



Beach, Please: Exploring Black Women's Lived Outdoor Recreation Experiences

Kristine M. Fleming¹  · Milanika S. Turner² 

Received: 30 January 2023 / Accepted: 9 October 2023 / Published online: 2 November 2023
© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2023

Abstract

Minimal leisure research focuses exclusively on Black women, with even fewer studies examining outdoor recreation experiences among active participants. The purpose of this study was to explore the outdoor recreation experiences of Black women in their own words. Convenience sampling was used to recruit Black women employed at a university located in the U.S. Southeast who have frequented beach areas along the Florida Panhandle. Questions asked related to recreation experiences, including the motivation and barriers to visiting beach areas, participation in leisure activities, and history of their first beach visit. Motivation for visiting beaches included social or solo traditions, informal self-care retreats to disengage and reflect through writing and meditation, and access to local amenities. Barriers to visiting coastal beaches ranged from work and personal life commitments, lack of discretionary funds, and safety concerns from the fear of being a Black woman traveling alone or through segregated areas. In addition, this study addressed stereotypes of leisure experiences among Black women that included hair care and recreating in spaces typically occupied by non-Black beachgoers. The importance of Black women's leisure surfaced as a theme as respondents connected beach recreation to overall health, well-being, and the idea of pleasure being intertwined with work rather than being separate or in conflict with their leisure time. Using a Black feminist standpoint, the stories Black women tell about themselves in leisure are a rich resource to provide insight into this topic.

Keywords Intersectionality · Ethnicity · Outdoor Recreation · Beaches · Leisure

✉ Kristine M. Fleming
kristine.fleming@famu.edu

¹ Department of Health, Physical Education and Recreation, Florida A&M University, Tallahassee, FL, USA

² Department of Sociology & Criminal Justice, Clark Atlanta University, Atlanta, GA, USA

1 Introduction

Leisure is an essential aspect of life that can have numerous benefits for physical and mental health, social connection, personal growth, and community building; however, leisure is also shaped by social and cultural factors that may impact the experiences of different groups. Previous research has shed light on the perceptions of outdoor recreation among Blacks (Dorwart et al., 2019; Erickson et al., 2009; Lee & Scott, 2016; Lee et al., 2022), but is limited in sharing the experiences of people who frequent outdoor recreation areas (Davis, 2019).

This study aimed to explore the leisure experiences of Black women, a group that has been underrepresented and overlooked in research on leisure. By examining Black women's leisure behaviors, motivations, and barriers, this study sheds light on how race, gender, and other identities intersect to shape leisure experiences and contribute to the broader field of leisure sociology.

1.1 History of Beachin' in Florida

Throughout the United States, a number of historically segregated areas were established to allow African Americans a separate opportunity for leisure and recreation experiences. Extreme efforts, such as intimidation and violence, were used along with formal policies and practices by White Americans to segregate African Americans from shared leisure experiences until the middle of the 20th Century. African American beaches, fish camps, and resorts were established for leisure and recreation (Jackson, 2020).

Several parks along the coastal shores were designated as segregated beaches in Florida. American Beach on Amelia Island was established in 1935 as a beach community for African Americans by a wealthy Black business owner (Finney, 2014; Jackson, 2020). Since African Americans were not permitted to frequent other beaches or recreate at White-only facilities (Goldberg, 2016; Jackson, 2019), areas, such as American Beach provided a place to bring together the community. Before American Beach on Amelia Island opened, Pablo Beach, located in Jacksonville, was only available on Mondays for African Americans to frequent (Soergel, 2018). Restricting African Americans to specific times and days to participate in recreational activities is an example of racial isolation, which uses time as a form of segregation (Goldberg, 2016; O'Brien, 2015; Weyeneth, 2005).

In Miami, Virginia Key Beach was the only beach available to African Americans in the region from 1945 to the late 1950s (Glave et al., 2005). The significance of Virginia Key Beach to the leisure experiences of African Americans during segregation was overlooked until the late 1990s, when a group of older African American professionals, who were primarily women, brought to light the need to retain the memory and consider new public use of the land (Glave et al., 2005). While Virginia Key Beach was the only area for swimming available to African Americans in Miami, the area was also considered the most dangerous, with currents that often resulted in the death of many swimmers who attempted to access the area (Glave et al., 2005). In general, segregated beaches for Black Americans were located in

areas that were more dangerous and less desirable, resulting in more pollution, fewer amenities, and potential incidents of discrimination (Jackson, 2019; O'Brien, 2015). Therefore, going to the beach was often undertaken as a community experience that allowed people to care for one another, which went beyond family ties to shared values and a shared sense of oppression (Jackson, 2019).

Along the Florida panhandle, Money Bayou Beach was established in 1951 by African American investors to provide beach recreation for local community members and those living in nearby states. Although Money Bayou Beach included a dance hall, café, and cottages to stay overnight, much of the area closed upon the desegregation that occurred with the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. In the years prior to the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the Attorney General of Florida, Richard W. Ervin, stated that Florida was not ready to have children of different races swimming together to include interacting in integrated parks and beaches (Paulson, 1982). Across the state of Florida, many of the beach communities resisted segregation efforts as African Americans were eventually able to frequent establishments of their choice.

Although many White Americans in the years after the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Acts disapproved of discrimination towards African Americans, at the same time, support of segregation practices continued (Durrheim & Dixon, 2013). In the decades following the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, *laissez-faire* racism emerged (Bobo et al., 1997; Tuch et al., 1997), as demonstrated through the closing of public leisure spaces to include movie theatres, golf courses, swimming pools, and beaches as efforts for integration were stifled, and the privatization of these recreation spaces began to rise (Paulson, 1982; Retzlaff, 2021; Wiltse, 2007). More specifically, *laissez-faire* racism reinforced colorblind attitudes and the minimization of power imbalances reinforced through racial biases and stereotypes in communities and education (Gaias et al., 2021). Despite the decline in explicit forms of segregated leisure and recreation practices, the variations in outdoor recreation pursuits of Black Americans continue to evolve.

