (Pederson, 2013). A key point about narrative inquiry is that "the narrative approach places the people being studied at the heart of the study and privileges the meanings that they assign to their own story" (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p. 631).

Interviews were scheduled for one hour, with the flexibility to expand if necessary. The medium of the interviews depended on the participants' geographic location and comfort. Participants were given the choice of an in-person, virtual, or telephonic interview. With permission, interviews were audio-recorded only and initially transcribed by AI-assisted software. During the interview, participants were asked questions to elicit narratives about their experiences in outdoor spaces and/or programs. Interview questions included:

1. Why do you go outdoors?
    a. Why is this important to you?
    b. Where do you go? Why? With who?

2. Can you share a story about the ways you navigate and experience the outdoors as a Black trans person?
    a. Does this change depending on where you are and who you are with?
3. Give me an example of a time that you think exemplifies what it's like to be a Black trans person in the outdoors.
4. Can you share a meaningful or positive experience you've had participating in an outdoor activity or program as a Black trans person?
    a. What made that experience significant for you?
5. How has your relationship or connection with the outdoors evolved over different parts of your life and identity journey?
6. As a Black trans person, how has the changing political climate affected your experience in the outdoors? Can you share a specific example?

I developed these questions with the specific intent of being as broad as possible while still seeking the answers I was looking for. I wanted to ensure that participants had the freedom to share both negative and positive experiences. Given the significance and real-life effect of politics on the lives of Black and trans people, I felt it impossible to ignore and necessitated an additional question.

Co-constructed Transcript

Adams et al. (2017) argue that research involving trans people should include trans people in every step of the process from inception to dissemination. Therefore, I have chosen a co-constructed approach to transcription between the researcher and the participant. Rather than simply providing a text form of what was said, a co-constructed transcript also aims to include the essence of the conversation. It includes interactional content, such as pauses, sighs, and

emotion. Continuing along the theme of self-identification, participants were given the choice of using their chosen name or using a chosen pseudonym. I did the initial transcription with the assistance of Otter.ai transcription software. Both the initial transcription and narrative were emailed to the participant for review. This review period allowed participants to reflect on the conversation and think of any changes they would like to see in the transcription. Participants were given the option to set up an additional Zoom or phone call. As part of the call, participants had the opportunity to delete, clarify, or add to the conversation and ensure the essence of their stories were adequately captured.

Ethical Considerations

Corbin and Morse (2003) identified two potential risks involved in unstructured interviewing, which applied to the narrative interviewing used in this research: risk to anonymity and the possibility of distress. Although every attempt was made to protect participants' anonymity, the risk remains that someone may recognize the stories told or quotes used in the presentation of this research. Furthermore, given the special consideration necessary for those who live stealth or hidden lives, the location and avenue in which the interviews were conducted were chosen carefully.

In order to create an accepting and empowering environment and combat any hesitancy or fear regarding the interviews, participants remained in complete control of the stories they shared. A further layer of protection for participants includes the destruction of their audio recording immediately after transcription. This ensures that no participant can be identified via their voice. Most importantly, participants were permitted to use a pseudonym of their choosing, and through the process of co-constructing the transcript, they could remove any content they felt would risk their anonymity. However, no participant elected to do so.

While the possibility of distress existed in sharing potentially traumatic experiences, with narrative inquiry and narrative interviews, participants remained in control of their own stories. They have the agency to determine what and how their stories are shared with the researcher. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and participants could revoke their consent to participate in the interview at any time. However, due to the previously mentioned risk and the fact that it is a human-based research study, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was required.

Data Analysis

My data analysis was informed by hooks' (2015) statement that "Only as subjects can we speak. As objects, we remain voiceless—our beings defined and interpreted by others" (p.12). To me, this means even in the analysis of participants' stories, I continued to view participants as subjects of their own stories rather than seeing their stories as objects of my research. To do that, I chose to conduct a narrative analysis.

Unlike thematic analysis, which aims to deconstruct narratives into smaller comparable parts, narrative analysis aims to retain the essence of the storyteller's account (Glover, 2003). "The outcome of narrative analysis is a story" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15). The goal is to produce a *restorying* of the narratives in a way that is authentic to both the participants and their stories. Data analysis was conducted using a holistic content approach, which Lieblich et al. (1998) describe as focusing on the content and the meaning derived from the whole story. While there may be some common themes throughout the shared stories, the stories must remain whole rather than stripped of their complexity. "When we turn stories into concepts, theories, or social facts, on the other hand, we run the risk of rupturing what makes them stories" (Bochner, 2001, p. 140).

Spector-Mersel (2011) details four elements of a holistic interpretive strategy: the story as a whole unit, regard for content, attention to contexts of production, and a multidimensional and interdisciplinary lens. As previously mentioned, *the story as a whole* unit refers to treating the narrative as a whole rather than fragments. *Regard for content* gives attention to what is/is not said and how it is said. *Attention to contexts of production* emphasizes the significance of the circumstances and environment in which a narrative emerges and is shaped. *A multidimensional and interdisciplinary lens* accounts for the cultural, social, and psychological factors that led to the narrative selection (Spector-Mersel, 2011). These elements can be used when employing Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) analytical tools for narratives: broadening, burrowing, and restorying.

Following the completion of the interviews, I began the analysis process by reviewing the AI-generated transcript. I listened to each interview individually, not only making corrections to the transcript where necessary but also adding the nuances of the conversation (i.e., pauses and laughs). Although the intent was always to delete the audio recordings upon completion of the transcripts, listening to the words of each participant in their own voices allowed me to feel a deeper connection than the words on the page. No matter how hard we might try, one-dimensional text simply cannot accurately capture the things unsaid during these interviews. Roller (2017) argues that "although serving a utilitarian purpose, transcripts effectively convert the all-too-human research experience that defines qualitative inquiry to the relatively emotionless drab confines of black-on-white text" (para. 3).

Broadening

Broadening refers to looking at the greater context of the participant's story. It involves generalizing a person's character, way of life, and social climate (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

This tool is about taking into account what else we know about the participant and their story outside of the text. Next, I read through each transcript several times to note any significant insights that I might have missed during the initial transcription. Unlike the transcription process, whose purpose was logistical in nature, this second step was purely for analytical reasons. As a part of this process, I read each individual transcript in its entirety at least once. Doing so allowed me to dive deeper into each participant's stories and begin the process of applying outside context about the participants, their location, and politics to their stories.

Burrowing

Kim (2024) describes burrowing as focusing on the specific details of the narrative, such as feelings, understandings, or impacts. The aim is to ascertain how these details have influenced the participants' experience. After the initial readings of each transcript, I began to recall specific parts of each transcript that shared some commonality with other participants. For example, the word "grounded" stood out to me in both Rey and Kato's interviews, so I revisited each mention of being grounded by both participants. The purpose of this was not to compare stories but rather to try to understand what it meant for them to be grounded and the impact of that feeling on their lives.

Restorying

The next step was two-fold. I created narratives for each of the participants using their interview transcript. The primary purpose of this was to create a much more user-friendly summation of the interview transcripts to send to each participant for approval. The secondary benefit of these narratives was for analysis purposes. Looking through these narratives allowed me to take a step back from the data and view it with fresh eyes as if I were the reader. "What would the reader find interesting?" I asked myself. With that question in mind, I began the

process of restorying by highlighting key elements of each interview that represented core messages woven throughout all of the interviews.

Restorying is about bringing out the significance of the participant's story. This is where the mean-making occurs. Rolón-Dow & Bailey (2021) describe restorying as the process of communicating the why and how to the reader from the participant's perspective.

The holistic content method of narrative analysis provides a comprehensive framework for examining stories in their entirety. This method allows researchers to preserve the rich quality of participants' stories while deriving insightful meaning.

Presentation of Findings

For the purposes of my thesis, I chose to present the findings of the study in a traditional written format, which includes narratives from each participant along with a discussion surrounding the meaning derived from their narratives in conjunction with theory. Additionally, in line with my goal of producing research by and for trans people, I have elected to present my research in an article for a popular queer magazine (e.g. Out Magazine or The Advocate), in order to make it more accessible to my target audience.

Manuscript Thesis Option

Per the Western Carolina University Experiential and Outdoor Education Handbook, I have chosen to complete the manuscript thesis format option. This option requires Chapters One, Two and Three plus a full-length journal manuscript formatted to the requirements of a specific journal. The following chapter contains my complete manuscript, which I have chosen to submit to the World Leisure Journal. This journal requires authors to submit a manuscript of up to 9,000 words and written in APA format. Please note that the journal requests images are placed within the document where referenced.

Between two worlds: An exploratory study of outdoor experiences of Black trans people

Despite abundant research on outdoor experiences, a critical gap exists in understanding Black trans individuals' experiences in outdoor settings. This study explores the lived experiences of Black trans individuals who face discrimination within their own communities yet experience unique joy outdoors. Using narrative inquiry methodology, Black Feminist Theory, and Trans studies as theoretical frameworks, I conducted narrative interviews with participants who self-identified as Black and trans and enjoy outdoor activities. My primary goal was to hold space for their stories. As Cairo (2021) notes, "When holding space, we need to be courageous not just for its own sake, but because we want to create a crack in what is established" (p. 212).

Findings highlight four ways Black trans people exist within nature. Amplifying these voices in leisure literature is essential for fostering equitable outdoor experiences and advancing social justice within recreation communities.

Introduction

"I'll just pee in the water." This is the most logical decision after googling about urine dilution and learning there were no facilities at the trailhead. This way, since there is no bathroom, I won't have to squat behind a tree, and people won't question why I, a man, am squatting to pee.

