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Author Demographics of Outdoor Books: Exploring Diversity On The
Shelves at Oregon Outdoor Retailers

Nell Stamper

MS in Book Publishing: Final Research Project

May 17, 2023

ABSTRACT:

In 2023, the book publishing industry faced a documented lack of social diversity (racial, ethnic and gender expressive). The outdoor recreation industry is also predominantly White and male, and there is a rising presence of Instagram influencers working to increase diverse representation in the outdoors. This paper used a literature review, digital ethnography, and field research to examine the gaps in the hypothetical experience of a White heterosexual cisgender male vs. that of any other demographic when browsing and buying books at outdoor retailers in Oregon. Field research showed that out of 300 authors represented on the shelves of outdoor stores, only 10 were not White males. With a descriptive research approach, the author used this information to explore scenarios, possible consequences, and further research topics.

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

In the last few years, the publishing industry as a whole has started to openly discuss topics of representation, inclusivity, and the need for diversity in books. This conversation is not unique to book publishing—a similar discourse has begun about the lack of diversity in outdoor recreation, and my research converges at the intersection of these two concerns.¹ I found an intriguing overlap in the following question: What are the social identities of authors represented

¹ I am using the words “diversity” and “diverse” to refer to people who self-identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC); Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual, Queer, plus others (LGBTQ+) as well as fat, disabled, or intersectional categories of social identity.

in books for sale at outdoor retailers in Oregon, and what can we learn from that data in the context of a growing online social justice movement toward inclusivity in outdoor recreation?

Surveys show that people who are disabled, fat, BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and of intersectional identities are not present as visitors to national and state parks, sponsored athletes in professional competitions, and outdoor recreation jobs at the same rate as White male able-bodied participants.² Recent research on Instagram and social justice movements in the outdoors has highlighted a “movement of outdoor and environmental justice activists using the platform to address race, disability, gender, sexuality, and other diversity issues in outdoor recreation.”³ My own research echoes this increasing presence and impact of influencers who are outdoor enthusiasts and experts, and are other than White, male, cisgender, heterosexual, and able-bodied.⁴

Outdoor retailers have started to respond to calls from these and other voices for diversity in advertising, product lines, and sponsorship.⁵ What about the book sections of their online and brick-and-mortar stores? While books may not immediately come to mind as a significant portion of what we purchase at outdoor stores, they remain of value. For one thing, anyone who travels into the wilderness out of cell phone range, and requires references or information, may want (or need) printed material. Also, we know from large survey studies that a large percentage

² “2021 Outdoor Participation Trends Report.” Outdoor Foundation, June 20, 2022.

<https://outdoorindustry.org/resource/2021-outdoor-participation-trends-report/>.

Additionally, body positivity activists reject “fat” as a pejorative word, and use it as a simple description of body size that carries no judgment about one’s physical capabilities. I am applying that use here.

³ Whitson, Joseph. “Indigenizing Instagram: Challenging Settler - ProQuest.” Accessed November 1, 2022.

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2547572516?accountid=13265&parentSessionId=Ec%2FrIQQEfVAFfB7BMNNxzhqgro4hiLQQPOHBecfc15c%3D&pq-origsite=primo&forcedol=true>.

⁴ A commonly accepted definition of “influencer” is a person who is a regular Instagram user, but with a unique ability to influence others, well-established credibility, and a considerably large audience.

⁵ REI. “REI Co-Op Update on Our Racial Equity Commitments.” Accessed May 13, 2023.

<https://www.rei.com/newsroom/article/update-on-rei-racial-equity-commitments>.

of book users are “context-agnostic” when choosing books.⁶ Modern readers, especially millennials, are willing to browse shelves and purchase books at places other than bookstores. While the size of the book sections at the outdoor retailers examined in my research varied, all of them at least *had* such a section; so books remain a part of the outdoor retail experience for consumers.

