

MSc Education for Sustainable Futures in Adult, Community & Youth Contexts

The University of Glasgow

The School of Education

Project Title: *Outdoor Education with Women: Bringing in more humanistic approaches to learning in nature.*

2473058P

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Word Count: 13,608

Due Date: 25th August 2023

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Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to thank my research supervisor Dr. Elizabeth Nelson for her continued support and guidance throughout this research project. She is a truly inspiring academic within her field of expertise in literature and representation in childhood play and has been a wonderful breath of fresh air. I would also like to thank my partner Stephen for his continued support throughout my academic years while attending my undergraduate to postgraduate degree. He has never once doubted my abilities and continued to support me through all the highs and lows of essays, research and whatever life has thrown at me. Lastly, my parents are to thank you for always believing in me as a child and continuing to believe in me as an adult. I'm thankful to have come from a loving and nurturing home growing up and they have helped to shape the person I am today.

Introduction

This research is based on the outdoor experiences of woman in the Northeast of Glasgow. It was important to me to research the positives and negatives of outdoor education by using different theories and methods to underpin the work I was doing. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic there has been a significant rise in outdoor education within families, especially in urban areas. Biddle (2020) discusses the significant rise in outdoor physical activities during the pandemic. They talk about this increase being due to the fact families and individuals were stuck inside their homes during the lockdown. This made more people motivated to go outdoors and exercise, so they were not stuck at home. From a personal perspective this is what happened to myself as well, once restrictions on travelling out with your city were lifted, I couldn't wait to go and explore Scotland. I found outdoor activities a way to release any stresses from my day-to-day life and it made me fall in love with the beauty of my country. Stolzenberg (2020) talked about the benefits of outdoor education and recreational activities in woman and how it helped grow self-esteem and body image in females. This resonated with me when exploring my findings within this piece of research. It really came down to how the woman were feeling at the beginning of this piece of work through to the end. This will be a topic I will cover when discussing the findings of this research.

Outdoor education can be a powerful tool for experiential learning and personal growth. I wanted to take the focus on promoting women's leadership, building self-confidence, and challenging stereotypes. Female participants can be encouraged to take on leadership roles in planning and implementing activities, fostering a sense of agency and self-efficacy. This was at the core of this research and women's empowerment through fostering different humanist and community development theories. The ideology of bringing in community development theories was based on my undergraduate degree and my full-time job as a community worker and outdoor educator. This research will explore these theories and how they have underpinned this piece of work.

Something that made this piece of work very authentic and important was the fact that women involved had no prior experience to taking part in outdoor education. In terms of authenticity the reason for no prior experience was to gauge a true reflection on progress. If someone came in who has done some of these activities before then it would be difficult to gauge their progression, especially within the case studies. Throughout this piece of work, I will speak about the following different aspects of outdoor activities;

Paddle sports using a Stand-Up Paddleboard (SUP)

Cold Water Therapy

Outdoor Meditation

Hiking in Lowland Terrain (lowland terrain being a walk which doesn't have an incline and remains at the same level throughout)

Hiking in Hills and Munros (Munro being the Scottish Term for a mountain)

These are the main areas of activity in which I worked in with these women. Any areas I took them to were well researched by me taking each area in on a solo activity. This allowed me to take notes on any issues with land access and risk assessments in each area to suit the activity. This whole journey with the woman took place over June and July in 2023 in all weathers. The important thing out of all of this was about bringing women into outdoor spaces and bringing in the theories that shaped this piece of work. Not only was this an important factor but also the importance of connecting people and creating new safe spaces. Block (2008) focused on asset-based community development, and he discusses the importance of connecting people through safe spaces and the importance of empowering individuals and creating a space to open up new dialogue. I really resonated with this due to opening a safe space outside in which women could engage in the literature around outdoor education and the importance of nature when looking at our mental and physical wellbeing. Morton (2012) delves into the philosophy around connecting all people to the environment around us. My

understanding of his work was how we as humans shape our relationships within outdoor spaces. It allowed me to engage in dialogue with the participants about our ecological responsibilities and how we might look to shape or even reimagine our connections deep within nature.

Furthermore, in this research my understanding of how we engage in outdoor education really adapted. Upon undertaking this research and starting to understand the theories, I really thought I would use certain theories and could imagine how they would work. However, like all community workers and researchers we adapt our ideas and theories to suit how our groups or participants fit within that field. For me at first it was difficult to disengage from my professional career to a more researcher role in outdoor education. Working in the outdoors had never been a researching point of view and more of an exciting role within my life where I got to share my passions with others. I think it's important to reflect on my own journey within this project and how it shaped me to become the researcher I am today, and how I will not only use this piece of work to shape my understandings but also shape me as a researcher in the future.

Chapter One

Literature Review

This section has four sections which were important for me to explore to underpin this piece of work. Section one will be exploring why empowerment is key to outdoor education when working with women. Section two is looking at the theories of posthumanism again to underpin some of the key theories I will explore throughout this research. Section three is exploring the existing theories of community development theories that underpin my practice as a professional in my field of work. Here is where I wanted to explore how community development theories can underpin some of the research that I am undertaking.

Section One

Empowering Women in Outdoor Education

At the start of researching this topic I had to first further my knowledge on empowerment but specifically with women. Firstly, Johnson & Hendricks (2017) sparked my interest within their article around the current research within empowerment with women in outdoor education. They highlighted the current academic need for more research around women and outdoor education, something which I had already been thinking about before undertaking this research. The plan with this research was to continue on from existing literature to represent women within outdoor education and the need for more space in the academic world. The purpose of this literature review is to highlight the importance of thorough inclusive research in which we can foster gender equity and ensure the needs of participants are being met and support empowerment. Cortwright and Darvin (2015) talk about the emphasis on the fact that more research is needed within women in adventure and outdoor education. In looking at this reading it really underpinned the work that I want to continue and represent women more fairly within this field of work. Taylor and Hyrnas (2021) stood out in their article while exploring the needs for challenging gender norms within outdoor education.

This stuck with me because I understand the firsthand experience of being judged for my gender within the field of sports in which I work. Taylor and Hynas continues on to talk about this in the terms of stereotypes and how women are constantly told they aren't abled bodied to do sports which are mostly dominated by men. This research can aim to promote female role models in the field of outdoor education and with informed literature and research this could be possible. It is important to highlight the existing achievements and contributions of women in outdoor education and especially in leadership roles. Forsyth and Tarrant (2018) examine this representation in leadership roles and again pushing for more equity and diversity in leadership roles within the field with women. Again, going back to this current research, it really applied to the work I was undertaking with the participants as well as within my professional capacity women in the sports and outdoor field are widely misrepresented. I work predominately with men in my outdoor education side of my role. Ideally with this research I wanted to see how I could work with the women to dismantle barriers that prevent women from gaining different roles with outdoor education. Taylor (2017) explores this 'dismantling effect' when addressing barriers to women in particularly leadership roles. However, in disagreement they discuss the women are almost not pushing hard enough for these roles when further in my findings you will find the opposite. I will come back to this point of leadership roles within my findings and discuss how the women felt when discussing this literature.