1.2 Perceptions of Outdoor Recreation Experiences

Over the past 20 years, researchers have attempted to gain knowledge related to the leisure experiences of Black and African Americans. While research ranges from the visitation patterns of the National Park Services (Weber & Sultana, 2012; Xiao et al., 2022) to the self-reported participation in recreation (Shores et al., 2007) and the experiences of college graduates (Kaplan & Talbot, 1988), these findings report limited usage of outdoor recreation areas among African Americans. Most recently, Lee et al. (2022) investigated leisure satisfaction and well-being related to African Americans' interest in outdoor recreation activities. Although these studies provide insight into perceptions of African Americans, participants had limited engagement, if any, in outdoor recreation and instead reported the perceptions of the barriers and constraints to participation.

Earlier studies on the perceptions of wildland areas, including forests, were conducted in the late 1980s and early 1990s. More specifically, African American

adults surveyed on the use of the Apalachicola National Forest in the Florida panhandle had more negative views of the wildlands when compared with White adults (Johnson et al., 1998). Additional studies have indicated that the history and brutality of Jim Crow, fear of discrimination, and stereotypes (e.g., African American lack of interest) has impacted African American participation in outdoor recreation pursuits (Erickson et al., 2009; Johnson & Bowker, 2004; Lee & Scott, 2016). During the 1980s, Black college students living in the U.S. West perceived the forest as more dangerous and preferred outdoor spaces with more visibility and less dense vegetation (Kaplan & Talbot, 1988).

Previous studies have included various examples of discrimination in recreation settings (Borrell et al., 2013; Erickson et al., 2009; Lee & Scott, 2016, 2017). More specifically, Lee and Scott (2017) conducted semi-structured interviews from 2012–2013 among 13 African Americans in the U.S. South Central regions, all of whom earned at least one college degree and earned income. Among the participants, fear of racism and racial discrimination during travel impacted leisure pursuits. In addition, older participants reported prior experiences of racism, creating increased fear when traveling, unlike younger participants who had not experienced racism (Lee & Scott, 2017). Although younger participants had not experienced any racism, storytelling, and instructions to be safe from older family members may have impacted their fear indirectly (Lee & Scott, 2017). Furthermore, Lee and Scott's (2017) findings report the type of discrimination African Americans may experience after taking time to contemplate the previous experiences of others (Erickson et al., 2009; Lee & Scott, 2016). In a study conducted among Black Americans living in Chicago, IL, Oakland, CA, and Minneapolis, MN, Black Americans with higher levels of income and education reported experiencing more racism when compared with Black Americans with lower socio-economic status, as well as higher levels of participation in inclusive recreation programs (Borrell et al., 2013). While these findings support previous perceptions related to the fear of discrimination, these findings are not limited to the discrimination that occurs in outdoor recreation (Davis, 2019).

Of note, a 2012 report by Congaree National Park surveyed 3,240 users to understand park use, but needed to consider the various entrances and the demographic characteristics of individuals at each entrance point. Furthermore, the entrance used for the survey was not commonly used by African American visitors, who represented 3% of survey participants, with only 2% fishing at the park (Begley et al., 2013). Considering the lack of representation in the 2012 Congaree National Park report, Davis (2019) conducted interviews that offered insight into the fishing experiences of African Americans in the wildlands of Congaree National Park. Participants in the study were serious fishers with large boats and trucks who experienced structural discrimination as policies and practices in the park changed, limiting their ability to access areas historically used by these fishers. While Davis (2019) provides essential insight into the outdoor recreation pursuits of the wildlands in Congaree National Park, these findings are not specific to the experiences of Black women.

1.3 Black Women's Outdoor Leisure Experiences

Research on Black women's outdoor leisure experiences is limited. Previous research often compares the experiences of Black women to those of other races and ethnicities, except for the study conducted by Dorwart et al. (2019), which reports the leisure constraints of outdoor recreation experiences by African American women living in Central North Carolina. The 10 women interviewed for the study participated in 150 min of moderately intense physical activity at a wellness center; they did not participate in outdoor recreation activities (Dorwart et al., 2019). The need to be fit, have a companion, lack of outdoor identity, and impact of convenience when considering participation were reported as constraints to participation in outdoor recreation activities (Dorwart et al., 2019). In addition, the fear of trying new activities and caution with the unknown impacted participation in outdoor recreation activities. Findings from Dorwart et al. (2019) provide valuable insight into recent perceptions of African American women who have not participated in outdoor recreation activities. Still, there is a need to explore the experiences of Black women who pursue leisure experiences outdoors.

Sene-Harper et al. (2022) challenge the traditional notion of outdoor recreation experiences, typically dominated by White participants, in settings that take place in national forests and wilderness areas. They contend that, as a result, there is a lack of understanding of Black outdoor recreation experiences in natural settings (Sene-Harper et al., 2022). By centering the experiences of Black women in outdoor recreation spaces, new meanings and narratives may be interpreted to understand the diverse preferences in experiences (Finney, 2014). The voices and experiences of Black women in outdoor recreation spaces must be included to create culturally relevant outdoor recreation experiences (Sene-Harper et al., 2022).

Furthermore, previous studies have identified the need to integrate Black feminist theories in the application of leisure and social research (Mowatt et al., 2013; Pinckney et al., 2018); however, minimal leisure research has focused exclusively on Black women, with even fewer studies examining outdoor recreation experiences. This study aimed to explore Black women's outdoor recreation experiences along the Florida panhandle.

