

Hamline University

**DigitalCommons@Hamline**

---

School of Education and Leadership Student  
Capstone Projects

School of Education and Leadership

---

Summer 2023

## **LGBTQIA+ Inclusivity in the Outdoors**

Allison Brown

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse\\_cp](https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_cp)



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

LGBTQIA+ Inclusivity in the Outdoors

by

Allison Brown

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Education: Natural Science and Environmental Education.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

August 2023

Primary Advisor: Jana Lo Bello Miller

Content Reviewer: Kimberley Nichols

Peer Reviewers: Cora Greenawald and Katie Shealy

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction.....	4
Overview.....	4
Background.....	5
Conclusion.....	12
 CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review.....	 14
Introduction.....	14
Inclusion in Outdoor Organizations and Parks and Recreation.....	15
Geographical Factors - Urban vs. Rural Settings.....	19
Experiences of LGBTQIA+ Youth in School and at Home.....	23
Heteronormativity in the Outdoors and Outdoor Recreation.....	28
Rationale for this Research.....	38
Summary.....	39
 CHAPTER 3: Project Description.....	 41
Introduction.....	41
Project Description.....	42
Setting/Audience and Limitations of the Project.....	48
Timeline.....	50
Assessment.....	51
Summary.....	52

CHAPTER 4: Conclusion.....	54
Introduction.....	54
Personal Learnings.....	54
Literature Review and Influential Sources.....	56
Implications, Limitations, and Recommendations.....	59
Results, Benefits, and Future Use of the Capstone Project.....	63
Conclusion.....	65
REFERENCES.....	67

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### Overview

Outdoor recreation activities and outdoor spaces should be inclusive and accessible to all communities. Spending time outdoors provides both physical and mental benefits to individuals. Everyone can be outside, but not all individuals and communities have equal access to the outdoors and feel included in outdoor recreation (NRPA, 2018-a). An example of this is the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) community. LGBTQIA+ community members face inequities, lack of inclusivity, and numerous barriers to accessing outdoor spaces and participating in outdoor recreation. This capstone project explores the research question: *In what ways can outdoor educators and the fields of outdoor recreation and education become actively inclusive to the LGBTQIA+ community?* The research question culminates in an virtual, asynchronous toolkit with learning activities designed for outdoor recreation organizations and individuals to examine their inclusivity levels towards the LGBTQIA+ community, and to find resources to increase LGBTQIA+ inclusivity. In this chapter, an explanation of the development and inspiration behind my research question is provided, followed by a description of my personal and professional experiences with the capstone topic. The significance of this topic to stakeholders is discussed, and the importance of outdoor recreation organizations and professionals ensuring they are practicing inclusivity for the LGBTQIA+ community is identified.

## **Background**

In this section my own personal and professional experiences related to the research question are discussed. This section details my personal experiences and my own identity and how they intersect with my research question. The reasons I chose my research topic and the journey towards my interest in this topic are also overviewed. Without having direct professional experiences with my research question, the professional experience section focuses on the importance of the research question and the intended audience for the capstone project. A positionality statement is provided describing how my own identity shapes my perspective on the research question. The relevance of this topic to various stakeholders and the importance of the capstone project to the outdoor recreation and outdoor education profession is identified. Rationale for the capstone project and my personal inspiration for exploring the research question is discussed in this section, including the significance to the profession of outdoor recreation for practicing active LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in the outdoors.

### ***Personal Experience***

As a gay woman who identifies as part of the LGBTQIA+ community, both the topic and research question are very close to my own identity. I have always been drawn to the outdoors and outdoor recreation activities, such as hiking, camping, and exploring parks and outdoor spaces. During my youth, I can remember going on many hiking excursions and spending countless hours outdoors with my father. As I entered my teenage years my love for the outdoors continued to develop, pursuing me to enroll in an environmental magnet high school.

Learning about aspects of environmental science during my high school years inspired me to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies at Gustavus Adolphus College. My passion for outdoor recreation continued to develop through my undergraduate coursework. During my youth and my time at Gustavus Adolphus College I never questioned what communities were dominantly participating in outdoor recreation activities. It was not until my enrollment in the Natural Science and Environmental Education program at Hamline University that I was exposed to how the outdoors and outdoor recreation can be exclusive to many communities. Throughout the course of this project, the outdoors is used to refer to outdoor spaces, such as parks, trails, and other outdoor settings. Outdoor recreation is used to refer to outdoor recreational activities including hiking, biking, climbing, and other outdoor recreational activities.

The Natural Science and Environmental Education program at Hamline University has exposed me to many aspects of outdoor recreation that I was not previously aware of. One particular course at Hamline University, Equity and Inclusion in Environmental Education, informed me of how the outdoors and the field of outdoor recreation is unequally accessible for people of color. While the focus of this course was on inequity in the outdoors for people of color, our instructor told us that other communities, such as disabled individuals and the LGBTQIA+ community, also face inequities and lack of access to the outdoors. After taking the Equity and Inclusion in Environmental Education course I began to research and explore the level of accessibility to the outdoors for the LGBTQIA+ community.

During the fall of 2021 I enrolled in the Policy and Advocacy in Education course at Hamline University and our final project was to create a photo voice presentation.

Photo voice presentations rely on images and drawings to convey the messages instead of written text. My photo voice project was focused on LGBTQIA+ inclusion in outdoor settings. My final project for Policy and Advocacy for Education ended up being the very early start to my capstone project. I found my initial sources during the research for the photo voice project and was able to expand upon that research as inspiration to pursue my topic and research question for the capstone project. The research conducted early in my studies at Hamline began to align with my own experiences in the outdoors, showing that many members of our community do not feel that they have a place in the outdoors and outdoor recreation, and that members of this community feel isolation and fear in outdoor settings.

As a queer woman who enjoys outdoor recreation activities, I find peace and solace in exploring the outdoors. Being outdoors in a park or nature setting can bring peace of mind and a sense of calmness. Those experiences can vary significantly depending on the outdoor setting. Many LGBTQIA+ individuals feel more comfortable participating in outdoor recreation activities with a group to feel safe. Many others do not feel comfortable openly displaying their identity in a remote outdoor setting, out of fear of facing harassment from individuals who may be nearby (NRPA, 2018-a). I have experienced similar situations in outdoor recreation settings. My girlfriend and I do not always feel comfortable openly displaying our sexuality in outdoor settings, and have personally faced homophobic comments and slurs in outdoor settings for wearing pride apparel. I have also overheard indirect, hateful comments about our partnership from others while we are out on the trails. These experiences can be a horrifying experience for LGBTQIA+ community members, especially in remote settings with not many other



people around. Through my research I discovered that numerous LGBTQIA+ community members have had similar experiences and felt a lack of inclusivity in the outdoors and outdoor recreation.

### ***Professional Experience***

I have not had formal professional work experience with my specific research topic. I have worked in various positions within outdoor recreation and outdoor education, including employment as an elementary science teacher, park attendant, and park horticulturist, but did not grapple with the inclusivity of the outdoors and outdoor recreation to the LGBTQIA+ community in these positions. It is my goal to be employed in an environmental education position. As a member of the LGBTQIA+ community it is important to me that our community feels included and welcome in the outdoors and outdoor recreation. My research question was inspired through the courses I have taken at Hamline University and through my own experiences facing lack of inclusivity as an LGBTQIA+ community member in the outdoors and outdoor recreation.

My capstone project is the creation of a virtual, asynchronous toolkit with learning activities for individuals and organizations within the field of outdoor recreation, including outdoor recreation organizations and parks and recreation organizations. The learning activities within the toolkit will provide a professional development resource that outdoor professionals can work through to reflect on LGBTQIA+ inclusivity initiatives. The toolkit will give background information for LGBTQIA+ community members having less access and feelings of inclusivity in the outdoors and outdoor recreation, offer recommendations and suggestions for practicing active inclusion towards the community, and have participants reflect on LGBTQIA+ inclusivity at their

own organizations. Organizations within the outdoor industry are positioned to serve a large number of community members, including all members of the LGBTQIA+ community (NRPA, 2018-b). With the increased amount of discrimination and harassment that the community faces, outdoor recreation and park and recreation organizations are able to offer safe, inclusive spaces, but not all outdoor recreation organizations offer these safe spaces for the LGBTQIA+ community (Barnfield & Humberstone, 2008; NRPA, 2018-a; NRPA, 2018-b). The creation of a virtual toolkit would provide a resource for these organizations to assist in meeting the needs of their LGBTQIA+ community members and ensure LGBTQIA+ individuals are able to access the resources of these organizations.

### ***Positionality Statement***

My social identity significantly impacts my position and perspective on my research question: *In what ways can outdoor educators and the fields of outdoor recreation and education become actively inclusive to the LGBTQIA+ community?* As an openly queer woman who frequently participates in outdoor recreational activities and visits outdoor organizations, I always keep my experiences and viewpoints as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community in mind. My own experiences of facing discrimination in the outdoors due to my sexual orientation give me a unique perspective on the inclusivity of the outdoors and outdoor recreation, and is something I kept in mind throughout the duration of my capstone research and the completion of my capstone project.

### ***Significance of LGBTQIA+ Inclusivity in the Outdoors***

The research question for this capstone project focuses on exploring how inclusive the outdoors is for LGBTQIA+ individuals from both youth and adult age

groups. A critical examination of accessibility levels of the outdoors for LGBTQIA+ community members is a topic that has not been explored extensively in academic literature. This topic and research includes various stakeholders, such as the LGBTQIA+ community, outdoor recreation organizations, parks and recreational organizations, and outdoor education and recreation professionals leading outdoor programming for the public. For LGBTQIA+ youth and adults, spending time outdoors can act as a safe space. Many LGBTQIA+ community members face feelings of isolation and LGBTQIA+ youth are frequently ostracized at home, school, and in the community. Despite the known benefits of time spent in the outdoors, most outdoor recreation organizations do not have a strong focus on LGBTQIA+ inclusion or a formal inclusion policy (NRPA, 2018-a).

In a survey of 497 parks and outdoor recreation organizations across the United States, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) found that only 30% of the surveyed organizations have programming for the LGBTQIA+ community, and only two in five park and recreation organizations have a formal inclusion policy to ensure all community members have equal access to the outdoors (NRPA, 2018-a). According to Taylor et al. (2021) “the right to be physically active outdoors, to play, and to gather in parks as community is essential for health” (p. 24). All individuals have a right to feel safe and included in outdoors settings and outdoor recreation activities, including every member of the LGBTQIA+ community. The data from the NRPA 2018 Park and Recreation Inclusion Report (NRPA, 2018-a) and the feelings of many LGBTQIA+ community members point towards a need to ensure that outdoor recreation organizations are prioritizing inclusivity for all members of the communities they serve, including members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

### ***Practicing Active LGBTQIA+ Inclusion for Outdoor Recreation Organizations***

Outdoor spaces and outdoor recreation organizations should be accessible to all members of a community. Every individual should feel safe and feel that they have a place in the outdoors and outdoor recreation, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Beyond that, all community members should feel comfortable displaying their own individual identities in the outdoors without fear of facing discrimination or harassment in outdoor settings. Unfortunately, many LGBTQIA+ community members do not have this experience in outdoor spaces and outdoor recreation settings (Barnfield & Humberstone, 2008; Heath et al., 2023; Movement Advancement Project, 2019; Schultz et al., 2019).