It was important for me to include my participants as much as I could within this research to help almost design it around them. Finding the literature and discussing different points with them was good in designing these sections in the literature review. Reason (1994) really hits on this when discussing feminist participatory action research (FPAR) in that it emphasizes on making research a more inclusive environment. A theory that really stood out to me when I intertwined empowerment with woman was ecofeminism and a women's sense of place. Gaard (1993) explored how nature and women can be interconnected through women being known as nurturing. Interestingly Gaard went into depth around how from ecofeminism we can then start to feel empowered and work towards

more environmental justice. This is something I explored when conducting this research and how a connection with nature can allow us to be almost more inclined to fight for the justice of protecting the planet.

Section Two

Posthumanism Theory

Posthumanism theories felt right to apply to this piece of work in exploring agency within outdoor education with women. The exploration of interconnectedness, entanglement, and interdependence amongst living beings with humans, non-humans and environment was something I felt strongly about exploring. The way in which we as humans connect with something such as the environment is such a beautiful thing, the feeling of the grass or the sand beneath your feet or enjoying cold water is very freeing. Bennet (2010) discusses the impact non-human entities can have on humans and the vibrancy it can have within society. For me when exploring non-human entities within this research was around water, soil, fire, and air. I took from reading this piece of literature the importance of something like air as we need it to live, however we more than likely take this for granted. It is a non-human entity that we probably do not think about every day as it's natural to us. Unlike water, which is something we need to drink, to use it as a way of connecting with nature wouldn't be a human's first thought, Bennet (2010). Bringing in the notion of posthumanism with feminism, empowerment and nature just really pieced together a missing part of this research.

Braidotti (2013) really allowed me to better understand posthumanism theories and promotes the shift away from anthropocentrism and working towards a more holistic and ecological understanding of human's relationships with nature. They challenge the notion of nature as a passive resource for use and emphasize the agency, energy, and interconnectedness of all entities within our ecosystem. This has allowed me to think of new ways around environmental ethics, sustainability, and our place upon a very large planet. Haraway (1991) written from a perspective before technology is as advanced as it is now, but some points were relevant to today. Her fear was that with the increasing use of technology that we would become disconnected with the world around us. As the world went into a lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic we shifted our work online to safeguard ourselves as

workers and others we worked with. Guidance at the time set the United Kingdom government was set for safeguarding and remote education throughout the pandemic GOV.UK (2021). Rosen (2012) explored the increase of psychological issues with the increased use of technology and the effects of us disengaging with nature. They explored the increased screen time, and the effects blue lights would have on our sleep and mood. Turkle (2015) then backed these claims around the breakdown of communication in human relationships due to increased usage of screens. Turkle then went on to explore how the relationship between humans and nature was a 'disconnection' and we stopped caring about our planet. I agree with both these pieces of research as I see it often within my outdoor education role with young people and adults. They are always keen to know if they are allowed their phones when on camping trips or when we are having a day out in nature and connecting with the ecological systems. However, sometimes technology can prove to be useful when we can connect to nature. For example, there are certain apps for your phone you can use to identify flora and fauna and GPS apps that allow us to be safe outdoors. An app that is very beneficial for anyone who does outdoor education is *what.three.words* and this is an app that allows you to tell emergency services exactly where you are.

Posthumanism has allowed researchers to raise ethical questions around human interactions with nature. Specifically in outdoor education, this has led to in depth discussions around sustainable practices and responsible stewardship of natural spaces, which are particularly relevant to women. Braidotti (2013) addressed issues around ethical considerations around environmental ethics. Braidotti is renowned for their post humanist philosophies specifically linked to the environment and human-nature interactions. They explored in depth that there are some complications when we start looking into posthumanism and connecting with nature, from the sense of technology. This explored how most people will connect post humanist theories to how humans have evolved with the help from technology. Most of our knowledge now comes from the internet and how we can delve into discussions, articles and journals published online to further our knowledge. However, I would say

that there is something a bit more meaningful to learning with nature directly, rather than engaging with the digital resources. To do this however, we will need books and the internet and as mentioned before apps. Williams and Espinosa (2019) really underpin my thoughts around the notion of learning from nature. When we equip ourselves with knowledge, we can then use that and share that with other humans. Therefore, those participating in outdoor educational groups aren't learning from technology but having that human connection and seeing nature and how we can use it to learn.

It is important to recognise posthuman environmental education and how we can seek to develop an understanding of a more holistic and ethical understanding of our relationship with the environment. McKenzie et. al. (2019) talks about the context of Anthropocene, an era which was characterized by human activities and the significant impact we have had on the Earth's ecosystems. Industrialization, urbanization, deforestation, the burning of fossil fuels, and the release of greenhouse gases, have had a profound effect on the earth's climate, biodiversity, landscapes, and geological processes. Bonneuli and Fresoz (2016) explore the history of human impact on the environment and argues for a new perspective on our relationship with the planet. For this research to be successful it was critical for me not to be naive to the impact human life has had on the planet and ensure myself as a researcher recognised those impacts. Me and the participants could all reduce our carbon footprint and to understand Anthropocene was purely down to research within posthumanism and its connections with nature and outdoor education.

Section Three

Community Development: Linking with new learned theory.

While exploring this research and literature my experience and previous academic knowledge really came out a lot. Community development theories are something that I recognise in a lot of the work I do, and it felt only natural to bring that into this research. A lot of the work I completed to bring this research alive was connected to group work theories (refs) and exploring strengths and weaknesses.

Tuckman (1965, pg. 64) explains the various stages of what forming groups will go through and how we can support them to achieve their goals. There are five key stages to groups coming together to achieve similar goals. "Forming" is really when groups are getting together and learning about each other and look to a leader for guidance. "Storming" is where conflicts and differences can arise, and members may challenge each other's ideas. "Norming", this is where the groups start to establish norms, values, and a sense of cohesion. "Performing", where we can see high productivity and effective group functioning. This can be from the group working well together to one set goal. Lastly, "adjourning", the group is likely to disband and move on due to achieving their goals and there can be a lot of celebration here but also sadness due to disbandment. These are five stages I will explore in more depth when coming to my findings within this paper. However, this was a theory that really came to light when researching the literature that would support this piece of work.

Community empowerment theory was a focus on building the capacity of community members or group members to take control of their own development processes. It involves education, skill-building, and increased decision-making power for communities and group members. Tandon and Hall (2003) discuss how as practioners within the community development field can explore different dimensions of community empowerment. Something that really resonated with me was the fact we can't just simply 'empower' someone, we can only use the tools and knowledge we have to support

empowerment. This is something I knew that with the right literature and knowledge I could support empowerment within the women I would be working with. Homan (2005) emphasizes the role of the planner when looking to facilitate empowerment within individuals. We need to be able to recognise the group's strengths and weaknesses and how we can use that to plan effectively for positive results.

Momsen and Townsed (2005) looks at the theory around Gender and Development and how we can take these considerations into our work. They advocate for integrating gender considerations into all development efforts and prioritizing women's empowerment. Gender and Development approaches emphasize women's access to resources, education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. They also address cultural norms and policies that perpetuate gender disparities. Momsen (2015) later went on to integrate community development ideas into the gender and development theory. Upon looking at community dynamics and how they can influence the intersection of gender and power and how that can affect women's self-empowerment. Ledwith (2016) critically analyzes the topic of gender and the community development field. She discusses the importance of integrating gender analysis into community development practices. I completely agree that we need to be having more conversations on addressing gender issues which can then lead to more effective and equitable community development.