"Should I take my shirt off? Will people notice my scars? Will they know what they are from? What will they think? What will I say if someone asks about them?" I had top surgery eight years ago, and I still ask myself these questions every time the opportunity to go shirtless presents itself. I do it anyways because "fuck it, I paid good money and waited a long time to be able to do this."

"Am I walking too close?" I asked myself out of fear that my presence as a Black man was a threat to the white woman hiking in front of me. The wilderness has always welcomed me without judgment, but I cannot forget that some who walk these trails carry backpacks full of prejudice and bottles full of hate.

The constant planning around when I have to pee, what clothes I do (or do not) wear, and fear of discrimination often detracts from what should be an enjoyable experience outside. What I am really trying to discern through all the hypervigilance and analysis of people's body language is, "Is this space safe for me?"

According to the most recent Gallup (2023) data, 7.6% of the United States population identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT)—furthermore, Herman et al. (2022) estimated that there are approximately 1.3 million transgender adults in the United States. Among that 1.3 million, 16.8% identify as Black or biracial. Conversely, of the Black and biracial adult population, only 1.6%, or approximately 224,400 people, identify as transgender. (Herman et al., 2022). I am one of those 224,400 people, and I share my story above because

when I participate in outdoor activities, I want to feel safe and free, the same as the cisgender straight white men society tells us belong in the outdoors.

The Need for the Work

Barriers to Participation in Outdoor Recreation

When considering the small size of the Black trans population, one might question the importance of focusing on this marginalized group. In response, the words of the renowned poet Maya Angelou offer insight: "No one of us can be free until all of us are free" (CNN, 2013). Black trans people are under attack on the basis of their race and gender identity. At the time of this writing, there were 547 proposed anti-trans bills across the United States (Trans Legislator Tracker, 2024). The 2023 Outdoor Participation Trend Report also shows that Black people continue to have the lowest participation in outdoor activities (Outdoor Industry Association, 2023).

When we seek to find out why Black and queer people are underrepresented in outdoor spaces, we must look to current research. Dorwart (2019) found that personal fears, lack of companionship, and lack of socialization inhibited participation in outdoor recreation. Additionally, Scott and Lee (2018) found that socioeconomic resources, cultural factors, and discrimination were three limiting factors to Black people visiting National Parks. For queer people, things such as gendered activities (Oakleaf & Richmond, 2017), discrimination (Heath et al., 2023), and medical concerns (Lundin & Bombaci, 2023) prevent participation in outdoor activities.

Holding Space for Black Queer Voices

For years, there has been a call to increase diversity in our field, both academically and practically (Davis, 2019; Kisiel & Hibbler, 2020; Lee, 2024; Lundin & Bombaci, 2023; Powers

et al., 2022; Vo, 2021). The following are some examples of scholars doing the work to include marginalized voices in leisure literature.

Through the lens of LatCrit as a theoretical framework, Orozco et al. (2024) elevate the voices of Chicana/o men and women regarding their experiences with nature. By using *testimonios,* Joanna Orozco is "doing the work of decolonizing the academy" (p. 61) and making space for more diverse voices. Sharing a similar goal of holding space for diverse voices (and methodologically challenging the academy in the process), Schmidt et al. (2023) used the creative medium of art to highlight Black and Brown youths' conceptualization of nature. Furthermore, Schmidt and Bobilya (2022) argue for including youth in all stages of outdoor education programming and research. In a similar way, and focused on embodied knowledge, Joseph (2024) calls on scholars to listen more deeply to the stories of those who:

> Move their bodyminds for sport and recreation; those who move across borders and engage in sport; those whose movements are surveilled, measured, and mined for their athletic potential; those who align social and epistemic justice activist movements with their physical culture movements, and those whose (storytelling about) physical culture is central to their livingness. (p. 66)

Finally, exploring embodiments of queer recreation, Litwiller (2021) uses gender play workshops to explore the impact of recreation on queer youth. Litwiller et al. (2023) also contribute a critical discussion to leisure literature on how justice and inclusion intersect. This conversation in the leisure literature highlights that true inclusion goes beyond token representation and requires transforming power structures that exclude marginalized groups.

While the aforementioned studies focus on either race or gender, what's missing from the outdoor and leisure literature is the voice of Black queer people, and more specifically, in the

case of this study, Black trans people. Conner (2021) writes:

> W.E.B. DuBois coined the term double consciousness to describe the feeling of being Black in America, and it is just as relevant today to note the experience of departing in order to relax in nature while being keenly aware of how nature's seclusion has been used to disappear people like us: Black, queer, women, and any intersections of them. (para. 12)

For too long, the narrative of the outdoors as a space for cisgender white men has marginalized and excluded individuals from diverse backgrounds, perpetuating barriers to access and participation (Davis, 2019; Stodolska et al., 2020). Introducing Black feminist thought into the study of outdoor recreation enables us to examine how the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality shape the outdoor experiences of marginalized individuals. As Hill Collins (2000) asserts, Black feminist thought challenges dominant narratives by centering the voices and lived experiences of Black women and other marginalized groups, making it ideal for this study. By employing Black feminist thought as a theoretical lens, this research not only highlights the erasure of Black trans voices but also provides a guiding framework for creating inclusive outdoor spaces.

Recognizing and embracing the multifaceted identities and experiences of all people in outdoor recreation is not only a matter of social justice but also a means to enrich the outdoor community and experiences for everyone. Shifting away from this narrow narrative, cracks open the door to a more inclusive outdoor culture, and "not only are we meant to welcome the cracks, we might cause them on purpose and might Hold the Space as a posse for those who need to use the cracks for their conversion" (Cairo, 2021, p.274).

Despite the abundance of research on outdoor experiences, the lack of research exploring

the experiences of Black trans individuals in outdoor settings underscores a critical gap in understanding the nuanced intersections of race, gender identity, and outdoor spaces. Regardless of the growing recognition of trans issues and the importance of outdoor recreation for overall well-being, there remains a glaring absence of studies addressing the unique challenges faced by Black trans people in outdoor environments.

This gap limits our understanding of the diverse ways marginalized communities engage with nature and hinders efforts to promote inclusivity and accessibility within outdoor recreational spaces. Although affinity groups like Outdoor Afro and LGBT Outdoor exist to provide representation in outdoor spaces, they lack the intentional intersection of race and gender/sexuality. Amplifying the voices and experiences of Black trans individuals in scholarly discussions is essential for fostering more equitable outdoor experiences and advancing social justice within outdoor recreation communities.

Dr. Aminata Cairo (2021) talks about the love-work and courage involved in creating alternative spaces where people can just be, stating, "When holding space, we need to be courageous not just for its own sake, but because we want to create a crack in what is established. We want to create a disruption in the status quo" (p. 212). My primary goal of this research is to do what Cairo (2021) calls "holding space" for Black trans people to tell their stories of how they experience the outdoors. I want people like me to see themselves reflected in the research and to have their experiences validated. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to explore the lived experiences of Black trans individuals within outdoor spaces and/or programs. To do this, I will ask the following research questions:

1. How do Black transgender individuals navigate and experience the outdoors (outdoor spaces and/or programs)?

2. What elements of an outdoor experience lead to a positive experience for Black transgender individuals?

Literature review

I will begin this literature review by providing definitions for terminology that will be common throughout this paper. While some of these terms have varied definitions, I have chosen ones that best encapsulate the context in which I am using them. Then, I will examine the current understanding of barriers to outdoor participation for Black people, queer people, and Black queer people. I will also discuss the intersectionality of race and sexual orientation or gender identity and the need for further research into this subgroup of the population. Furthermore, I will take a turn to a strength-based approach and examine what current research says regarding Black joy and queer joy. I conclude with an in-depth discussion of Black Feminist theory, the guiding theory for this study, and its connection to trans studies.

Terminology

Before beginning, it's important to provide definitions for terminology that will be common throughout this proposal. While some of these terms have varied definitions, I have chosen ones that best encapsulate the context in which I am using them. For the purposes of this research, the term *Black* will be used to describe any person who self-identifies as Black. Cénat (2022) noted that the use of *African-American* "may exclude Black people of Caribbean and other origins and may include people who do not identify as Black, such as people from Northern or South Africa" (p. 948). The use of self-identification allows for including those with multiracial identities (e.g., Afro-Latina and biracial) and allows participants to decide for themselves how they identify.

Throughout this paper, the terms *LGBT* and *queer* may be used interchangeably. In the context of this paper, queer refers to:

> An umbrella term for a social/intellectual/political movement that seeks to encompass a broad range of sexual identities, behaviors, and expressions. It has also been reclaimed as a personal identity for some after its historical use as a homophobic and transphobic slur. However, not all individuals are comfortable with the reclaiming of the word, and it should not be used to describe someone without their consent. It is sometimes used as a catch-all for the rainbow community and may or may not be seen to include trans people. (The Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity, n.d.)

The National Center for Transgender Equality (2023) defines *transgender* as "a broad term that can be used to describe people whose gender identity is different from the gender they were thought to be when they were born." The term *trans* as a shorthand for transgender will be used most often in this paper. However, when necessary, specific reference will be made to such identities as transgender, transwoman–someone who identifies as a woman, but was assigned male at birth, transman—someone who identifies as a man but was assigned female at birth, and non-binary—someone who does not identify as either gender regardless of their birth sex.

Importantly, since this research involves members of two marginalized communities, we must discuss *intersectionality*. For this paper, I will use Hill Collins' (2015) definition of intersectionality as "critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities" (p. 2).

Next, I will review pertinent literature, followed by an overview of the methodology and methods.