This matters because there is a significant element of teaching and coaching in printed “how-to” outdoor guides. Are historically excluded groups seeing themselves in books about backpacking, camping, fishing, knot-tying, first aid, and other outdoor skills? Are there diverse stories of adventure and overcoming adversity on the bookshelves of outdoor retailers? Can a BIPOC woman in an outdoor store find a hiking guide that was written by someone who shares at least some of her lived experiences? I am not a member of a demographic group that generally faces exclusion (or worse) in outdoor activities, but I feel that it is incumbent upon me as a publishing professional and as an ally to those groups to ask these very pointed questions.

My challenge with addressing this topic is to ensure that I include as much factual information as possible, present the contributions of representative members of excluded groups in a way that honors their lived experiences, and avoid the error of presuming that one person speaks for everyone in their demographic.

To expand on my opening question, it would be fascinating to know if the diverse outdoor influencer movement of the past few years is impacting what outdoor books are being marketed and sold in Oregon. If so, that would be a signal of success for the activists; if not, it is

⁶ Noorda, Rachel, and Kathi Inman Berens. “Immersive Media and Books 2020: New Insights About Book Pirates, Libraries and Discovery, Millennials, and Cross-Media Engagement: Before and During COVID.” *Publishing Research Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (June 1, 2021): 227–40. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-021-09810-z>.

a potential growth area for publishers of diverse outdoor guides. However, the scope of this paper allows only for a snapshot of the current social media landscape and the book offerings of some outdoor retailers, and we will not find a definitive answer about any correlation between the influencers and the retailers. The purpose of this research is to describe a scenario: Imagine a person who lives in Oregon, becomes interested in an activity through a social media influencer, decides to join a recreational community because of that influencer's welcome, and then goes to their local outdoor retailer in search of gear and information. In terms of outdoor guidebooks and "how-to" manuals, what will they find on the shelves at that retailer, and who are the authors representing the corpus of expertise? If the newcomer is a member of a historically underrepresented group, what impacts and questions may result from what they find on their search?

I will look at this research problem in three ways: 1) a literature review regarding use of social media and outdoor activism, 2) digital ethnography research methods to examine profiles of some key Instagram influencers, and 3) analysis of data collected by the direct observation of books for sale at outdoor retailers in Oregon during a given period of time. I will discuss these findings and offer questions for further investigation.

LITERATURE REVIEW: INSTAGRAM IN THE OUTDOORS

A review of pertinent literature highlighted the following key points: Instagram inspires people to go outdoors and seek out connection with others like themselves, outdoor spaces are dominated by White colonial ideologies about nature and recreation, and Instagram influencer presence in the outdoor space is growing and challenging that White space.

1) *Instagram can help to create supportive diverse communities outdoors*

In a 2021 paper, Arts et al. explored the reasons and motivations behind the use of Instagram to organize, document and influence outdoor recreation. The study was fairly small, and done in Scotland. It included a small section on diversity of users, centered around gender rather than race or other identifiers. Some of the ideas and conclusions about how users sought to build an outdoors community on Instagram are useful to consider for this paper. In particular, the authors described elements of authenticity, social norms, and “user aims,” citing the desire for connection that drives people to use the social media platform:

[Users] mentioned that it was still relatively uncommon to meet fellow female mountain bikers or climbers when they were out enjoying their activity, whereas on Instagram, they would find greater female representation. Following female (professional) climbers or mountain bikers and seeing their posts and achievements celebrated was reportedly experienced as inspiring.”⁷

When users saw themselves reflected in outdoor recreation, they felt encouraged to join in that activity. Another 2019 netnographic study focused on queer identities, hiking, and activism offers a similar conclusion. The author found that Instagram outdoor influencers who document both oppression (fat-shaming, racism, homophobia) and strategic interventions against that oppression (particularly to amplify and support other oppressed communities) can play a significant role in creating cultural change. The authors offered the example of the Instagram account @UnlikelyHikers (profiled later in this paper): as early as 2018, the account normalized the use of preferred pronouns for all hikers, not just those who are not cis-gender, and also

⁷ Arts, Irma, Anke Fischer, Dominic Duckett, and René Wal. “The Instagrammable Outdoors – Investigating the Sharing of Nature Experiences through Visual Social Media.” *People and Nature* 3, no. 6 (December 2021): 1244–56. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10239>.

