

Nature in Our Own Backyard for Overall Wellness

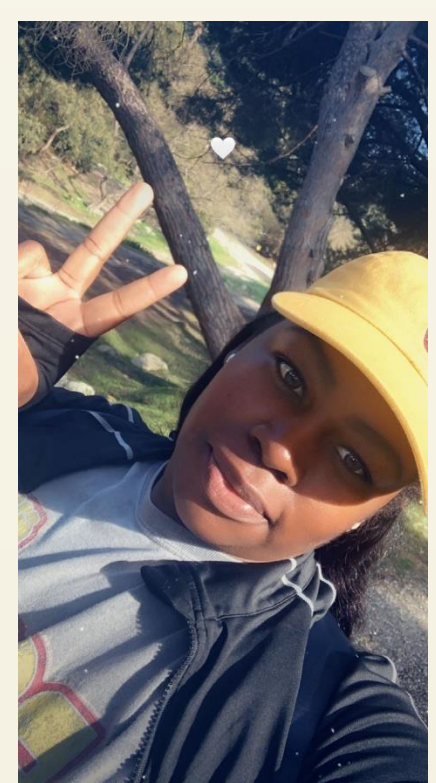
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Background

- Nature and wellness can be defined in multiple ways, varying based on personal experiences and subjectivities.
- Both nature and wellness work together to promote overall health, including physical, mental, and emotional health (Mitten, et. al 2016).
- Being in nature encourages people not only to care for themselves, but care for the environment around them (Mitten, et. al 2016).
- Nature-based therapeutics (outings) involve intentionally guided interactions between humans and nature designed to promote favorable health outcomes (Alexander & Brooks 2021).
- The initial desire to unite Black women hikers grew into larger goals: promoting outdoor equity and the creation of safe spaces (Kim 2023).



Purpose

- To understand perceptions of nature and wellness, accessibility and safety, and personal experiences in nature to improve access to these spaces and overall wellness for marginalized communities.

Methods

- **Autoethnography:** Reflective visits to the South Bay Botanical Gardens were conducted once a week on Sunday mornings from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. from February – April 2023 and to the Ocean Trail Reserve twice in March 2023.
- **Literature Review:** Approximately 12 sources including interdisciplinary peer-reviewed journal articles and popular media and podcasts (e.g., “Bring Birds Back”) that illuminate personal experiences, struggles, and perceptions of nature within marginalized communities.
- **Preliminary survey:** In the month of April, a ten-question survey was electronically distributed to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) to understand and illuminate the history, experiences, and sense of inclusion within natural spaces and the effects it has on wellness.

Findings

| What does nature mean to you? | How do you define wellness? | Favorite outdoor activities that makes you feel safe and connected in nature. |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ P1: Nature is essentially the outdoors that you purposefully interact with, such as parks, beaches, and trails. ▪ P2: It means the beauty of earth. ▪ P3: Well, what it means is outside activities. ▪ P4: Nature is being outdoors surrounded by trees, plants, flowers or the ocean. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ P1: Wellness is both a state of mind and state of being. So basically, healthy in mind and body because in order to achieve one you must also achieve the other. ▪ P2: To me, wellness is physical health, mental health, emotional health, and nutrition. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ P2: Camping, Hiking, Naturalist activities (for example, birdwatching, tide pooling, bug observation, etc.), Outdoor sports (for example, baseball, outdoor basketball, soccer, etc.), Walking ▪ P3: Bike riding, Playing outside, Walking |

Discussion

- Based on the literature review and preliminary survey results, the researchers argue that the discrepancies between individuals’ experiences in outdoor activities (e.g., hiking) and their desire to try outdoor activities (e.g., camping) reflects larger trends about safety, access, and inclusion in nature for marginalized communities.

Future Direction

- Building on the preliminary research, future directions should include conducting focus groups and interviews with designated BIPOC birding or naturalist clubs and organizations (e.g., BIPOC Birding Club), BIPOC hiking groups (e.g., Black Girls Trekkin’), and other outdoor clubs through the lens of wellness and health within these communities.
- Advocate for more research on safe spaces in nature for the individuals in the study. There should be grants given to open more local botanical gardens that are within reach of urban communities.

Lessons Learned

- Conducting research has taught me ways to communicate properly when working with others; being sure there is a common goal. This research has also allowed me to become more knowledgeable about nature and wellness, and how individuals may view those two things differently based on their economic status.

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References

- Scan QR code for references