Numerous LGBTQIA+ community members do not feel comfortable displaying their own sexual orientation or gender identity in outdoor spaces. This can be influenced by geography - being in an outdoor space in a dominantly conservative area, with less acceptance of the LGBTQIA+ community, leads many LGBTQIA+ individuals to avoid outdoor spaces. Transgender and gender non-conforming individuals face increased barriers and feelings of isolation and fear in displaying their own identities in the outdoors, especially being in rural areas versus urban areas (Grossman et al., 2005; Movement Advancement Project, 2019). Outdoor spaces and outdoor recreation organizations should ensure that all members of a community feel safe in the outdoors and take active rather than passive approaches to ensure inclusivity and equal access to the outdoors and outdoor recreation. This capstone project is aimed at helping outdoor

recreation organizations implement active approaches to ensure LGBTQIA+ inclusivity and equal access to the outdoors for LGBTQIA+ community members.

### **Conclusion**

My own personal experiences and sexual orientation have influenced me to pursue the research question: *In what ways can outdoor educators and the fields of outdoor recreation and education become actively inclusive to the LGBTQIA+ community?* Personal experiences, such as my time spent in the outdoors, participating in outdoor recreation, and the coursework taken at Hamline University drove my interest to pursue this research question for the capstone project. There are multiple stakeholders related to this topic, including the LGBTQIA+ community, outdoor recreation organizations, and outdoor recreation staff members, with their own significance related to the inclusivity of the outdoors to the LGBTQIA+ community. Outdoor recreation organizations should ensure they are taking an active approach to practicing LGBTQIA+ inclusivity and are providing equal access to the outdoors.

In the next chapter, a review of the available literature related to the topic and research question is discussed. With minimal research focused on LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in the outdoors, sub topics related to the research question: *In what ways can outdoor educators and the fields of outdoor recreation and education become actively inclusive to the LGBTQIA+ community?* are explored to argue for further research on this topic. Four sub topics related to LGBTQIA+ experiences in the outdoors are discussed, emphasizing the inclusion efforts of outdoor organizations, experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals in rural versus urban settings, experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth in school settings and at home, and the presence of heteronormativity in the outdoors. Following the four sub

topics, the rationale for conducting this research and the importance of pursuing the research question is stated. Chapter three includes an in-depth description of the virtual toolkit, an explanation of the project format, timeline for completion, and assessment of the project. The conclusion in chapter four includes a discussion of my personal learnings through the capstone project, a review of implications, limitations, and benefits of the project, and a discussion of how I plan to use my capstone project in the future.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

Outdoor spaces, organizations within parks and recreation, and outdoor recreation should be accessible and inclusive to all community members. This extends to all members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Individuals should feel safe and welcome in outdoor spaces, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity. Inclusive practices towards the LGBTQIA+ community should be present in all organizations with outdoor recreation and parks and recreation to ensure that LGBTQIA+ community members are able to have equal access to outdoor spaces and outdoor recreation. This chapter explores the research question: *In what ways can outdoor educators and the fields of outdoor recreation and education become actively inclusive to the LGBTQIA+ community?* through exploring related topics to LGBTQIA+ inclusion within the outdoors.

In this chapter, a review of the available literature related to the research question is presented. The literature that is reviewed in this chapter helps to explore the research question: *In what ways can outdoor educators and the fields of outdoor recreation and education become actively inclusive to the LGBTQIA+ community?* Four sub topics are covered in this chapter: inclusion in outdoor organizations and parks and recreation, geographical factors of urban vs. rural settings, experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth in school and at home, and the presence of heteronormativity in the outdoor industry. The inclusion efforts of existing outdoor recreation organizations for the LGBTQIA+ community are examined in this chapter, followed by an exploration of how LGBTQIA+ community members experience the outdoors in urban versus rural settings. The

experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth and adults are examined with an emphasis on exploring the importance of time spent outdoors on mental health. The presence of heteronormativity in the outdoor industry and its impact on LGBTQIA+ individuals is explored, followed by a review of the four sub topics. Specific experiences of transgender and non-binary individuals participating in outdoor recreation are examined, and an overview is given of the major organizations and activists working towards promoting inclusivity in outdoor settings. These four sub topics of the literature review help to provide a thorough examination and understanding of the various factors related to the research question of: *In what ways can outdoor educators and the fields of outdoor recreation and education become actively inclusive to the LGBTQIA+ community?* The research and sources presented in this chapter related to the sub topics helped to create a virtual, asynchronous toolkit with learning activities related to LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in the outdoors as a resource for outdoor education and outdoor recreation professionals.

### **Inclusion in Outdoor Organizations and Parks and Recreation**

The LGBTQIA+ community faces many forms of discrimination in the outdoors and outdoor recreation settings. Parks and outdoor spaces are public areas, but not all LGBTQIA+ community members are able to feel a sense of safety and belonging in outdoor settings despite the fact that parks and outdoor settings should be open to all. Parks and outdoor spaces, at their essence, should be accessible and inclusive to all members of a community (Taylor et al., 2021). This is not always the case for members of the LGBTQIA+ community, where community members can feel levels of unease within outdoor recreation settings and parks and recreation organizations (NRPA, 2018-a).



This section examines levels of inclusivity and explores LGBTQIA+ inclusion initiatives within outdoor recreation organizations. Outdoor organizations play an important role in fostering inclusive practices towards LGBTQIA+ community members. A 2018 study of inclusion in parks and recreation organizations by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA, 2018-a) is examined and levels of the inclusivity within the National Park Service are examined in the section.

### ***National Recreation and Park Association Findings***

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) conducted a national survey examining levels of inclusion towards individuals with cognitive and physical disabilities, members of multicultural and racial/ethnic communities, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and members of refugee and immigrant communities within park and recreation settings. The NRPA's park and recreation inclusion report summarizes the findings of their research, showing that most park and recreation organizations do not have a formal inclusion policy and do not have many programs for the LGBTQIA+ community (NRPA, 2018-a).

In September 2017, the NRPA sent a survey to numerous park and recreation organizations across the United States related to their inclusion practices towards various members of groups of their communities. 497 organizations responded to the survey, with the results indicating that only 30% of park and recreation organizations have programs for members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and only two in five parks have formal inclusion policies. Compared to 74% of the organizations offering programs for individuals with physical disabilities and 71% offering programs for community members from multicultural and racial/ethnic communities, there is a statistically

significantly lower number of park and recreation organizations focusing on LGBTQIA+ community members (NRPA, 2018-a).

The need for programming for LGBTQIA+ community members in park and recreation settings is significant. LGBTQIA+ individuals face higher rates of suicide, substance abuse, and psychiatric disorders due to discrimination (NRPA, 2018-a). LGBTQIA+ youth face many forms of discrimination at home and at school, linked to higher rates of depression, anxiety, increased substance abuse, and lower self-esteem (HRC, 2018). Time spent outdoors can offer a safe space and help to increase the physical and mental health of LGBTQIA+ community members, signaling a need for parks and recreation organizations to offer programming and activities for LGBTQIA+ community members. There are abundant program offerings for individuals with physical and cognitive disabilities and for community members from multicultural and racial/ethnic backgrounds within outdoor organizations, compared to only 30% of outdoor recreation and park and recreation organizations having programming specifically for the LGBTQIA+ community (NRPA, 2018-a).

### ***Inclusion within the National Park Service***

The National Park Service (NPS), with over 400 parks within the United States and millions of visitors coming to national parks every year, plays an important role within the communities where national parks exist. The NPS has established relevancy, diversity, and inclusion (RDI) programs to ensure they are meeting the needs of their communities. Schultz et al. (2019) examined NPS RDI programs that were conducted from 2005 - 2016, through target areas such as age, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, and other areas. NPS employees were asked to self-report about the NPS RDI

programs and asked about areas of diversity their programs target. The results from the study revealed that age, ethnicity, race, economic status, and urban population were the dominant areas of diversity covered by NPS RDI programs - the results cover 1,359 total NPS programs. Only 2.6% of the responses mentioned programs for sexual orientation and only 6.6% mentioned programs for gender, compared to 17.7% for age group and 12.2% for ethnicity (Schultz et al., 2019). Similar to the NRPA findings related to decreased programming for LGBTQIA+ community members in park and recreating settings, there is a similar decrease in programming within the National Park Service for LGBTQIA+ community members. The National Park Service, being an important part of local communities and serving many community members, must ensure it is meeting the needs of all community members, including the LGBTQIA+ community.

### ***Summary***

The findings and results from both the NRPA park and recreation survey and the NPS RDI programs survey reveal a lower presence of programs and activities for LGBTQIA+ community members in park and recreation organizations. There are many barriers to park and recreation organizations implementing inclusive programming, such as funding, lack of staff training, and inadequate staffing levels (NRPA, 2018-a). Despite the obstacles, these organizations should ensure they are meeting the needs of all community members that they serve. The efforts of outdoor recreation organizations to implement inclusive practices is relevant to the research question due to the impacts that outdoor recreation organizations have on the LGBTQIA+ community. Implementing active and visible inclusion and programming for the LGBTQIA+ community, such as programming geared for LGBTQIA+ community members, safe space signage, gender

neutral restrooms, and LGBTQIA+ youth programming could help LGBTQIA+ community members to feel welcome and included in park and recreation settings. The next section of the literature review examines differences in inclusivity towards the LGBTQIA+ community in rural versus urban park and recreation settings.

### **Geographical Factors - Urban vs. Rural Settings**

This section examines the role of being in a rural versus urban setting in assessing LGBTQIA+ experiences in the outdoors. The experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals in rural areas versus urban areas are examined, focusing on the more frequent occurrences of LGBTQIA+ discrimination in rural areas and the lower existence of anti-discrimination legislation. Examining the role of geographical influences on LGBTQIA+ experiences in the outdoors and outdoor recreation is a key component of this section.

LGBTQIA+ individuals face different lived experiences in rural versus urban environments. Between 3-5% of the rural population in the United States identifies as LGBTQIA+, and approximately 10% of youth identify as LGBTQIA+, with rural youth equally as likely to identify as LGBTQIA+ as urban youth. In total, 15-20% of the entire LGBTQIA+ population in the United States lives in rural areas of the US (Movement Advancement Project, 2019). Urban and rural, for the purpose of this project, are defined using the United States Census Bureau criteria. The US Census Bureau identifies an area as urban if it has a population of at least 5,000 or 2,000 housing units (Ratcliffe, 2022). There is no formal definition of rural under the Census Bureau. According to the United States Census Bureau (n.d.), any population, territory, or housing units not within an urban area is a rural area. It is important to include distinctions between urban versus

rural areas for the research question due to the different lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ community members depending on if they are in an urban or rural setting.

The Movement Advancement Project (2019) argued that there are more negative perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ community in rural areas due to decreased public support of the community. With increased visibility for LGBTQIA+ individuals in rural areas, fewer alternatives to healthcare and employment when faced with discrimination, less structural support, and a lower existence of anti-discrimination legislation in rural communities, there are many barriers that the LGBTQIA+ community faces when living in and visiting rural areas and communities (Movement Advancement Project, 2019).

Compared to urban areas, rural areas and communities are less LGBTQIA+ friendly based on legislation that targets LGBTQIA+ community members. In an analysis of over 35 LGBTQIA+ related policies and laws conducted by the Movement Advancement Project (2019), policies across the fifty US states and Washington D.C. were assigned a positive or negative point. A positive point during the analysis meant a policy for protection of the community, while a negative point meant a policy for discrimination against the community. Each state's policy was then added up to create an overall score for the state, or an equality tally. Negative tallies signaled a hostile policy climate, while high equality tallies signaled a protective policy climate for LGBTQIA+ individuals (Movement Advancement Project, 2019). From the results of the analysis, the Movement Advancement Project (2019) found that 69% of largely rural states have negative or low LGBTQIA+ equality index scores, compared to 26% of urban states with negative or low LGBTQIA+ equality index scores. Rural states are overall less likely to have legal protections for LGBTQIA+ people, and more likely than urban states to have

discriminatory laws against the community. 69% of rural states have a low equality index score. This can be compared to urban states, where 63% of urban states have a high equality index score (Movement Advancement Project, 2019).