Black outside

US public lands are just that, available to *the public*, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender etc. (though many argue that entrance fees for some US public lands make them inaccessible to low socioeconomic class). However, this has not always been the case, especially around race. During the Jim Crow era, Black people were either barred from visiting public spaces, like national or state parks, or were forced into segregated and often inferior areas (e.g., segregated beaches) (Finney, 2014; Lee, 2024; Mowatt, 2019). As the diversity of the US population continues to grow, Black people continue to have the lowest overall participation rate in outdoor recreation (Outdoor Industry Association, 2023). Scott and Lee (2018) were able to identify three main reasons why Black people represent the lowest percentage of visitors to national parks: limited socioeconomic resources, cultural factors and boundary maintenance, and discrimination and white racial frames. I discuss each in detail below.

Cultural Factors

Several studies have explored the differences in leisure preferences between Black and white people. While white people tend to prefer naturalistic activities, Black people prefer sports or more organized activities (Floyd et al., 1994; Shinew et al., 2004). This preference can be attributed to factors such as socialization and representation (Martin, 2004; Shinew et al., 2004). One participant in the study conducted by Dorwart et al. stated, “Obviously when I think of outdoor recreation, I see White females, White males. I don’t see a lot of people like me” (2019, p. 180). This lack of representation contributes to the idea of outdoor activities being “white people stuff” (Finney, 2014). However, as Lee (2024) asserts, the notion that Black people ‘under’ participate in outdoor recreation assumes that white participation levels are the standard.

While the dominant narrative says that Black people are not outdoorsy, affinity groups such as Outdoor Afro, Vibe Tribe Adventures, and Melanin Base Camp discredit that narrative by working to reconnect Black people to the outdoors.

Discrimination

Although discrimination based on race is now illegal, it is also very much alive in public and private outdoor spaces. As Powell (2021) mentions, when Black people are in the outdoors, they are often being surveilled. "Their presence is not considered to be normative, which rationalizes the constant policing in outdoor spaces and during leisure activities" (p. 127). Despite the ever-present discrimination and surveillance, numerous organizations host events specifically to welcome Black people and other people of color to outdoor spaces. These events foster a sense of community, provide representation, and create a safe and supportive environment that encourages people to participate in outdoor recreational activities. A prime example of this is A Great Day in the Stoke, an annual event lauded as the largest gathering of Black surfers in the world (A Great Day in the Stoke, n.d.). During this event, there are surf competitions, wellness activities, and free surfing lessons, among other things. This event is also meant to bring attention to the population of Black surfers who are often ignored by both the professional and commercial surfing industries. As Black Americans' buying power is projected to grow to $1.98 trillion by 2025, more companies are realizing the importance of inclusion (The Nielsen Company, 2022).

Socioeconomics

According to the US Census Bureau (2023a), Black families have continually held the lowest median household income. Stodolaska et al. (2020) found that cost was the number one constraint to recreation among people of color. Outdoor activities can be extremely expensive

when considering the cost of transportation, lessons, and gear. In a literature review of 49 studies, Rigolon (2016) found that while minority communities often have more parks nearby, the quality and acreage of those parks are significantly decreased compared to white or wealthier areas. The National Recreation and Park Association (2018) reports that lack of funding and inadequate staffing are two primary barriers to making parks and recreation more inclusive. In an attempt to overcome such barriers, organizations like Sports Basement, Backpacking Light, and the National Recreation Foundation offer grants aimed at increasing access to the outdoors for underserved populations.

Out in the Outdoors

Much like those of the Black community, the queer community has a storied history of discrimination in the US generally and in outdoor spaces. It was not until 2015 that same-sex marriage became legal in all states (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.). At the time of this paper, the American Civil Liberties Union (2024) is tracking 527 anti-LGBTQ bills. Approximately 76 of those bills are related to recreation and leisure activities. These bills are direct attacks on trans people's ability to just simply live our lives.

Discrimination

As I demonstrated above, white cisgender heterosexual men traditionally dominate outdoor participation. Participating in outdoor activities often requires subscription to and performance of heteronormative behavior or dress. Barnfield and Humberstone (2008) discussed several strategies in which gay and lesbian outdoor educators navigated heterosexism, including pretending to have an opposite-sex partner and dressing in a way that would not cause question (i.e., dressing or presenting as a hyper-masculine man to avoid suspicion about their sexuality).

For many queer people, hiding their identity is necessitated by personal safety and discrimination (Heath et al., 2023). In the case study of Zach, who worked as a counselor in a wilderness therapy program, he was promptly removed from his job after sharing his identity as a transman (Heath & Duffy, 2023). This was made legally possible because only 33 out of 50 states offer employment protections based on gender identity (HRC Foundation, 2024). Oakleaf and Richmond (2017) identified risk management as a common theme among transgender individuals regarding public recreation. Some strategies mentioned were avoiding public pools or locker rooms, refraining from drinking water to prevent urination, and hypervigilance (Oakleaf & Richmond, 2017). While these strategies may help trans people avoid potentially awkward or dangerous scenarios, they also severely hinder their experience of the outdoors.

Much like race-based affinity groups, queer affinity groups or queer organizations also exist to help foster or create a welcoming environment for queer people to experience the outdoors. One such organization is Camp Lost Boys, a summer camp-like experience exclusively for transgender men. During this camp, transmen participate in typical camp activities such as archery, swimming, and campfires, but in an environment that accepts, welcomes, and supports who they are without judgment and discrimination. In an article detailing his experience at Camp Lost Boys, Allen (2024) explains, “Here, none of us are having to do any of that wondering if we pass, wondering if we are safe, wondering if we are being clocked, wondering if we are man enough” (para. 20). Organizations like Camp Lost Boys are critical to creating safe and supportive outdoor spaces for queer people.

Medical Concerns

Special consideration during outdoor recreation pursuits must be given to trans and non-binary individuals who receive hormone replacement therapy (HRT). According to the University of

California, San Francisco (n.d.), taking HRT places trans and non-binary individuals at an increased risk for blood clotting, heart attack, and stroke (n.d.). Individuals who bind their chests are at risk for rib and skin injuries as well as shortness of breath, overheating, and back or shoulder pain (Peitzmeier et al., 2017). As stated in Oakleaf and Richmond (2017), several participants refrained from drinking water to avoid using the restroom. This places them at an increased risk for dehydration and heat injuries. The above risks all present barriers for trans and non-binary individuals to participate in outdoor activities.

Intersectionality of Black and Trans

The term *intersectionality* was first coined by Crenshaw (1989) to describe the ways in which Black women face discrimination based on both their race and gender. However, I will be using Hill Collins' definition, which is grounded in Black feminist theory and encompasses other marginalized identities, such as those related to religion, age, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, etc. In this study, I will be focusing on the intersection of race and gender identity, specifically Black and transgender.

What Intersectionality Means for Black Queer People

Historically the Black community has not been the most accepting of those in the queer community. Much of Black culture is centered around the Black church. Thus, religion carries a strong influence on the morality of Black people. Douglas (1999) makes the point that the Bible has been used as a tool of oppression both against and by Black people. Furthermore, Douglas (1999) explains that some view homosexuality (and inevitably all things queer) as a white people thing therefore a threat to the Black community. This argument is formed on the basis of historic racialized sexual exploitation of Black people. As Black people continue to be overly sexualized and seen as sexually deviant, homophobia in the Black community is seen as a way to distance

Black people from the perversions of sexuality. This tension between racial and sexual/gender identities creates a unique complexity for Black trans people who must navigate outdoor spaces.

As previously discussed, both groups, Black and queer, often face discrimination and barriers to participation in outdoor activities. However, little literature addresses how the intersection of those identities might present unique challenges to outdoor participants. Some inferences can be made based on literature from other disciplines. For example, Conron et al. (2023) found that twice as many LGBT people of color faced anti-LGBT harassment at school compared to their white counterparts. This suggests that their race was also a factor. A study by Velez et al. (2019) found that "heterosexist discrimination, racist discrimination, internalized heterosexism, and internalized racism each yielded positive correlations with psychological distress and negative correlations with psychological well-being" (pp. 145–146).

In their analysis of 101 qualitative studies that examine the experiences of oppression and liberation among Black queer people, Mosley et al. (2021) identified two subthemes in the literature: identity salience and multiplying oppression. *Identity Salience* refers to how Black queer people perform their identities in spaces that are connected to their wellness. They often place one identity over the other. Similarly, what Hunter (2010) calls "up-down identities" refers to participants who identify as Black-then-gay or gay-then-Black, with one participant expressing, "I am Black first and always. That's what people see, and that's what I deal with. The gay thing is something else. It's not that I locate it elsewhere, or don't identify with it. But I choose Black first" (p. 87).

Multiplying oppression refers to how Black queer individuals not only experience oppression based on their race and gender identity/sexual orientation but also other social factors such as age and weight. This can be seen displayed in the hateful social media comments in

response to Calvin Klein's inclusion of Jari Jones, a self-identified fat Black transwoman. One person wrote, "@IAmJariJones I only see a Big Fat Ugly and N*gga boy with shit in the brain" ([@profemamadowski], 2020).

These examples show proof that people of multiple marginalized identities, such as Black and queer, experience discrimination and oppression at higher rates compared to their counterparts of either identity, but they don't tell the whole story.

Black Joy, Gender Euphoria

Research on minorities, especially queer people of color, is overwhelmingly produced from a deficit model. Black bodies and queer bodies are poked, prodded, and medicalized, and academia often focuses on deficits, barriers, discrimination, and negative aspects of Black queer life. This is also true in the leisure literature, where there is a depth of literature on barriers to Black people in the outdoors (e.g. Schwartz & Corkery, 2011; Scott & Lee, 2018; Stodolska et al., 2020) and queer people in the outdoors (e.g. Heath et al., 2023; Heath & Duffy, 2023; Mosley et al., 2021; Oakleaf & Richmond, 2017) but not much celebrating Black joy (for exceptions, see Outley et al., 2021; Tichavakunda, 2021) and queer/trans joy (for exceptions, see (Flynn et al., 2024; Shuster & Westbrook, 2024; Westbrook & Shuster, 2023) in leisure spaces. Despite this, we exist, we play, we laugh, we love, and we experience joy. We can lay our burdens down and simply *be* in spaces where we feel safe to be ourselves.