While exploring the concept of bringing community development theories alive within this research, it was worth exploring literature that brings community development and outdoor education together. Russell and Wheway (2008) reflect upon the importance of integration of outdoor education and community development and discuss the potential for outdoor educational programs to contribute to community empowerment and sustainability. I think from this it's important to recognise that we can integrate theories together and allow them to underpin and understand the work we are undertaking. Becker et, al. (2016) explores that skill development is crucial as community development worker especially within outdoor education. There should be some form of lifelong learning for participants

when taking part to fit with our values and competencies as community workers. This is something I agree with and strongly believe that when participants are undertaking activities that they leave each day with learning to up skill themselves. Glass et al. (2012) also backs the work of Becker by providing a comprehensive overview of outdoor education and its role in personal and skill development. They also explore in depth how we can apply the notion of outdoor education within more settings, especially within communities. As explored previously, outdoor education has taken a more crucial role within communities as a response to COVID-19. While exploring literature around linking community development and outdoor education it seemed quite outdated and there wasn't a lot to explore after 2020.

Chapter Two

Methodology

For this research I decided to use a qualitative approach by applying constructivism theory as the research paradigm. Along with this the methods I picked were to conduct semi-structured interviews with eight participants, four case studies of observation and forty participants taking part in an online survey. I aimed to work with around all forty woman each week however this was dependent on activity and availability for all participants. Each participant who would be interviewed would be in a safe environment where it would just be myself and the participant I was interviewing. These interviews would be conducted outside within nature and the participant would stay behind after sessions so there wasn't a risk of breaking confidentiality by discussing the questions when anyone else was around. In this section I will explore each method in detail.

Theory of Constructivism

The key principles of constructivism allowed me to shape what I wanted to come out of this research especially around multiple perspectives and reflection within the research. Fosnot (2013) describes constructivism as in engaging the student and immersing themselves within their learning. She discusses giving the learners the opportunity for concrete, contextually meaningful experiences through their learning by raising important questions and standing by their interpretations of their learning. From her work I got that constructivism could emphasize active learning, where students can fully engage in a wide range of different activities that require them to explore, question and problem-solve. Applying this to outdoor education, this can involve a more hands on experience like hiking, swimming, and paddle sports. Applying the constructivism paradigm to outdoor education has allowed me to provide a rich and experiential learning environment where participants have been

able to actively construct knowledge and understanding through direct engagement with the natural world. Bonwell and Eison (1991) discuss how active learning aligns with constructivist principles and how can as educators actively engage our learners. This felt important to me as the work I was doing had a lot of physical aspects to it and I had to ensure as a researcher I could actively engage the participants and ensure I could keep up motivation. Bransford et, al. (2004) underpinned constructivism in a positive and influential way and allowing me to understand how people learn. We must take into consideration a lot of factors that can impact how someone learns. With the aspect that all the activities I would be doing would be outside, I had to assess the impact of the weather and people's physical capabilities. To ensure I have done this I risk assessed each area I would conduct these sessions in and considered accessibility, weather, physical strength needed, what kit is needed and ensure there was space for rest. On top of conducting a risk assessment I would constantly dynamic risk assess on the day of the session. This takes me back to Bransford (2004) on considering people's capabilities and how all the things I would risk assess could affect that persons' learning journey. Overall constructivism is a comprehensive theory of learning and knowledge that suggests individuals actively construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through their experiences and interactions. Berger and Luckmann (1966) explored that knowledge is socially constructed while providing foundational concepts for constructivist thoughts. While exploring their book it was clear that a lot of the things I was exploring around gender and the misconceptions of women in sport where socially constructed views and therefore had to be challenged.

Playful Theories in connection with Nature

While play-based theories are often associated with children, there is a growing recognition of the benefits of play, including nature play, for adults. Engaging in nature play as adults can promote well-being, creativity, and a deeper connection to the natural world. Here I will explore some literature that is related to nature play-based theories around adults. I will also look at the activities and the theories that support the physical activities conducted within this research in this chapter.

Williams (2017) spent time researching the science behind the positive effects on adults when they engage in nature. Her results showed an increase in creativity and improved mental health. In terms of play, Williams looked at adults engaging in designing and building shelters outside and almost thinking outside the box. This is something I took as adults using their imagination to explore creative ways to bring to life a den. Things like fort building are often associated with children, and not often something people see adults doing. Not only is this a form of play but is also a skill development, as here we are teaching adults basic survival techniques in the outdoors. The ability to be able to build a secure and safe den outside could come in handy if they were ever faced with a situation of being stuck outside. Irvine (2022) said something I really enjoyed when looking at adults and playing when we are looking at outdoor activities and forest school.

“Nonetheless, grown-ups are still part of the forest school community, and they want to play, make, and explore without necessarily being a “responsible adult”.”

The wholesomeness of his book and the enjoyment of reading how adults have the right to play and play just isn't for children, really just brought together what I was trying to do. He is completely right in some of the valid points he makes around the taboo around adults literally just enjoying being kids for the day. Adults have the right to play, explore and be creative in any way that they find enjoyable.

In this context we are exploring the ideas of playing outdoors which can cover a wide range of different activities. Brown (2009) explored the importance of play for people of all ages and how play contributes to problem-solving and overall well-being. He talks in depth around adults, opening their imagination and how it can shape us from childhood to adulthood. Again, really hitting on the fact that adults have the right to play. An interesting point from Penenberg (2013) is that adults often to role-play within professional settings, and again this is normal in professional environments especially around development and training days. However, this wouldn't be seen as adults running around playing a game, but this is something children do. Children will often be seen as playing when they are role playing different roles such as teachers or doctors. Not adults though, this is mandatory to show you can handle different scenarios in a work capacity. Is this not imaginative play that children do though? Yes, it is completely just in different contexts of scenarios. Penenberg, says this promotes innovative thinking and creativity within adults. I agree with the fact that adults are playing just as children would here, but it is seen as work and not play.

While exploring the activities I listed in the introduction these are all forms of different play for adults when we relate to outdoor education. For example, when I have adults out on the SUPs (Stand Up Paddleboards) I often get them to engage in different games such as:

Basketball on the Water

Tig with our paddles

Building Rafts (bringing together all our crafts to be one big craft)

Friendly competition racing

Who can get the highest from the water (Using our team skills to see how high up we can get someone in the team, this can be using our rafts and equipment)

These are all activities I would do with young people and children when doing sessions on the water. All activities are enjoyed by all ages, especially adults, and sometimes they will have more fun than the children at times. Kim and Park (2018) explored the effects of outdoor education on adults' creativity, and how outdoor education can offer valuable insights into adult problem-solving skills and creativity. Again, most literature always comes back to the benefits to adults becoming more creative in play. It also highlights the importance of experiential learning and outdoor experiences in fostering these valuable life skills. I feel it is important to also recognise that most child-based play theories can be adapted and applied to adult play, as there is no age on play.