Similar to findings from the Movement Advancement Project, Toth and Mason (2021) argued that gay men in the rural areas of the US and Canada face increased levels of homophobia and bigotry compared to gay men in urban areas. Further, they found that gay men in rural areas tend to travel to urban areas to connect with other LGBTQIA+ individuals and to seek out LGBTQIA+ inclusive spaces. Toth and Mason (2021) argued that there are higher levels of gay spaces in urban areas compared to rural areas, causing many LGBTQIA+ individuals to travel to urban areas. Many LGBTQIA+ individuals in rural areas, with less access to inclusive spaces, tend to seek online sources to find LGBTQIA+ community members in rural settings (Toth & Mason, 2021). Similarly, the Movement Advancement Project (2019) argued that internet access allows LGBTQIA+ individuals to find support in rural areas and to build community with other LGBTQIA+ individuals. For rural LGBTQIA+ youth especially, the internet and online sources allow youth to build connections in rural settings and help to define their own identities (Movement Advancement Project, 2019).

Distinctions between rural versus urban experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community transfer to rural versus urban park settings. The NRPA (2018) found that park and recreation agencies in urban areas are more likely to offer programs and activities for the LGBTQIA+ community than park and recreation agencies in rural areas. These programs and activities include community events and awareness campaigns, such as pride month events, social activities and programs geared for LGBTQIA+ community

members, and youth groups and activities geared for LGBTQIA+ youth. Additionally, the findings showed that some park and recreation agencies offer gender neutral and unisex restrooms, private locker and changing rooms, and signage indicating safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ youth (NRPA, 2018-a). NRPA findings from the 2018 park and recreation inclusion report indicated that 36% of urban parks offer programming and activities for the LGBTQIA+ community, compared to 23% of rural parks. Similarly, 24% of rural park and recreation agencies have a formal inclusion policy, compared to 53% of urban park and recreation agencies having a formal inclusion policy (NRPA, 2018-a).

### ***Summary***

LGBTQIA+ individuals face different experiences in rural versus urban settings. Findings from the Movement Advancement Project (2019) indicated that LGBTQIA+ individuals in rural areas face increased forms of harassment and discrimination, with less community support available compared to urban areas. With rural states having lower LGBTQIA+ equality scores compared to urban states, the LGBTQIA+ community in rural areas face unique challenges. Less access to safe spaces leads rural LGBTQIA+ community members to seek urban areas to find community and make connections with other LGBTQIA+ individuals (Movement Advancement Project, 2019; Toth & Mason, 2021). Further, with less availability of safe spaces and inclusive spaces in rural areas, there is also decreased availability of programming for the LGBTQIA+ community in rural park and recreation organizations compared to urban park and recreation organizations (NRPA, 2018-a). Experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community in rural versus urban areas and decreased programming for the LGBTQIA+ community in rural parks and recreation organizations relates to the research question due to limited access to

safe spaces for the rural LGBTQIA+ community. The next section will explore the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals by age group and examine the importance of establishing outdoor safe spaces for the LGBTQIA+ community.

### **Experiences of LGBTQIA+ Youth in School and at Home**

This section examines how LGBTQIA+ youth face forms of discrimination at home, school, and in their communities. The impacts of anti-LGBTQIA+ education legislation on youth is also discussed. LGBTQIA+ youth and adults face numerous forms of discrimination. This creates a need to establish outdoor safe spaces and programming for this community. This is especially true for LGBTQIA+ youth with forms of discrimination they face in school settings and home settings.

#### ***LGBTQIA+ Youth in Schools***

For LGBTQIA+ youth, the school setting can be an unsafe place. LGBTQIA+ youth face increased levels of harassment and discrimination in schools compared to their straight, heterosexual, and cisgender peers. The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) surveyed 16,713 LGBTQIA+ students across the US on their experiences in school settings. GLSEN's survey focused on documenting school climate and the effects that a negative school climate around the LGBTQIA+ community can have on LGBTQIA+ students. The results from the GLSEN survey revealed that schools can be a hostile environment for LGBTQIA+ youth, rather than being a safe space. Of the surveyed youth, 59.1% reported feeling unsafe in school due to sexual orientation, 42.5% felt unsafe due to gender expression, and 37.4% felt unsafe due to their gender identity (Kosciw et al., 2020). Further, many LGBTQIA+ youth experienced feelings of unease in school settings and classes, including bathrooms, locker rooms, and physical education



and gym courses. 45.2% of youth avoided bathrooms in school, 43.7% avoided locker rooms, and 40.2% reported avoiding or skipping physical education and gym classes due to feeling unsafe or uncomfortable in the course (Kosciw et al., 2020). Further, LGBTQIA+ youth face increased levels of harassment in school settings compared to their heterosexual, cisgender peers (HRC, 2018; Kosciw et al., 2020).

Kosciw et al. (2020) reported that 68.7% of LGBTQIA+ youth faced verbal harassment due to sexual orientation, 56.9% experienced harassment due to gender expression, and 53.7% experienced harassment due to gender identity. While the high levels of harassment faced by LGBTQIA+ students due to sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender identity is concerning by itself, there is an additional layer of LGBTQIA+ youth fearing reporting harassment they face in school. 56.6% of the youth indicated that they did not report instances of harassment to school staff, and 60.5% indicated that when they did report harassment school staff either did not take action or informed the student to ignore the harassment. These levels of harassment and feelings of unease have negative consequences for LGBTQIA+ youth. 42.2% of LGBTQIA+ youth reported they considered dropping out of school due to harassment they faced in school settings (Kosciw et al., 2020).

LGBTQIA+ students face higher rates of discrimination and victimization in school settings than their non-LGBTQIA+ peers (GLSEN, 2018; Kosciw et al., 2020; Kosciw et al., 2013). Increased rates of victimization and bullying that LGBTQIA+ students face in school settings can lead to decreased academic performance, including lower GPA and increased attendance issues (Kosciw et al., 2013). In a study focused on the use of in-school supports to combat decreases in academic performance, Kosciw et al.

(2013) found that schools with in-school supports for LGBTQ+ students helped to combat decreases in academic performance. 7,261 gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students between the ages of 13 and 21 were surveyed on the use of in-school supports for LGBTQIA+ students and how they helped to combat negative school climate and influenced academic performance. Four in-school supports were examined, including the presence of gay-straight alliances (GSAs), supportive educators (teachers and staff who are supportive towards LGBTQIA+ students), LGBTQIA+ inclusive curriculum, and comprehensive anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies. From the study, the presence of supportive educators in a school setting had the highest impact on students' experience in school and academic achievement. Schools with a greater number of LGBTQIA+ supportive educators correlated with higher self-esteem of students, increased GPA, decreased incidents of victimization, and fewer missed days of school. Similarly, the presence of GSAs in school settings correlated with decreased incidents of victimization, and the presence of LGBTQIA+ inclusive curriculum correlated with higher GPA and decreased victimization of LGBTQIA+ students (Kosciw et al., 2013). The results from Kosciw et al. (2013) showed that the use of in-school supports for LGBTQIA+ students correlates with a more positive experience in school settings for LGBTQIA+ youth and increased academic achievement. Harassment in school settings negatively impacts LGBTQIA+ youth in schools, and the presence of anti-LGBTQIA+ education legislation in multiple states furthers discrimination and harassment of students.

### ***Anti-LGBTQIA+ Youth Education Legislation***

The effects of harassment and discrimination in schools for LGBTQIA+ youth are intensified by states that implement 'no pro homo' laws. 'No pro homo' laws are specific

education laws that prohibit any positive portrayal of homosexuality in school settings. According to GLSEN (2018), there were seven states in the US with specific ‘no pro homo’ laws as of 2018 - Alabama, Arizona, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas. Utah used to have ‘no pro homo’ laws, but repealed them in 2017. States with specific ‘no pro homo’ legislation negatively impact the experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth in those states. With legislation banning positive portrayal of homosexuality in school settings, LGBTQIA+ youth are prevented from learning information about the LGBTQIA+ community. This kind of legislation targeting LGBTQIA+ youth can force youth to face feelings of stigmatization and alienation in school settings. In total, these laws affect almost 10 million public school students across the seven states that implement them (GLSEN, 2018).

Outside of existing ‘no pro homo’ laws, there have been increasing numbers of anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation filed in recent years. In 2022, 315 anti-LGBTQIA+ bills were filed during state legislative sessions, with 29 of the 315 bills signed into law. Of the 315 anti-LGBTQIA+ bills, 193 were bills focused specifically on LGBTQIA+ youth, making about half of all anti-LGBTQIA+ bills filed in 2022 focused on youth. The 193 anti-LGBTQIA+ youth bills especially targeted nonbinary and transgender youth (HRC, 2023). Specific areas that these bills target include restricting transgender youth from accessing gender affirming care, forbidding teachers from using a student's preferred name and pronouns, and preventing transgender students from participating on a sports team and using a restroom that aligns with their gender identity (HRC, 2023). While not all states have these kinds of legislation, it is important to address the negative outcomes

that non-inclusive legislation can have on the LGBTQIA+ community, and to show support for community members who are being targeted by this legislation.

### ***LGBTQIA+ Youth at Home***

Outside of school, many LGBTQIA+ youth face discrimination in the home setting as well. Family relations play an important role in ensuring the health and well-being of youth. LGBTQIA+ youth, however, face many barriers when interacting with family members and parents. The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) 2018 LGBTQ youth report showed that only 24% of LGBTQIA+ youth can openly identify as LGBTQIA+ at home, and only 25% of LGBTQIA+ youth have families who get involved with the larger LGBTQIA+ community. Further, 48% of LGBTQIA+ youth reported that family members mock them for their identity, and transgender youth are two times more likely to be mocked for their identity compared to cisgender LGBTQIA+ youth (HRC, 2018).

### ***Summary***

LGBTQIA+ youth face many forms of harassment and discrimination. The school and home settings should be a safe and inclusive place for all youth, but this is not the case for all LGBTQIA+ youth. LGBTQIA+ youth face increased rates of harassment and discrimination in school settings, with youth reporting feeling unsafe and uncomfortable in school based on sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender identity. LGBTQIA+ youth also can fear reporting forms of harassment in school to staff members, leading to feelings of isolation in school settings (Kosciw et al., 2020). At home, not all LGBTQIA+ youth are able to openly express their LGBTQIA+ identity. With large numbers of LGBTQIA+ youth reporting having families who do not openly

support the LGBTQIA+ community and family members who mock LGBTQIA+ identities, the home setting can act as an unsafe and unwelcoming place for LGBTQIA+ youth (HRC, 2018).

Facing harassment and discrimination both in school settings and in home settings can lead LGBTQIA+ youth to have decreased physical health and mental health, making the establishment of safe spaces and community spaces for LGBTQIA+ youth essential. There are many resources available to LGBTQIA+ youth, including community safe spaces, the presence of gay straight alliances, and in-school supports, but many youth do not feel comfortable accessing these resources (Elsenberg et al., 2018). Both indoor community spaces and the establishment of outdoor community spaces and programming for LGBTQIA+ youth in outdoor recreation organizations can help to combat the forms of harassment and discrimination they face through providing a safe space (NRPA, 2018-b). The next section addresses the presence of heteronormative ideals and assumptions in the outdoors and outdoor recreation settings, and discusses how heteronormativity can impact LGBTQIA+ community members participating in outdoor activities.