We must hold space in our field for minority and marginalized communities to share the whole story—the deficits and the strengths. It is critical that we hold space in our field to hear the whole story, the barriers, and the joy. In her TED talk, Chimamanda Adichie (2009) speaks about the danger of a "single story". Stereotypes, like the misconception that Black people aren't outdoorsy, are examples of single stories we often tell about groups of people. These stories are

shared from a position of power as “power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person” (Adichie, 2009, 10:03). So, we must instead use our power to share the *many* stories. In order to do that, we must do what Cairo (2021) calls “holding space.”

When we hold space for others to share their stories, we create alternative spaces “where people can be just to be, just for who they are, just because they breathe” (Cairo, 2021, p. 304). By sharing diverse narratives, our shared humanity emerges, and we may begin to cultivate spaces that work to shift the dominant narrative. Below, I detail three ways in which the single story of discrimination and deficit is interrupted by authenticity and safety, relaxation, and enjoyment.

Authenticity and Safety

Based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the minority stress model (Meyer, 2003), safety is a foundational requirement for positive experiences. For Black trans people, who may face heightened risks of discrimination or violence, a safe outdoor environment is vital for reducing hypervigilance and allowing engagement with nature. When looking at elements of Black joy, Tichavakunda (2021) suggests that cultivating spaces and practices that incorporate Black culture leads to Black joy. This might look like organized events or spaces specifically designed for Black trans people, where we can present ourselves authentically without the constraints of fear or judgment.

Some examples that can provide the foundational framework include the trans and non-binary swim group studied by Caudwell (2020) and the various LGBTQ youth residential camps that exist throughout the United States. One organization in particular that serves queer people of color is the previously mentioned Camp Lost Boys. Camp Lost Boys, founded by two transmen

of color, is committed to the inclusion of transmen of color as both participants and staff, with an average of 35-45% of its participants being men of color (*FAQ*, n.d.). The creation of these spaces specifically for trans people of color is critical to creating a sense of belonging and contributing to the resilience necessary to survive the everyday life of a marginalized individual (Pulice-Farrow et al., 2023).

Relaxation

Stress reduction theory suggests that natural environments have inherent restorative properties (Ulrich et al., 1991). When describing her healing journey through nature, Wynn-Grant (2022) writes, “Slowly but surely I found rest, inner peace, and renewed self-confidence. My healing was directly facilitated by nature” (p. 180). For transgender individuals dealing with minority stress, relaxation in outdoor spaces can provide a crucial counterbalance to daily stressors and promote mental health. It is worth noting that although all participants in Herraiz’s (2019) study were white trans people, several reported feeling relaxed, free, and less stressed when experiencing the outdoors. These feelings are supported by quantitative data showing a reduction in cortisol (stress hormone) levels after visiting a natural environment (Ewert et al., 2016). While this biological response demonstrates nature's stress-reducing capabilities, it also paves the way for more positive emotional experiences.

Enjoyment

Academic narratives often focus on the struggles of minority communities, yet our lived experiences encompass a full spectrum of emotions, including abundant joy. Despite its challenges, there is joy in being a member of marginalized communities (Breslow et al., 2015; Flynn et al., 2024; Shuster & Westbrook, 2024; Westbrook & Shuster, 2023). Finney (2022) describes joy as “a multidimensional feeling that expands and contracts as it responds to pain,

emerges in healing, and is expressed in the day-to-day experience of being in relationship to our world" (p. 168). As a culture of marginalized individuals, we are taking the turn to place our collective joy at the forefront with the creation of social media hashtags such as #BlackBoyJoy, #BlackGirlMagic, and #transisbeautiful. Love (2019) recognized that while joy is necessary for justice, Black joy, specifically, is how we survive in white spaces. Our joy is not in spite of our race or skin color but rather because of it.

Gender euphoria is a relatively new term used by the trans and non-binary community to describe the generally positive and joyful feeling created by the affirmation of a person's identified gender identity or expression (Kai & Devor, 2022). For some, this can include acknowledgment of pronouns, "passing," or acceptance into their chosen community (Beischel et al., 2021). It is easy to get bogged down by the constant hostile rhetoric about trans people, but these moments of euphoria breathe life into the resilience required to survive our everyday lives in a society that actively tries to erase our existence.

Theoretical Framework: Black Feminist Theory

Ellison et al. (2017) ask the question, "Is Black feminism an interrogation of gender or an attachment to the category of 'Black woman'?" While at its core, Black feminism centers around the experiences of Black women, its principles of intersectionality and the dismantling of hegemonic masculinity speak to those of other identities, such as trans. Black feminism has a long history of being tied to queer oppression. In 1989, bell hooks (2015) called on Black feminists to examine and challenge the nature of homophobia. Chaudhry (2019) argues for creating *trans/coalitional love-politics*, "a reading practice and critical orientation that grapples with the complicated relationship between blackness and transness" (p. 523). He further suggests that this incorporation of Black feminism in trans studies is necessary if we are going to see a

future of racialized gender justice. This connection rejects single-use politics and explores the possibility of reconstructing the meaning of gender rather than the expansion and inclusion by giving attention to the ways in which Black bodies have been used as ungendered commodities.

Although Black women have a storied history of oppression dating back centuries, Black feminist theory was born in the civil rights era in response to the civil rights exclusion of women and mainstream feminism's exclusion of Black women. Camped in the theory of intersectionality, Black feminist thought explores the unique challenges Black women face due to their intersectional identities (e.g., race, sex) (Hill Collins, 2000). Hill Collins (2000) insists that "Black feminist thought aims to empower African-American women within the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions" (p. 22). bell hooks (2015) argues for making Black feminist theory more accessible and experiential, stating, "Such theory emerges only from a context in which there is either an integration of critical thinking and concrete experience or a recognition of the way in which critical ideas, abstractly formulated, will impact on everyday life experience" (p. 39).

In her book *Black Feminist Thought*, Hill Collins (2000) distinguishes Black feminism as a theory concerned with other social justice projects, recognizing that "Black women's struggles are part of a wider struggle for human dignity, empowerment, and social justice" (p.41). This concept necessitates what she calls "dual dimensions" of Black women's activism. First, struggles for group survival, while not directly or overtly challenging power dynamics, work to undermine oppressive structures. Second, struggles for institutional transformation rely on relationships and connections to directly challenge systems of oppression. This research falls under the first dynamic as it attempts to resist the hegemonic culture that exists in the outdoors by undermining the stereotypes of Black people in nature.

Why Not Queer Theory?

Although much of the community, myself included, camp “trans” under the queer umbrella, Stryker (2004) makes a valid point that queer is often synonymous with "gay or lesbian." Although queer theory and trans studies emerged of the same feminist and sexuality parentage, they are not homogenous, as Stryker (2004) considers trans studies to be "queer theory's evil twin." Both queer and trans studies concern themselves with the social construction of identity; trans studies focuses on nonnormative gender (Keegan, 2020b). Moreso, Keegan (2020a) makes the argument that trans studies are, in fact, “against queer theory” by giving claim to the subjective nature of gender embodiment and departing from queer theory’s value of deconstruction. Despite the understanding that sexuality and gender are separate, we must also acknowledge that the two are inextricably linked. It is through the recognition of gender and gender expression that sexuality exists. As a simplistic example of this principle, it is a self-identified man's attraction to what he recognizes as men that deems him "gay."

A core component of trans studies is the focus on the *embodiment* of trans people as producers of self-knowledge (Keegan, 2020a). The philosophy of trans studies works to validate the lived and felt experiences of trans people, and it is the acknowledgment of trans people as experts of their own stories that form the basis of this research. This embodied experience takes on particular significance in natural spaces, where:

> Wilderness can allow participants to experience their bodies without the social constraints of gender. With the presence of nature and without surveillance, we are better able to be in our bodies and to feel our bodies moving, sensing, reacting, and interacting. Without judgment and patrol, people find refuge and belonging in wilderness away from the constructs of society; away from prescribed and idealized ways we use and present

> our bodies; and away from the predatory eyes of oppression. (Meyer & Borrie, 2013, p. 314)

However, I would be remiss not to mention the significant difference in the experiences across the trans spectrum. Transwomen, more specifically Black transwomen, are more likely to be victims of violence. Since 2013 the Human Rights Campaign (2024) reports that 61% of trans or non-binary victims of fatal hate crimes were Black transwomen. Serano (2016) makes the argument that this is a result of *trans-misogyny*, which stems from transphobia and misogyny. Trans-misogyny is frequently seen in the media as the hyper-sexualization of transwomen as sex workers, the assumption of fraudulence (i.e. men in dresses), and the increased violence against transwomen.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, transmen are often invisible, assumed to be either butch lesbians or cis men (Toze, 2021). This phenomenon, too, can be attributed to trans-misogyny as this idea values masculinity over femininity. Under this guise of manhood, transmen are required to distance themselves from their femininity. The reward for displaying such masculinity is access into male spaces, however, this assimilation can also mean being overlooked amongst the queer community.

More research is necessary to explore the experience of Black trans individuals as the focus of a strength-based approach. We deserve to have our stories centered rather than as a subsection in relation to our white cisgender peers. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to explore the lived experiences of Black trans individuals within outdoor spaces and/or programs.

Methodology & Methods

The purpose of this research is to explore the lived experiences of Black trans individuals within outdoor spaces and/or programs. To do that, I chose narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin,

1990) as my methodology because it focuses on individuals' stories of lived experiences. I chose to use narrative interviewing (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016) and co-constructed transcription (Nasheeda et al., 2019) as methods that center the voice of the participant throughout the research. Below, I unpack the methodology, methods, participants, and data analysis technique in detail. Throughout, I tie in Black feminism as the theoretical framework for this study.