Moving on to the other connections we have nature that aren't just play, cold water therapy is a method of connection to nature. It is important to note here that there isn't a lot of solid research around cold water immersion, and they are complex and vary among academics in the field of healthcare. It is also worth noting that I do not hold the relevant qualifications in health care and my knowledge is only based on research and case studies. Higgins et, al. (2017) written about the effects of cold-water immersion and the recovery from sports related injuries. However, with the increased use of cold-water therapy amongst sports athletes and normal everyday people there are some cases to reflect on for research. They reviewed different methods of research and did find some interlinked work in relation to the recovery of muscles. Knechtle et al. (2020) explored many forms of positive research of cold-water therapy and in particular the benefits to our cardiovascular and psychological health. Firstly, they discussed several studies that suggested positive effects on our cardiovascular system. What the studies showed was that people who took part in cold water therapy had lowered blood pressure. Secondly those that done cold water swimming showed positive effects on their mental health. One case study showed a woman at the age of 24 with symptoms of severe depression and anxiety and resulted in immediate improvement of mood after each swim. From the findings of the research, I will discuss more the improvements seen from the feedback from participants. Nicholas (2014) explored the psychological and emotional benefits of being in and around water,

highlighting how water environments promote wellbeing and a sense of connection to nature. They suggested that water environments promote relaxation, reduce stress, and enhance overall mental wellbeing. I would agree that the water can have a calming and therapeutic effect, whether it's a river, lake, ocean or even a simple water feature.

Moving on to connect with nature through walking, whether that be from lowland walking or hill walking. There are so many ways in which we can integrate ourselves to the nature around us while on these walks. As we walk, we will more than likely encounter some form of wildlife, trees, plants, or weather elements. Hanh (1991) explores how practicing mindfulness in daily life, including walking can be important to our physical and mental health. Walking has been shown to reduce stress and improve cardiovascular health. There is plenty of research from health professionals that will advocate for people to take up walking for a wide range of different physical and mental health conditions. Oguoma et, al. (2017) provides an overview of the physical and mental benefits of walking as well but also the importance of the sustainable aspect of it. If you live within walking distance of a store you need to go to then walking has an eco-friendlier imprint on the planet. There are often a lot of people who will opt to take their car to a shop that is close by. However, sometimes people have no choice but to take transportation due to mobility issues. Tolley and Davis (2017) also backed the sustainability aspect of walking to and from locations and promoted the idea that people should walk more. Not only is walking good for the environment but of course the mental and physical positives of it. Not only is walking a positive influence impact on the earth but also cycling.

Research Design

To achieve my research design, I wanted to conduct semi structured interviews, observations, and surveys with participants. The aim of this data collection was to interview eight participants on the research, observe four participants and conduct online surveys with all forty participants. Other than the surveys all other data collected was done face to face using notes and audio recordings to go back on to transcribe. Each interview took around twenty to thirty minutes long and I felt this was an adequate amount of time to keep the participants engaged in the interview process. However,, due to availability with participants I had only gained 2 case studies, 4 interviews and 28 responses to the online survey. I allowed for my literature review and the theories learned to underpin how I conducted myself as a researcher within this project. The survey data was collected using Microsoft forms and the link was shared in a private Facebook group that only the participants had access to. All the participants who took part in this research had their identity protected and their names were referred to in the findings with their pseudonyms. Rubin and Rubin (2011) discuss the art of hearing and collecting data through semi-structured interview approaches. They provided a real clear understanding on ensuring participants felt at ease throughout the process of research. It resonated with me more because of the holistic approaches I wanted to maintain throughout this process.

The four? participants were interviewed after activity sessions once all other participants had made their way home. They had agreed to stay behind to do their interviews with me while still being able to enjoy the outdoors. Participants were only interviewed upon given full informed consent, all adult age and able to consent. The semi-structured interviews were set not to be uncomfortable for participants, however if they felt they needed to stop at any time to recollect their thoughts or ground themselves they had the opportunity to do so.

Research Participants

Participants were recruited through the online private Facebook group for 'Holistic Outdoor Learning' which is a women's only group. This group was set up in early 2022 for me to volunteer my time to give women a safe space to engage in outdoor education. It really hit off within the local communities of the Northeast of Glasgow and North Lanarkshire. For me it was a way of getting women of all different socioeconomic backgrounds a safe space to engage in nature, empowerment and physical activity that had not cost. Upon my ethics being approved by the School of Education at the Ethics review board at the University of Glasgow, I recruited through this page through a post to everyone. The women were very keen to support me in this research journey not only for myself but for themselves as well. Each participant in the research had no prior knowledge or experience within outdoor education and this was important to really capture true progress through the positives and negatives.

One of the participants suffered from arthritis and was going through menopause and she was keen to be a case study (with interviews and observations). The case studies were set up not to judge or almost score people on how well they were doing, but only to provide positive feedback on their strengths through their participation in activities.

Ethical considerations

This research project remained a low risk in terms of themes in line with my ethics committee, however it was deemed high risk due to lone working in the outdoors. However, with my experience and knowledge as an outdoor education I was able to ensure the safety of the group I was working with. In all the activities I carried out I had the relevant qualifications and experience to undertake each activity. For the paddlesports I am a qualified paddle sports instructor with the Scottish Canoeing Association (SCA). My other qualifications in outdoor walking are all gained qualifications with Mountain Training Scotland (MT), and I carry the relevant outdoor first aid qualification and insurance to provide outdoor education. With my experience in outdoor education, I was able to provide my theories and academic knowledge to offer new insights into research informed in outdoor engagement with women.

Throughout my engagement I kept in touch with a home base contact who was my partner and my supervisor. This was a simple email or text to let them know which time I arrived at the site, location, and what time I expected to be finished. I allowed a half hour at each side of activities that if contacts hadn't heard from me to contact the relevant services. For example, if I was hiking a Munro and there was no contact with them to call Mountain Rescue Teams. However, when on hikes I had an excellent GPS system which allowed me to safely navigate and contact emergency services if needed. I also had access to the University of Glasgow SafeZone app that always stayed on my phone when I was out working with groups.

As mentioned previously the protection of privacy of the participants had been considered, with using pseudonyms being chosen for each person. This allowed me to give ownership to the participants through their involvement in this piece of work. When working with the participants I allowed them to choose their own pseudonyms as I felt it was important to the research and still ensured their privacy.

I had considered and planned for any safeguarding issues that may or may not arise and ensured I had the relevant information to hand if needed. This meant if anyone disclosed any issues that related to them harming themselves or someone else then I had let them know I would need to disclose this information with my supervisor or relevant services. I had an information leaflet with all the information of contact numbers for a wide range of different services that I gave to every participant. This included information in outdoor emergency services such as, Coast Guard, Mountain Rescue Teams, and local pharmacies for different insect bites. I also included numbers for the Scotland Association for Mental Health, Breathing Space and NHS 24. All participants and I went over the Plain Language Statement and Consent Forms carefully before signing them. This also included consent to whether they were taking part in Interviews, Case Study or Survey.