2 Theoretical Framework

As conceptual and practical discussions of race in leisure continue to expand—albeit slowly—relevant theories are sparsely applied. The theoretical importance of this study lies in addressing a critical gap within the existing literature that takes a historical approach to the issues in the literature review (Henderson et al., 1996). The outdoor recreation experiences of Black women have been vastly underrepresented in research, resulting in a paucity of insights into their lived realities. This study recognizes the historical neglect of this demographic's experiences and endeavors to rectify this oversight.

By delving into the historical, societal, and systemic factors that contribute to the lack of representation and understanding, the study aims to shed light on the

complexities of Black women's outdoor recreation experiences. This approach is both sound and warranted to provide a foundation for a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities Black women may encounter while pursuing outdoor activities. Black feminist standpoint is used to gain insight into the experiences and perspectives of leisure among Black women while shifting away from the Eurocentric practices and lens often employed to understand the experiences of Black women (Crasnow, 2014; Versey, 2014; Yuen, 2018). Black feminist standpoint is infused to understand the complex ways in which race, gender, age, and other identities intersect to shape experiences (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Considering the social and cultural context in which experiences occur, we offer a nuanced understanding of how broader societal structures and cultural norms shape Black women's actual leisure behaviors and experiences—not just their perspectives.

3 Methods

Qualitative research methods (i.e., in-depth interviews, storytelling, life history) were employed to gather and critically analyze data from Black women's own narratives while allowing for the expression of the complexity and nuance of these experiences. Convenience sampling was used to recruit a sample of seven Black women employed at a university located in the U.S. Southeast who have frequented, or considered frequenting, outdoor recreation areas such as beaches along the Florida Panhandle. The process began by identifying participants through personal connections and professional. Each individual was invited to participate in a virtual semi-structured interview in which questions related to recreation experiences along the Florida Panhandle were asked. The beaches along the Florida Panhandle were selected for study due to the history and close proximity of the beaches to the university. Due to the resource constraints to conduct the study, it is essential to note the sample was not randomly selected and may not represent the larger population of Black women faculty. The use of convenience sampling allowed us to gather a small group of participants for this study, which we were able to gather rich, detailed data on outdoor recreation throughout the lifecycle as well as how leisure may be used as a site of resistance or as a tool for challenging racialized gender stereotypes.

3.1 Demographics of Participants

We collected basic demographic information to contextualize the responses. Due to the resource constraints available to the authors to conduct the study, Black/African American women faculty members ($N=7$) were interviewed from a single university in the U.S. Southeast. Participants ranged in age from 38–69 years. They were heterogeneous regarding household composition, marital status, faculty rank (e.g., tenure/tenure-track, assistant and associate professors), academic discipline, number of children or grandchildren, nativity, and years in the region. The majority of participants were from the U.S. Southeast ($n=6$), and one was from the U.S. Northeast. Most did not have children ($n=4$); three were single, never married, and had no

children. Of the participants who had children, one was married with young children, another was married with adult children and grandchildren, and another was "happily divorced" with adult children. Recognizing our respondents' multiple identities and complexities is just a first step. The women were all at different stages and places in their lives. Each participant had visited U.S. Southeast beaches, including the Florida Panhandle.

3.2 Data Collection Procedures

Following the flexible guidelines of semi-structured interviews, participants were asked questions related to outdoor recreation experiences along the Florida Panhandle. The cross-sectional design allowed study participants to explain their motivation for and barriers to visiting these areas and the types of activities often conducted in addition to describing the first visit to an outdoor area in the Florida Panhandle in their own words. Interviews were conducted and recorded using Zoom video conference software. The duration of the interviews ranged between 30–60 min. We collected oral narratives by interviewing women faculty from a Black feminist standpoint that recognizes individual identities are multifaceted and interconnected (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Versey, 2014). The interviewers prioritized centering the voices and perspectives while creating a safe and welcoming space to record their knowledge and experiences (Collins & Bilge, 2016) and the shifts that took place (or are anticipated) in these women's lives. This allowed us to uncover how the women viewed themselves and how this view affected the choices they made. A smaller sample size also allowed for more in-depth analysis within the resource constraints presented to the authors. Prior to conducting the interviews, approval was granted by a U.S. Southeast University Institutional Review Board.

3.3 Data Analysis

Narrative thematic analysis allowed us to learn about participants' personal beach experiences, as shared in their own words. Narrative thematic analysis was used to code the data after transcription based on identifying recurrent patterns (Butina, 2015). Codes were generated separately to establish interrater reliability and allow the researchers to uncover individual biases (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The codes were organized into categories and further analyzed for patterns and relationships within and between them. Our findings are organized thematically, and our interpretation of the results follows.

4 Results and Discussion

The findings from the study extend the body of knowledge related to the motivation and barriers to leisure experiences among Black women in beach areas. They provide insight into the factors most influential in shaping leisure decisions and could inform future research on leisure motivation. Our findings also

dispel common myths and stereotypes while identifying the actual barriers to outdoor recreation that Black women face and promoting greater access to leisure opportunities.

Motivations Unlike many out-of-state visitors seeking a break from colder weather, the warm climate was not a major draw for our respondents since they lived elsewhere in the Florida Panhandle with a similar climate. Instead, when discussing trips to the beach, these experiences often entailed traditions and memories with family members and close friends. The experiences ranged from pre-planned trips to spontaneous weekend adventures. Participants described beach trips as an activity with the closest and "best" friends. When asked if taking a beach trip was the norm for "people like you," a participant responded, "It is for the ones that are part of my inner circle... when they come home, we always go to the beach..." Another participant shared, "I remember times I wanted to go, but didn't go, mainly just not being able to get the right folks to come with me."

