



“My Dude, Are You Tired? I’m Tired:” An Intersectional Methodological Intervention

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This manuscript is a methodological intervention that addresses ethical considerations associated with conducting research in outdoor spaces, particularly with communities of color and other marginalized communities. The core issue is that BIPOC individuals, LGBTQIA + individuals, and disabled individuals face discrimination and violence in outdoor/recreational spaces. By investigating these issues, scholars can intensify the problem. We hope that our perspectives can assist ethical decision-making processes in methodology, advocacy, and interaction with outdoor communities of color.

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INTRODUCTION

We share a unique positionality as academics, current outdoor professionals, and members of organizational boards tasked with addressing social justice in outdoor recreation. Outdoor recreation professionals often help individuals access the wilderness and experience public lands through high-adventure activities such as rafting or rock climbing. With our collective knowledge as scholars and outdoor community advocates, we write this as a consideration for scholars studying the diversification of American outdoor recreation communities, which are being critiqued for their white supremacist, heteronormative, and ableist structures, practices, and norms.

Upon reading the call for submissions for a special issue of *Frontiers in Communication: Science and Environmental Communication* that had a focus on communication, race, and outdoor spaces, this group of scholars was excited. We have researched and written separately about gender, race, and ethnicity in outdoor recreation spaces and are proud of our dual identities as researchers and guides/advocates. With this dual positionality, we feel we may be able to speak on behalf of those working in the field that might be called upon to study diversity in the outdoors who can be put in precarious positions if they do not proceed in this research with extreme care. We are hopeful that this journal call is the start of critical intersectional discussions. We hope our piece is an intervention that urges environmental and outdoor communication scholars to consider important intersectional factors that impact their presence in such spaces. In particular, this is an opportunity for those who do not have outdoor recreation experience to stop and think about ways in which our scholarship might potentially negatively impact minoritized and marginalized communities during the research process. An example of such a disconnect manifests in the title of this article, as reviewers wondered about the significance of the wording and our use of the phrase “My dude.” “My dude” is in reference to a common way that outdoor recreationists refer to each other, a slang used by people outside recreating together. Being tired is how minoritized individuals in these spaces feel right now. The title is a nod to the increase of labor we will be asking of minoritized communities as researchers from outside of these communities approach insiders to do research.

This manuscript is a methodological intervention that addresses ethical considerations associated with conducting research in outdoor spaces, particularly with communities of color and other marginalized communities facing discrimination and violence in outdoor/recreational spaces. By investigating these issues, scholars can intensify the problem. We hope our perspectives can assist ethical decision-making processes in methodology, advocacy, and interaction with outdoor communities of color.

AN INTERSECTIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL METHODOLOGICAL INTERVENTION

Cultivating spaces that make outdoor recreation more inclusive and diverse is long overdue. It is vital that researchers understand the racist, sexist, ableist, and exclusionary policies and practices that have long existed, policies and practices that not only communicate to minoritized people that the outdoors is not a space for them but heavily regulate their very presence and threaten their safety. These barriers to safe participation range from: representation (Maria looked at forty websites for commercial whitewater companies and only observed three photos of guides of color) to implicit bias, which affects hiring, scheduling, promotion, and retention (in interviews, she found that female guides were more often scheduled on the family sections of river instead of the intense whitewater) to explicit racism (guides on rivers were routinely highly verbally racist about their East Indian clientele) and violence and predation (patterns of outbursts or predatory behavior by return clients or coworkers directed at only guides of color). It is time for investigation and intervention into these spaces. However, since few researchers have held space in both academic and outdoor recreation areas, the authors of this article hope to provide information and considerations to those engaging in this work. In the process of investigating these barriers, researchers must consider the extra emotional, physical, and mental burdens that often characterize research with people of color, and, in the case of the outdoors, particularly if these people are key informants within their field (i.e., the only person of color guiding in a particular sport or locale). The labors asked of such individuals are often already multiple, especially in this era of DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) initiatives. In this manuscript, we will be providing a framework of intersectionality, research, and action. We will be considering the extra labor we are asking participants to do, reflecting on the potential cost to participation, and investigating how labor and identities intersect in these organizations. Last, this article asks researchers and practitioners to consider material and tangible ways communities can be supported through research.