provided bracketed visual descriptions for each image posted.⁸ This had the effect of not only drawing in and welcoming diverse hikers to the @UnlikelyHikers community, but also modeled how to set a high level of inclusivity as normal for the outdoor users who were not BIPOC, LGBTQ+, fat, or disabled.⁹

2) *Outdoors is White, Male, Straight, and Able-Bodied*

As mentioned in the introduction, we have a growing body of research showing that outdoor recreational spaces are dominated by White, male, able-bodied participants. A 2022 article by Dashper and King called the outdoors “contested leisure terrain”, with perceived freedom and openness that is constrained by often unspoken norms and expectations.¹⁰ The authors referred to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in the UK, and highlighted the social tensions caused by a surge of urban residents heading out into rural areas, where they had previously not recreated. These urban residents (largely lower income and BIPOC) were blamed for crowding, littering, and destroying outdoor spaces and made to feel uncomfortable and unwelcome.

Building on that observation, the idea that those with existing privilege to access the outdoors act as gatekeepers to those who don’t “belong” is supported and amplified by Ho and Chang in their 2021 study of “Whiteness and Diversity In Outdoor Recreation and Education”. These Canadian authors highlight a fascinating through line in the White middle-class homogeneity among users of outdoor spaces, who become advocates for outdoor spaces, and then join (and lead) mainstream environmental movements. The authors pointed out the

⁸ To identify this and other Instagram accounts mentioned in this paper, I will use the convention of “@accountname”.

⁹ Stanley, Phiona. “Unlikely Hikers? Activism, Instagram, and the Queer Mobilities of Fat Hikers, Women Hiking Alone, and Hikers of Colour.” *Mobilities* 15, no. 2 (March 3, 2020): 241–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2019.1696038>.

¹⁰ Dashper, Katherine, and Jason King. “The outdoors as a contested leisure terrain.” *Annals of Leisure Research* 25, no. 3 (2022): 435-443

prevalence within this group of historical and cultural approaches based on colonialism and exclusion. Their conclusions speak directly to the need for, and goals of, the social justice movement for a more inclusive outdoor experience.¹¹

Roast continues this line of thinking about colonial influence on outdoor spaces in a 2022 thesis titled “Defining The Outdoors As White: Outdoor Recreation And The Perpetuation Of Everyday Racism In The Outdoors”. Using Bourdieu’s theory of fields, Roast traces the existence of cultural capital in the field of outdoor recreation in both embodied and objectified forms. Roast proposes that in modern outdoor recreation, both the embodied form (knowledge that requires time and effort to acquire, and may be mistaken for natural aptitude) and the objectified form (the gear needed to participate in an outdoor activity) are deeply based on a collection of White preferences that impact how non-White people are able to participate.¹² The focus of my own research, outdoor books, can be classified as elements of both embodied and objectified cultural capital; such a classification, and Roast’s finding of racial bias within outdoor recreation, bring to mind Thompson’s use of field theory to explore the moral and ethical responsibility of book publishers in transmitting cultural capital.¹³

3) *Diverse outdoor influencer presence is growing*

A search of the Statista database for “Instagram historical identity topics” showed that the use of certain hashtags associated with social justice concerns increased from Jan to Dec 2021. Specifically, #DiversityAndInclusion usage grew by 85 percent on Instagram; and #BIPOC had

¹¹ Ho, Yi Chien Jade, and David Chang. "To whom does this place belong? Whiteness and diversity in outdoor recreation and education." *Annals of Leisure Research* (2021): 1-14.

¹² Roast, Kaia. “Defining the Outdoors as White: Outdoor Recreation and the Perpetuation of Everyday Racism in the Outdoors,” n.d.

¹³ Thompson, John B. *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century*. Oxford, UNITED KINGDOM: Polity Press, 2013.
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/psu/detail.action?docID=1956424>.

an increased usage of 55 percent.¹⁴ Both of these hashtags were frequently present in the profiles and posts of the Instagram influencers that I examined.