Participants who began visiting the beach during undergraduate and graduate studies often referred to best friends they would travel with to the beach as a time to rest, relax, and reset from the week. Additional traditions and memories of going to the beach included a few recreational activities (e.g., beachcombing, playing beach volleyball) and preparing food to eat while sitting on the beach listening to the waves. These experiences often involved buying snacks and sub sandwiches at the local grocery store (i.e., Publix). When describing the memories and traditions created as a family with her children, a participant said, "they just love the whole experience. I have a tradition; I always go to Publix to get them some subs... so it's not just the water, but the journey to the water." Another participant said, "We would build a fire and cook the crabs and shrimp on the beach." Other participants shared going to the beach and visiting local restaurants as part of the beach trip.

Going to the beach also represented the time, space, and place for participants to reflect and rest. Although only one participant could not swim, most enjoyed simply sitting beside the water and listening to the waves. Each participant discussed the joy of simply sitting by the water, even if they did not get into the water. Some described hearing the waves as having a calming effect on their rest and reflection. The sight and sound of the waves, as well as the natural beauty of the Gulf coastline, were soothing and therapeutic. Participants also discussed taking time to read, write, and reflect. Consistent with planning a vacation or leisure trip, the women in our study visited beaches to relax and escape the demands of daily life. Ultimately, it is difficult to generalize about the motivation for visiting Florida Panhandle beaches as the reasons may vary widely among different individuals and groups, but it may be a combination of these and other factors.

Barriers While single women expressed financial barriers to visiting the beach, women with children expressed visiting the beach as an affordable recreation opportunity to experience with the family. Participants with children indicated a major

reason for visiting the beach was their children's interest. A participant stated, "In all fairness, when we do go to the beach, a lot of times it's because of our kids." Another participant also indicated beach trips were often tied into other leisure experiences for their children stating, "...with them being in their sports, whether it was football or baseball, whenever they had a game, or whatever, and we would drive and turn it into a family trip and stay, instead of just coming back after the game." Another participant indicated going to the beach was an affordable activity for their family to rent cottages and stay on the beach.

Although women with children perceived the beach as an affordable activity for family leisure, single participants indicated financial barriers to visiting the beach during adulthood compared to visits as graduate students. Participants shared they often visited the beach during graduate school as a cheap way to relax and reset with friends. As professionals, single participants indicated recent beach trips were often planned as part of attending a conference for work. A participant shared, "If I'm at a conference, I can get close to a beach in Florida. We would just go to the beach on the weekend and afternoons." Another participant shared, "During the day, I was at the conference, but then in the evenings we were able to hang out, see the beach, go to dinner." The lack of affordability to take beach trips is often due to the amenities participants desire when going on a beach trip, which includes staying in clean, easily accessible, and affordable hotels close to the beach with amenities close by, including grocery stores, shopping outlets, and restaurants. A participant described a desirable hotel's characteristics, including easily accessible room service and a spa. A participant who takes solo trips to the beach stated, "When I go by myself, I'll go to this fancy place and go for a couple days when I can afford to." The cost of travel, accommodations, and activities can be a major deterrent for some people—particularly for those on a limited budget.

Additionally, comments regarding whether participants' parents and grandparents knew how to swim were often tied to economic means. More specifically, participants whose parents or grandparents served in the U.S. military knew how to swim due to their service. Participants' responses regarding why their parents or grandparents did not know how to swim were connected to the lack of economic resources, which were also tied to why they did not visit beaches growing up. Not having the economic resources as parents to learn themselves was connected to their motivation in making sure participants (i.e., their daughters) took swim lessons growing up. A participant shared, "She [mom] could not swim, so she really wanted us to. All of her kids had swimming lessons, and all of us know how to swim." Another participant shared that she did not visit the beach with her family because her parents were "frugal" with spending. Visiting the beach for the first time among participants was often experienced through trips planned by schools ranging from high school and college, as well as annual church trips to the beach. For many African Americans during segregation, visiting beaches with churches was common for planned religious services and recreation (Glave et al., 2005). Despite not visiting the beach with their families, participants described other leisure experiences as children. These experiences ranged from joining different summer camp programs, such as Girls Scouts, church programs, and taking swim lessons.

Although most participants took swim lessons and knew how to swim, concerns about the need to be cautious around the water were expressed. Among the participants who expressed fear of the unknown with the water, three of the participants indicated near-drowning swimming experiences in the pool during childhood, despite having parents who knew how to swim. More specifically, participants indicated the need to be hyper-aware of the rip current and rough waters. A participant stated, "You have to have a respect for the water in terms of the rip current and know that you don't get in the water." When taking children to the beach, the participant expressed she would tell children, "...because of the flags, sometimes you can go out far, but then you can step down off of something and into deep, deep water. So, if I had to get you twice to get out the water, it meant when you got back home you weren't going with me again because I can't replace nobody's baby." Another participant who takes her children to the beach stated, "I can dictate how far they go into water... They do go deeper there with me, you know, I'm holding them, my husband is holding them, so I feel like I'm in more control, even though the beach water can be tricky." Other participants indicated a fear of critters in the water or other unknowns. A participant stated, "I like to be by the water and I'll go up to my legs, but I'm not going out to swim." Another participant shared that she chose not to attend Black Spring Break Week in Daytona in high school due to the fear of being thrown into the water. Participants who did not fear the water did not express any previous incidences to cause fear.