AUTHORS' POSITIONALITIES

Maria was a whitewater rafting guide for twelve seasons before becoming a scholar of environmental and organizational communication. For the past 3 years, she has been working on

a project examining sexism and sexual harassment issues in the whitewater rafting industry. Through this project, her privilege as a white, heterosexual, cisgender woman has become evident to her. She understands that for the outdoors to be fun for everyone, an intersectional examination of who is welcome in the outdoor recreation world is necessary to find out who perpetuates systems of exclusion. She is a founding member of the A-DASH (Anti-Discrimination and Sexual Harassment) Collective, an organization created to help organizations combat harassment in the river industry.

Alexa is a mixed-race, immigrant, cisgender, queer woman, as well as a long-time whitewater paddler. A whitewater guide for the past 14 years, most recently in the Grand Canyon, she dabbles in other outdoor pursuits, like climbing and mountain biking. Additionally, she is a Ph.D. candidate in sociocultural anthropology, studying difference and power in the outdoor industry, as well as spirituality, secularism, identity, and change in the outdoors. A fellow member of A-DASH, she has also worked with various DEI committees in Grand Canyon area river companies, but her heart lies in extra-organizational solidarity and community-building efforts.

Leandra is a Mexican-American, cisgender, queer woman who has been rock climbing for 7 years. She is a communication scholar at the intersections of health communication, Latino communication studies, and media studies, and she has recently started exploring race-based and health-based angles of rock climbing. Her main passion is rock climbing, although she also enjoys hiking and alpinism pursuits. As a scholar and outdoor enthusiast, her research explores the intersections of gender and race that shape media discourses about outdoor recreation and communities' experiences in the outdoors. She has been a member of several women-based and queer-based climbing organizations, most recently as a member of the Salt Lake Climbers Alliance (SLCA) Board of Directors, a member of the SLCA Communication and JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion) Committees, and a co-facilitator for the Salt Lake Area Queer Climbers group. Through her experiences, both personally and organizationally, she continually observes the disconnect between organizational acknowledgment of JEDI initiatives and program follow-through to make outdoor spaces more inclusive and equitable for all.

FRAMEWORKS: INTERSECTIONALITY, RESEARCH, AND ACTION

Our primary social justice and theoretical lens is intersectionality, a framework that arose from contexts interrogating identity politics, social movement politics, anti-discrimination, and violence against women. First developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) to address structural and systemic violence against Black women, intersectionality is an approach that analyzes the interconnected matrices of power facilitating social hierarchies and patterns and structures of marginalization. We utilize intersectionality to emphasize the matrices of exclusionary power (racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism) that affect the experiences of marginalized

communities in the outdoors. Furthermore, Leah Thomas, an eco-influencer, has introduced the term intersectional environmentalism, which advocates the ideas of environmental justice while also asking environmental organizations to reflect on racial disparities in their organizations (Oglesby, 2021) that have historically been white.

Several researchers have contributed to this conversation by exploring the role of race in shaping outdoor experiences and research practices. Outdoor recreation scholars have explored what bodies are expected in particular activities (Harrison, 2013) and the exclusionary consequences of such expectations. Floyd (1998) outlines past discussion around a lack of participation in outdoor recreation to be “class-based” or “race-based,” but furthered the ideas about discrimination being the cause of people not engaging in outdoor recreation. This idea is also asserted by Harrison (2013) in an investigation of racism “securing” social spaces in the ski industry. Additional investigations have explored the environmental movement and outdoor recreation gatekeepers that keep particular bodies and communities out of outdoor spaces (Finney, 2014). There has also been a call for leisure studies to examine how leisure produces, fortifies, and preserves racist practices (Arai and Kivel, 2009). We applaud efforts to make outdoor recreation spaces more inclusive and the call for environmental communication scholars to open understandings of space and wilderness to consider race, ethnicity, and marginalized people. This article asks for thought and care to be given to that process, especially in understanding and differentiating the unique pressures on diverse outdoor industry employees.