### **Heteronormativity in the Outdoors and Outdoor Recreation**

The outdoor industry, including outdoor recreation and outdoor education organizations, has been dominated by heteronormative and male-dominated messaging. Advertising for outdoor recreation activities and for outdoor recreation organizations is often displayed in a heteronormative, male-dominated nature. This section addresses the presence of heteronormativity in the outdoor industry and the impacts this can have for the LGBTQIA+ community.

### ***Heteronormative Advertising in the Outdoors***

Outdoor recreation activities can be enjoyed by all, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. Despite this, advertising and messaging for the outdoor industry is frequently displayed in a heteronormative nature. Gender roles are dominantly displayed in outdoor advertising through displaying oppressive gender roles towards women in outdoor advertising. In a study focused on outdoor magazine advertising, it was found that women were depicted in outdoor magazines as being less physically active than men, were advertised as following men rather than leading in advertisements, and were dominantly shown in relation to motherhood. In contrast, men were shown pursuing active outdoor activities and exploring rugged areas. Men were also shown as leaders and were shown in advertisements alone, while women were dominantly either with a man or with children in outdoor advertising (Warren, 2015).

### ***LGBTQIA+ Voices in Outdoor Education and Recreation***

In a study focused on interviewing gay and lesbian outdoor practitioners in the UK, it was found that the heteronormative nature of the outdoor industry and outdoor education has profound negative impacts on the LGBTQIA+ community. Barnfield and Humberstone (2008) argued that the fields of outdoor recreation and outdoor education have an overwhelming homophobic and heterosexist nature, in turn minimizing the voices of the LGBTQIA+ community in the outdoor industry.

Heteronormative practices and ideologies in the outdoor industry present many challenges for LGBTQIA+ individuals. The use of heteronormative and heterosexist language within outdoor education in the UK, for example, presented a negative situation for outdoor educators. While heterosexual individuals may not understand the

implications of phrases such as ‘that’s so gay’ and ‘you’re so gay,’ it presents an uncomfortable situation for LGBTQIA+ individuals. With society being largely heterosexist, the fields of outdoor recreation and outdoor education operate in a manner that normalizes heteronormative behavior and casts LGBTQIA+ identities as an outlier (Barnfield & Humberstone, 2008).

In a study focused on LGBTQIA+ outdoor recreation and outdoor education professionals, Heath et al. (2023) found that LGBTQIA+ individuals working in the outdoor industry face numerous challenges to displaying their identities and feeling equal to their heterosexual and cisgender colleagues. This study focused on six LGBTQIA+ professionals working in outdoor recreation settings found that these professionals frequently need to confront a heterosexist and heteronormative environment, similar to what Barnfield and Humberstone (2008) found. The six individuals interviewed in the study all stated that they frequently do not feel comfortable displaying their true identities as outdoor recreation professionals, especially if they are leading a group for fear of disrupting the group culture. Heath et al. (2023) noted that LGBTQIA+ individuals frequently need to engage with heteronormative structures to participate in outdoor recreation. LGBTQIA+ outdoor recreation professionals similarly need to confront heteronormative structures in their work environment and many find ways to manage or conceal their identities to succeed in their profession. The participants in the study discussed how being an openly out LGBTQIA+ person can lead to lack of promotion and dissuade individuals from seeking job advancement in the outdoor recreation field. Participants also disclosed how employers in the outdoor industry can spotlight LGBTQIA+ employees for inclusivity initiatives, while simultaneously holding

employees back from fully engaging with their chosen career path of outdoor recreation to meet inclusivity goals (Health et al., 2023). The findings and experiences of the individuals in the Health et al. (2023) study point towards large inequities in the outdoor recreation field and towards a need for the heteronormative aspects of the outdoor industry to be actively dismantled.

One example of an outdoor organization that actively works to combat heteronormativity in the outdoors is the Girl Scouts of the United States of America (GSUSA). LGBTQIA+ youth are able to actively participate in the GSUSA with the organization having national and regional policies that address inclusiveness towards LGBTQIA+ participants. Argus (2018) argued that outdoor spaces can be crucial for LGBTQIA+ youth in exploring their identities, and the GSUSA is one example of an organization that allows youth to freely participate in outdoor recreation without the presence of heteronormative practices. In a study interviewing 16 LGBTQIA+ girl scouts on their experiences within the girl scouts, a common trend was being able to freely display their sexual orientation and gender identities within a non-judgemental atmosphere with other LGBTQIA+ youth. Providing a space for LGBTQIA+ individuals to freely participate in outdoor recreation and outdoor education activities without the looming presence of heteronormativity helps to combat the dominant discourse of the outdoor industry being heteronormative and heterosexist (Argus, 2018; Barnfield & Humberstone, 2008).

### ***Experiences of Transgender Youth in Recreational Activities***

Transgender individuals face higher risk of discrimination and feeling excluded from recreational activities. In a study focused on exploring the experiences of



transgender youth participating in recreational activities, Grossman et al. (2005) found that the 22 participants in their study faced numerous barriers to participating in recreational activities. While not directly related to the outdoors or outdoor recreation, this study presented an example to the barriers presented for transgender individuals in freely and comfortably displaying their identities in community settings. During the study, the 22 participants, ages 15-21, were interviewed about their gender expressions and gender behaviors related to sports, games, play, and playmates. Most of the participants in the study identified as female. From individual interviews and focus groups, the study found that almost all the participants in the study identified themselves as transgender around the age of 13. Most participants, however, engaged in gender non-conforming behaviors well before the age of 13 (Grossman et al., 2005)

Transgender youth face many challenges related to their gender identity at a young age. Transgender youth may face feelings of isolation when disclosing their feelings around gender differences and can receive negative comments from other youth around their gender identity. Grossman et al. (2005) found that the gender binary associated with specific recreational activities can dissuade transgender youth from participating. For example, most of the participants indicated that sports, social, and recreational activities do not feel welcoming to the transgender community. They further noted that many recreational and sports programs for youth are designed around gender stereotypes, and those who fall outside of the gender binary do not feel welcome to participate. Transgender females noted in the study that they do not feel comfortable participating in sports, such as football, baseball, and basketball because they are generally considered a boys activity. Similarly, male youth may not feel comfortable

participating in activities such as dance or gardening as they are generally considered a girls activity (Grossman et al., 2005).

With the heavily gendered nature of many recreational activities, it can feel difficult for transgender youth to comfortably participate alongside their peers. Furthermore, there are 22 states out of the 50 states within the United States that ban transgender youth from participating in sports teams that align with their gender identities (Movement Advancement Project, n.d.). Numerous barriers exist for transgender youth to comfortably participate in outdoor recreation and sports activities. The heavily gendered nature of many outdoor recreational activities, combined with increasing numbers of anti-transgender legislation prohibiting transgender youth from participating in sports and recreational activities that align with their gender identity, can make it difficult for transgender youth to participate in outdoor recreational activities in an inclusive way.

### ***Organizations and Activists Focusing on LGBTQIA+ Inclusivity in the Outdoors***

There are a number of individuals and organizations with a specific goal of promoting LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in the outdoors and outdoor recreation settings. Pattie Gonia is an activist working to promote LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in the outdoors. Pattie Gonia is a drag queen who promotes environmental advocacy work through their instagram page. As an activist, Pattie Gonia frequently publishes videos of themselves going on hikes, walks, or participating in other outdoor recreation activities while in drag. They also frequently fundraise for outdoor organizations focusing on inclusion for the LGBTQIA+ community, BIPOC community, and disabled individuals to participate in outdoor activities and outdoor programming (Pattie Gonia, n.d.).

The Venture Out Project is an example of an organization actively working to make the outdoors inclusive to the LGBTQIA+ community. Venture Out Project is an LGBTQIA+ Outdoor Education organization based in Massachusetts. The organization leads backpacking and wilderness trips specifically for members of the LGBTQIA+ community throughout the east coast. The Venture Our Project leads day trips and overnight trips focused on providing community and a safe environment for LGBTQIA+ individuals to participate in outdoor recreation and enjoy the outdoors with other community members. Outside of organizing and leading outdoor programming, the Venture Out Project also hosts transgender inclusive workshops for outdoor educators and other individuals within outdoor recreation (Venture Out Project, n.d.).

Another organization focusing on LGBTQIA+ outdoor programming for youth is Brave Trails, a national non-profit organization that focuses on offering outdoor experiences for LGBTQIA+ youth and families. Brave Trails offer LGBTQIA+ youth summer camps each year, LGBTQIA+ family camps, and week-long LGBTQIA+ backpacking trips (Brave Trails, n.d.). Offering a space for LGBTQIA+ youth to safely gather with other community members allows them to make connections and participate in outdoor recreational activities without fear of discrimination.

Each of these individuals and organizations are examples of outdoor organizations with an emphasis on creating safe spaces for the LGBTQIA+ community to be in the outdoors and safely engage in outdoor recreational activities. There are many more examples of individuals and organizations with similar missions to make the outdoors an inclusive place for all LGBTQIA+ community members. While the existence of these organizations is critically important for LGBTQIA+ individuals to participate in outdoor

recreation and form community connections, it points towards a need for larger outdoor recreation organizations and parks and recreation organizations to actively disrupt heteronormativity in the outdoor industry and become actively inclusive towards the LGBTQIA+ community.

### ***Making Outdoor Field Experiences More Inclusive to the LGBTQIA+ Community***

Outdoor field experiences, such as group hikes and multi-day outdoor expeditions, have historically not been inclusive to the LGBTQIA+ community and other marginalized communities (Lundin & Bombaci, 2022). Lundin and Bombaci (2022) administered an online survey to 17 leaders of outdoor programs focused on inclusivity initiatives for the LGBTQIA+ community, with nine individuals responding to the survey. Various recommendations are given for outdoor recreation professionals to make their programming more accessible and inclusive to the LGBTQIA+ community based on the results of the study. These recommendations include using gender-inclusive language and gender-neutral outdoor gear, offering gender-neutral or single stall restrooms, being aware of physical limitations LGBTQIA+ individuals may have, setting community norms and guidelines, and offering LGBTQIA+ inclusion training for staff (Lundin & Bombaci, 2022).

Lundin and Bombaci (2022) recognized the importance of using gender-inclusive language in outdoor programming. This could include outdoor guides introducing themselves with their personal pronouns, wearing name tags with pronouns, and asking participants to share their own pronouns if they would like. Gender-inclusive language would also include addressing a group without using gendered language, such saying “everyone or folks” instead of “guys or ladies and gentleman.” The survey results also

indicated that using gender-neutral gear can help LGBTQIA+ participants feel more comfortable. Outdoor gear is sometimes labeled based on gender, and letting participants choose their own gear instead of labeling by gender is important to avoid making assumptions about an individual's gender identity (Lundin & Bombaci (2022)).

Lundin and Bombaci (2022) discussed the importance of offering gender-neutral or single stall restrooms and gender-neutral showers during outdoor field experiences. Only having gendered bathrooms and shower facilities can lead to feelings of discomfort for transgender and non-binary individuals who do not align with gendered facilities. In discussing LGBTQIA+ inclusive practices during field work and outdoor activities, Lundin and Bombaci (2022) emphasized the importance of being aware of the challenges that can be present for individuals who are wearing a chest bind. Chest binds can be used by transgender men and nonbinary individuals to lessen feelings of dysphoria, or the differences between sex assigned at birth and their gender identity. Chest binds can present physical challenges during physical activities, such as back pain and shortness of breath (Lundin & Bombaci, 2022). Outdoor field leaders should be aware of these challenges and check in with participants to offer support, while recognizing that longer breaks may be required.