As participants discussed their beaching experiences, references to their parents' leisure experiences often emerged as they shared their perspectives. Stories of these leisure behaviors and experiences included parents who loved to go fishing and took time to visit family during the summers. Even if they did not grow up taking trips to the beach, a theme emerged when describing parents, which included the emphasis on working and playing hard. A participant explained:

So my mom was a stay-at-home mom and my father was the sole provider for the family. My mother was very heavy on education and she felt like you work hard, and you should play hard. So, every summer, whether it was something elaborate, which it usually wasn't, or just you know going away to the beach, she would try to make sure that we did stuff. Every summer we had memories and we'd have to write stories about it and all kinds of stuff, so she just really thought that, you know, vacations were very important.

Another participant shared, "We didn't know we were poor because they would come together and put their resources together to make sure we had opportunities (for recreation)." When describing the leisure perspective of her father, another participant stated:

My dad used to have a timeshare every November. He'd say, 'Hey, if you're trying to get me you can't for the next two weeks. I'm going to my timeshare...' He didn't care what was going on, who was looking for him... he would go and come back, and he'd say, 'Boy, I needed that.' So, that made me start thinking about, you know, he's got the right idea, and even some-

times when my girlfriend can't go (to the beach) I would sometimes get in the car and just drive over there, even if it was just to drive, and come back.

Suggestions to Promote Leisure A final theme of promoting leisure as self-care emerged as respondents expressed a desire for information to be provided on affordable leisure experiences in addition to establishing partnerships with local agencies to provide more recreational activities while also improving knowledge on the health benefits of leisure for Black women. A participant shared:

10-15 years ago, I probably would have said [Black women's leisure experiences were] a little bit on the strained or restricted side, but now I think we just kind of do whatever the heck we want to do when we want to do it, or when we feel like doing it... I have some of those same girlfriends I'm friends with now. We say what we wouldn't do and couldn't do because we didn't want to, but now we just throw caution to the wind as long as we're being safe and not bothering anybody, doing what we want to do just because there is time.

When asked what changed, the participant responded, "Time and things that happened in your life that make you realize, you know, you only have one life to live and you need to live it with laughter... I think watching my dad go through cancer, the fourth time." In addition, participants indicated participating in leisure was part of their health and self-care, with a participant describing the beach as part of her "wellness ritual," which included, "being by the water, even though I don't get in it, being near the water, the air, the existence, even the drive, like I said, is really therapeutic for me. It's necessary for me, I always feel better, I always feel more centered, I feel happy." Consistent with Black feminist standpoint theory, this finding privileges Black women's knowledge and understanding of their emotions, minds, and bodies while situating health (broadly defined) within the intersectional social conditions that support (or constrain) their lives (Crasnow, 2014; Versey, 2014).

Additional sub-themes emerged when asked if they had 15 s to talk to health professionals and what recommendations they would give them to promote leisure and recreation in or among their community. Recommendations reinforced the need for self-care opportunities and providing affordable leisure and recreation opportunities. The importance of health and well-being, mental health, letting go, and quality of life at work were highlighted. More specifically, participants discussed the need to understand the interconnectedness of each dimension of health. The need to be mindful and intentional about health and the need to let go of stresses in one's life was emphasized. Understanding the connection between leisure and active living was also foregrounded as a means to live a longer, healthier life and the importance of work-life integration.

Dispelling common myths and stereotypes Previous leisure research has indicated discrimination during leisure and recreation experiences is more likely to occur to people of color (Sharaievskaya et al., 2014), and the fear of experiencing racism among African Americans is a barrier to participation (Dorwart et al., 2019; Lee & Scott, 2017; Lee et al., 2022). Participants in the current study did not indicate

discrimination or fear of racism as a factor that restricted their choices in recreation in activities. The hypervigilance to potential threats of racism and discrimination was referenced to signs that support known-racist political figures (Hornbuckle, 2021). Participants discussed driving during daylight hours and at busy times of the day to ensure adequate help was available while driving to destinations; however, once participants arrived at the destination, concerns about being hypervigilant were no longer expressed.

While previous research has indicated the views on and lack of participation in outdoor recreation by African Americans are rooted in the historical and exclusive practices of Jim Crow as well as fear of discrimination (Erickson et al., 2009; Glave et al., 2005; Johnson & Bowker, 2004; Lee & Scott, 2016), the current study did not reveal these findings. More specifically, the oldest participant, who was born during legal segregation, shared the experience of going to a segregated movie theater in which she described squeezing to sit in the segregated balcony section stating, "we had so much fun messing with the White folks in the balcony throwing stuff down on their head and they would come upstairs yelling and everybody would sit there and look like you don't have a clue who did it." After legal segregation had ended, a decision was made to close the movie theater to avoid full integration. Although the public schools in the region were integrated, extracurricular activities outside of school were segregated based on race. Despite the theater's closing and continuation of segregated recreation, the participants shared intimate details of leisure experiences with family and friends in other areas, including beach recreation. Another participant in her late 50 s described going to the recreation center growing up, which had a segregated Black pool and a White pool they were not allowed to use. Once integration occurred, the participant recalled, "I clearly remember sometimes we would get in, and people who did not look like us would get out." Despite these incidents at the recreation pool, the participant shared she later attended an integrated overnight camp where she received three awards, two of which included best camper and best swimmer. Overall, the participants who experienced legal segregation and the initial stages of integration provided a unique insight to augment the lived experiences of the women who participated in the study.