More specific to one particular community of influencers, *A Journal of Social Justice* published an article in May of 2022 highlighting the underappreciated role of LGBTQ+ influencers in discussions about adapting to the climate crisis. The author pointed out that while queer communities are often cited as extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (based on what is already often a tenuous position in society), members of this group have also shown themselves to be extremely creative and productive in solving big problems. While the article does not directly address representation in outdoor recreation, the findings highlight the agency and effectiveness of LGBTQ+ influencers on closely adjacent environmental topics, like challenging corporations about wasteful packaging. The author uses the term “eco-queer” to describe activists and influencers who sometimes work in collaboration with other marginalized communities to advance their goals.¹⁵ This type of partnership is reflected in the collaborations of some of the diverse outdoor influencers that will be introduced later in this paper, including @PattieGonia, who is mentioned in the journal article and who advocates for both environmental and recreational causes.

@PattieGonia and @UnlikelyHikers are also specifically mentioned in a 2022 University of California Press Media + Environment article about “ecodrag and ecoqueer Instagram”. The author emphasized their connection to each other and to their broader queer communities; reflecting back to the first section of the literature review, the author also concluded that

¹⁴ “Instagram Historical Identity Topics Buzz Growth 2021.”

¹⁵ Pakin-Albayrakoğlu, Esra. “Out and Proud in the Field: Eco-Queers for Climate Adaptation.” *Peace Review* 34, no. 1 (January 2, 2022): 51–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2022.2023429>.

Instagram is a medium “uniquely positioned to provide spaces for members of marginalized communities to find each other and to see themselves in the outdoors.”¹⁶

This literature review paints a picture of a diverse online outdoor community that is striving to effect change in the mostly White local outdoor community. The next steps are to look more closely at a small number of diverse outdoor influencers who are disrupting and changing the outdoor recreation industry, and to examine the diversity among authors of books at outdoor retailers.

METHODOLOGY

As part one of my research, I collected profiles of five prominent Instagram influencers from a range of historically excluded demographic groups at these intersections: BIPOC, LGBTQ+, outdoor industry/recreation experts, and conservationists. Following the example of Dr. Joseph Whitson in his work on Indigenous activism on Instagram, I applied digital ethnography — specifically media analysis — to these Instagram accounts.¹⁷ The results provide some detail about the current social justice movement for diversity in the outdoors, and offer a sense of its audience reach.

For each account, I conducted a simple form of digital ethnography media analysis. Viewing the accounts as a follower, I collected details from Instagram about the date the account was created, the number of followers, and an average rate of posts per week. I also noted general information that was readily apparent from the influencers’ profiles and posts, such as which specific historically excluded group each influencer represented, and their particular activist

¹⁶ Anderson, Jill E. “‘Pack in. Pack out. and Pack Your Heels Hunni’: Ecodrag and Ecoqueer Instagram.” *Media and Environment* 4, no. 2 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1525/001c.37272>.

¹⁷ Whitson, “Indigenizing Instagram.”

goals. Finally, I documented apparent connections with industry, other influencers, or established advocacy groups. Because my research design was descriptive, and because the primary topic is books, I did not need to amass a large data set relating to Instagram and influencers; and I also did not engage in deep digital ethnography fieldwork as described by Postill and Pink (such as interacting directly with the influencers or followers by “liking” or commenting on posts).¹⁸

Using online social media data for research requires some particular consideration of privacy and ethics on the part of the researcher. I took the approach suggested by Stevens et al., which was to use only public-domain Instagram accounts and to limit the identifying information about individuals to what they have themselves published online.¹⁹ There are third-party software applications that can analyze the growth of an Instagram account (primarily used to assess a competitor’s social media success) but as I was interacting with these influencer accounts as a typical follower, I did not use them.

In part two, I analyzed data from direct observations of books for sale at outdoor retailers. This data was collected from 14 non-bookstores that specialize in outdoor gear and products. I selected a representative sample of stores in Oregon, visited each over a 4-week period, and documented the books displayed for sale. Specifically, I went into each store listed in Appendix A, and spoke to a manager to inform them of my project and get their consent for it. Most retailers did not have easily shareable inventory lists, so I located the area or areas where books were offered for sale, and noted the metadata of each title by photograph. This provided me with

¹⁸ Postill, John, and Sarah Pink. “Social Media Ethnography: The Digital Researcher in a Messy Web.” *Media International Australia* 145, no. 1 (November 1, 2012): 123–34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X1214500114>.