Lundin and Bombaci (2022) discussed the importance of setting community norms and guidelines early on for a group, especially if embarking on a longer outdoor expedition. This could include discussion of using correct pronouns, avoiding gendered language, and other related guidelines. Setting group norms early can help to improve the experiences for LGBTQIA+ community members during field experiences (Lundin & Bombaci, 2022). The importance of outdoor professionals receiving LGBTQIA+

inclusion training is heavily emphasized in the study. Outdoor professionals, such as outdoor educators, park rangers, and field guides, should receive formal training in inclusion topics related to the LGBTQIA+ community, including using pronouns appropriately, differences between gender versus sex, and the importance of using gender-neutral language (Lundin & Bombaci, 2022). If outdoor professionals are not trained and aware of inclusion needs of LGBTQIA+ community members on outdoor field experiences, it can lead to an uncomfortable and non-inclusive experience for the community. Lundin and Bombaci (2022) stated that “for the LGBTQIA+ community to be fully supported in outdoor field experiences, outside of affinity trips and groups, many cultural and procedural changes are required” (p. 2). While the field of outdoor recreation and education has historically not been welcoming and inclusive to LGBTQIA+ community members, implementing similar changes and recommendations such as those referenced in Lundin and Bombaci (2022), outdoor organizations can take an active approach to ensuring their outdoor programs and field experiences are inclusive towards the community.

### ***Summary***

The large presence of heteronormativity in the outdoors and outdoor recreation settings further supports the importance of outdoor recreation organizations establishing inclusive practices and programming for the LGBTQIA+ community. Heteronormative messaging and the presence of oppressive gender roles in outdoor advertising, and the experiences of LGBTQIA+ outdoor educators in the UK encountering heteronormative in their work support the need for inclusive practices towards the LGBTQIA+ community in the outdoor industry. There are a number of activists and outdoor organizations actively

promoting LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in the outdoors, including numerous organizations with a focus on providing a community space for LGBTQIA+ youth to safely explore the outdoors and participate in outdoor recreation. Outdoor organizations can take an active approach to ensuring their programming is inclusive towards the LGBTQIA+ community. Lundin and Bombaci (2022) outlined several recommendations including using gender inclusive language, letting participants pick their own outdoor gear instead of assigning based on gender labels, having gender-neutral bathrooms and showers available, being aware of additional physical challenges community members may have during strenuous activities, setting community norms and guidelines, and training staff in LGBTQIA+ inclusion topics. Providing inclusive and safe outdoor spaces, and implementing changes to make outdoor field experiences inclusive, can help to combat the large presence of heteronormativity in the outdoors and ensure that LGBTQIA+ community members feel welcome and included in outdoor spaces and outdoor recreation.

### **Rationale for this Research**

LGBTQIA+ individuals deserve to feel welcome and included in all areas and spaces that they visit, but face multiple forms of discrimination and harassment due to their own identities. The literature reviewed in this chapter indicates a need for increased programming and activities for LGBTQIA+ community members in park and recreation organizations and the establishment of outdoor safe spaces. There is minimal available literature on the level of inclusivity for the LGBTQIA+ community in outdoor recreation settings and park and recreation organizations, pointing towards a need for this gap in the research to be examined more extensively. There have been significant studies conducted

on related topics, including discrimination that LGBTQIA+ youth face in school settings, levels of LGBTQIA+ discrimination and hate crimes in rural versus urban areas, and studies related to the number of outdoor recreation and park and recreation organizations that have inclusion policies and programming for the LGBTQIA+ community (Kosciw et al., 2020; Movement Advancement Project, 2019; NRPA, 2018-a). These related topics make a strong argument for the importance of further studying the level of inclusivity towards the LGBTQIA+ community in outdoor recreation organizations, and for the importance of providing safe and inclusive outdoor spaces for the LGBTQIA+ community to safely gather and recreate in. Parks are public spaces and all community members that a park or outdoor space serves, including all members of the LGBTQIA+ community, deserve to be able to enjoy parks and outdoor spaces without fear of harassment and discrimination.

### **Summary**

The literature and research reviewed in this chapter indicates a need for outdoor and outdoor recreation organizations to strongly focus on inclusivity efforts towards the LGBTQIA+ community. LGBTQIA+ community members face increased levels of harassment and discrimination in rural areas compared to urban areas (Movement Advancement Project, 2019). LGBTQIA+ youth face increased harassment and bullying in school settings compared to their straight, cisgender peers (GLSEN, 2018; Kosciw et al., 2020; Kosciw et al., 2013). With a lack of access to safe spaces, park and recreation organizations can play an important role in acting as a safe space and providing community resources for LGBTQIA+ community members, but the NRPA findings indicate that most park and recreation organizations do not offer programming and



activities for the LGBTQIA+ community (NRPA, 2018-a). The effect of heteronormative practices that are dominant in the field of outdoor recreation make it especially difficult for LGBTQIA+ individuals to comfortably and safely participate in outdoor recreation and activities (Barnfield & Humberstone, 2008; Heath et al., 2023). There are barriers to park and recreation organizations implementing inclusive policies and LGBTQIA+ programming, including lack of funding, lack of staffing, and lack of access to staff training (NRPA, 2018-a).

Even with the existing barriers, park and recreation organizations and outdoor recreation organizations play an important role in ensuring that the LGBTQIA+ community feels safe and respected in their organizations, and in providing safe spaces and community resources for the LGBTQIA+ community. Chapter three examines the research methodology and provides an overview of my capstone project creation of an online toolkit to be used as a professional development resource for outdoor recreation organizations related to the research question: *In what ways can outdoor educators and the fields of outdoor recreation and education become actively inclusive to the LGBTQIA+ community?*

## CHAPTER 3

### Project Description

#### Introduction

The research question: *In what ways can outdoor educators and the fields of outdoor recreation and education become actively inclusive to the LGBTQIA+ community?* was explored through the creation of a virtual toolkit to be used as a resource for professional development in the outdoor industry. The importance of creating inclusive outdoor spaces for the LGBTQIA+ community, being aware of barriers the community faces to accessing the outdoors, and outdoor recreation organizations practicing active, visible inclusion for LGBTQIA+ community members was examined through designing a virtual, asynchronous toolkit to be used as a professional development resource for outdoor recreation organizations and professionals.

This chapter reviews the virtual toolkit through a detailed description of how the project was completed and the importance of creating professional development activities as a resource for outdoor recreation and park and recreation organizations. The intended audience for this project is explained, followed by a proposed timeline for completion of the research, and an overview of the online content creation for this project. In the assessment section the use of a Google survey is reviewed to gather feedback on the virtual toolkit from participants and rate the effectiveness of the learning activities. The following section provides a detailed description and overview of the capstone project that addressed the research question: *In what ways can outdoor educators and the fields of outdoor recreation and education become actively inclusive to the LGBTQIA+ community?*

## **Project Description**

There is a large gap in available literature addressing the inclusivity of the outdoors and outdoor recreation to the LGBTQIA+ community. NRPA findings reveal that most outdoor organizations and park and recreation organizations do not offer programming for the LGBTQIA+ community (NRPA, 2018-a). With the level of discrimination that the LGBTQIA+ community faces, providing safe outdoor spaces for gathering and recreation is crucial.

This project consisted of literature analysis and content creation of a virtual, asynchronous toolkit with nine learning activities to be used as a resource for professional development. Literature that was reviewed in chapter two was analyzed further to explore the level of inclusivity in the outdoors and outdoor recreation settings. Both primary academic sources and secondary sources, including articles in periodicals, websites, and reports addressing the experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community in the outdoors were utilized for the creation of the virtual toolkit. While there is a gap in the available literature, relevant topics that connect to the inclusivity of the outdoors were examined. The four sub topics addressed in chapter two were explored in detail for this project, including current levels of inclusion in the outdoors and outdoor recreation, how urban versus rural settings influence the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals, levels of discrimination that the LGBTQIA+ youth face in school settings and at home, and heteronormativity that is present in the outdoor industry. These sub topics gave an informational overview of LGBTQIA+ discrimination and the importance of outdoor safe spaces, provided an argument for outdoor recreation and park and recreation organizations to practice active and visible inclusion for the LGBTQIA+ community, and

gave recommendations and resources for outdoor recreation organizations to ensure they are being inclusive and accessible to the LGBTQIA+ community.

After conducting a thorough review and analysis of the literature from chapter two, the information gathered was used to create a virtual, asynchronous toolkit with learning activities. These learning activities focused on becoming aware of barriers the LGBTQIA+ community has to accessing the outdoors, how outdoor recreation organizations and park and recreation settings can practice active, visible inclusion for LGBTQIA+ community members, and self-evaluating current inclusivity levels and reflecting on practices. There were nine total learning activities designed for this toolkit. The learning activities were titled as followed in the order they appeared in the toolkit: overview of related terms, LGBTQIA+ experiences in the outdoors, LGBTQIA+ inclusive resources in outdoor settings, immersive experience, heteronormative outdoor advertising, rating personal LGBTQIA+ knowledge and self-efficacy, rating site based LGBTQIA+ inclusivity, uncommon path - blog post reflection, and design an LGBTQIA+ inclusive outdoor program. A variety of learning activities including reading and reflections, likert scale activities, site visits and observations, and outdoor program planning were provided to give participants multiple forms of learning.

The toolkit was created in the format of a Google slideshow with an overview and instructions for each activity written on individual slides, and the learning activities accessed with a link to individual Google documents. The toolkit and learning activities are meant to be completed either individually or as a group for organizations. The toolkit also included further resources for learning for individuals working in the fields of outdoor recreation and outdoor education. Learning activities and the toolkit slideshow

were shared with a public link to allow anyone with the link to access the contents of the toolkit. Development and creation of the toolkit and learning activities was guided by examples of inclusivity toolkits from outside organizations.

### ***Examples of Inclusivity Toolkits and Self-Assessment Tools***

A number of organizations have created toolkits and self-assessments for inclusivity initiatives. The United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) created a self-assessment tool specifically designed for schools to examine LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in school settings (CDC, 2020). This self-assessment tool includes four sections with each section being designed for different staff members, including a section for all school staff members and specific sections for educators, administrators, and health services staff. Each section of the toolkit gives various statements related to LGBTQIA+ inclusivity and participants rate how much the statement applies, with an A rating meaning it applies greatly, a B rating meaning it applies moderately, and a C rating meaning it applies minimally or not at all. The statements given in each section pertain to aspects of LGBTQIA+ youth and their experience in schools, with the tool being designed to help staff better serve LGBTQIA+ students (CDC, 2020). Another assessment tool analyzed for this project is a learning tool to measure current inclusion levels within municipalities created by the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA, 2017). This tool is a ranking activity designed for municipalities to become inclusive and welcoming places. The AUMA tool includes 15 areas of focus, with examples including leadership and accountability, employee engagement and education, and public attitudes and awareness (AUMA, 2017). Within each area of focus, participants of the inclusion tool must read a statement and then rank

a level of inclusion for each statement to indicate their rating. The lowest rating, invisible, would indicate no recognition of the importance of diversity and inclusion, while the highest rating, culture of inclusion, would indicate a community where inclusion is highly valued and recognized (AUMA, 2017). There are five total rankings on the inclusion scale for participants to rank themselves in. This specific example of an assessment tool is designed for leaders and managers of municipalities and provides a useful example for ranking and assessment activities within toolkits.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) office in Bangkok designed a toolkit for creating inclusive and learning friendly environments. This toolkit is designed to be used by individuals working in school settings, such as teachers, administrators, coaches, and pre-service teachers and is meant to be completed individually (UNESCO, 2004). There are six separate sections to this toolkit focused on topics including inclusive learning environments, involving families and communities in learning, barriers to inclusivity in schools, how to create inclusive learning classrooms, lesson planning and management of inclusive classrooms, and finding ways to make learning settings safe for all children in a community (UNESCO, 2004). UNESCO's toolkit includes a wide variety of learning activities, such as readings, reflections, self-assessments, rating activities, lesson planning activities, and resources for further learning related to embracing diversity in classroom settings (UNESCO, 2004). This toolkit includes more variety and a larger number of learning activities compared to the toolkits designed by the CDC (2020) and the AUMA (2017). Each toolkit is designed to be an educational tool to support diversity and inclusion initiatives with an emphasis on self-learning and reflection through the various learning

activities. These toolkit examples served as a framework for the design and creation of my virtual, asynchronous toolkit and learning activities for LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the outdoors. There has been minimal research conducted on the effectiveness of toolkits, but the benefits of offering professional development to LGBTQIA+ youth has been thoroughly researched and supports the project design of the toolkit development as a professional development tool for LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in the outdoors.