There are examples of scholars reflecting on the damage done while conducting research in a speech community. Goode (2002) offers a reflection of his inappropriate behavior as a researcher as he reflects on an ethnography he conducted in a fat acceptance group as he dated and had sex with multiple participants. In her 2012 ethnographic textbook, Madison instills in new ethnographers the importance of considering the consequence of our work to participants. Environmental communication with its roots in rhetoric is newer to ethnographic study. These cautionary tales of ethnography gone wrong need to be considered as we enter the tiny speech communities that make up outdoor guides to do research. Additionally, it is difficult to find examples of communication scholarship in which authors are reflexive on the harm they may have inflicted on participants or communities. This article hopes to increase awareness of how outside researchers can proceed with caution in such spaces.

As research expands to examine the experiences of historically minoritized groups in the outdoor recreation and environmental sectors, we must remain sensitive to and attempt to mitigate the additional labor and exposure we are putting onto potential participants. We argue that this is done through what we are calling radical community-engaged participant research, a form of participatory action research (Rahman 2008). This is not the moment for curious researchers to be temporary tourists in the world of outdoor recreation, but a time for interested scholars to approach these individuals and communities and ask, “What do you need? How can I help? What information is necessary for you to feel safe doing this job?” The word “radical” signals that

this research is led by those consistently marginalized in the past. This research should start with questions and issues from minoritized changemakers within the outdoor communities to ensure that we, as allies and researchers, avoid both performative allyship by privileging the interests of the people we are working for and with.

Before beginning a research project, a researcher must understand where they fall on what Ong (N.D.) characterizes as a ladder of involvement in social movements. An activist is a person fully involved in a movement, works through protest, resistance, education, and engagement for change. An advocate can be an insider or outsider to the movement who publicly supports a cause, perhaps raising funds or awareness of an issue. An ally is an outsider to the movement who can elevate activists’ and advocates’ work by educating themselves and sharing information with others. While the work of making the outdoor recreation arena safe and fun for all people will take all three levels of involvement, we propose we as researchers should prioritize advocacy and activism that privileges our minoritized participants, always keeping an eye on creating more equity and justice in outdoor recreation.

A CONSIDERATION OF EXTRA LABOR WE ARE ASKING PARTICIPANTS TO DO

The first consideration is the extra work we are asking outdoor guides, coordinators, and board members to do in addition to the extensive emotional labor they are performing daily as BIPOC guides and community participants, dealing with the racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia that already characterize most outdoor recreation spaces. They are also doing the work of mentoring newcomers in both formal and informal contexts and warning other people could be in danger about communities or people that could be unsafe for them (i.e., whisper networks). This unseen and often uncompensated labor should be recognized and taken into account as researchers recruit participants for outdoor recreation projects.

In one women’s climbing organization with which Leandra was affiliated, for example, she was the only woman of color on the leadership board; when group concerns about racism rose to the fore, Leandra was told that “since she was the diversity expert, she could create a separate internal group to talk about racism in the outdoors,” since the main group should only focus on climbing beta (information), trip details, and gear. This conversation highlighted the group’s prioritization of a white feminist, cisgender-based perspective, treating sexuality and race/ethnicity as both secondary and irrelevant to the cisgender-based concerns of the group, all at the expense of an intersectional, truly inclusive lens. When a journalist approached Leandra about the reasons underlying the group’s disbanding, she did not participate in the interview because, due to her positionality, she knew that she would immediately be identified as the proverbial whistleblower. Juggling these tensions—the disproportionate labor demands, the paradoxical organizational siloing of inclusivity and justice, the need for someone to do this work, the value of speaking out publicly,

and the safety risks of doing so—was exhausting, crushing work for Leandra and typical of the experience of minoritized leaders in the outdoors. Often, the only way a person of color gets to “only focus on climbing beta, trip details and gear” in hegemonically white outdoor communities is to subsume their own identity and experiences in favor of white supremacy and the status quo.

