



DIVERSITY

EQUITY

INCLUSION

&
BELONGING
FIELD GUIDE

Stories of Lived Experience

**Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Field Guide:
Stories of Lived Experience**

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We Still Have Work to Do

Mary Breunig

Historically, outdoor trips and outdoor professions have been deeply segregated by gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and ability as well as other intersectional identities (Warren, et al., 2013). Two examples are included in this paper to highlight these ongoing challenges followed by a call to action to acknowledge and further consider some of these historical injustices.

In April 2022, I volunteered for a Wilderness Inquiry (WI) Canoemobile outing. WI provides equitable access to the outdoors for people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities. The Minneapolis-based organization started as an initiative to demonstrate that people with disabilities could enjoy the wilderness with little to no accommodations other than positive attitudes and a collective group effort. WI's Canoemobile is a "floating classroom" that offers students the opportunity to paddle their local, urban waterways in 24-foot Voyageur canoes to learn about science, history, geography, and culture. As I paddled with sixth grade students on the Consumnes River in California, one student of color turned around in his seat and said, "I see that all the instructors are White, are any of you racist?"

This group was 90% students of color with Spanish as their first language. The WI instructors were all White, young, pale-skinned Midwesterners. The perceptive student recognized a gap between the written mission of this organization and the lack of representative diversity of its outdoor instructors.

Another example that affects diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) in experiential education programs is how the media portrays adventurers. Recently, I wrote about a young

explorer named Colin O'Brady who was featured on the popular United States NBC Today morning show. Colin was a member of a team of six rowers who crossed the Drake Passage and became the first known person to reach the South Pole unassisted via human-powered watercraft (George, 2020). In addition to that extraordinary feat (dubbed "The Impossible Row"), O'Brady had previously accomplished the Explorer's Grand Slam—reaching both the North and South Poles and setting speed records for ascents of the highest peak on each of the seven continents (Stulberg, 2016). He did this despite being told he may not walk again after a 2008 backpacking accident left him with a traumatic brain injury.

This type of epic adventure story, focused on a (White) man "conquering the wilderness" and overcoming adversity mimics many of the great adventure narratives of North American and Western European lore (Breunig, 2020) such as Magellan's circumnavigation around the world, Shackleton's voyage to the South Pole, Mallory's purported summit of Everest, and other achievements deemed noteworthy.

These traditional historical and media narratives of White men conquering nature are increasingly recognized as problematic, particularly by women and Indigenous people who seek an integrated rather than an adversarial relationship with the natural environment (Gray & Mitten, 2018) and who demand that outdoor enthusiasts explicitly grapple with male settler colonialism (Newberry, 2012). The forced relocation of Indigenous peoples from their homelands in North America to develop wilderness areas for public recreational consumption by wealthy male European immigrants demands attention (Laurendeau, 2020; Lowan-Trudeau, 2017) as does the marginalization of perspectives of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), whose individual experiences and collective

memories are not represented in predominantly male Euro-centric discourse (Finney, 2014). Further, interpretations of concepts such as challenge, adventure, and risk and the hegemonic premise that physically ambitious outdoor adventures engender participant growth have been scrutinized in the outdoor adventure and leisure fields and contested by those concerned about the ways these perspectives can (re)produce ableism, racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and sizeism (Warren & Breunig, 2019).

While conceptually easy to understand, these examples create barriers to DEIB. Rather than use these two narratives and examples to point out ongoing deficits and challenges, I encourage readers to use them as a call to action.

Action Steps

- Continue to develop social justice literacy and increase self-awareness relevant to conscious and unconscious biases (see, for example, <https://www.titlemax.com/discovery-center/lifestyle/50-cognitive-biases-to-be-aware-of-so-you-can-be-the-very-best-version-of-you/>).
- Unpack your backpack of privilege (Warren, 2009) relevant to your own OEE hegemonic privilege(s).
- Take decolonization steps in your program. List a minimum of five and track progress meticulously setting actionable goals and assessing short- and long-term efficacy and success.
- Be a social justice advocate and work for greater DEIB.
- Amplify BIPOC voices relevant to your professional communities of practice and/or scholarship.

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