Methodology: Narrative Inquiry

bell hooks (2015) said it best, writing, "Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible" (p.9). In order to do this (give voice to the silenced) I chose narrative inquiry as my methodology. Narrative inquiry "embraces narrative as both the method and phenomena of study" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 5). Czarniawska (2004) defined narrative as "a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected" (p. 27). Stemming from John Dewey's theory on experience, narrative inquiry is a collaborative approach between the researcher and participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This approach uses the power of storytelling to understand experiences (Clandinin, 2007). Glover (2003) argues for using narrative inquiry in leisure research as it helps us understand communities, the social dynamics of a leisure experience, and the role leisure plays in self-identity, along with providing a voice to the silenced. "People are looked at as embodiments of lived stories ... composing lives that shape and are shaped by social and cultural narratives" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 43). Mankowski and Rappaport (2000) argued that narratives can amplify the voices of those outside the dominant.

Given the focus on stories and the goal of my research to hold space for Black trans people, narrative inquiry is a suitable methodology for this study. Next, I will discuss Rosiek's

(2007) three dimensions of narrative inquiry guiding this study.

Temporality. Temporality refers to the time in which an experience occurs and how those stories are carried into the present and future. How does the current time in which we live affect the participants' stories? As previously mentioned, in 2024, 527 anti-LGBTQ bills have been considered across state and federal governments, which is almost three times the 186 anti-trans bills proposed in 2021 (Trans Legislator Tracker, 2024). Along with these anti-trans bills, we have witnessed attacks on all minority communities, such as the rollback of LGBT protections, the repeal of Roe v. Wade, the reversal of Affirmative Action, and the ban on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs across the United States.

In the aftermath of the 2024 US presidential election, the risk of being identified as other remains at a critical level as the president has signed executive orders to remove all mention of trans and non-binary people from the government and formally recognize only two genders. Price et al. (2021) found that the 2016 election and Donald Trump's subsequent presidency had a negative impact on trans and gender-diverse people, with feelings of hopelessness, betrayal, and fear commonly mentioned among participants. Since participant interviews took place shortly after the 2024 US presidential election, it is crucial to recognize how the political climate has influenced participants' willingness to share certain narratives or their framing of lived experiences.

Sociality. Sociality refers to the relationship between the participant and the researcher. My primary goal is to amplify the voices of my community members, ensuring their narratives are shared accurately and thoughtfully rather than exploited. Rosenberg and Tilley (2021) found that trans-led research "provides more in-depth data, builds more constructive rapport with community members, and produces more effective research than the norm of purely outsider

research in the field" (p. 923). Trans participants in studies focusing on transgender experiences report more positive interactions when the researcher is also transgender.

Place. Place refers to both where the experience and the inquiry take place. When conducting an interview, especially where intimate and private things may be discussed, it is imperative that participants feel comfortable and safe in the space. Location profoundly shapes the lived experiences and narratives of trans individuals, influencing not only how they navigate daily life but also how they express and share their identities. In this study, place refers to where the participants live and recreate in the outdoors.

Participant Selection

The target population for this study was self-identifying Black trans adults (18+) who spend time in the outdoors. The use of "self-identifying" is meant to further empower participants as it rejects the power dynamics of externally defining who is Black and trans (Hill Collins, 2000). Participants for the study were recruited using snowball sampling. First, I reached out via text and phone to my personal contacts within the trans and queer community for participation and/or recommendations for other participants. Secondly, I reached out via email to affinity groups and organizations, such as Wild Diversity, Camp Lost Boys, and The Venture Out Project. Lastly, I reached out on social media groups such as Facebook and Reddit.

Due to time constraints the study was limited to five participants: one transwoman, one non-binary transmasculine person, and three transmen.

Name	Pronouns	Race/Ethnicity	Location
Maia	She/They	Black	Indiana
Rey	He/They	Afro-Latino	Illinois
Kato	He/Him	Black & Latino	Oregon
Jalyn	He/Him	Black	Washington
Etienne	He/Him	Black	Illinois

Table 2. Participant Demographics

Methods

Narrative Interviewing

The method I chose was narrative interviewing (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Narrative interviewing uses open-ended questions to elicit stories or narratives from participants. Unlike semi-structured interviews, which also include open-ended questions, narrative interviewing is guided by the participant without the researcher's influence toward a specific predetermined topic. In narrative interviewing, the researcher serves primarily as a listener and less as a guide, and the questions are structured in such a way as to elicit narratives or stories (Pederson, 2013). A key point about narrative inquiry is that "the narrative approach places the people being studied at the heart of the study and privileges the meanings that they assign to their own story" (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p. 631).

Interviews were scheduled for one hour, with the flexibility to expand if necessary. The medium of the interviews depended on the participants' geographic location and comfort. Participants were given the choice of an in-person, virtual, or telephonic interview. With permission, interviews were audio-recorded only and initially transcribed by AI-assisted software. During the interview, participants were asked questions to elicit narratives about their experiences in outdoor spaces and/or programs. Interview questions included:

1) Why do you go outdoors?
    a. Why is this important to you?
    b. Where do you go? Why? With whom?
2) Can you share a story about the ways you navigate and experience the outdoors as a Black trans person?
    a. Does this change depending on where you are and who you are with?

3) Give me an example of a time that you think exemplifies what it's like to be a Black trans person in the outdoors.
4) Can you share a meaningful or positive experience you've had participating in an outdoor activity or program as a Black trans person?
    a. What made that experience significant for you?
5) How has your relationship or connection with the outdoors evolved over different parts of your life and identity journey?
6) As a Black trans person, how has the changing political climate affected your experience in the outdoors? Can you share a specific example?

I developed these questions with the specific intent of being as broad as possible while still seeking the answers I was looking for. I wanted to ensure that participants had the freedom to share both negative and positive experiences. Given the significance and real-life effect of politics on the lives of Black and trans people, I felt it impossible to ignore and necessitated an additional question.

Co-constructed transcript

Adams et al. (2017) argue that research involving trans people should include trans people in every step of the process from inception to dissemination. Therefore, I have chosen a co-constructed approach to transcription between the researcher and the participant. Rather than simply providing a text form of what was said, a co-constructed transcript also aims to include the essence of the conversation. It includes interactional content, such as pauses, sighs, and emotion. Continuing along the theme of self-identification, participants were given the choice of using their chosen name or using a chosen pseudonym. I did the initial transcription with the assistance of Otter.ai transcription software. Both the initial transcription and narrative were

emailed to the participant for review. This review period allowed participants to reflect on the conversation and think of any changes they would like to see in the transcription. Participants were given the option to set up an additional Zoom or phone call. As part of the call, participants had the opportunity to delete, clarify, or add to the conversation and ensure the essence of their stories were adequately captured.

Data Analysis

My data analysis was informed by hooks' (2015) statement that "Only as subjects can we speak. As objects, we remain voiceless—our beings defined and interpreted by others" (p.12). To me, this means even in the analysis of participants' stories, I continued to view participants as subjects of their own stories rather than seeing their stories as objects of my research. To do that, I chose to conduct a narrative analysis.

Unlike thematic analysis, which aims to deconstruct narratives into smaller comparable parts, narrative analysis aims to retain the essence of the storyteller's account (Glover, 2003). "The outcome of narrative analysis is a story" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15). The goal is to produce a *restorying* of the narratives in a way that is authentic to both the participants and their stories. Data analysis was conducted using a holistic content approach, which Lieblich et al. (1998) describe as focusing on the content and the meaning derived from the whole story. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) employed three analytical tools for narratives, which I have also used: broadening, burrowing, and restorying.

Following the completion of the interviews, I began the analysis process by reviewing the AI-generated transcript. I listened to each interview individually, not only making corrections to the transcript where necessary but also adding the nuances of the conversation (i.e., pauses and laughs).

Broadening

Broadening refers to looking at the greater context of the participant's story. It involves generalizing a person's character, way of life, and social climate (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This tool is about considering what else we know about the participant and their story outside of the text. In the next step, I read through each transcript several times to note any significant insights that I might have missed during the initial transcription. Unlike the transcription process, whose purpose was logistical in nature, this second step was purely for analytical reasons. As a part of this process, I read each individual transcript in its entirety at least once. Doing so allowed me to dive deeper into each participant's stories and begin the process of applying outside context about the participants, their location, and politics to their stories.

Burrowing

Kim (2024) describes burrowing as focusing on the specific details of the narrative, such as feelings, understandings, or impacts. The aim is to ascertain how these details have influenced the participants' experience. After the initial readings of each transcript, I began to recall specific parts of each transcript that shared some commonality with other participants. For example, the word "grounded" stood out to me in both Rey and Kato's interviews, so I went back to read each mention of being grounded by both participants. The purpose of this was not to compare stories but rather to try to understand what it meant for them to be grounded and the impact of that feeling on their lives.

Restorying

Restorying is about bringing out the significance of the participant's story. This is where the mean-making occurs. Rolón-Dow & Bailey (2021) describe restorying as the process of communicating the why and how to the reader from the participant's perspective.

The next step in my analysis was two-fold. I created narratives using each participant's interview transcript. The primary purpose of this was to create a much more user-friendly summation of the interview transcripts to send to each participant for approval. Portions of those narratives are included in the findings below. The secondary benefit of these narratives was for analysis purposes. Looking through these narratives allowed me to take a step back from the data and view it with fresh eyes as if I were the reader. "What would the reader find interesting?" I asked myself. With that question in mind, I began the process of restorying by highlighting key elements of each interview that represented core messages woven throughout all of the interviews.