Of course, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and the prevailing impacts of hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy, and white feminism continue to be problems of violence in outdoor spaces. For our research participants, excavating those experiences for researchers may be cathartic. However, it may also be retraumatizing, particularly a researcher without prior training in trauma-informed approaches. Several authors have described how professional climbers have created fake social media accounts to bully professional women climbers (Abel, 2018; Hernández, 2021); how white feminists (and feminists writ large) are social media policing larger conversations about racism and sexism in the outdoors (Abel, 2017); and how climbers like Méliè Edwards are speaking out about the need to recognize the diverse histories of the sport in order to have more accepting and open communities (Salabert, 2019), especially for the recognition and inclusion of diverse bodies that are constantly at risk of violence. As Nikki Smith, a professional climber, climbing photographer, and a transgender woman describes, “Climbing still has a long way to go in regards to inclusion of all underrepresented groups. The discussion can no longer be ignored, though, and so many people are advocating for change. Unfortunately, for trans folk, the visibility and change has led to much pushback which has made life more difficult in many ways, but overall, society, in general, is slowly (too slowly) moving forward” (May, 2020, para. 10; see; Ellison, 2019). Reliving those memories and discussing the issues—albeit important for social and structural change—are part of the larger web of emotional trauma that bodies of color, as well as queer and disabled bodies, constantly face in outdoor recreation spaces, especially those in positions of leadership. Any research participant faces the same quandary when approached to do research, risking exposure and continuous reliving of associated trauma.

REFLECTIONS ON THE POTENTIAL COST OF PARTICIPATION

The second research consideration is the potential cost of participation to the contributor. Outdoor spaces are dangerous spaces for people of color in the United States. From their inception, they were always sites of violent regulation of nationhood and whiteness (Kosek, 2004; Ray, 2010; Spielhagen forthcoming). The risks, therefore, to the financial, physical, mental, and interpersonal wellbeing of our research participants are magnified both by the long histories of violence in the outdoors against people of color and the relative lack of anonymity for such people within their outdoor communities.

There is a deeply rooted gendered and racial danger in remote outdoor spaces (Roberts, 2009; Graham, 2020), where just

existing with identities that are not often represented in the outdoor industry can be risky. Examples abound. For instance, Maria recalls her first year of guiding in 2001 when, after 9/11, two guides with Middle Eastern heritage were left racist notes on their cars threatening their job and place in the community. Additionally, it is common to live out of your vehicle and park and sleep wherever you find a place to park as a guide. Indeed, this practice is often a financial and geographical necessity. Maria remembers the season that she never found housing in Jackson, Wyoming. She lived in her truck, parking and sleeping on side streets. Recognizing her privilege, she realizes that experience would have probably been different had she had another body. Alexa was recently warned by a white friend against sleeping roadside in a certain isolated section of a road trip, who said something like, “I might be okay, but it’s probably not safe for a woman of color in that part of the state.” In “Out There, Nobody Can Hear You Scream,” Graham (2020) details her unnerving experiences as a Black woman exploring isolated areas of the Great Smoky Mountains. Merely existing in these outdoor spaces can be dangerous for our potential participants, especially if they hold multiple marginalized identities. That danger increases as we ask individuals to speak out against inequities in outdoor recreation or expose themselves by participating in research.

