# Neoliberal Ideologies in Outdoor Adventure Education: Barriers to Social Justice and Strategies for Change

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## Executive Summary

Outdoor adventure education utilizes expeditions and experiential education to provide students with opportunities for personal growth. However, by selling the possibility of adventure and character development, outdoor adventure education organizations unknowingly entangle the field with neoliberal ideologies. Neoliberalism is a political and economic ideology that promotes decentralization of governance, the rule of law, individual rights, and a free market. Despite its prevalence in the literature of related fields, outdoor adventure education scholars seldomly address neoliberalism, especially its effect on the field's social justice efforts. In this paper, we examine how outdoor adventure education's subscription to neoliberal principles, most notably individual rights and the free market, inhibits the field's attempts to contribute to social justice.

Social justice is a process that seeks to unearth the institutional and systemic roots of injustice to work toward greater social equity. Institutions working toward social justice must disentangle from elements of a dominating neoliberal system that actively perpetuates social inequities. By understanding neoliberalism's influence, the outdoor adventure education field can become a leader for social justice by identifying the problems, and subsequent inequities, associated with neoliberalism. However,

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if outdoor adventure education hopes to progress beyond the oppressive structures imposed by neoliberal ideologies, we argue that the field needs to critique its current political, economic, and pedagogical practices. Outdoor adventure education organizations must embrace their role in developing citizens for a more just society by taking systematic and collective action. In an effort to make a tangible contribution, we offer potential strategies for mitigating the effects of neoliberalism and advancing social justice efforts in outdoor adventure education.

# Background

Outdoor adventure education (OAE) developed as an educational approach in the 1940s to help youth build skills to grow into well-rounded citizens who could contribute to a more just democratic society (Breunig, 2008; James, 1995). To meet this aim, OAE programs often use intentionally designed programming through expeditions and in outdoor settings to facilitate group and individual developmental experiences over multiple days or weeks (McKenzie, 2003; Rose & Paisley, 2012). Examples of OAE programs in the U.S. include wilderness expedition-based summer camps, Scouting, NOLS, Outward Bound, and other higher education and nonprofit programs (Breunig, 2008). Many OAE organizations consider their programs to be opportunities for character development (Itin, 1999).

Kurt Hahn, the founder of Outward Bound, had a significant influence on the direction of early OAE programming (Breunig, 2008). Hahn believed that meaningful educational experiences should prepare young people to stand up for justice in the face of tyranny and fight for democratic values (Itin, 1999; James, 1995). Contemporary educators have continued to see OAE as a setting where youth can develop meaningful skills, but as societal norms have shifted, critics have called for OAE to adapt to society's changing needs and changing populations (Warren et al., 2014). A predominant complaint from critical scholars is that OAE caters to students from privileged backgrounds and does not provide equitable learning opportunities for the broader population (Rose & Paisley, 2012; Warren et al., 2014). While serving a specific population is not inherently problematic, we argue that such exclusive programming, whether intentional or not, serves as a potential symbol of a distinctly neoliberal influence on the field.

Past efforts to work toward equity in OAE have focused on creating greater access to programming or have identified discrepancies between existing practices and social justice (e.g., Warren et al., 2014); however, they often fail to address the role of neoliberal ideologies in preventing the field from changing. Further, although some literature about neoliberal's influence on OAE exists (e.g., Beames, Mackie, & Atencio, 2019; Roberts, 2012), scholars and practitioners have not adequately addressed neoliberalism's effect on the field's social justice efforts or provided suggestions for how to move forward. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is two-fold: 1) to identify how neoliberal ideologies manifest in OAE and, subsequently, have influenced the aims of OAE and the pedagogy used to meet these aims, and 2) to propose strategies for overcoming

neoliberalism's effects on social justice efforts. We begin by discussing neoliberalism and social justice broadly. We then describe how neoliberal ideologies have influenced (and continue to influence) OAE through a discussion of character development as an outcome and common pedagogical practices used in OAE programming. Following this critique, we suggest strategies for change by explaining how existing structures in the field can be leveraged to create the broad scale action needed to enhance equity in OAE.