### ***Effectiveness of Offering LGBTQIA+ Professional Development in School Settings***

While there are few to no supporting resources addressing the effectiveness of toolkits as a resource for professional development for LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in the outdoors, there have been numerous studies focused on the effectiveness of offering LGBTQIA+ professional development opportunities to school staff. In a study focused on mandated LGBTQIA+ professional development at a secondary school, Greytak et al. (2013) found that a training workshop emphasizing experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth in schools made staff more confident in addressing anti-LGBTQIA+ remarks. The study focused on increasing participants' understanding of how bullying, name calling, and harassment impacts LGBTQIA+ students and staff, increasing understanding of how harassment and bullying of LGBTQIA+ students impacts school climate, and developing participants skills in creating a safer school climate. Results showed that attending and participating in a two-hour professional development session created great confidence in staff to address bullying and harassment of LGBTQIA+ students. The results also indicated increased empathy for students based on greater understanding of what they encounter with anti-LGBTQIA+ behaviors in schools (Greytak et al., 2013). Similarly, in a study examining the effectiveness of strategies to promote school safety and positive

school culture for LGBTQIA+ students, Russell et al. (2021) found that offering professional development led school staff to better understand the needs of LGBTQIA+ students and led to a greater number of supportive school staff. Further, it was found that offering both preservice and in-service professional development opportunities resulted in school staff having greater empathy and awareness of LGBTQIA+ student needs, and increased self-efficacy in confronting homophobic and transphobic remarks in school settings (Russell et al., 2021).

The effectiveness of offering professional development opportunities to school staff in an effort to increase the school climate for LGBTQIA+ students signaled that professional development creation is a viable option for outdoor recreation professionals as well. There is a parallel between school staff members' lack of awareness of the experiences and needs of LGBTQIA+ students in school settings with outdoor recreation professionals. Outdoor recreation professionals are not always cognizant of the needs of the LGBTQIA+ community and may not be familiar with the barriers they face to safely and comfortably being in the outdoors and participating in outdoor recreation activities. The creation of this toolkit as a resource to use in professional development opportunities provided an accessible source of information for individuals and organizations within the outdoor and outdoor recreation industries. A virtual, asynchronous format allowed the most accessibility to the recommendations and resources that were created for this capstone project.

### ***Summary***

The goal of this capstone project was to create a virtual, asynchronous toolkit addressing the research question: *In what ways can outdoor educators and the fields of*



*outdoor recreation and education become actively inclusive to the LGBTQIA+ community?* Using an virtual, asynchronous format allowed numerous stakeholders to easily access the toolkit and resources with a shared public link. Literature from relevant topics related to the importance of practicing active inclusion for the LGBTQIA+ community in outdoor settings was analyzed to create interactive learning and reflection activities to critically examine LGBTQIA+ inclusivity initiatives in outdoor settings. Numerous organizations have created inclusion toolkits to address and evaluate inclusion initiatives (AUMA, 2017; CDC, 2020; UNESCO, 2004) and multiple studies have been conducted to show the effectiveness of offering professional development opportunities focused on LGBTQIA+ students in school settings (Greytak et al., 2013; Russell et al., 2021). The intended audience for the toolkit and learning activities created for this project is addressed in the next section.

### **Setting/Audience and Limitations of the Project**

The intended audience for this project were individuals working within outdoor recreation and park and recreation settings, such as park rangers, environmental educators, management and leadership staff within outdoor organizations, and other related roles. Creating safe spaces for the LGBTQIA+ community to gather outdoors is essential to ensuring that the outdoors is accessible to all, including all members of the LGBTQIA+ community. The content creation for this project addressed the importance of outdoor recreation organizations taking an active approach to ensuring outdoor spaces and outdoor programming is accessible to the LGBTQIA+ community.

Recommendations for outdoor organizations and park and recreation organizations to

take to practice active, visible inclusion for the LGBTQIA+ community was included in the content creation of the project.

The setting for this capstone project was an online, asynchronous setting. A virtual toolkit with accompanying learning activities was made in the format of a Google slideshow and was designed to be used as a learning and reflection resource for individuals and organizations within the fields of outdoor recreation and outdoor education. In addition, learning activities were included to self-evaluate current levels of inclusivity and to provide resources for increasing inclusivity initiatives for LGBTQIA+ community members. Each learning activity was presented on a Google slide with instructions and links to each activity. The toolkit was shared with a public link to allow anyone with the link to access the learning activities and contents. Distribution of the toolkit would occur by sharing the link and learning activities with individuals and organizations within the fields of outdoor recreation and outdoor education. There were limitations to collecting relevant data due to a lack of research related to the inclusivity of the outdoors and outdoor recreation towards the LGBTQIA+ community. This gap in formal research led towards qualitative research being used with a literature analysis of related topics to the research question. The format of a virtual, asynchronous toolkit made the project readily accessible to individuals and organizations, but may not be as effective as giving the resources to individuals and organizations in-person.

### ***Summary***

The intended audience for this project were outdoor recreation organizations and park and recreation organizations, and individuals working within these industries. Using a virtual toolkit format, this project focused on urging outdoor recreation organizations

and park and recreations organizations to practice active and visible inclusion for the LGBTQIA+ community. The online content created for this project, including the toolkit slideshow and accompanying learning activities, is designed to help individuals and organizations within the outdoor industry become aware of barriers the LGBTQIA+ community faces to accessing the outdoors, reflect on their own LGBTQIA+ inclusivity initiatives, and encourage active and visible LGBTQIA+ inclusion. The timeline for completion of the project is addressed in the next section.

### **Timeline**

The timeline for completion of this project was twelve weeks. The project was completed during the summer 2023 semester, from June through August of 2023. Research and analysis of the literature in chapter two was started at the beginning of summer semester, starting on June 5th, 2023. The research and literature analysis was completed by July 10th, including research and evaluation of inclusivity toolkits from outside organizations. Development of the learning activities and drafting of the toolkit began during the week of July 9th. Five learning activities were fully completed by July 23rd, followed by the complete drafts of all nine learning activities by July 30th. Each learning activity included in the toolkit was fully completed by August 13th. The toolkit slideshow was developed alongside the learning activities and fully drafted by July 30th with a complete version completed by August 13th. All components of the project, including research, literature analysis, online content and learning activity development, and writing of the capstone project document was completed by August 26th, 2023.

### ***Summary***

The summer semester of 2023 was used to complete this project. Utilizing the full semester allowed for quality research, analysis, and online content development. The month of June focused on researching and completing the literature review. July and August of 2023 were used to create the online toolkit and develop the learning activities within the Google slideshow, with the month of August emphasizing finalization of the toolkit resource. Every component of the capstone project was finalized and completed by August 26th, 2023. An overview of how the project was assessed is outlined in the next section.

### **Assessment**

The effectiveness of the toolkit and learning activities was measured through a Google survey taken at the conclusion of the toolkit and learning activities. The aim of this project was to create a resource for professional development for organizations within the outdoor industry to deeply reflect on the inclusive practices they have towards the LGBTQIA+ community, and to become aware of the barriers the community has to accessing the outdoors. An online Google survey was created for participants to provide feedback on the learning activities and resources in the toolkit. There were eight total questions in the survey. The questions asked participants to rate on a scale of 1-5 (1 meaning low and 5 meaning high) how useful the toolkit could be to their organization and their level of awareness prior to the toolkit of barriers LGBTQIA+ individuals have to accessing the outdoors. Participants also rated on a scale of 1-5 (1 meaning strongly disagree and 5 meaning strongly agree) if completing the activities increased their knowledge of LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in outdoor settings. Participants were also asked to

list their main takeaways from the toolkit, if there were any resources or learning activities that particularly stood out to them, action steps they may take to promote LGBTQIA+ inclusion at their organization, list any additional feedback they had, and write any questions they had after completing the toolkit. Effectiveness of the toolkit and learning activities was measured through participants' responses to the survey, specifically looking at the rating questions for level of prior knowledge and awareness of LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in the outdoors after completing the toolkit.

### ***Summary***

Assessment of the effectiveness and usefulness of the toolkit and learning activities for participants was measured through completion of a Google survey. Participants were asked to complete this survey after the completion of the learning activities within the toolkit. During completion of the survey participants provided feedback of the learning activities and rated how helpful and relevant the activities were to themselves and their organization. Participants' responses were used to measure how effective the learning activities were to increase awareness of LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the outdoors.

### **Summary**

The capstone project of an online toolkit for outdoor recreation and park and recreations organizations allows these organizations to gain ideas on how to practice active, visible inclusion for LGBTQIA+ community members. The virtual toolkit aimed to have individuals reflect deeply on the inclusive practices they have towards the LGBTQIA+ community, self-evaluate their current inclusivity initiatives, and provided an in-depth overview of barriers LGBTQIA+ individuals face to accessing the outdoors

and the importance of outdoor recreation and outdoor spaces as safe spaces. Inclusion toolkits and self-assessment tools from other organizations were researched to assist in the design and development of the learning activities. All members of a community, including every member of the LGBTQIA+ community, should feel safe and included in outdoor spaces and outdoor recreation organizations. Ultimately, this project advocated for outdoor recreations and park and recreations organizations to practice active, visible inclusion for their LGBTQIA+ community members, and provided resources and recommendations for ensuring they are accessible to all members of their community, including all members of the LGBTQIA+ community. At the end of the learning activities, participants were asked to complete a Google survey to give feedback on the online toolkit and rated how helpful and relevant the activities were. The research conducted for this project and the creation of a virtual, asynchronous toolkit to be used as a professional development resource helped to address the research question: *In what ways can outdoor educators and the fields of outdoor recreation and education become actively inclusive to the LGBTQIA+ community?*

Chapter four includes a conclusion to the project and a reflection of the project as a whole. A reflection of personal learning through the capstone project process, a review of the literature used and influential sources, and limitations and implications of the project are overviewed in the following chapter. Recommendations for future research and for outdoor organizations based on the findings of this project, results of the project, benefits to the fields of outdoor education and outdoor recreation and my plan to use the project in the future are discussed in chapter four.