Calling out racist, sexist, and homophobic practices is incredibly difficult and can be met not only with violence but impacts to their career. In Maria’s work, she found that scheduling trips was often used as a reward or punishment. The desirable trips are saved or those that are favored by management. A person who exposes themselves through research or advocacy or activism increases their risk of lost work. Another consequence can be a loss of product sponsorship, which can be an important way that outdoor professionals can access gear or money. Last, much outdoor recreation occurs through informal buddy networks to access trips, routes, permits, and even jobs. Tips about access and current safety and conditions information often depend on connections, without which it becomes difficult to navigate the industry, the community, and sometimes even the landscape. The cost of participating in research can be high. In Leandra’s experience with the women’s climbing organization, when she was approached by outside researchers before the organization unraveled, she worried about the safety of participants in the group and how the group would be framed in outside research. Although this happened almost 4 years ago, researchers she interacted with were insensitive to gender-based and network-based concerns raised by members of the leadership at that point in time.

These risks are magnified by how easily identifiable many minoritized outdoor participants are, particularly those with any longevity or leadership roles and particularly if they work in the outdoor industry, where they are often the first and/or only. The authors have personally experienced and continue to see evidence, whether in their research (Blevins, 2019; Blevins, 2020; Spielhagen, forthcoming) or personal networks, of hostile work environments, harassment, discrimination, and retaliation against non-traditional outdoors people for even seemingly minor acts of non-compliance, or even simply

perceived non-compliance. The ramifications of participating in research studies are serious not only for our participants, should they be identified, but for potentially misidentified bystanders as well.

Rock climbing as a sport and industry, for example, is male-dominated and has historically been such. As Abel (2018) describes, rock climbing is a sport that shirks personal responsibility, utilizes colonialist attitudes, and is dominated by white men: “Let’s peel back another important layer here—rock climbing is a white male-dominated sport. Only 29% of sponsored rock climbers are women. Only 4.5% of climbing guidebooks are written by women. We use a grading system that was created by men and is still predominantly upheld and maintained by white men. White men create most of the routes in climbing gyms. White men hold most of the powerful positions in the climbing industry. White men write most of our content and create most of our media” (p. 10). Given these factors, it is no surprise that queer folk, individuals of color, and disabled bodies are most often tokenized in outdoor research spaces despite researchers’ best efforts to maintain participant confidentiality. How can we do better, especially when considering how research with such participants—participants whose bodies are marked as different and often fetishized in research spaces—often resurfaces such trauma and violence, and to what end?

LABOR AND IDENTITIES

People of color can become lightning rods as they speak up, attracting increasing attention and requests for time, labor, and representation. This phenomenon often problematically reinforces a monolithic vision of systemic issues in the outdoors. In working with various advocacy movements and groups in the outdoors, we see the same few individuals being drawn upon repeatedly to stand in as the voice of a whole. The movement(s) and individuals are therefore grappling with thorny tensions around activism, solidarity, specific needs, and intersectionality. Even as researchers, we realize we do not have a language that adequately addresses these different interest levels. For instance, in crafting her research study, Alexa could not find an adequate pre-existing umbrella term for outdoor professionals who are not cis het (cisgendered and heterosexual), able-bodied, white people.

In being visible to their colleagues, peers, and researchers alike, marginalized participants become hyper-subjectified, pinned in place under multiple axes of identity, performance, and expectation. We theorize that proximity to white supremacy, with all its heteronormative, masculinist, able-bodied, classed implications, has been central to survival and advancement within the mainstream outdoors industry, which is partially why Roberts (2009) points out that being involved in outdoor pursuits or activities often associated with whiteness, can challenge a minoritized participants other identities. Additionally, outdoor work is identity work, and most literature on outdoors work and practice to date has attended to one (identity) or the other (work), but not to the dialectic

between the two how labor issues like chronic wage theft and discriminatory hiring and promotion practices have operated within a white supremacist system. These intricacies of performed and felt identities, together with financial and physical precarity, a morass of survival strategies, and their implications, raise further concerns around internalized racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and fatphobia, and ableism and undermining our participants’ credibility and senses of self.