Chapter Three

Research Findings and Analysis

This section of this research project will be the reflections of strong women who shared some beautiful insights to their experiences on this journey with me. I will use my academic study to underpin some of the findings and discussions throughout this piece. For me it was important to highlight the true feelings and reflections of all participants. What is meant by true feelings is that I wanted to capture the representation of the women's words into quotes. This fit with my feminist epistemology of ethical framing of the participants voices. This meant ensuring I captured how the women felt by what they told me and the way in which they spoke, this meant not correcting grammar upon me typing my findings within their quotes. The aim is these findings will justify the need for more research around outdoor education and supporting empowerment in already strong women and aim to highlight the need for more women in leadership roles within the outdoor field academically or in sports.

Section One

Starting from Basics

At the beginning of the process, especially within recruitment it was important to recruit women who were just starting out in this outdoor journey. This would allow me to really monitor their progression in the activities they were setting out to do with me. I am going to start with the case study of two incredible women who we are going to call Sandra (42) and Ella (18). Sandra suffers with arthritis in her legs and wrists and is currently going through menopause, which she described as really ruining her quality of life. Ella is young women who is currently studying and working a part-time job and has no known medical conditions but was keen to get involved. Both participants also took part in interviews and surveys, and I will reflect on their journey from all three methods of data collection. Gray (2016) embarked on a wonderful journey of exploring women in outdoor education and how she welcomes more research on talented women in the field of adventure sports. She considered herself very optimistic on approaching the issue and other researchers exploring this. I resonated a lot with her work when conducting this research with these women. She mentioned about the need for an equal playing field when it came to outdoor education, and I could not agree more. This is because as mentioned when justifying this research is that I work predominately with men in this field. As being as open and honest as I could be participants, I enjoyed sharing parts of literature from different researchers. Ella and Sandra were both keen to get involved in more extensive training out with this research with Ella now joining a Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) program. This means that while studying and holding down a part-time job she is now volunteering with an organisation and on her way to finishing a silver DofE award.

“I hope to finish this award and go on to being a leader within the DofE awards and supporting more young women in outdoor education. Learning basic skills has already equipped me with so much knowledge and I feel so confident in my abilities.” – Ella, reflecting on her experiences.

Sandra was also keen to get involved in some volunteering in outdoor education, as unfortunately she can't work now due to her arthritis. However, upon studying her progression through coaching she made some amazing progress in her physical abilities. When Sandra first came to a session it was at Luss, Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park and it was cold water session. This session involved guiding women into the water using breathing techniques and taking it slow. Sandra was visibly showing she was nervous about going into the water, however with encouragement with the other women she was right in there enjoying every moment. The water this day was cold but enough to reap the physical and mental benefits. After this session when we all came out of the water Sandra immediately expressed how alive and free, she felt and that she had never done anything like that in her life. Sandra sat down with me at the end of July to reflect on her journey through cold water immersion, paddlesports and hiking. The interview it's self will be a reflection of her whole journey and I will reflect on her case study and my own reflections.

Question 1.

What encouraged you to engage with outdoor learning?

"I think it was more about getting myself out my comfort zone, really for me it was about meeting new people."

As a researcher I hadn't considered the possibility of people joining the group to meet new people. Naively I just thought everyone is here because they are all keen to get into outdoor education. Which then made the conversation change slightly on to that first coming into this and not having expectations.

“Most of day is filled up with looking after my grandson and making sure the house is up to scratch with all the bloody washings I have. I think I needed something for me, you know, I do a lot for everyone but myself.”

Hearing Sandra discuss how she doesn't take time for herself, I could almost see something a light in her about actually taking the time today to engage in all the activities. She radiated absolute pride in herself for getting in the cold water that first day. It really made me think of a piece of work written by Brown (2007) in the importance of self-compassion and self-acceptance, which are crucial aspects of self-empowerment. She explores how as a women we have these norm expectations of looking after the family and the home, but where do we take time for us? It really resonated with a lot of what Sandra was saying within her interview. One of the key things I took from just exploring the first question and the conversations was that she didn't have that crucial time for self-care. Which led very naturally on to the next question, in which she reflected upon the positive improvements and any negative impacts.

Question 2.

Is there anything that has made a positive improvement on your time within this research project?

Also, is there anything that may have had a negative impact on you while participating?

“For me it has given me a new release of life, I have been able to really enjoy the last two months and even prior to this research with joining your group. The biggest improvement for me has been the ability to be physically activity again.”

What Sandra decided to share with me next was something personal and she got emotional sharing with me. I reminded her she could take time away if she needed to and ground herself if needed and referred to the Plain Language Statement (PLS). Sandra informed me that she was ok and that she

wanted me to record this for the purposes of research. What she said next not only caught me off guard as a researcher but as a human being who is in touch with their emotions.

“Beth, you honestly have no idea how much you’ve really helped me over the last wee while of taking part in this. If you had come to me a year ago, I was honestly ready to run away. I was so exhausted of being a mum, a gran, a wife, and a daughter, so much so I just hadn’t taken time for myself over the last 20 years. I never thought I would be able to do any of these things, like look at me! I’m jumping in and out of water every week and I have been paddleboarding, what! That’s insane!”

This really got me to think that this wasn’t just a research project, but it was becoming bigger than that, it was giving people like Sandra an escape. Sandra didn’t have anything negative to say about her experience and that was wholesome, just seeing her emotions come out in this whole journey. Evans et, al. (2020) discusses the relationship between research and participant and sometimes it isn’t as simple as that. You gain meaningful relationships with these people you are working with, especially if it’s a small pool of people. Especially when Evans is talking about evidence-based work in outdoor recreation with women, you watch these women develop and grow throughout the process.

From this I wanted to reflect on Ella who again was completely new to outdoor education and looking back over her own personal journey. When she first came along to her first session it was a SUP session at White Loch, Newton Mearns and she appeared very nervous. She did mention she was a bit uneasy, and she was the youngest person in the group of women. However, at the end of the first session she seemed a bit more relaxed and talking to the women in the group. At any SUP sessions on the water, I went over a safety talk before taking anyone on the water. This included the following protocol of ensuring buoyancy aids were on correctly, what do if you find yourself in danger, if you fall off your board, manual handling of a board and how to correctly hold and use a paddle. Ella picked all these points up very quickly and showed confidence straight away while being on the SUPs. She only

participated in the water sports sessions as she wasn't too keen on hiking and she only attended one hill hike at Meikle Bin, Stirling.

Over seven sessions of the water sport sessions Ella managed to demonstrate how to self-rescue if she fell off the board, how to rescue someone else and how to stand up on the board. Standing on the paddle boards is usually something a lot of people struggle with. On her last session we took time after the session had ended to conduct her interview. Here she reflected on her journey over the sessions and where her confidence was at.

Question 1.

What encouraged you to engage with outdoor learning?

"I seen you promoting your group on a community page in [redacted for privacy], and I really wanted to try paddle boarding but never had access to do this. I remember looking at the cost of boards and they were super expensive and there was no way I could afford that. I couldn't believe you were running sessions for free."