¹⁹ Stevens, Gemma, Victoria L. O'Donnell, and Lynn Williams. “Public Domain or Private Data? Developing an Ethical Approach to Social Media Research in an Inter-Disciplinary Project.” *Educational Research and Evaluation* 21, no. 2 (February 17, 2015): 154–67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13803611.2015.1024010>.

a list of authors to work with, included as Appendix B. Using metadata and public-facing information, I identified and coded the demographics of each author where possible.

RESULTS

PART I: Outdoor Influencers On Instagram

Whitson notes that as access to Instagram increased, activists adapted the use of the platform to publicize negative behavior by corporations or governments, to agitate for change, and to invite and collate emotional labor from other activists in responding to comments and new posts on a given topic.²⁰ This is particularly true for environmental and social justice issues on Instagram. On this searchable network, users are easily able to identify who they wish to support with their clicks and donations. In this section, I will introduce five outdoor influencers who have become closely associated with historically excluded groups, and who identify as activists.

While these five influencers cover a range of diverse and intersectional identities, I did not include an example of an Indigenous activist influencer, although there are many with a large Instagram following. This was an intentional decision and does not reflect any lack of respect or support for the Indigenous influencer movement; rather, it is because I agree with Whitson's conclusion that Indigenous influencers who are present in the Instagram outdoor community have some unique concerns and potentially a different relationship with the outdoors than other historically marginalized communities. Indigenous activists on Instagram frequently address existential and historical issues, including land theft, food sovereignty, missing and endangered women and girls, and the right to practice religious and spiritual traditions that are deeply rooted

²⁰ Whitson, "Indigenizing Instagram."

in their natural environment. These are broader and deeper issues than a lack of recreational access and participation, which is the main goal of the Instagram influencers introduced below.

@PattieGonia is an account founded by a self-described “drag queen, environmentalist, community organizer” who uses she/he/they pronouns.²¹ As a drag artist, PattieGonia started attracting Instagram followers when she created elaborate and glamorous drag looks based around outdoor themes: hiking, climate change, pollution, and wildlife conservation. This account was started in August of 2018, and currently has 526,000 followers. The actor/creator of PattieGonia, Wyn Wiley, is a very active fundraiser who partners extensively with other organizations and influencers, specializes in LGBTQ+ youth outdoor camps and retreats, and places a strong focus on industry engagement (including hosting a queer outdoor/environmental job board). As cited in a journal article about queer outdoor activism and Instagram, PattieGonia has skillfully used their reputation and audience in a way that “affects corporate narratives about diversity in the outdoors.”²² PattieGonia/Wiley frequently collaborates with Teresa Baker.

@UnlikelyHikers is an account founded by Portlander Jenny Bruso. The name of the account comes from Bruso’s experience in outdoor recreation settings, after having many people look at her with skepticism that she was a “real” hiker. Bruso identifies as fat, disabled, femme and queer, and is a writer, hiker, group hike leader and activist. This account was started in June 2016 and currently has 156,000 followers. Bruso is sponsored by outdoor retailers Merrell, REI, Eddie Bauer, and Next Adventure, and runs the website www.unlikelyhikers.org which offers a calendar of nationwide events as well as merchandise.²³

²¹ @PattieGonia “Profile” Instagram, May 16, 2023.

²² Stanley, “Unlikely Hikers?”

²³ @UnlikelyHikers “Profile” Instagram, May 16, 2023

@TheMirnavator is an account founded by Mirna Valerio, a fat BIPOC woman who began as an ultrarunner and is now a sponsored ski and mountain bike athlete. She is a former teacher, has written a book, and is a motivational speaker. This account was started in January of 2015 and currently has 155,000 followers. Valerio runs a website, www.themirnavator.com, was the subject of a documentary film, and published a book. She has been featured in many major news outlets and has multiple sponsors; it is likely that her audience reach exceeds her Instagram following.