## CHAPTER 4

### Conclusion

#### Introduction

This capstone project explored the research question: *In what ways can outdoor educators and the fields of outdoor recreation and education become actively inclusive to the LGBTQIA+ community?* The capstone project culminated in the creation of an online, asynchronous toolkit with learning activities related to LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in the outdoors to be used as a resource for outdoor education and outdoor recreation professionals. This chapter reviews my personal learnings throughout the capstone project and research process, revisits the literature review, and describes sources that were particularly influential to my project. This chapter also discusses implications and limitations of the project, reviews recommendations based on the findings of the project, explains how the project will be used in the future, and describes how it is a benefit to the fields of outdoor education and outdoor recreation.

#### Personal Learnings

Throughout the course of the capstone project process I have grown as a researcher, writer, and learner. I initially struggled with the research for this capstone project due to the lack of studies that have been conducted on the topic of LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in the outdoors. After many hours of trying to find sources directly related to my research topic, I chose instead to focus on the four related sub topics reviewed in chapter two: current levels of inclusion in the outdoors and outdoor recreation, how urban versus rural settings influence the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals, levels of discrimination that LGBTQIA+ youth face in school settings and at home, and

heteronormativity that is present in the outdoor industry. The examination of these related sub topics allowed me to articulate a strong argument for the fields of outdoor education and outdoor recreation to have a stronger emphasis on LGBTQIA+ inclusion and to recognize the importance of the outdoors as a safe space for the community. The minimal formal research on the research question presented barriers throughout the course of my capstone project, but allowed me to grow as a researcher and make connections to related sub topics that I otherwise would not have explored.

The capstone project completion process has given me the opportunity to grow as a writer and to exercise my creative thinking. Prior to the capstone I had never written a document as long as the capstone paper. The capstone requirements were daunting prior to beginning the writing, but the research process made me excited to work through the steps of completing the capstone. Taking all of the information I gathered for the literature review and determining what to include was a difficult process and I ultimately chose to focus on the sources that provided the most supporting evidence for implementing LGBTQIA+ inclusion in outdoor settings. The process of taking all the research I had gathered and combining it together in the literature review was more challenging than I originally anticipated. Synthesizing my sources together allowed me to write the literature review in a way that supported my research question and provided an argument to emphasize the importance of LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the outdoors.

The capstone project allowed me to exercise my creative thinking and lesson planning skill set. My original idea for the capstone project was to create the toolkit in the format of a PDF with all of the instructions and learning activities within the same document. After discussing the capstone project with my content reviewer, she



recommended making the toolkit in the form of a Google slideshow with links to access each individual learning activity. This allowed for a more interactive process for participants who use the toolkit. The project challenged me because I had never designed learning activities for adult learners. I was able to utilize toolkits created by outside organizations and particularly drew inspiration from inclusive toolkits created by the CDC and UNESCO (CDC, 2020; UNESCO, 2004). These toolkit examples combined with my lesson planning experience allowed me to create meaningful learning activities around my research topic of LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the outdoors.

### ***Summary***

The capstone project completion process presented numerous challenges and allowed me to grow significantly as a writer, learner, and researcher. I grew as a writer in terms of writing the parts of the capstone paper and in synthesizing the numerous sources in chapter two. As a researcher I learned how to conduct research on a topic that has been minimally researched and how to make connections between related sub topics. I learned a great amount about planning activities for adult learners and in creating a resource for use in professional development opportunities. The next section addresses the literature review and discusses which sources found through the research process were particularly influential on my capstone project.

### **Literature Review and Influential Sources**

The literature review for this capstone project was challenging to write due to the lack of formal research on the research topic of LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the outdoors. This gap in the research led me to pursue four related sub topics to argue the importance of focusing on LBGBTIQ+ inclusion in the outdoors and point towards the lack of

research on this topic. The four related sub topics in chapter two were: inclusion in outdoor organizations and parks and recreation, geographical factors - urban vs. rural settings, experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth in school and at home, and heteronormativity in the outdoors and outdoor recreation. During the research process I began to group each source into related themes, which led to the development of the four sub topics used in the literature review.

The four sub topics made up the majority of the literature review and each sub topic aimed to support the message of outdoor organizations and outdoor education and recreation professionals focusing more on LGBTQIA+ inclusion. There were specific sources referenced in each sub topic that were particularly influential on the research and development of the capstone project. From the first sub topic, inclusion in outdoor organizations and parks and recreation, both of the reports referenced from the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA, 2018-a; NRPA, 2018-b) were utilized to support the message of outdoor organizations and outdoor recreation and education professionals focusing more on LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Referencing the statistics from the NRPA's park and recreation inclusion report (NRPA, 2018-a) allowed me to spotlight how most outdoor organizations do not offer programming specifically for LGBTQIA+ individuals and how only 2 in 5 outdoor organizations have a formal inclusion policy (NRPA, 2018-a). A report from the Movement Advancement Project (Movement Advancement Project, 2019) was used to describe the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals in urban settings versus rural settings for the second sub topic - geographical factors - urban vs. rural settings. While this source does not specifically address LGBTQIA+ experiences in outdoor settings, the report does analyze the experiences of

LGBTQIA+ individuals in rural areas and ultimately argues that the community faces less support, resources, and overall acceptance in rural areas (Movement Advancement Project, 2019). Using the analysis from this report I was able to argue that LGBTQIA+ individuals may feel less comfortable being in outdoor spaces located in rural settings.

The LGBTQ youth report from the Human Rights Campaign (HRC, 2018) was critical in the development of the third sub topic, experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth in school and at home. This report summarizes the findings of a national survey that asked about the experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth in their family settings, schools, social circles, and wider communities. The report captures the responses of over 12,000 youth and their experiences navigating family, school, and other settings while also discovering their gender identities and sexual orientations (HRC, 2018). The findings from the LGBTQ youth report were used to further argue the need for outdoor organizations and outdoor settings to ensure they are practicing LGBTQIA+ inclusivity due to the large amount of discrimination that LGBTQIA+ youth must confront. For the fourth sub topic, heteronormativity in the outdoors and outdoor recreation, two academic articles were especially influential. Heath et al. (2023) discusses the experiences of LGBTQIA+ outdoor professionals and the ways in which outdoor professionals in the LGBTQIA+ community confront working in a heteronormative industry. Lundin and Bombaci (2022) outline recommendations for making outdoor group activities inclusive towards LGBTQIA+ individuals and discuss the ways in which many outdoor activities, especially group activities, are not generally LGBTQIA+ inclusive. These two articles were used to display the ways in which the outdoor industry is heteronormative and heterosexist, and argue for LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the industry to help combat

heteronormativity. Each of the four sub topics allowed me to develop my main points and arguments for encouraging outdoor organizations to emphasize LGBTQIA+ inclusion and become familiar with the barriers the LGBTQIA+ community faces to accessing the outdoors.

### ***Summary***

The four sub topics in the literature review allowed me to develop my capstone project and support my argument for outdoor organizations to focus more on LGBTQIA+ inclusivity. Minimal research has been conducted on the topic of LGBTQIA+ experiences in the outdoors and the development of the four sub topics allowed me to navigate the lack of formal research and present an argument for the gap in the research to be addressed. A wide variety of sources were used in the development of the literature, but particular sources were especially influential during the course of the research, including NRPA (2018-a), NRPA (2018-b), Movement Advancement Project (2019), HRC (2018), Heath et al. (2023), and Lundin and Bombaci (2022). The next section addresses implications and limitations of the capstone project and discusses my own recommendations for future research on the research topic and for outdoor organizations to take to implement LGBTQIA+ inclusion.

### **Implications, Limitations, and Recommendations**

This capstone project has highlighted an overall lack of LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in outdoor settings and the fields of outdoor education and outdoor recreation and points towards a need to implement LGBTQIA+ inclusion initiatives. Outdoor spaces can act as a safe space for LGBTQIA+ community members and serve as a space away from discrimination they may be facing, but not all outdoor organizations and outdoor

education and recreation professionals are competent in implementing LGBTQIA+ inclusion (Barnfield & Humberstone, 2008; NRPA, 2018-a, NRPA, 2018-b). My goal for the implementation of the LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in the outdoors toolkit is for outdoor organizations and professionals within the fields of outdoor education and outdoor recreation to become aware of the barriers the LGBTQIA+ community faces to accessing the outdoors and to begin to evaluate their own organizational levels of LGBTQIA+ inclusion. After completing the toolkit and learning activities, organizations and individuals should have resources to begin implementing LGBTQIA+ inclusion initiatives into their organizations and outdoor programming for the community.

While the toolkit is meant to be an interactive experience and is designed to best meet organizational and individual needs, there are limitations due to the toolkit being an online, asynchronous format. This format was utilized to make the learning activities and contents of the toolkit easily accessible to outdoor organizations and professionals within the fields of outdoor education and outdoor recreation. An in-person and synchronous format would offer benefits such as interacting directly with participants, group discussions, and developing connections with outdoor organizations and outdoor education and outdoor recreation professionals. There would be benefits to offering the activities in-person, but this could lead to less individuals and organizations participating with the toolkit and limit participation to individuals and organizations within a smaller geographic area. The online, asynchronous format was utilized to provide greater access to the learning activities and allow a larger number of organizations and individuals to access the toolkit.

The research that was conducted for this capstone project shows a large gap in research on the topic of LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in the outdoors. I would recommend that formal research be conducted on the topic of LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in the outdoors. Studies similar to Heath et al. (2023) where LGBTQIA+ outdoor professionals were interviewed about their experiences being in the outdoor industry would be useful for organizations to ensure they are practicing LGBTQIA+ inclusion that is affirming of community members. Similar research studies focusing on LGBTQIA+ individuals, instead of outdoor professionals, would be useful to gauge inclusivity initiatives within outdoor organizations to obtain raw feedback from LGBTQIA+ community members.

I would further recommend, based on the findings from this capstone project, that outdoor organizations conduct their own learning activities aimed at staff members reflecting on and recognizing their own ideas and biases of the LGBTQIA+ community. Becoming familiar with and recognizing our own biases is critical to complete before engaging in LGBTQIA+ inclusion initiatives. I would also recommend that outdoor organizations take an active and visible approach to LGBTQIA+ inclusion and ensure they are practicing LGBTQIA+ inclusion throughout the entire year, instead of only at specific times of the year. This could include displaying LGBTQIA+ pride symbols, implementing gender neutral restrooms, wearing pronoun pins, and having safe space signage to indicate to the LGBTQIA+ community that they are welcome and accepted at the organization. Taking ideas from Lundin and Bombaci (2022) on how to make outdoor programs inclusive to the LGBTQIA+ community is another recommendation to ensure all individuals, including all LGBTQIA+ individuals, feel comfortable participating in the program. Setting group norms and expectations, having a plan to address homophobia or

transphobia, pointing out gender neutral or single stall restrooms, and having introductions with the use of pronouns are recommendations from Lundin and Bombaci (2022) that all outdoor organizations can use to practice active, visible LGBTQIA+ inclusion during outdoor programs.

### *Summary*

Implications of this capstone project include outdoor organizations and individuals who participate in the LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in the outdoors toolkit becoming familiar with barriers the community faces to accessing the outdoors and evaluating LGBTQIA+ inclusivity at an individual and organizational level. After completing the toolkit and learning activities, outdoor organizations will be better able to implement LGBTQIA+ inclusion within their organization and in outdoor programming. The toolkit was made in an online, asynchronous format. This allows for widespread accessibility to the contents of the toolkit, but it may not be as effective as offering the learning activities in an in-person, synchronous format. Participants may not be as engaged with the learning activities as they would be in a synchronous format. The capstone project points towards a large gap in the formal research available on the topic of LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in the outdoors. I recommend future research be conducted on this topic to obtain feedback from LGBTQIA+ community members. I also recommend outdoor organizations ensure they are practicing active, visible LGBTQIA+ inclusion throughout the whole year and to develop outdoor programming with LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in mind for community members. The next section addresses how I will use the results of the capstone project, discusses how the project is beneficial to the fields of

outdoor education and outdoor recreation, and details how I will use the capstone project in the future.