## Neoliberalism and Social Justice

Neoliberalism is a political and economic ideology that favors the restoration of traditional class power, decentralization of governance, the rule of law, individual rights, and a free market (Harvey, 2005). The exact origins of neoliberalism have been debated; some scholars believe neoliberal theory came to be in the late 1940s and early 1950s as the USA grappled with post-war economics (Foucault, Senellart, & de France, 2008). Others believe it developed from a number of regulatory changes championed by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the early 1980s (Harvey, 2005). Broadly, these changes made by Thatcher and Reagan deemphasized federal power, emphasized individual freedoms, and promoted the supposed power of market ideology (Hamann, 2009). Neoliberalism has been expanded conceptually in recent years to become a seemingly common and generalized critique of political economy (Giroux, 2015). In its new conception, neoliberalism is far from a passive, slow-moving political economic development; instead, it is an intentional process of class restoration of the elites, maintaining and increasing political economic inequality (Harvey, 2005).

Neoliberal agendas almost never play out as initially outlined in theory, a theme well-documented throughout history (Harvey, 2005). Instead, implementations of neoliberalism allow problematic and unjust dominant values to systemically influence all aspects of society (Giroux, 2015). Neoliberal supporters believe that spreading power and decision-making to the masses makes the political process slow and unnecessarily complicated and instead favor the decentralization of collective and governmental power, with increased power allocated to experts and corporations, which is a strategy that fundamentally undermines a democratic system (Harvey, 2005). This decentralization allows for the supposedly free market—that rarely accounts for "externalities" that brutalize already-marginalized peoples, economies, and environments—to drive decision-making (Hamann, 2009). Subsequently, in a neoliberal environment, individual consumers have the power to make purchasing decisions that ultimately influence economic and political spheres (Hamann, 2009).

Neoliberal values are often implemented globally; however, they also influence all aspects of culture, with wide-ranging racial, gendered, and environmental ramifications (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001; Giroux, 2015; Harvey, 2005). For example, neoliberal ideology has infiltrated the education system in the form of standardized curricula and tests that do not account for the influence of identities and culture on learning (Stanley, 2007). We argue that by selling the opportunity for adventure and character development, OAE organizations entangle the field with damaging aspects of neoliberalism (Hales, 2006; Loynes, 1998; 2002; Roberts, 2012) in ways that prevent the field from fully engaging in efforts that seek to unearth the institutional and systemic roots of injustice.

Social justice is the recognition of, and processes to resolve, inequities based on systems of power that privilege specific identities and groups over others (Bell, 2016). Due to the many cultural and contextual definitions of social justice, describing how neoliberalism and social justice intersect and conflict can be challenging and vary greatly (Stanley, 2007). At a basic level, social justice is neither an outcome or a process alone; instead, social justice is a process of working toward an equitable society across social, educational, political, and economic domains (Bell, 2016). Social justice-oriented practices are intended to disrupt existing conditions by identifying social structures rooted in culture, politics, and the economy that perpetuate inequity.

Social justice has become widely discussed in academic literature across a variety of disciplines, with more recent increasing attention in the OAE literature (e.g., Breunig, 2017; Martin, 1999; Rogers, Taylor, & Rose, 2019; Rose & Paisley, 2012; Warren, 2005; Warren et al., 2014). Similarly, social justice efforts have also become a more frequent topic among OAE practitioners. For example, a review of the program at national associations' annual conferences will reveal numerous educational workshops focused on diversity and social justice-related topics (i.e., AORE, 2019). However, even with an increase in attention, working toward a broadly defined notion of social justice for the field requires an analysis of OAE within the larger (neoliberal) political, economic, and cultural landscapes in which it operates. Rose and Cachelin (2013), when considering the role of global political economic trends on outdoor education, advise that "unmasking oppression as an explicit outdoor/experiential education goal calls on us to simply take a broader view of our own roles in globalized socioenvironmental system and attend to those at broad scales" (p. 6). These authors suggest that in order to affect real change, the OAE field must acknowledge its role within oppressive structures.

We argue that the contemporary OAE field has failed to situate itself within this broader system. In doing so, the field has largely unacknowledged neoliberal pressures that continue to limit its ability to challenge hegemonic norms that perpetuate inequitable participation in learning opportunities (Beames et al., 2019). If OAE organizations hope to both identify and account for neoliberal influences, while also implementing strategies for social justice, there needs to be a plan for embracing the field's role in developing citizens for a more just society.