@TeresaBaker11 is an account founded by Teresa Baker, a BIPOC woman who is an activist and hiker “working to increase representation of underrepresented communities in our parks and within the outdoor industry.”²⁴ This account was founded in April 2014 and has 302,000 followers. Baker is the founder of <https://www.insolidarityproject.com/> which specifically calls out the outdoor retail/industry for lack of inclusivity. She often collaborates with PattieGonia and is the creator of the “Outdoor CEO Diversity Pledge” which currently has 186 companies participating.²⁵

@Badgal_brooky is the Instagram account of Brooklyn Bell, an artist and sponsored professional outdoor athlete. Bell is a BIPOC woman who writes and speaks about her experience as one of few women of color in the sports of skiing and mountain biking. She has also been featured in films and television interviews.²⁶ This account was started in March of 2014 and has 54,200 followers.²⁷

²⁴ @Teresabaker11 “Profile” Instagram, May 6, 2023

²⁵ <https://www.insolidarityproject.com/partners>

²⁶ @badgal_brooky “Profile” Instagram, May 16, 2023

²⁷ Randall, “Carving Out Space: Athlete-Meets-Artist-Meets-Instagram Influencer Brooklyn Bell Is Leaving Her Mark On The Ski Slopes, And Making Room For Other Black Athletes To Do The Same.”

These are all very different personalities from different areas of the United States, from different backgrounds, and participating in the outdoors in very different ways. What they have in common is an experience of exclusion and “othering” from both the outdoor retail industry and from the most popular user groups in their respective endeavors. In response to their experiences, these influencers have built significant online communities and have engaged both corporations and individuals to support diversification and inclusion in outdoor recreation.

There is no easy way to calculate the actual reach of an Instagram influencer (and a deep dive into the question is outside the parameters of this paper). However, the following general observations are helpful. Follower numbers for these five accounts are considered mid-range for Instagram. The majority of influencer accounts are found in this range, so these examples can be considered typical in terms of followers. (Only about four percent of Instagram accounts have more than a million followers, and only twenty percent have over 100,000 followers.)²⁸ Two of these influencers, @PattieGonia and @UnlikelyHikers, are mentioned in academic research about online influencers and diverse online communities. All of these influencers are active in other media besides Instagram (such as writing for books and magazines, hosting websites, coordinating in-person workshops and events, and appearing in film and television). In terms of our research scenario, it is plausible that someone who is on Instagram and has interests both in the outdoors and in a specific identity would get connected with these influencers, or others like them.

²⁸Statista. “Global Instagram Accounts by Audience Size 2019.” Accessed May 16, 2023. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/951875/instagram-accounts-by-audience-size-share/>.

PART TWO: Authors Represented In Outdoor Retail Stores

In summary, I found what I expected, which was a corpus of 365 books written almost entirely by cisgender heterosexual White authors (predominantly male). Of the 300 different authors that I found represented at outdoor retailers,

- *five* were BIPOC women,
- *three* were BIPOC men, and
- *two* were LGBTQ+ authors.

Less than three percent of books on the shelves at outdoor retailers were by diverse authors. About twenty percent of the authors that I identified were White women, and another four percent were White women who co-authored a book with a White man. Of the books authored and co-authored by women, the topics of food, botany, and children/babies in the outdoors were disproportionately represented. There was one book in the entire corpus written to inform and support disabled hikers.

I accomplished the demographic coding of the authors (as White, Male, Female, BIPOC, or LGBTQ+) based on publicly available information such as author websites and biographies, and author photographs. Drawing conclusions about a person's race and gender from such limited information may well lead to some errors. However, my purpose was to view the authors from the perspective of a consumer on a brief shopping trip to an outdoor gear store. It is unlikely that such a shopper would stop to do extensive research on an author; it's more probable that they would note the immediately obvious metadata information on the book's cover (such as author's photo, name, and brief biography) and draw their conclusions about their own relationship to the book, the activity and its inclusivity or lack thereof. In any case, the

percentage of authors who were clearly identifiable as White and Male was so overwhelming that even several mis-classified authors would not significantly change my analysis.²⁹

While this data is useful, it is limited. Although there are several trade organizations for outdoor retailers, I was not able to find one that could provide me with sales numbers for books. (I chose not to use commercially available data on book sales for this project, in order to retain the rights to share the results widely.) Turning this into an on-site observation led to several constraints: limiting the number of outdoor stores to query to a number that I could complete in person, and limiting the range of stores to Oregon so that travel time and expense to get from store to store didn't become burdensome. (On the positive side, Oregon is rich with opportunities for a wide range of outdoor activities, and I had no trouble finding data within that geographic constraint.) E-books were not considered for this project.