I wanted to ensure there was never a financial barrier to outdoor education for anyone, and coming from my community development background I understand the barriers people can face. Education should always be kept free in my own opinion. Waite (2020) discusses the increased demand for outdoor education and adventure sports in the UK and the cost that some companies front for people to take part. She breaks down how we can as educators look at reducing these costs and ensuring that people have access to these resources. For me I was in a very fortunate position that I drove and had access to a car and purchased my own equipment. I used all my own equipment for people to use on the days of sessions and had friends that could lend SUPs as well. Something that resonated with me in her writing was that we should be closing the gap to access to resources within outdoor education for young people and adults. Something that DofE Glasgow do is allow leaders and

participants access to free training in outdoor education and will also work to the best of their abilities to ensure everyone has the access to this. One of the barriers Ella faced was access to transport for her training journey in DofE and those conducting the training would make allocated meeting spots to pick up those who didn't drive. A lot of the time training and the sessions I ran were remote and hard to access due to lack of public transportation. I always asked if people could car share where possible, more on access but also to reduce carbon emissions in national parks in Scotland. However, chatting through this interview with Ella is where she addressed question two very naturally.

Question 2.

Is there anything that has made a positive improvement on your time within this research project?

Also, is there anything that may have had a negative impact on you while participating?

"Taking part in this has allowed me to be more confident in my abilities to socialize with others.

Something I wasn't very good at. I don't have anything negative to say, other than access to things like kit for doing activities. Like I couldn't afford a proper wet suit or dry robes that the other women had. I also don't drive so I'd like to go places I could access on my own with public transport."

In sessions I tried to provide additional parts of the kit that's required for these activities. However, as Ella mentioned, wetsuits can be expensive, and I only had two that I could lend out. Most of the women attending did have access to funds to purchase different parts of kit they needed. Macintyre et, al. (2008) spoke about the lack of access to resources in areas of deprivation in Glasgow. The area in which Ella lives in Glasgow does fall into an area of deprivation and with her being a student and working in a job that offers the national minimum wage for an 18-year-old, she did disclose this wasn't a lot to get by on. Macintyre (2008, pg. 901) cited from Jones and Simmons, 1987, p. 45.) that those living in low-income families are restricted to cheaper brands or sometimes actually going without taking care of other bills. Something I have seen too often in my time working in Glasgow is that adults must currently make the decision between eating or heating their homes.

It was important to highlight these points of barriers within this part of my findings due to the reflections of participants. In Ella's case she had mentioned her financial struggles from being a student and working part-time and how she still wasn't getting by in day-to-day life financially. Something I see as a community worker in my day to day working. In previous experiences I worked for seven years within food poverty and how do we eradicate food poverty. As it stands the United Nations (2015) have set 17 goals and number 1 is no poverty and 2 zero hunger. Which for me just highlights the need for an increase of the national minimum wage for people like Ella and many others.

Section Two

Capturing Holistic Experiences

“Outdoor education should not just be about learning facts and skills; it should also nurture the soul, foster a connection to nature, and promote holistic growth.” – Bob Powell (2018) ‘Outdoor Education for a Sustainable Future: Principles and Best Practices’

A woman in the group had commented in her survey on the mid way survey which was conducted at four weeks on the question of ‘has anything changed for you in terms of knowledge, physical or mentally so far?’ and her response was as follows:

“Being able to appreciate the outdoors more, looking out my window has a new meaning. I have found love in the most simplest of things such as feeling my feet touch the water.”

As Powell (2018) says in the quote at the start of this chapter, we can foster some form of connection to nature and as the participant mentioned that it’s the simple connection there of feet in water. This was something I honestly did not think I could gain feedback on was the holistic side of what I wanted to do. For me as a researcher the holistic approach was about being nurturing and allowing that safe space for women. The survey did not capture the age or which person was responding as it was completely anonymous, however 28 participants sent back consent forms for the survey, and they were all members of the group. The links were sent directly to them to save anyone just clicking on the link in the group who wasn’t taking part in the research aspect of the group.

One of the comment themes from the survey was around the holistic approach towards mediation and personal growth. I will list some of the quotes from participants to the question and the end of the research survey.

What was the biggest takeaway from this whole experience for you?

“I’m defo more confident in who I am as a person. Beth was amazing from start to end and really cared for each and every single one of us. But my biggest takeaway has to be the fact I am more grounded as a person and can control a lot of anger I had carried around for a long time.”

“Biggest takeaway is honestly my ability to be confident and progress on to other things in outdoor education. I have booked myself on to navigational course to teach nav and to become a lowland leader.”

“This whole experience has been amazing!!!! I am so in touch with myself on a more spiritual level than ever before. The healing I have gained from doing cold water therapy and enjoying a warm fire afterwards is honestly something amazing.”

These are just some of the amazing comments that some of the participants shared in their surveys. To hear that these women are all on a new journey out with this research now is something I am super happy to have witnessed. Especially that some of these women are now going into outdoor education as a career or going to study as well is a huge achievement. Out of the 28 participants that responded to surveys question of ‘Do you feel you’ll continue this journey in outdoor education?’, 26 said that they are all looking into doing more training. Since the research finished, I have 34 women signed up to do a NNAS (National Navigation Award Scheme) at bronze level which is all about map reading and navigational skills in lowland terrain. All of these women will gain a qualification from this can work their way up to Mountain navigation. Gray and Mitten (2018) talk about women’s contributions and leadership within outdoor education and the need for more women in this field of work.

An overall holistic approach to education in any form is about the development of the whole person, mind, body, spirit, and emotions. In using a holistic approach within this research has allowed me to

nurture the participants intellectual, emotional, social, physical, and ethical dimensions to create well-rounded individuals who not only academically proficient but also emotionally balanced, socially aware, and morally responsible. All these women had a lot of different reason to why they joined this research and one that stood out most was from an interviewee with Kimberly (40).

Question 1.

What encouraged you to engage with outdoor learning?

“I have experienced a lot of toxic people in my life, and it was time to let go of that. I wanted this for me and no one else. I attended one of your sessions before you started research in guided meditation in the water, I remember writing down everything that was negative, and we all let go of it together into the fire. For me, that was emotional, it was like a weight lifted.”

Kimberly really thrived from participating and it really showed throughout her interview with me. I had organised a sunset swim at the Duck Bay Marina, Loch Lomond and Trossachs Park and thankfully we had a clear night for it. After the participants left Kimberly sat with me and we went through the interview questions.

Question 2.

Is there anything that has made a positive improvement on your time within this research project?

Also, is there anything that may have had a negative impact on you while participating?

“Aw massively, it has really allowed me to get rid of some nasty people in my life and start to listen to my body and soul. I never realized the improvements until someone actually commented on how happy I was looking. Never realized I was walking about looking miserable (laughed here).”

“Also, the only negative experience I had throughout this experience was falling off my paddleboard but more so cause I didn’t want to get wet!”

Kimberly really shined a strong personality through her time in the group and was vocal on decision making and was someone that had everyone laughing. I refer to earlier in my literature review where I spoke about Tuckman's model (1965) on the stages of group development. In the forming stage of this group there were a lot of big and small personalities, and I wasn't sure how well it was going to go. It is always a nerve-wracking experience as a researcher to start a research project that involves a group of people who are going to come together. Once the group hit the "norming stage" (Tuckman, 1965, p.62) of where they started establishing strong relationships, is where I stopped being nerves. This big group of women all lifted each other's spirits and the main women in all of that was Kimberly. If someone was having a bad day, she was there to hold a hand and offer guidance. However, as Tuckman's models suggests that the group will go through an "adjourning stage", this has not happened with this group. These women meet every single week, whether it's in the local park or for a coffee, they are all there for each other. I still organise different sessions and they will be there if they can and it's great to see. One thing they don't do is exercise or attend indoor facilities anymore, which was interesting to see when they were arranging different meetings.