Findings and Discussion

For the purposes of this manuscript, I have chosen to present the findings of the study in a written format, which includes narratives from each participant along with a discussion surrounding the meaning derived from their narratives in conjunction with theory. The results of the study are presented in two sections. The first section includes excerpts of each participant's narrative. In this section, each participant's story and narrative are considered independent. The second section details lessons learned from the interviews, including four common trends seen across all five interviews.

Restorying

As I previously mentioned, I used participants' interview transcripts to create narratives. This was meant to capture the essence of each participant based on their interview transcript. Portions of each participant's narrative are included below.

Etienne is a Black transman living in a large urban city. His story centers around his experiences living in an urban area but still finding ways to experience nature and wilderness.

Through his story, we can see how identity, location, and accessibility intersect. For him, engaging with nature is "integral to remaining a well-rounded human being," and he finds ways to do so by visiting local parks, beaches, and green spaces.

> *Um, so, you know, I live in the middle of a huge city, but luckily, we have a lot of green space and programs for people. So, we've got some pretty big parks here in [city omitted]. We've got [local] Park, actually, which has a bird watchers' group. And I have a dog, so I like to take him to assorted parks. We go to the beach when it's warm enough.*

Well into his transition, Etienne feels like his relationship with nature has evolved alongside him.

> *I am not really religious or spiritual per se, but I've noticed as I have transed myself more, I've gotten a little bit more mystical. And I feel like, and I, you know, do enjoy weed and mushrooms, and that helps. And I feel like the outdoors is, you know, for a non-believer like me, I feel like the outdoors is kind of one of the closest things that I can get to, like a sacred space. And so over time, you know, the way that I notice things has evolved. I feel like being trans has made me feel like— it's made me notice more things, or at least it's kind of evolved over the same period of time. You know, maybe it's not directly related, but it's kind of how my brain operates, and I feel like maybe a little bit more confident about embarking on outdoor adventures, like I went camping with friends back when— I am seven years into transitioning, so in my 20s— I was still cosplaying as a lesbian, and used to go camping all the time with my friends back then, but I was always just like, Imma, let y'all do all the things. I don't know how to do any of this. I don't know. How do I start fire? I don't know. I don't want to go off too far. I'm scared. But now I'm like, Yeah, I don't know. I can do it. I can take it.*

Despite the financial and transportation constraints, Etienne remains hopeful and interested in continuing to explore and increase his knowledge of the outdoors.

> *I mean, I'm a rambler. I like to walk a lot, so honestly, probably just more, more hiking, more like intentional hiking. And, you know, learning, what the different things I'm seeing are, plants. I don't know if I necessarily want to gather mushrooms and herbs and all that, but, I mean, it'd be nice to know what the things are, just in case. Foraging, that's the word.*

In Jalyn's case, his relationship with nature has changed as he has grown and transitioned. Originally seen as a place of escape from unaccepting parents, nature now offers enjoyment in Jalyn's everyday life. His experiences offer some insight into the nuances of how access to outdoor spaces varies across cultural and socioeconomic boundaries.

> *When I was younger, especially I came out when I was, like, 14 or something–Lived with my parents. They didn't, weren't very supportive at all. I would go outside and just smoke with a weed cigarette, or just, we had a beach next to our house. I'd go walk on the beach, pick up bones, and stuff. It was like a comforting place. No one's talking to you, you know, no one looking at you. There wasn't really any people around me. It's just kind of like a thinking, thinking place, safe place where, you know, nothing's going on. You're just with your thoughts, and you're looking at something beautiful, and you're just vibing.*

Now, six years into his transition, and with the help of his boyfriend's family Jalyn's experiences outdoors are more about enjoyment and discovery.

> *It's like, they do all this stuff. And they do every year, they go on a bike, they just get on a bike and just ride, like, if I go on a bike, I'm going, like, the gas station. So, you know what? I mean? It's like, it's different. It's they do it just to exercise. There's no gas station*

for miles. Every morning, and, you know, they go. It's, I don't know. It's a whole different world, but I appreciate that. I got to, you know, experience that with them, for sure. My family went fishing and stuff. We didn't, you know, kayaking. Nothing like that.

As a transman who rejects the rigid standards of masculinity, Kato's story illustrates his deep connection with nature which is inspired by indigenous practices and rooted in a spiritual foundation.

Yeah, I mean, I think a lot of, I mean all of our cultures, like being Black, being indigenous, you know, putting terms on, like Latino, all that we all, like a lot of our indigeneity, revolves around nature. If you look at it, all our tribes and all that like has always surrounded, has always had huge emphasis on nature, and colonization has really wiped that away from us and in erasure. So, to like, return back in a ways, like returning, reclaiming back our like, you know, our roots. So, I feel like it's always been like, inherent in us to go back to nature. I don't know, for me, at least, I've always, I've always been connected to, like, just the most wholesome as possible, you know? And, yeah, so I usually get that out here, like, I'm very ever since I moved up here, I don't have, like, really, any problems that I had back in when I was living in cities and stuff. Like, I really do feel whole, I feel more content, I feel more laid back. I feel just grounded. I don't know, I just– and there's a huge indigenous presence up here, and I think that helps a lot too, just kind of helping everyone reconnect to nature. You know, it's a really beautiful spot.

Kato speaks movingly about his experience with nature when under the influence of mushrooms.

Yeah, I almost feel like it's, I'm literally like, I can see the trees breathing. I can see everything. I do tend to hyper focus when I am under that influence in nature, like, it's

nothing else but nature, and I find a deep admiration. If I am going to get emotional about it, I'm going to cry because of nature, like, but anytime I feel something deeply emotional, it's because of nature, like, I don't know. I just always–I've always had these deep eyes and, like, even since I was a little kid. And it's just like, when you are under that influence, you just take– it makes you just lock all the noise and just really sit where you're at and just appreciate your surroundings and the life that it's given you. Like, I'm just really heavy on like, you know, I'm kind of tearing up right now, but, like, I don't know, like, just, seeing the trees, seeing, like, the little creatures crawling on the rocks. I'm hearing the ocean right next to you. I mean, there's– it makes you reevaluate and be like, you know, I don't need all of these other high tech stuff in my life. You know. I don't need to have, like, all, you know, video games, TVs and stuff, I can just come out here and feel so much better, you know.

His rejection of rigid masculinity standards has allowed Kato to define and express his manhood in ways that he feels are true to him.

I think being a man is how you want it to be, you know, if you want to be hyper masculine, and that's what you consider a man, like, that's– that's on you. You know, for me, it's whatever I determine to be a man, who I am as a man, you know, like, if I think a man should be caring and loving and, you know, a good human being and like, you know, and if I'm, you know, fulfilling that, then I'm being true to being a man in my eyes, you know… I just feel like manhood is how you describe it, you know, it's not how other people are gonna put it on you.

When Maia made the conscious decision to prioritize her own comfort over conformity, she freed herself from the confines of gender performativity and allowed herself to experience nature as a place of peace and source of solace.

> *I still want to pass, but I'm also not interested in performing hyper femininity or just like being… like the extra work and just also being like uncomfortable all the fucking time, because, like being hyper feminine, and like having your nails done and your hair done and make up twenty-four fucking seven. I'm autistic, so, like, it was becoming sensory hell, like trying to keep all of this shit together, and then it's not comfortable having, like braids and like nails and hair and all of that. Like, I don't know, it just got to a point where, like, me being comfortable in my body, as in, like, physically, like I'm not over stimulated all of the time.*

Maia speaks about the intersection of her identity and how the Black community can sometimes lack acceptance of the queer community.

> *I wish– the thing is, like with my Blackness, with transness, the relationship I have with it is still centered in like Black trans womanhood, and not just transness itself, because– I really do not know how to explain this thought– like when I first learned about transness, I don't know about you, but I feel like a lot of people, especially Black people, can understand, like when you first learn about queerness in general, it's always taught or talked about as something that only white people experience and something that just Black people don't really have any relationship or connection to. So then when, like, you try to find representation, or you try to, like, build relationships With other queer people, a lot of the times you're, you're met with like, you only see like, there's only like, white queer people that you are like, can connect to or, or like, see you. Like, have*

representation about this one aspect of your identity. I don't know. I don't know. I've just I've been Black longer than I've been trans, yeah, but I've been both my entire life.

Despite the challenges of feeling unsafe, Maia continues to connect with nature through her art.

I, just for me, I, and I hate to say this, and because it's really sad, but I'm kind of used to being like having eyes on me. I'm, I'm used to feeling unsafe in public. When I first began transitioning, I would like, experience so much anxiety with, like, going outside, like a wig on, or, like my makeup done, and over time, you just kind of get−you get used to the way that you're treated. [It's] sad but at the same time, no, it's just sad... For me, the most impactful, like outdoor activity for me is just like art and drawing, maybe drawing my surroundings, or just doing a portrait or for photography, is another thing too.

Rey describes himself as a "poetically minded" person and often speaks of nature in a beautiful way. He credits an outdoor experience during his youth as a foundational moment in his journey to connect with nature. However, current outdoor experiences are profoundly shaped by his identities as a Black non-binary transmasculine person:

They took us to this one area that had, like a really big open clearing, like there were it was just like one area with no trees, no trees, no lights, it was the only thing that was illuminating us was the moon. And being able to clearly see the Milky Way, be able to see just the sky at large… But I was just so immersed in that moment, in present, in that moment and taking in just how small we actually are in the grander universe. Like it was really pivotal for me personally, and it's something that I've wanted to try and re-experience even now, because, like, we have light pollution everywhere, so it's hard to see anything that isn't just like a dingy brown haze on the sky, but just to see everything then just like so clearly, really gave me a greater appreciation for the outdoors as a

whole. Because I'm just like, wow, like, this is all interconnected… And, yeah, I would say, like, that profoundly impacted, just like, how, how I see the world and my place in it, I would just say, like in that moment, my world did get, like, a lot larger.