Throughout the interviews for the current study, participants acknowledged awareness of the stereotypes related to Black experiences in leisure; however, most participants indicated these were not part of their lived experiences. Finney (2014) indicates the stereotypes of African Americans' detachment from nature and the lack of representation in nature photographs have perpetuated the narrative of disconnect in the literature. Not only are such stereotypes offensive and false, but they can also be harmful. A participant further recognized the historical and structural roots of the inequities:

There, of course, is this stereotype right in Black communities about Black people not being very fond of water, in terms of not knowing how to swim and stuff like that you know. Me, I don't remember ever having a very candid conversation with my parents about how they felt about swimming... And I don't know if that has something to do with the history of Black peo-

ple not being in water, and there can be several reasons why Black people have these hang-ups... I have heard my father reference how segregated it was once upon a time, and he made references to the Black boy, who was in the Chicago area, he had the rocks thrown at him because he crossed the invisible line. So, I think that older Black people still have this stigma that's attached to beaches and where we show up and sometimes that stigma is unconscious, subconscious I should say.

Suggesting racial discrimination as a potential cause for the lack of representation among African American participants is often considered as a perception of what may be encountered rather than actually experiencing discrimination (Davis, 2019). Another participant stated that it was not uncommon for her and her friends to take beach trips, but followed up with, "Although society presents differently, so I don't know where they (researchers) get their information from, but I don't think they get it from me...I think sometimes people are making those assumptions without just cause or supporting evidence." In recent years, the stereotype of the lack of interest and enjoyment of outdoor recreation among Black Americans has been challenged as more research is conducted to understand the lived experiences of people of color in nature (Chávez, 2020; Root, 2017). Another participant stated,

Many people have this assumption that Black folks don't go to the beach... Whenever we go to the beach, we're just amazed at the number of people that look like us at the beach... And it's not just the young teenyboppers walking around. It's people older than me, even older couples walking hand in hand and they just seem to just be there for relaxation, they're not going in the water, either. But the sand feels so good on your feet, so you know. The thing that amazes me is a number of people in my age group that's African Americans at the beach when you just kind of immediately think it's just not.

Unlike previous studies that reported outdoor recreation as an activity for "White" people (Dorwart et al., 2019; Powell, 2021; Schwartz & Corkery, 2011), the findings were not supported by the women's experiences in the current study. Similar to the hunter-fishers interviewed by Davis (2019), the current participants challenged the narratives that dominate and support detachment from the environment among African Americans.

Furthermore, stereotypes regarding leisure experiences among Black women that included hair care were addressed. While previous research has indicated hair care as a barrier to Black women's participation in leisure (Henderson & Ainsworth, 2003; Versey, 2014), findings from the current study demonstrated otherwise. More importantly, participants initiated dialogue to address stereotypes related to hair care and participation in recreation. A participant remarked:

I think I may be unique in some regards with my leisure experiences, but I don't care if my hair gets wet, it gets wet and will dry. If it curls, it curls. I don't care a whole lot, and that's not always the case for other people, so I think it depends on the Black woman. I think it depends on what they've been exposed to. I think it depends on what's important to them.

A couple of participants indicated hair concerns were related to exposure and generational differences in access and styles, "You don't have to worry, but if you have one of those Angela Davis afros that could be a problem with the beach so you would have to stay on the beach, as opposed to getting in the water." Another participant indicated planning beach trips around hair appointments stating, "I am notorious for timing a beach trip. Like if I have a hair appointment this week, we're not going to the beach this week, maybe next week." Despite considering the different hairstyles and timing of participation in recreational activities (Versey, 2014), concerns related to hair care during recreational activities were not evident among five of the seven African American women who participated in the current study.

While the findings from the current study did not support previous research related to the inequalities in leisure and recreation experiences, this may be due to the environment in which the participants live. More specifically, the Black women in the current study live in environmental conditions similar to White community members, often resulting in fewer barriers to engaging in recreation opportunities (LaVeist et al., 2011). Although portions of the demographic region the participants currently live in are segregated, opportunities to engage in outdoor recreation areas, including parks and greenways, are accessible (Miller, 2019). Although outdoor recreation organizations have been established to promote access among African Americans (Roots, 2017), participants in the current study did not disclose participating in similar groups.

Regardless of efforts to include the history of segregation among Black Americans during leisure and recreation experiences, more research needs to be conducted to understand Black Americans' representation and participation, especially among women. The segregation of African Americans in society was a series of conscious, systemic acts also exhibited in times and places of leisure (Jackson, 2020). The over-generalization without considering intersectionality in identities and experiences impacts the narratives of African Americans in nature (Davis, 2019). Understanding Black women's outdoor recreation experiences may help provide a historical understanding of leisure and recreation experiences. Despite the social injustices placed on African Americans to recreate freely, minimal research is available to understand Black women's experiences in outdoor spaces. Thus, the stories Black women tell about themselves are a rich resource.

5 Conclusion

Few studies have examined the outdoor recreation experiences among African Americans. Although the study is undertaken in the U.S. Southeast, particularly in the Florida panhandle, those invested in promoting racial equity, addressing historical and system racism, and amplifying the voices of Black women should consider the value of engaging with this research. The use of a Black feminist standpoint provides a framework for Black woman to center and share their experiences (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Black feminist standpoint theory aligns more closely with the lived reality and experiences of Black women who are studied (Versey, 2014), by centering their voice when conducting research. To our knowledge, this study is the first to

explore the lived leisure experiences among African American women who actually participated in outdoor recreation activities.

6 Limitations and Future Research

Although we interviewed a small sample of Black women, the diversity and complexity of all Black women's outdoor recreation experiences are not fully represented. Conclusions drawn from the study may only apply to this particular group and may not be easily extended to a larger population. The risk of selection bias is also present as the sample consisted of Black women working in a limited occupational range as faculty members at a singular university in the U.S. Southeast and did not represent the entire population. Resource constraints related to time and budget to conduct the interviews, including transcribing and analyzing the qualitative data, prevented the authors from including more participants, such as Black women university students. Despite the resource constraints to conduct the study, the study deeply explored the unique outdoor recreation experiences of a specific and underrepresented group – Black women. While the results are not generalizable to all Black women nor other geographical locations, the smaller sample allowed for an in-depth examination of the nuances within each participant's experience. Finally, all interviews were conducted approximately two years after the onset of the global coronavirus pandemic, which disrupted and restricted everyone's "normal." This may have positively or negatively affected the timing and character of respondents' outdoor recreation behaviors.