## Neoliberal Ideologies in OAE

Situated at the intersection of economic, cultural, and educational domains, neoliberal ideologies have influenced the OAE field through the standardization, privatization, and commodification of curriculum (Roberts, 2012), which we argue subsequently inhibits the spread of social justice efforts in OAE. In this paper, we specifically focus on the OAE field's adherence to the free market and individualism, which, in many ways, resemble main tenants of capitalism (Hall, 2011). In the following sections, we discuss how neoliberalism has shaped the OAE field into an industry that sells character education as a standardized commodity to the individual and depoliticized consumer.

### The Character Development "Industry"

In an effort to remain viable in a neoliberal market, the OAE field has intensified its focus on outcomes-based programming (Loynes, 1998). Take for example, this statement made by an OAE program director: "We are not a social justice organization.

That's not what parents are paying for." As suggested by this administrator, OAE programs sell experiences to participants, and more often, to the parents of participants, with an understanding of what they "are paying for"—certain outcomes deemed to be useful and desirable. Both the OAE organization and consumer are participating in and have been influenced by neoliberal ideologies through the implicit understanding of OAE's marketed instrumental purpose (Roberts, 2012). This instrumental perspective is similar to that which is easily identifiable in mainstream classroom education as the standardization of curriculum, instruction, and evaluation (Hall, 2011; Harvey, 2005).

A large portion of OAE research has focused on demonstrating the effects of course participation on certain outcomes, thus demonstrating its instrumental nature. For example, in a seminal meta-analysis, Hattie, Marsh, Neill, and Richards (1997) suggested that OAE experiences provide students with outcomes that have a lasting effect in their lives. However, while demonstration of OAE's usefulness may support scholarly research and help legitimize the field, some critics question the unwavering value of outcomes-based research alone and suggest that such a focus essentializes the OAE experience (Rea, 2008; Warren & Loeffler, 2000). Others problematize this practice, suggesting that as a result, OAE has complacently assumed character development to be an essential outcome without considering how such claims impact programming (e.g., Brookes, 2003a; 2003b). We argue that the assumption of character development as a necessary outcome not only essentializes the OAE experience, but also demonstrates an implicit subscription to neoliberal ideologies by turning these experiences into economic transactions aimed at self-enhancement (Foucault et al., 2008).

Standardization of OAE programming is perhaps one of the most prominent results of the common focus on character development. Some scholars suggest that as OAE programming has become more standardized, OAE programs have become more like products with predictable outcomes (Loynes, 1998; 2002; Roberts, 2012). While identifying outcomes can help determine program effectiveness, up until recently (e.g., Meerts-Brandsma, Sibthorp, & Rochelle, 2019), very little outcomes-based research has considered how a program might influence participants from marginalized demographics (Roberts, 2012; Rose & Paisley, 2012). Proponents of a free-market economy argue that businesses adapt to the needs of the people, thereby satisfying all; however, the reality is that those with means—financial resources and access—most directly shape management and business decisions (Hall, 2011). If high fees prevent certain people from participating, and if consumer demand drives programming design, it would follow that these costs also limit whose input OAE programs respond to and designed for. Without reconceptualization, OAE programming may continue to primarily respond to the demands of more privileged student demographics (Rose & Paisley, 2012), which may ultimately lead to a misalignment of the field in such a way that further inhibits social justice efforts and OAE's potential contribution to a more just society (Liboro, 2015).

Despite OAE programming's potential to contribute to a more just society (Itin, 1999; James, 1995), OAE organizations, like many other businesses, have financial bottom lines that may dictate their actions. Furthermore, many OAE organizations may be especially vulnerable to the grasps of neoliberalism, as the viability of their business models are deeply ingrained within the broader economic climate of individual consumerism (Giroux, 2015; Harvey, 2005). This dependence aligns well with the OAE

administrator's statement that was previously shared; programming is driven by the consumer. Additionally, some OAE organizations, like many other not-for-profits, may rely on alumni or donor generosity for financial viability, potentially influencing these organizations to remain politically neutral to avoid pushing an ideological agenda that may not be endorsed by donors (Baldridge, 2014). If this is the case, we argue that OAE organizations may continue to struggle to more meaningfully contribute toward social justice efforts, as social justice is political. The previous arguments, while problematizing the role of outcomes-driven programming, ultimately address neoliberalism's effects on the individual consumer and how OAE programs unknowingly work against the field's ability to engage in social justice work.