While still interviewing Kimberly and gaining her feedback we chatted about this which was the next question.

Question 3.

"Do you find a difference to engaging with outdoor exercise rather than indoor? For example, using an indoor swimming pool to swim in nature? The same applies to walking a treadmill or walking nature?"

"Oh 100 percent, who would want to go to a boring gym with pure gray walls when you can go for a walk outside and see beautiful hills and not to mention highland cows! (Kimberly regularly got excited about seeing Highland Cows when we done any walking). I don't mind swimming indoors; it is warmer but outside is so much better for up here [points at head]."

Another Interviewee was Hannah (33) who also answered to question three the following answer.

“I have actually started taking my exercise outside than going to the gym. Where I live in [redacted for privacy] there is an outdoor gym, and it is pure brilliant. I get out there and use it and don’t care if people are staring at me. I actually hope it gives another women the confidence to come and use the outdoor gym.”

Hannah is visibly very physically fit and really enjoyed taking her exercise outside the gym and into nature. I honestly did not expect her to engage as much as she did as she wasn’t a huge believer in the benefits of outdoor education. She completely swore by the gym and went everyday minus her rest days, but as she came more and more to sessions, she fell away from it. Hannah, after a month, had bought herself a paddleboard and a whole hill walking kit. Something she said when looking back at question two was great to hear and did give myself a good laugh.

Question 2.

Is there anything that has made a positive improvement on your time within this research project?

Also, is there anything that may have had a negative impact on you while participating?

“Well firstly, did I hell think you were gonna get me up some absolutely boggin [Scottish slang term for muddy or dirty] mountain or jumping about water. There wasn’t a chance that was happening, however my pal dragged me along and now I’m absolutely obsessed with climbing hills. Like, I went up Loch Vorlich myself, myself that’s mental. You’ve taught me so much and there is no better feeling than getting to the top of a hill and seeing those views. Oh aye, negative you’ve made me cold and gave me blisters, if I knew that I would have bolted. But I’m glad a never.”

Hannah was another participant who was another big personality but again she made us all have a chuckle and lifted moods. We conducted her interview after a day climbing Ben Lomond, and it was a miserable day for the weather. However, Hannah and the other participants in the group walked up and back down Ben Lomond without one single complaint and done amazing. Brown et, al (2020) conducted hike-along ethnographical research to explore women who were hiking up and down

Munros in Scotland. They referred to studies previously being just walking in nature and not having a real meaningful collection of data. They solely captured women's experiences in bagging Munros around Scotland. What resonated with me from this piece of work was a similar experience I noticed in this research was the embodiment of empowerment within the women accomplishing these Munros. Again, it was great to read another great piece of work that captures women's experiences in outdoor activities.

Sandra (42), who was one of the case-studies as well, managed to tackle Ben Lomond this day and this was a huge achievement for her, as she had never been on a Munro before. Sandra commented at the top that day that she was proud of herself for doing this. Bearing in mind that Sandra suffers from arthritis in her legs, and this could have been something very painful for her. At the end of the hike and as we headed into the car park, Sandra got most of the women together and suggested we all get in the water to cool down. This wasn't something I had planned for the day, but I liked that she organised, and all the women were keen to follow. As we reached the bottom the weather did turn thankfully, and the group decided to go for a swim. This wasn't about the benefits but more about the group celebrating their achievements together and just having fun. Bleakley, et al. (2012) conducted analysis on the effectiveness of cold-water therapy after exercising and the potential benefits. What they found was that it was helpful in preventing and treating muscle soreness after exercise. This was a useful paper that helped provide some insights into the benefits of cold-water therapy.

These findings in this section only helped to capture the true need for more holistic approaches within the outdoor education field. Also, the importance of taking into consideration the physical and mental needs of the participants in which we work with. There was something about brining across the community development theories of group work and posthumanism of interacting with non-human object such as water. I really wanted to continue the focus on the positives within this

research of the participants feedback on their own feelings and thoughts around interacting with the different activities.

Section Three

What is the Humanistic connection?

“In nature, nothing is perfect, and everything is perfect. Trees can be contorted, bent in weird ways, and they’re still beautiful.” – Alice Walker (Unknown)

For me this quote resonated with what a lot of the conversations and answers received from interviews and surveys were saying. A very common theme was around that human connection to nature and how we interact with it. From this research it there was a clear theme of all participants connecting with nature in a very humanistic and soulful way. I refer back to Reason (1994) about the impact on feminism in action research and the inclusivity of bringing women together. This allowed me to explore how nature and women can be connected and as Gaard (1993) said it as brining in those feelings of empowerment.

“I have been able to enjoy being deep rooted in my connections with nature through this process. Personally, I gained the experience I expected from this journey and much much more! Beth really took the time to talk through everything and always make me feel at ease.” Women’s comment from end survey to the question of ‘Did you gain the experience you wanted?’.

Codrescu (2009) explained the playfulness of connecting and exploring posthumanism in the context of nature. The way in which they provoke new thoughts around connecting with nature in a more play based way, while also focusing on the humanistic approach. Thomashow (1995) discusses the posthumanism ideas influencing our understandings of ecological identity. He talks about how humans are not separated from nature but are deeply intertwined with it.

“The connections I have felt with not only within nature but with all these women has been a whole new experience. I am so glad I really pushed myself to come along to these sessions and take part in this research.” Kimberly (40).

Kimberly hit on not only that connection she had with nature but the human connection between the group. Fromm (1956) delves into the nature of love and the art of forming meaningful connections with others. This allowed me to understand that not only is the connection with nature important, but the human connection explores a deeper psychological need. We as humans all need someone to speak to, care for and be cared for, it's in our genetic make-up. Mostly all the participants in the research commented on the human connections they made with the other members of the group. As the researcher this wasn't anything I had considered when taking this project on. For me it was a pure focus on those connections within nature, the activities and with something other than human connection. Which lead me down a research rabbit hole of researching into the importance of those connections of human and nature intertwining. This juxtaposition allowed me to connect two very beautiful natural things into this research.

“Making good friends while being able to enjoy our beautiful country has been the highlight of my summer. A lot of my friends are normally so caught up in their own lives and it's nice to know I now have a group of women who enjoy the same things as me. Myself and Tina [34-year-old, women who was a participant in survey collection] regularly go walks at night together and swimming now.”
Sandra (42).

Here Sandra is connecting not only to enjoying what nature has to offer but also what a human connection has. It's been great to see that from this research that the women regularly meet without me facilitating. Something that sparked interest in me was exploring ecopsychology and its exploration between human psychology and the natural environment. Roszak (1992) suggested that

spending time in natural environments can reduce stress, anxiety and depression while promoting overall mental well-being. Furthermore, looking at the notion of bringing together the human and nature aspects together to form a humanistic approach to outdoor education has been important in this research. Ecopsychology offered this holistic approach to understanding human and environmental stewardship. It underscores the importance of recognizing and nurturing our connection with the natural world as a means of addressing psychological, ecological, and ethical challenges. This just naturally linked to the community development theories especially when we revisit Russell and Whewey (2008) when they discussed the importance of linking community work and outdoor education. We have to understand the group in which we are working with so we can better plan and facilitate to offer more holistic approaches.