DISCUSSION

With research results in hand, we can now explore some implications and connections. Without a great deal of further study that exceeds the scope of this paper, we can't draw a direct connection between influencers and retailer behavior. However, anecdotal evidence shows that the outdoor industry is hearing these new voices and has been making some efforts toward inclusivity.

Teresa Baker wrote in 2018 that “This [outdoor recreation] industry has such amazing power, yet it is mostly silent when it comes to expanding that power into matters of racial

²⁹ Reviewers of this paper noted that the book data section of the results is somewhat abbreviated. I originally planned to include infographics and further analysis, but the data was too homogenous for that approach to be useful.

diversity and inclusion.”³⁰ Baker’s essay, “An Open Letter to the Outdoor Industry on Diversity,” prompted reflection and actions from some major outdoor retailers such as Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI), Patagonia, The North Face, and Marmot.

REI in particular has tried to diversify the company’s marketing, products and communications. REI’s blog series, “Uncommon Path”, has a subsection titled “Inclusion” which highlights underrepresented athletes, advocates and issues.³¹ The company also began a project called Path Ahead Ventures, which launched in October 2021 and will invest \$30 million in 300 founders of color to start and scale businesses.³² In my direct observations, I noticed that some REI locations are making a visible effort to improve the diversity of their book sections. I did not break out which books were sold at which store in my author analysis, but there are some points worth noting. Each REI orders their books independently (in order to serve their local customers well), and the REI stores in larger cities had at least some BIPOC and LGBTQ+ author representation.

While REI is notable in its efforts, other outdoor recreation companies have also signed Baker’s “Outdoor CEO Diversity Pledge”, donated money to nonprofit organizations that support outdoor education and access for underrepresented groups, and changed their marketing strategies to be more inclusive.³³ As this movement gains more traction, let’s consider the affected stakeholders. Who should pay attention to the lack of diverse outdoor books at outdoor retailers?

³⁰ Baker, Teresa. “An Open Letter to the Outdoor Industry on Diversity.” Outdoor Retailer, June 7, 2018. <https://outdoorretailer.com/magazine/an-open-letter-to-the-outdoor-industry-on-diversity/>.

³¹ Uncommon Path – An REI Co-op Publication. “Inclusion Archives,” May 1, 2023. <https://www.rei.com/blog/tag/inclusion>.

³² REI. “Path Ahead Ventures | REI Co-Op.” Accessed May 13, 2023. <https://www.rei.com/path-ahead>.

³³In Solidarity Project. “The Pledge.” Accessed May 13, 2023. <https://www.insolidarityproject.com/the-pledge>.

Individuals who would be interested include users, outdoor experts, and authors.

Advocates for greater diversity and inclusion in both outdoor recreation and publishing might find fertile ground for action on these issues. This issue impacts outdoor brands and retailers who want to effectively seek new customers (as REI bemoans its aging membership), as well as who want to do the right thing morally/ethically, and keep their diversity pledge promises. This topic is also of interest to publishers, who have the tools to find and amplify expert authors from historically excluded and often intersectional demographics of race, gender, ethnicity and ability.

Based on my observations from real-time bookshelves, we can posit that there is a disconnect between the outdoor diversity social justice movement, the outdoor retailer response at the big corporate level, and the book offerings in Oregon outdoor retailers. I did not see that gap specifically addressed in any of the influencer/activist profiles, sites or articles; that may be an opportunity for PNW publishers in acquiring, publishing, and marketing books intentionally inclusive of historically excluded groups in the outdoors. There were also no guidebooks, maps, or other printed materials in any language other than English at any of the outdoor retailers that I visited. I will conclude with some recommendations for further research and possible action items for publishers who may be interested in learning more.