Future research should continue exploring the lived experiences of Black women of different ethnicities and nationalities while considering the intersectionality and shifting positionality evident in their leisure experiences. Future research is also needed about outdoor recreation for Black women of different occupations. The body of knowledge regarding the leisure experiences of Black women could also be further expanded by examining a more comprehensive range of leisure activities. To date, much of the research on the leisure experiences of Black women has focused on a limited range of activities, such as sports and physical activity, for health reasons. Expanding the scope of research to include a broader range of recreation types, such as outdoor cultural and artistic pursuits, cycling, kayaking, hiking, camping, and other activities, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of Black women's leisure experiences.

Moreover, expanding the knowledge base on the leisure experiences of Black women may require examining the role of intersecting identities, such as social class, care responsibilities, and age, in shaping leisure experiences. This could involve conducting research that considers how these identities intersect and how they may impact behavior. No matter the direction of future research on Black women's outdoor recreation, it remains necessary to center the perspectives of Black women through methods that include personal narratives and glean experiential knowledge. This ensures that their voices and perspectives are included in research about them and validates them as experts in their own lives while allowing them to name their own reality—a privilege long denied to historically underrepresented people.

Acknowledgements This work was funded by Florida A&M University ADVANCE (National Science Foundation Award HRD-184267).

Declarations

Conflicts of Interest The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

References

Begley, A., Le, Y., & Hollenhorst, S. J. (2013). *Congaree National Park Visitor Study*. Fort Collins.

Bobo, L., Kluegel, J. R., & Smith, R. A. (1997). Laissez-faire racism The crystallization of a kinder, gentler, antiblack ideology. *Racial attitudes in the 1990s: Continuity and change*, 15, 23–25.

Borrell, L. N., Kiefe, C. I., Diez-Roux, A. V., Williams, D. R., & Gordon-Larsen, P. (2013). Racial discrimination, racial/ethnic segregation, and health behaviors in the CARDIA study. *Ethnicity & Health*, 18(3), 227–243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13557858.2012.713092>

Butina, M. (2015). A narrative approach to qualitative inquiry. *Clinical Laboratory Science*, 28(3), 190–196.

Chávez, K. (2020). Black Folks Camp Too aims to get Black people hiking, camping, into the outdoor economy. *Citizen Times*. <https://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/local/2020/09/03/wnc-based-businessman-earl-hunter-starts-blackfolks-camp-too/5405261002>

Collins, P. H., & Bilge, S. (2016). *Intersectionality*. Key Concepts (Polity Press).

Crasnow, S. (2014). Feminist standpoint theory. *Philosophy of Social Science: A New Introduction*, 1, 145–161.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.

Davis, J. (2019). Black faces, black spaces: Rethinking African American underrepresentation in wildland spaces and outdoor recreation. *Environment and Planning e: Nature and Space*, 2(1), 89–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2514848618817480>

Dorwart, C. E., Cornelous, S. S., & Patterson, A. F. (2019). “Schwartz & Robertson Corkery, 2011 Activities. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education, and Leadership*, 11(3), 171–190. <https://doi.org/10.18666/JOREL-2019-V11-I3-8878>

Durrheim, K., & Dixon, J. (2013). *Racial encounter: The social psychology of contact and desegregation*. Routledge.

Erickson, B., Johnson, C. W., & Kivel, B. D. (2009). Rocky Mountain National Park: History and culture as factors in African-American park visitation. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 41(4), 529–545. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0022216.2009.11950189>

Finney, C. (2014). *Black faces, white spaces: Reimagining the relationship of African Americans to the great outdoors*. UNC Press Books.

Floyd, M. F., & Stodolska, M. (2019). Scholarship on race and ethnicity: Assessing contributions to leisure theory and practice. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 37(1), 80–94. <https://doi.org/10.18666/JPRA-2019-8339>

Gaias, L. M., Gal-Szabo, D. E., Shivers, E. M., & Kiche, S. (2021). From laissez-faire to anti-discrimination: How are race/ethnicity, culture, and bias integrated into multiple domains of practice in early childhood education? *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 36(2), 272–295. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2021.1951403>

Glave, D. D., & Stoll, M. (Eds.). (2005). *To love the wind and the rain: African Americans and environmental history*. University of Pittsburgh Pre.

Goldberg, D. E. (2016). *The Retreats of Reconstruction: Race, Leisure, and the Politics of Segregation at the New Jersey Shore, 1865–1920*. Fordham Univ Press.

Henderson, K. A., & Ainsworth, B. E. (2003). A synthesis of perceptions about physical activity among older African American and American Indian women. *American Journal of Public Health*, 93(2), 313–317.

Henderson, K. A., Bialeschki, M. D., & Shaw, S. M. (1996). & Freysinger (Vol. J). Feminist perspectives on women's leisure. Venture Publishing Inc.

Hornbuckle, L. M. (2021). Running while Black: A distinctive safety concern and barrier to exercise in White neighborhoods. *Preventive Medicine Reports*, 22, 101378. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmedr.2021.101378>

Jackson, A. T. (2019). Remembering Jim Crow, again—critical representations of African American experiences of travel and leisure at US National Park Sites. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 25(7), 671–688. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2018.1544920>

Jackson, A. T. (2020). *Heritage, tourism, and race: The other side of leisure*. Taylor & Francis.