Rey shares powerful insight into the complex reality of navigating outdoor spaces as a Black trans person, particularly when identifying as non-binary.

I found that as a Black trans person, there are a number of guards that I personally have to go out, that I personally have to keep up while I'm traveling through the world outdoors, and I found that was one of the main reasons that influenced me staying indoors quite a lot during the beginning of my transition, because I already knew the, I already knew the threats that I'd be up against navigating the world as a Black person. And to add transness on top of that, felt like a threat that I didn't necessarily know very much about, especially as it pertains to the way that I go about my life… It's like that fear of being clocked as visibly trans and knowing that when it comes to covering the stories of Black trans people and them being targeted. Black trans men and Black trans masc [masculine] we hardly hear about. So, I would say like that informs a lot of my caution and fear and navigating through the world, and I find that it's much safer if people perceive me as being on one of the binaries, like one of the cis gender binaries, rather than figuring me out as being trans.

Exhausted by the demands of social interaction, Rey prefers to experience nature alone.

Yeah, I do think that spending that time by myself is really important. Even though I do enjoy going with other people, I find that it distracts from the original intention in re-grounding myself in the grander world at large, getting a chance to interact with and appreciate and value nature, rather than it just kind of being something that falls to the

background of my life. I don't interact with it much, so I found that I've grown a great appreciation for various like, insects and plants and sceneries, especially as an artists. So that's why I personally just like to go by myself most times.

In my analysis of these narratives and the interview transcript, I noticed four common elements between participants' experiences. The following section details those elements.

Four Beings

Each participant spoke about the various ways they navigate, operate, and exist in nature: 1) as a Black and trans person, 2) as their authentic self, 3) in connection with nature, and 4) alone in nature. I discuss each of the four ideas, which were seen across narratives and interviews, below.

Being Black and trans in nature

"Most people don't know I'm trans. They just think Black kid or whatever the fuck they think." (Jalyn, personal communication, November 17, 2024)

How does one separate their identities? Can they be separated? Mosley et al. (2021) would argue no; rather than separation, identity salience suggests that Black trans people often lead with one identity depending on their environment. For all participants, identity salience usually takes the form of leading with their Blackness. Our skin color is the first thing someone sees when they come across us, and despite what some might say, from the moment they lay eyes on us, their judgment and unconscious bias begin. No dress, button-down, beard, fake breast, or packer is going to hide our heritage.

I wish—the thing is, like with my Blackness, with transness, the relationship I have with it is still centered in Black trans womanhood, and not just transness itself, because I really do not know how to explain this thought--like when I first learned about transness—I don't know about you, but I feel like a lot of people, especially Black people, can

understand—like when you first learn about queerness in general, it's always taught or talked about as something that only white people experience and something that Black people don't really have any relationship or connection to. So then when you try to find representation, or you try to build relationships with other queer people, a lot of the times you're met with—you only see—there's only like, white queer people that you that you are, like, can connect to or, like, see. Like, have representation about this one aspect of your identity. I don't know. I don't know. I've just... I've been Black longer than I've been trans, yeah, but I've been both my entire life. -Maia

Maia's identity as a Black trans woman requires that she account for all of her identities when relating to the world and the people in it. Audre Lorde (2017), a Black lesbian feminist, describes the struggle of incorporating identities, stating, "I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self. But that is a destructive and fragmenting way to live" (p.102).

This same sentiment rings true for other participants, as Rey describes an encounter at a queer gathering "I mentioned that my gender is very much influenced by my race, and they did not want to continue having that conversation with me, and just kind of like, like, shouldered me out of the conversation" (Rey, personal communication, November 19, 2024). What Rey experienced is an all too often example of people failing to understand and embrace the intersections of others' identities. The white queer people he was interacting with could not understand that for someone of transmasculine experience, such as Rey, being view as a Black man in society comes with its own unique struggles. Our presence is often seen as a threat, and for some, such as Ahmaud Arbery, the interpretation of that threat can result in violence. Rey finds himself adjusting his behavior in order to minimize his threat level.

Is it okay for me to stand this close to this woman, or even just like, be in an enclosed space with her, like in an elevator, or is it like weird for me to smile at this child or interact with them? And I find that in instances like that, I end up softening and feminizing my behavior, and I find that other people react in a lot more relaxed way to that. It's kind of like, let's say, like I'm disarming them.

For Kato, who considers himself to have passing privilege, his race is something that cannot be avoided on a daily basis. He notes that all other identities are secondary, stating:

My race always comes first, whether it's like job interviews or like housing, even getting pets at a shelter, or something as simple as that, you know, like, just my race always comes first. It was the first, you know, discriminatory thing I dealt with. So it's always, always in the for-There's not a day I don't like- I walk outside and I have to think about my, you know, my color, you know. So, yeah, it's, um, I definitely feel like everything else is very second, like all these added, you know, identities, yeah, they're important stuff. But I– if I have to say, like, the one that affects me the most, it has to be my race.

He further goes on to talk about his experiences recreating outdoors as a Black person and how it can be a dangerous event.

You have to just be careful, because you're going to deal with some type of, like, interaction that could be, honestly, like very dangerous. Like, I've been driven off the road in those towns. I've had some people get extremely upset, and threaten to pull knives out and stuff, it's just, there's certain areas, I would honestly consider those towns like, sundown towns. It's just one of those you just don't want to be there super late, and you want to try to choose a trail that is more populated in a way, like, I'm not going to try to go, I'm not going to try to be like, very like, small trails in those areas, like it's just, you

> *just got to be careful. And my white friends don't have a problem seeing this in these areas. And I definitely think it's because of like, my race being, like, included in it, like you just have to consider your race when you go into certain areas.*

As Powell (2021) mentions, "outdoor spaces and consequently outdoor recreation is coded as white" (pg. 172). Our presence in these spaces is often surveilled and judged based on the white standard of how to appropriately behave in outdoor spaces. For trans people who have passing privilege, like me, our race is seen as an unavoidable external struggle while our transness is often internal. Since people don't generally recognize me as trans, they don't possess the knowledge required to discriminate against me on the basis of my gender identity. For those without passing privilege, multiplying oppression becomes much more likely. Still, whether we pass or not, the real challenge is in living life in a way that feels authentic to us.

Being my authentic self

"I still want to pass, but I'm also not interested in performing hyper femininity" (Maia, personal communication, November 20, 2024)

"Men don't wear makeup." "You're not feminine enough." These statements and others like them all reference societies' narrow definitions of the male and female genders. Butler (2006) argues that gender is performative in the context of social dynamics, rather than an inherent truth. Butler (2024) further critiques the social demands of gender, asking:

> Who are these people who think they have the right to tell you who you are and what you are not, and who dismiss your own definition of who you are, who tell you that self-determination is not a right that you are allowed to exercise, who would subject you to medical and psychiatric review, or mandatory surgical intervention, before they are

> willing to recognize you in the name and sex you have given yourself, the ones to which you have arrived? (p. 151)

However, most of the participants have experienced the most authentic embodiment of their gender in the very absence of social recognition–through nature's validation. The very aspect of passing implies being accepted and viewed as the gender you identify with. Maia's refusal to perform hyper-femininity is her way of pushing back against societal standards of what it means to be a woman. Similarly, Jalyn struggled with how his feminine mannerisms would be viewed.

> *I used to be very obsessed with passing, I'd be like, I can't put my legs together. I gotta, I gotta sit like this. I gotta do this. I gotta do this. And now it's just to a point where it's like, people are gonna take me how they want to take me, you know. And it is what–I don't even correct people anymore because, like, it doesn't bother me*.

The notion that queer and trans people can experience authenticity in nature is further supported by Meyer and Borrie's (2013) findings that "In wild places they are able to escape these structures most significantly because of the lack of people, lack of judgment, and indifference of nature to our social constructions of gender" (p. 306). As part of his transition, Kato has redefined what it means to be a man for himself.

> *I've always been that person that, like, I've never given a fuck either at the same time. So I feel like I like, like I said, you know, I wear my feminine earrings, I wear my–I wear certain things that may not be super hyper masculine at times, but I feel like I like, I love makeup, right? Like I have loved it since I was, like, 18, and I was like, this is something that transness is not going to take for me. And I would wear makeup early transition, and I would wear makeup–I can wear makeup today, you know? Like, it's no problem.*

At least for now, nature tends to lack the panoptical surveillance that Foucault (1995) speaks about, but even under the occasional gaze of others, it seems each participant has found a way to accept themselves as they are. “I don't fucking care. Like, if you want to look at me funny, white man, then look at me,” Etienne remarked (personal communication, November 21, 2024).

Being connected to nature

“I feel like the outdoors is, you know, for a non-believer like me, I feel like the outdoors is kind of one of the closest things that I can get to, like a sacred space.” (Etienne, personal communication, November 21, 2024)

What Etienne is describing is not uncommon. Maia also mentions feeling a more spiritual connection with nature, stating, “I would say I've grown closer to nature in spirituality, but I've always loved nature in general” (personal communication, November 20, 2024). What they are describing is *ecospirituality,* the “manifestation of the spiritual interconnection between human beings and the environment” (Lincoln, 2000, p. 228). Perhaps the most interesting message to come from the interviews was the genuine connection with nature that supersedes the artificial enjoyment of nature as a "thing" or commodity. When referencing a biblical verse, hooks (2009) maintains that “we can gain spiritual strength by simply beholding the natural world, that indeed to look upon the wonders of nature is to gaze at divine spirit” (p.26). All of the participants spoke of nature in reverence. Rey so beautifully relates his transition to nature, stating:

> *I find that relating my transition to the way seasons transition, or how seeds transition into full flowers, have helped me better embrace my transition and kind of like romanticize it to myself in a way like I like, as I continue taking tea and finding myself, I'm blooming. So it's giving me a greater appreciation for nature as it relates to myself because I'm just like, you know, as everything in nature transitions, I'm transitioning and*

changing as well. I don't feel so disconnected from my body anymore because, I'm able to, I'm able to embrace who I am fully and being able to take that new groundedness out into nature as well.