CONCLUSION

In this project, I collected research demonstrating that Instagram helps build diverse communities, that Instagram can motivate people to go outdoors for activities, and that most of our outdoor spaces in the US are heavily coded as White. I determined that diverse outdoor influencers are gaining in popularity and presence. I also found some evidence that the outdoor

industry is beginning, slowly, to respond to the online social justice movement to expand diversity in the outdoors.

To revisit our descriptive research scenario with a little more detail, consider this course of events: A member of a historically underrepresented community becomes interested in an outdoor activity through a social media influencer (connection). This person decides to gain or deepen some outdoor expertise because of that influencer's activism (inspiration). They go to their local outdoor retailer in search of gear and information (seeking knowledge). In terms of guidebooks and "how-to" manuals, what will they find on the shelves, and who are the authors representing the height of expertise?

My research shows that in Oregon, in 2023, if that knowledge seeker is not a cisgender heterosexual White male, they will find little to no representation. The efforts of the diverse outdoor online community have not yet reached the retail level for books at outdoor retailers, even for companies that acknowledge the problem and are making other changes. Future researchers might explore the reasons for that with the following questions:

- Is the lack of diverse outdoor books at these retailers a deliberate marketing or merchandising decision, or are these books simply not available?
- Traditional book publishing is an extended process that can sometimes take years. Are there more outdoor books by diverse authors already in the publishing pipeline?
- Whitson notes that among social media platforms, Instagram is particularly ideal for informal publishing. How does this process of instant, informal publishing impact the industry in terms of outdoor books?

- Is this a problem that is exacerbated by Oregon's painful history of systemic racism and exclusion? Are there publishers that specialize in this genre of books by underrepresented authors in other regions of the US?
- What are some possible marketing strategies for pairing an author with an influencer in this particular genre and area of activism?
- How do the cover designs of outdoor books influence their sales?
- Which authors would I find in the outdoor section of a bookstore, as opposed to outdoor retailers?

While these and many other questions remain, one point is clear: there is a significant gap between the experience of a cisgender, heterosexual White person (especially male) and that of any other person who browses the bookshelves at outdoor retailers in Oregon. If we return to the value proposition of outdoor books discussed in the introduction—especially the teaching, coaching, and safety element of guidebooks and manuals—then that representation gap has damaging consequences to BIPOC, LGBTQ+, fat, disabled, and people of intersectional identities. The power of book publishers lies in the ability to change the way we transmit culture in written materials. We should use that power on behalf of those who are invited into the stream of connection, inspiration, and seeking knowledge. Everyone should be able to find representation on the shelves, as a small step toward being able to fully participate in healthy and rewarding outdoor activities.

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Appendix A: Oregon Outdoor Retailers Visited

Store Name	Location
Portland Outdoor Store	304 SW 3rd Ave, Portland, OR 97204
Sportsman's Warehouse	10645 NE Tanasbourne Dr, Hillsboro, OR 97124
Tillamook Sporting Goods	2205 N Main Ave, Tillamook, OR 97141
Backcountry Gear	1855 W 2nd Ave, Eugene, OR 97402
Fishermen's Marine & Outdoor	1120 N Hayden Meadows Dr, Portland, OR 97217
REI	1405 NW Johnson St, Portland, OR 97209
REI	380 SW Powerhouse Dr, Bend, OR 97702
REI	306 Lawrence St Eugene Planing,, Eugene, OR 97401
REI	6035 Ulali Dr, Keizer, OR 97303
Hike N Peaks	103 A E Hood Ave, Sisters, OR 97759
Mountain Supply	834 NW Colorado Ave, Bend, OR 97703
Eugene Gear Traders	505 Willamette St Suite 110, Eugene, OR 97401
Peak Sports Outdoor Shop	207 NW 2nd St, Corvallis, OR 97330
The Gear Fix	550 SW Industrial Way #183, Bend, OR 97702

Appendix B: [Books In Outdoor Retailers Visited](#)