Another theory that allowed connections to be made to in relation to the environment and psychological experiences of individuals. This more applies to urban areas in which the participants live and the psychological effects of not being connected to nature. Coverly (2006) provides a comprehensive overview of psychogeography and its influence on urban culture. What he aimed to do was for communities and individuals to really break down the areas in which they lived. For example, overflowing bins and a lack of green space would have a negative impact on someone's mental wellbeing. However, critiquing to why are the bins overflowing? Getting people to look at the lack of funding in public services etc. It was never about just looking at an area in a negative light but to spark conversations around lack of resources. This takes me to another theme about the lack of access to greenspaces within people's local communities. All communities mentioned have been redacted due to privacy and confidentiality of participants.

"In [redacted] the place is a riot, wait forever on the council collecting bins and clearing the streets.

People just don't care about the area we live in, there is little pride at all. I'm glad for [redacted] group that do community litter picks every week." Answer from Ella (18) when talking through her interview.

Bennett and Teague (1999) discussed the awareness of environmental injustices and how psychogeography can highlight disparities in access to green spaces. This awareness can contribute to social and environmental justice movements to seek to address these disparities. I believe that by integrating psychogeographical practices within environmental awareness, individuals can develop a deeper understanding of the connections between urbanization, the environment, and the climate change crisis. These understandings could provide inspiration in action, advocacy, and a commitment to a more sustainable way of living. Upon reflecting on climate change with the group this is where I could see the community development worker within me come alive when looking at collective action.

“Taking part in this research has made me a bit more aware of the ongoing climate change stuff that I see all the time online. I never realized how much damage we as people are doing to the planet. I’m glad to have found more ways to a bit more eco friendlier.” Sandra (42), this was her response to question 4 of the semi-structured interview, ‘Is there anything you’d like to add to your experiences while engaging in this research project?’.

Ostrom (2010) talks about how individuals and communities can successfully engage in collective action to work towards change. While reading this it made me refer to previous education and looking at community-based action when addressing economic and environmental issues. Filho, et al. (2013) provided a clear need for more collective action within the field of community development when addressing mitigation and adaptation of community-based approaches to climate change. I think it’s important to recognize the small steps we can take collectively to reduce waste and our carbon footprint on earth.

I think it’s important in this section to recognise the skill gain from participants and the knowledge gained around the impact humans have on earth. For the participants to acknowledge this and

comment on how they've changed their views was good feedback. Also, recognizing that urban areas can have an impact on how we feel as we walk around our communities. Not only are we opening our minds further to why there are problems but also taking action towards them. This was something I wanted to ensure participants left with from this research around climate change. As much as this research was really focused on women and empowerment within outdoor education, I think it was just as important to educate on climate issues.

I wanted to finish this chapter off with a quote from one of the participants within the survey at the end survey with:

Question 3.

'What would be your next steps in taking forward this journey if you answered yes to the previous question?'

"For me I've found a passion in being more self-aware of my impact on the planet. I have really enjoyed sharing a lot of my learning with my kids at home and they've also taught me so much! I want to be able to spread awareness not even for my lifetime but for my children and their children and so on so forth." Anonymous participant in survey.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

Firstly, I need to commend the women who took part in this research and sharing their personal journey within the experiences and opportunities they took part in. From women who were studying, working full or part time, being a mother, being a wife and everything else in between, they put their heart and souls into this piece of work. These women confirmed only what I thought I already knew that there is a more need for access to outdoor education for women. There is so much literature and on-going work that is all around outdoor education, which is equally as important. However, as some participants said it was more about taking time for them. Women are strong and resilient with everything they juggle in life from gender inequalities to the amazing abilities to birth a full child and give out their nurturing nature.

Upon undertaking this research, I had a lot of self-reflection around my own professional career and how I have been shaped by my master's degree in education for sustainable futures. I no longer see myself as a community worker but now as an educator within my field. I feel that is important to reflect on and how that will now shape me moving forward professionally and academically. Taking myself from the role of normally facilitating youth work session to focusing time on the need for more outdoor education through research has allowed me to move on to my next goals. Listening to these women and the inequalities they have faced and will probably continue to face in this field has only confirmed the academic research that's needed within outdoor education.

"Empowered women are the driving force behind sustainable and resilient communities, and nature is their ally." Carson (1962)

This quote really resonated with concluding this piece of work raised awareness on our environment and it's truly an inspiring piece of work. It just made me think of how all 28 women who contributed something to this piece of work have walked away as agents of change. They have upskilled on their knowledge and physical abilities around nature and have shown such compassion to our earth. Their energy of them spiritually just shined their self-empowerment, self-belief, and self-worth throughout this whole process. At our very end session, which was a session around fire and water and was a celebration of their journeys, they all had something special to take away with them. Asking them to reflect on their journey each of them shared the same word of empowerment and this was really at the heart of this research. Adichie (2014) discusses the importance of feminism and gender equality and calls for women to assert themselves as agents of change within society, and this is exactly what each of these women did. They are all either continuing their journey through education, volunteering or still within the group of outdoor learning with me. Each one of them takes away their experiences from this research but more importantly their own personal lived experiences prior to this research. Al-Sharif (2017) details in her memoir the details of her own activism and offers a firsthand account to why lived experience is so rich in knowledge. Through her own lived experiences, she has been able to challenge societal norms and be an advocate for change. Many women like Manal al-Sharif lead inspiring paths for young women in society to challenge and change. Other women who share stories of self-empowerment is Hyeonseo Lee (2015), an inspiring young woman who fled North Korea and shares her own journey of empowerment. What Lee does is shine a very important light on to the resilience of women in oppressive environments. However, circumstances here in the UK are different and some of her written work can be adapted here in some of these women's journeys.

What these books, articles and research projects do is show women can achieve high with the right support. Kay and Shipman (2014) say that as women we should empower and lift each other and support each other and not tear each other apart. There is something wonderful about women empowering women and its something that was clear to me throughout this process watching these

women support each other. If a participant felt unsure about anything before, I could even speak to them at least five group members would be saying 'you've got this' or 'you can do this', just small words of encouragement but meant a great deal to the person who needed them.

This research didn't just allow me to show that outdoor education with more holistic approaches is important with women but also highlighted the strength and resilience that comes from solidarity among women. I would like to promise of advocating for more research in the academic world around women in outdoor education and within leadership roles. Also, ensuring I as a women celebrate the importance of each women's achievements in adventure sports. I have had the pleasure over the years and within this research to work with very strong and resilient women, some who I may have only met briefly but had some form of influence in my life.

Overall, research focusing on women in outdoor education has allowed me to uncover a wealth of new insights and potential for growth by not only me but other academics. By acknowledging and addressing the unique challenges and opportunities that women may encounter within the field of outdoor education, we not only promote gender equality but also enrich the field of outdoor education. The stories of these women's experiences, achievements, perspectives, and their contributions to this research are integral to shaping a more inclusive and diverse outdoor education landscape. As we continue to explore these themes and advocate for equitable participation, we move closer to realizing the full potential of outdoor education as a transformative and empowering experience for all women.

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