Johnson, C. Y., & Bowker, J. M. (2004). African-American wildland memories. *Environmental Ethics*, 26(1), 57–75. <https://doi.org/10.5840/enviroethics200426141>

Johnson, C. Y., Bowker, J. M., English, D. B., & Worthen, D. (1998). Wildland recreation in the rural south: An examination of marginality and ethnicity theory. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 30(1), 101–120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.1998.11949821>

Kaplan, R., & Talbot, J. F. (1988). Ethnicity and preference for natural settings: A review and recent findings. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 15(1–2), 107–117. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0169-2046\(88\)90019-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/0169-2046(88)90019-9)

LaVeist, T., Pollack, K., Thorpe, R., Jr., Fesahazion, R., & Gaskin, D. (2011). Place, not race: Disparities dissipate in southwest Baltimore when blacks and whites live under similar conditions. *Health Affairs*, 30(10), 1880–1887. <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2011.0640>

Lee, K. J., Casper, J., Powell, R., & Floyd, M. F. (2022). African Americans' outdoor recreation involvement, leisure satisfaction, and subjective well-being. *Current Psychology*, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-03905-2>

Lee, K. J., & Scott, D. (2016). Bourdieu and African Americans' park visitation: The case of cedar hill state park in Texas. *Leisure Sciences*, 38(5), 424–440. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2015.1127188>

Lee, K. J., & Scott, D. (2017). Racial discrimination and African Americans' travel behavior: The utility of habitus and vignette technique. *Journal of Travel Research*, 56(3), 381–392. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287516643184>

Miller, S. (2019). Park Access and Equity in a Segregated, Southern US City: A Case Study of Tallahassee. *FL. Environmental Justice*, 12(3), 85–91. <https://doi.org/10.1089/env.2018.0026>

Mowatt, R. A., French, B. H., & Malebranche, D. A. (2013). Black/female/body hypervisibility and invisibility: A Black feminist augmentation of feminist leisure research. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 45(5), 644–660. <https://doi.org/10.18666/jlr-2013-v45-i5-4367>

O'Brien, W. E. (2015). *Landscapes of exclusion: State parks and Jim Crow in the American South*. University of Massachusetts Press.

Paulson, D. (1982). Stay out, the water's fine: Desegregating municipal swimming facilities in St. Petersburg, Florida. *Tampa Bay History*, 4(2), 1–14. <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory/vol4/iss2/3>

Pinckney, H. P., Mowatt, R. A., Outley, C., Brown, A., Floyd, M. F., & Black, K. L. (2018). Black spaces/white spaces: Black lives, leisure, and life politics. *Leisure Sciences*, 40(4), 267–287. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2018.1454361>

Powell, R. A. (2021). Who is responsible for normalizing Black bodies in White spaces? *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 39(1), 171–174. <https://doi.org/10.18666/JPRA-2020-10637>

Retzlaff, R. (2021). Desegregation of city parks and the civil rights movement: The case of Oak Park in Montgomery, Alabama. *Journal of Urban History*, 47(4), 715–752. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009644219877636>

Root, T. (2017). Changing the face of National Parks. *National Geographic*. <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/02/diversity-in-national-parks/>

Schwartz, A., & Corkery, M. R. (2011). Barriers to participation among underrepresented populations in outdoor programs. *Recreational Sports Journal*, 35(2), 130–144.

Sene-Harper, A., Mowatt, R. A., & Floyd, M. F. (2022). A people's future of leisure studies: Political cultural black outdoors experiences. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 40(1), 9–23. <https://doi.org/10.18666/JPRA-2021-11006>

Sharaievska, I., Stodolska, M., & Floyd, M. F. (2014). *Discrimination in leisure contexts. In race, ethnicity, and leisure* (pp. 177–190). Human Kinetics Publishers Inc.

Shores, K. A., Scott, D., & Floyd, M. F. (2007). Constraints to outdoor recreation: A multiple hierarchy stratification perspective. *Leisure Sciences*, 29(3), 227–246. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400701257948>

Soergel, Matt. (2018). Manhattan Beach: A resort for African-Americans once flourished in Hanna Park Dunes. *Florida Times Union*. www.jacksonville.com/news/20180504/manhattan-beach-resort-for-african-americans-once-flourished-in-hanna-park-dunes

Tuch, S. A., & Martin, J. K. (Eds.). (1997). *Racial attitudes in the 1990s: Continuity and change*. Greenwood Publishing Group.

Versey, H. S. (2014). Centering perspectives on Black women, hair politics, and physical activity. *American Journal of Public Health*, 104(5), 810–815. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2013.301675>

Weber, J., & Sultana, S. (2012). Why do so few minority people visit National Parks? Visitation and the accessibility of “America’s Best Idea.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 103(3), 437–464. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00045608.2012.689240>

Weyeneth, R. R. (2005). The architecture of racial segregation: The challenges of preserving the problematical past. *The Public Historian*, 27(4), 11–44. <https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2005.27.4.11>

Wiltse, J. (2007). *Contested waters: A social history of swimming pools in America*. Univ of North Carolina Press.

Xiao, X., Lee, K. J., & Larson, L. R. (2022). Who visits US national parks (and who doesn’t)? A national study of perceived constraints and vacation preferences across diverse populations. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 53(3), 404–425. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0022216.2021.1899776>

Yuen, F. (2018). “*We danced around the circle*”: Feminist standpoint theories and turning old stories into something new. In *Feminisms in Leisure Studies* (pp. 102–125). Routledge.

Publisher’s Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Springer Nature or its licensor (e.g. a society or other partner) holds exclusive rights to this article under a publishing agreement with the author(s) or other rightsholder(s); author self-archiving of the accepted manuscript version of this article is solely governed by the terms of such publishing agreement and applicable law.