Floyd also identifies that perceived discrimination is why people most often spend leisure time with people of the same ethnicity (Floyd et al., 1993). Nevertheless, lines become blurry between work and recreation in the outdoor recreation industry. In addition to feeling alienated when working in the recreation field, the multiple vulnerabilities of marginalized outdoor work - being physically vulnerable, isolation, and lack of control over group makeup - still exist. Even for cis het white women, there still has not been a deep reckoning, justice, and new sense of safety around the multiple rapes, assaults, harassments, and hostilities in the outdoor environment (Gilpin, 2016).

GIVING BACK TO RESEARCHED COMMUNITIES

We, as scholars, must also think and act like community members. We have to think about what we can give back to participants and ways that we can use our research to connect people to each other and new professional opportunities. “How can we best protect participants?” should be the foundation of all research. The call to research, support, and investigate marginalized groups in outdoor recreation is necessary, but we argue that exceptional care must be taken while doing so.

This is our roadmap for radical community-engaged participant research, which will accomplish the following:

1. We urge researchers to aggregate and anonymize their findings to the greatest extent possible, even if pressured towards greater specificity. In any research project, scholars potentially place a burden on participants to share their experiences and perspectives. A pseudonym will often not be enough. The complexity of analyzing race in such a situation when a person’s race and location could be used to easily identify and thus place them at risk.
2. Approaching people in the outdoor recreation community and asking them what research they need to be done to make the outdoor industry a better working environment. In white, masculine, male-dominated outdoor industries, privileging the perspectives and voices of BIPOC communities, disabled individuals, and LGBTQIA + individuals is a radical act, one that must be at the fore of any such project.
3. Make sure that we are not burdening participants with extra work as we collect data, which could include additional physical labor, emotional labor, and racial battle fatigue, among others.
4. This research protects participants by not using identifiers to describe them. Exceeding IRB expectations of protecting identities should be done in situations that could put

participants' livelihood and safety at risk. Editors, reviewers, and respondents to articles should develop an understanding and be more lenient when protecting the identity of participants in this sort of work.

- When the research is done, we need to ensure we get the information back to the outdoor communities we have worked with instead of only focusing on academic publications. Creative ways of disseminating information through outdoor publications, social media, and podcasts so that many people can have access to what we learn should be a goal of radical community-engaged participant research in the name of intersectional environmental praxis. An example of this is the work that Alexa and Maria are doing in A-DASH, partnering with agencies and outfitters to report findings and research to the whitewater community. Any research has to be useful to the groups we are studying, and those groups have to have access to it.

The goal of the researcher should be to create the safest environment for participants. Real bodies and real lives are implicated with every ask for support and participation, and researchers should not be tourists in these outdoor spaces. We need to be committed advocates for change with the care and safety of the participants at the core of all we do. We come back to the need for intersectional approaches—racist, sexist, ableist, and exclusionary policies and practices have long existed, and even when folks try to build alliances, there is still something missing in safety for marginalized groups. Can we as researchers use our process to create sharing spaces so groups can come together and advocate for each other to be outside? When conceptualizing, carrying out, and writing our research, our responsibility is to become safety builders for these communities.

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The issues outlined in this paper that interrogate the role of the researcher are paralleled in multiple communities in which issues of intersectionality and inclusion are being investigated (see, for example, De Los Santos Upton et al., 2021). Doing no harm to those that live and work in the outdoor recreation field should be the priority for researchers. Start with ourselves and ask: What are we asking of communities, and how can we help dismantle systems of oppression and contribute to more equitable change through the lens of radical community-engaged participant research? Madison, 2012; Springer, 2018; Blevins and Leslie, 2020; May, 2020; De Los Santos Upton et al., 2021, Ong, 2021.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All three authors contributed equally to this project in brainstorming, writing, and editing. MB did the administrative tasks.

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