### **Results, Benefits, and Future Use of the Capstone Project**

The results from the research conducted for this project shows a gap in the research available on LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in the outdoors and that most outdoor organizations do not offer programming specifically for LGBTQIA+ community members (NRPA, 2018-a). I am not currently employed in the fields of outdoor education or outdoor recreation, but am planning to enter the field in the future. In a future position, I would like to view the organization I am employed at using the ideas and learning activities that were generated for this capstone project. I plan to ask future colleagues to complete the LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in the outdoors toolkit to gather their feedback and input on the topic of LGBTQIA+ inclusion in outdoor settings. I am not sure what my future career will look like, but I would like to continue advocating for LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the outdoors and plan to use my capstone project as a starting point.

The LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in the outdoors toolkit serves many purposes to the fields of outdoor education and outdoor recreation. LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the outdoors is a topic that has not been thoroughly researched and is not a primary focus in either field. Outdoor organizations and individuals within the fields of outdoor education and outdoor recreation may not be aware of the importance and critical need of implementing LGBTQIA+ inclusion within their organizations. Further, outdoor organizations are not always aware of the barriers that the LGBTQIA+ community faces to accessing the outdoors. The toolkit and learning activities serve as an informational resource for outdoor organizations and individuals within outdoor education and outdoor recreation to



become familiar with these barriers and begin to critically analyze their own LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Through completing the toolkit, organizations and individuals can begin to think of ways to implement LGBTQIA+ inclusion initiatives and ensure they are practicing active, visible inclusion to LGBTQIA+ community members.

### *Summary*

Results from this capstone project showed a gap in the available research on LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the outdoors and further revealed that most outdoor organizations do not offer programming for the LGBTQIA+ community (NRPA, 2018-a). I will use this capstone project in my future career in either outdoor education or outdoor recreation. I plan to evaluate LGBTQIA+ inclusion at a future organization I am employed at and ask future colleagues to complete the toolkit to gather their feedback and input on LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the outdoors. This research topic is a personal passion of mine and I plan to continue advocating for LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the outdoors using this capstone project as a starting point. The capstone project is beneficial to the fields of outdoor education and outdoor recreation through serving as an informational resource on barriers the LGBTQIA+ community faces to accessing the outdoors and through encouraging outdoor organizations and individuals to critically examine their own LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Outdoor organizations and individuals within the fields of outdoor education and outdoor recreation can begin to implement active, visible inclusion towards the LGBTQIA+ community through completing the toolkit. In the following conclusion section the main messages of this chapter are reviewed and my future goals for the capstone project are discussed.

## **Conclusion**

Designing the LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in the outdoors toolkit and completing the capstone project presented many challenges that allowed me to grow as a researcher, learner, and writer. Pursuing a research topic that has not been heavily researched challenged me to make connections to related sub topics and synthesize sources together into related themes. The four related sub topics I discussed in the literature review allowed me to craft an argument for outdoor organizations to emphasize LGBTQIA+ inclusion initiatives. The process of developing a professional development resource for adult learners presented another challenge having never designed lessons for adult learners. I was able to utilize my prior professional experiences in education to design the learning activities and the toolkit slideshow.

My goal for this capstone project is for outdoor organizations and individuals within the fields of outdoor education and outdoor recreation to become familiarized with barriers the LGBTQIA+ community faces to accessing the outdoors and challenge themselves to implement active, visible LGBTQIA+ inclusion within their organizations. The toolkit was designed to be both an informational resource and to encourage outdoor organizations and individuals to critically examine their own levels of LGBTQIA+ inclusion. I would like to use my capstone project in a future career to examine LGBTQIA+ inclusivity at an organizational level and ask colleagues to complete the toolkit to gather their input and feedback. LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the outdoors is a passion of mine that has developed throughout the course of my degree completion within the Master's of Arts in Education: Natural Science and Environmental Education program. In the future I plan to continue my own advocacy work promoting LGBTQIA+

inclusion in outdoor settings and within the fields of outdoor education and outdoor recreation. The development of the LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in the outdoors toolkit was a starting point for me to continue the work of encouraging outdoor organizations and individuals within the fields of outdoor education and outdoor recreation to critically examine and implement LGBTQIA+ inclusion initiatives.

## REFERENCES

- Alberta Urban Municipalities Association. (AUMA). (2017). *Measuring Inclusion Tool*.  
[https://www.abmunis.ca/sites/default/files/Advocacy/Programs\\_Initiatives/WIC/measuring\\_inclusion\\_tool\\_-\\_electronic\\_user\\_0.pdf](https://www.abmunis.ca/sites/default/files/Advocacy/Programs_Initiatives/WIC/measuring_inclusion_tool_-_electronic_user_0.pdf)
- Argus, S. (2018). LGBTQ girl scouts reflect on their outdoor experiences. In Gray, T. & Mitten, D (Eds.), *Palgrave International Handbook of Women and Outdoor Learning* (pp. 529-543). [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-53550-0\\_35](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-53550-0_35)
- Barnfield, D. & Humberstone, B. (2008). Speaking out: perspectives of gay and lesbian practitioners in outdoor education in the UK. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, 8(1), 31-42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14729670801976086>
- Brave Trails. (n.d.). *Our mission*. Retrieved June 16, 2023, from  
<https://www.bravetrails.org/mission>
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (CDC). (2020). *LGBTQ inclusivity in schools: a self-assessment tool*.  
[https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/disparities/mai/pdf/LGBTQ\\_Inclusivity-508.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/disparities/mai/pdf/LGBTQ_Inclusivity-508.pdf)
- Elsenberg, M., Mehus, C., Saewyc, E., Corliss, H., Gower, A., Sullivan, R., & Porta, C. (2018). Helping young people stay afloat: A qualitative study of community resources and supports for LGBTQ adolescents in the United States and Canada. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 65(8), 969-989.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2017.1364944>
- Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network. (GLSEN). (2018). *Laws prohibiting “promotion of homosexuality” in schools: impacts and implications*.  
[https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/No\\_Promo\\_Homo\\_2018.pdf](https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/No_Promo_Homo_2018.pdf)

- Greytak, E. A., Kosciw J. G., & Boesen, M. J. (2013). Educating the Educator: Creating Supporting School Personnel Through Professional Development. *Journal of School Violence, 12*(1), 80-97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2012.731586>
- Grossman, A., O'Connell, T., & D'Augelli, A. (2005). Leisure and Recreational “Girl-Boy” Activities - Studying the Unique Challenges Provided by Transgendered Young People. *Leisure, 29*(1), 5-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14927713.2005.9651321>
- Heath, S., Duffy, L., Lewis, S., Busey, C., & Sene-Harper, A. (2023). Queering the Outdoors: Experiences of 2LGBTQIA+ Outdoor Recreation Professionals. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education, and Leadership*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.18666/JOREL-2023-11636>
- Human Rights Campaign. (HRC). (2018). *LGBTQ Youth Report*. [https://www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report?utm\\_source=GS&utm\\_medium=AD&utm\\_campaign=BPI-HRC-Grant&utm\\_content=456246405511&utm\\_term=lgbt%20school&gclid=CjwKCAiApfeQBhAUEiwA7K\\_UHwcmnSQbpedCElofyUmEprw37bqOokHqPiA-zdatIy6QjMApnyA4IBoCMagQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report?utm_source=GS&utm_medium=AD&utm_campaign=BPI-HRC-Grant&utm_content=456246405511&utm_term=lgbt%20school&gclid=CjwKCAiApfeQBhAUEiwA7K_UHwcmnSQbpedCElofyUmEprw37bqOokHqPiA-zdatIy6QjMApnyA4IBoCMagQAvD_BwE)
- Human Rights Campaign. (HRC). (2023). *2022 State Equality Index*. [https://reports.hrc.org/2022-state-equality-index?\\_ga=2.251836160.843173325.1687206810-574471683.1686875465](https://reports.hrc.org/2022-state-equality-index?_ga=2.251836160.843173325.1687206810-574471683.1686875465)
- Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., Truong, N. L., & Zongrone, A. D. (2020). *The 2019 national school climate survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools*. GLSEN. <https://www.glsen.org/research/2019-national-school-climate-survey>

Kosciw, J. G., Palmer, N. A., Kull, R. M., & Greytak, E. A. (2013). The effect of negative school climate on academic resources for LGBT youth and the role of in-school supports. *The Journal of School Violence, 12*(1), 45-63.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2012.732546>

Lundin, M. & Bombaci, S. (2022). Making outdoor field experiences more inclusive for the LGBTQ+ community. *Ecological Applications, 33*(5), 1-8.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/eap.2771>

Movement Advancement Project. (2019). *Where we call home: LGBT people in rural America*. <https://www.lgbtmap.org/rural-lgbt>

Movement Advancement Project. (n.d.). *Bans on Transgender Youth Participation in Sports*. Retrieved June 19, 2023, from

[https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/youth/sports\\_participation\\_bans](https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/youth/sports_participation_bans)

National Recreation and Park Association. (NRPA). (2018 - a). *Park and recreation inclusion report*.

<https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/e386270247644310b06960be9e9986a9/park-recreation-inclusion-report.pdf>

National Recreation and Park Association. (NRPA). (2018 - b). *LGBTQ inclusion in parks and recreation*.

<https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/b1f3a10f8b58405d907b053edb803282/parks-for-inclusion-lgbtq.pdf>

Pattie Gonia [@pattiegonia]. (n.d.). *Posts* [Instagram Profile]. Retrieved June 21, 2023,

from <https://www.instagram.com/pattiegonia/?hl=en>

- Ratcliffe, M. (2022, December 22). Redefining Urban Areas Following the 2020 Census. *Random Sampling, United States Census Bureau*.  
<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2022/12/redefining-urban-areas-following-2020-census.html>
- Russell, S. T., Bishop, M. D., Saba, V. C., James, I., & Salvatore, I. (2021). Promoting School Safety for LGBT and All Students. *Policy Insights for the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 8(2), 160-166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23727322211031938>
- Schultz, C. L., Bocarro, J. N., Lee, K. J., Sene-Harper, A., Fearn, M., & Floyd, M. (2019). Whose National Park Service? An examination of relevancy, diversity, and inclusion programs from 2005–2016. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 37(4), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.18666/JPra-2019-9052>
- Taylor, K., González, J., & Razani, N. (2021). Justice in access to the outdoors. *Parks Stewardship Forum*, 37(1): 23-33. <https://doi.org/10.5070/P5371517>
- Toth, S. & Mason, C. (2021). “Out” in the countryside: gay tourist perspectives on rural travel in British Columbia, Canada. *Journal of Rural and Community Development*, 16(3), 84-107.  
<https://journals.brandonu.ca/jrcd/article/view/2052/528>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (UNESCO). (2004). *Embracing diversity: toolkit for creating inclusive, learning-friendly environments*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000137522>

United States Census Bureau. (n.d.). *Rural America* [Story Map]. Retrieved June 15, 2023, from

<https://mtgis-portal.geo.census.gov/arcgis/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=49d4bc9c8eb444ab51218c1d5001ef6>

Venture Out Project. (n.d.). *What we do*. Retrieved June 19, 2023, from

<https://www.ventureoutproject.com/#what-we-do>

Warren, K. (2015). Gender in outdoor studies. In Humberstone, B., Prince, H., & Henderson, K (Eds.), *Routledge International Handbook of Outdoor Studies* (pp. 360-368). Routledge.