Rey's views on nature and its connection to his personal journey are echoed by bell hooks, who asserts that healing requires self-determination over the earth and our bodies. "When the earth is sacred to us, our bodies can also be sacred to us" (hooks, 2009, p.40).

Kato describes being "grounded" in nature stating, "I also find it really rewarding, like it's just, I feel more spiritual, and it's more like grounded in a way, it helps a lot mental health wise, obviously" (personal communication, November 25, 2024). He often refers to indigenous ties to the land, and when he speaks of being grounded, he's referring to the physical, sensory, and spiritual connection with nature.

I'm just super, like, inherently tied to nature… Like, this is a very like, I don't know it's just nature has always been connected, like, tied me. And I think that's more of like, you know, my indigeneity, like, just, kind of like, just, we are connected to the earth, you know, like, so we always want to reach back to that. …

So to, like, return back in a ways, like returning, reclaiming back our like, you know, our roots. So I feel like it's always been like, inherent in us to go back to nature. I don't know, for me, at least, I've always, I've always been connected to, like, just the most wholesome as possible, you know? And, yeah, so I usually get that out here, like, I'm very ever since I moved up here, I don't have, like, really, any problems that I had back in when I was living in cities and stuff. Like, I really do feel whole, I feel more content, I feel more laid back. I feel just grounded. I don't know, I just, and there's a huge indigenous

presence up here, and I think that helps a lot too, just kind of helping everyone reconnect to nature.

For hundreds of years, our ancestors tended and cared for this land we call home. Our heritage is connected to this land. hooks (2009) writes, “Our first home is the earth, and it will be where we come again to rest forever, our final homeplace” (p.203). Perhaps it is the appreciation of nature as a giver of life or the validation that who we are is also natural. We look to clownfish, which are capable of changing their sex, seahorses, where the males give birth, or the adorable "gay penguins" to find examples of queerness in the natural world. We are inherently tied to nature, and its acceptance of us literally gives us life.

Being alone in nature

“Even though I do enjoy going with other people, I find that it distracts from the original intention in re-grounding myself in the grander world at large” (Rey, personal communication, November 19, 2024).

A key element of Eco-Existential Positive Psychology is its incorporation of both the natural and human environment to address what Passmore and Howell (2014) refer to as the six existential anxieties: identity, happiness, isolation, meaning in life, freedom, and death. They argue that incorporating nature into your self-identity can result in a sense of authenticity, increased well-being, greater sense of relatedness, and increased autonomy (Passmore & Howell, 2014). For many of the participants, spending time alone in nature meant escaping from societal pressures and expectations, using phrases such as "less exhausting" (Rey, personal communication, November 19, 2024) and "more peaceful" (Maia, personal communication, November 20, 2024). This notion is supported by Passmore and Howell's (2014) theory that

"nature does not impose on us expectations of arbitrary social propriety; we are free simply to be" (p.379).

> *It's like a different type of aloneness, being outdoors alone, versus being indoors alone, just like a different, different kind of mindset and involved in that, yeah, like, I know a lot of people, and I just said I was like, at a music festival in the forest. I mean, you could get away from the music. I like silence, it's very important to me. And it's like, I don't necessarily like– like, I'm a musician. I listen to music all the time, but when I'm outside, a lot of the time, I don't want any music. I want to listen to what's happening outside. So some of it is just the exercising of senses differently. Yeah, a self-care thing.* -Etienne

Being alone in nature allowed participants to experience the other aspects of existing in nature previously discussed. Without other people, participants could be themselves and could fully connect with nature on a deeper, more personal level. Maia regards the forest as "a place where I can just sit solo and not be bothered by the world and just like, be around nature" (personal communication, November 20, 2024), which is echoed in the poem "Breathe" (Hemsley, n.d.). An excerpt of the poem reads:

> *She told them she felt she was never enough,*
> *She was either too little or far far too much,*
> *Too loud or too quiet, too fierce or too weak,*
> *Too wise or too foolish, too bold or too meek,*
>
> *Then she found a small clearing surrounded by firs,*
> *And she stopped...and she heard what the trees said to her,*
> *And she sat there for hours not wanting to leave,*
> *For the forest said nothing, it just let her breathe.*

Being alone in nature has allowed each of the participants to embody their authentic selves and experience the connection to nature I previously described.

Conclusion: Being in community

The outdoors exists in a powerful duality: the human element is unwelcoming of Black trans people, yet nature itself can be a place of authenticity, solace, and connection. Etienne, Jalyn, Kato, Maia, and Rey all found ways to exist in nature that brought them joy in spite of all the messaging that tells them they don't belong.

What I did not and could not anticipate was the intangible, real-life impact that these interviews had on me. My Blackness and my transness proved to be a pivotal point of connection regarding Rosiek's (2007) dimension of sociality (as a reminder, sociality refers to the relationship between the participant and researcher). The interviews felt like having a conversation with an old friend. No matter the goal, the topic, or the time, each participant and I took every opportunity to veer off the path I had so delicately drawn in my mind. We held space for one another and simply allowed each other to experience being in the presence of someone who got "it". I can't remember the last time I felt like that, and I haven't felt it since. These are my people, and together, at least in those moments, we created what hooks (1997) describes as "homeplace", a safe place where Black people come together to affirm one another and heal our societal wounds.

As I write this one day after President Trump has signed executive orders meant to erase trans and non-binary people from existence, I am reminded of the importance of community. Though we walk different paths, each of us is inextricably linked and reliant on each other, not just for survival but for resistance. Our very existence is in opposition to what the government tells us is true. When I began this study, I wanted to highlight the joys and strengths of being

Black and trans in the outdoors. I remain steadfast in my pursuit of that goal. Therefore, I have also chosen to publish the findings of this study in a more accessible article for a popular queer magazine such as Out Magazine or The Advocate. Our stories of joy deserve to be heard just as much, if not more, than the stories of our despair. Love (2019) writes:

> Black joy is to embrace your full humanity, as the world tells you that you are disposable and that you do not matter. Black joy is a celebration of taking back your identity as a person of color and signaling to the world that your darkness is what makes you strong and beautiful. Black joy is finding your homeplace and creating homeplaces for others. Black joy is understanding and recognizing that as a dark person you come with grit and zest because you come from survivors who pushed their bodies and minds to the limits for you to one day thrive. (pp. 138–139)

And thrive we shall because we owe it to ourselves and each other. It is my hope that future researchers will continue to listen to the voices of Black queer people and celebrate our strengths. With this knowledge may we continue to create spaces that are enthusiastically welcoming, overtly loving, and staunchly supportive.

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APPENDIX A: Recruitment Flyer

APPENDIX B: Organization Recruitment Email

Subject: Request for Assistance with Research Study on Black Trans Outdoor Experiences

Dear [Organization Name],

My name is Trenton Jones, and I am a Black trans graduate student at Western Carolina University. I am conducting research focusing on the outdoor experiences of Black transgender individuals for my master's thesis.

This study aims to explore and amplify the voices, stories, and lived experiences of Black trans people in outdoor spaces - a perspective that is underrepresented in existing scholarly research. By centering this intersection of racial and gender identities, the findings can provide valuable insights to make outdoor recreation more inclusive and equitable.

I am reaching out to your organization to request assistance in identifying and connecting with potential participants for this study. The criteria are self-identified Black/African American transgender adults (18 or older) who participate in outdoor activities or programs. Participation would involve a one-hour conversational interview about their experiences navigating outdoor spaces.

Participation is completely voluntary and protecting participant privacy and confidentiality is of utmost importance. All shared information will be kept strictly anonymous, and names/identities will not be published. Interviews can be conducted telephonically, virtually or in-person based on your location, preference, and comfort level.

Would you be willing to suggest appropriate individuals who may be interested in participating? Or alternatively, could you please share this study information with your networks? I'm happy to provide a recruitment message that can be forwarded.

This research has received approval from the Western Carolina University Institutional Review Board. By giving voice to this underrepresented community, it can foster greater inclusion within the outdoor recreation field.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and any assistance you can provide. Please feel free to reach out if you have any other questions.

Sincerely,

Trenton Jones

Email: Tjones19@catamount.wcu.edu

Cell Phone: (253)820-5483

APPENDIX C: Individual Recruitment Email

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Outdoor Experiences Study for Black Trans Adults

Hello,

My name is Trenton Jones, and I am a Black trans graduate student at Western Carolina University conducting research on the outdoor experiences of Black transgender individuals. This study aims to amplify the voices and stories of Black trans people in outdoor spaces, which have been largely missing from scholarly research.

I am reaching out to invite self-identified Black transgender adults (18 and over) who participate in outdoor activities to be interviewed for this study. Your perspective and lived experience are invaluable for this research. The interview will be a relaxed conversation, lasting approximately one hour, where you can share your narratives about navigating the outdoors as a Black trans person.

Participation is completely voluntary and protecting participant privacy and confidentiality is of utmost importance. All shared information will be kept strictly anonymous, and names/identities will not be published. Interviews can be conducted telephonically, virtually or in-person based on your location, preference, and comfort level.

If you are interested in participating or know others who may qualify, please reply to this email or contact me at 253-820-5483. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

This research has been approved by the WCU Institutional Review Board. By centering the voices of Black trans individuals, this study can help foster more inclusive outdoor spaces.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Trenton Jones