## Pedagogy for the Individual

As the U.S. began to more fully subscribe to neoliberal political and economic imperatives, there was an increased focus on of the rights of individuals, especially in the ways people invested in their future (Foucault et al., 2008; Hall, 2011; Harvey, 2005). Simultaneously, dominant cultural values in the US have systemically shifted toward a culture that desires adventures that provide feelings of risk (Bell, 2017). We argue that individuality, especially that expressed through a consumer-driven market for self-improvement, continues to influence the aims of OAE programming and the pedagogical approaches used to deliver these pre-established outcomes.

In a neoliberal state, the OAE student becomes an anonymous consumer, void of their unique characteristics and backgrounds (Roberts, 2012). The depoliticizing of participants' experiences and implementation of standardized programing leads OAE organizations to make the assumption that a one-size-fits-all approach will work (Loynes, 1998; 2002; Roberts, 2012). By making this assumption, OAE programming is subscribing to neoliberal ideologies that ultimately do not account for the systemic barriers that prevent culturally responsive or sustaining pedagogy (Roberts, 2012). Further, if prospective OAE participants are only viewed as individual consumers, not only will privileged consumer-driven demands for certain experiences continue to dictate program offerings, potential participants from marginalized social identities may continue to be excluded from and under-valued, leaving OAE a privileged space (Rose & Paisley, 2012).

We argue that if OAE is hoping to provide more equitable developmental experiences, the field must re-examine how neoliberal ideologies influence programming in ways that further marginalize certain groups of people. In the following section, we identify four areas (risk, group experiences, facilitation, and unique social environment) through which we argue neoliberal ideologies have influenced and created inequitable OAE experiences. In making these arguments, we recognize the potential for an over-attribution of certain program characteristics to neoliberal ideologies, which is a critique that has been raised against critical research that focuses on neoliberalism (Hardin, 2014). For example, certain programs may not have a focus on the group experience simply because there is no prior existence of intact groups, which from their perspective, may lessen the need to focus on group-related goals in programming. However, we contend that focusing on the individual, similar to the other examples of neoliberal ideologies at play in OAE, closely aligns with the more instrumental purposes of experiences that participants pay for in the pursuit of self-enhancement (Foucault et al., 2008; Harvey, 2005; Roberts, 2012).

*Risk*

Continued use of risk as a primary pedagogical tool in OAE may detract from the power of OAE programming. While not a new argument (e.g., Brown & Fraser, 2009), risk used as a pedagogical tool further perpetuates inequities for certain groups. A move away from risk would disrupt the status quo and undermine the platform on which OAE has anecdotally relied upon (e.g., Walsh & Golins, 1976) and consumers have demanded (Bell, 2017; Brown & Fraser, 2009). Further, a focus on risk in OAE supports an image of rugged individualism that resembles imperialistic and colonial narratives, many of which relate well to neoliberal ideologies, and that are contrary to the focus on community necessitated by social justice (Rose & Paisley, 2012; Warren, 2012). Since the assertion that all OAE programming relies on risk-taking would be essentializing the pedagogical strategies, it is also important to note that some programs conceptualize risk differently (i.e. emotional versus physical), while others focus on pedagogical strategies altogether in favor of more community or group-focused approaches (e.g., Breunig, 2017).

*Group Experiences*

A re-centering of the group experience and community may be helpful if OAE programs aim to offer experiences that develop citizens working toward a more just society. Scholars consistently highlight group dynamics as integral to the OAE experience (e.g., McKenzie, 2003), yet minimal literature focuses on leveraging the group experiences as social justice-related learning. Some scholars advocate that more strongly connecting students to their peers and the environment would help youth shift their attention from themselves to their communities (Hales, 2006; McKenzie, 2003; Rose & Cachelin, 2013). McKenzie and Blenkinsop (2006) draw upon the collective work of Noddings and Gilligan to suggest that an "ethic of care" become a more widely used pedagogical strategy, noting that its use should center on caring beyond the "close other," and instead focus on communities. Such a shift undoubtedly stands contrary to the implicit neoliberal ideologies that encourage individual success, describe individual demise as the individual's fault, and reward efforts for self-enhancement (Foucault et al., 2008; Hall, 2011). Since individual consumers purchase their OAE experiences, a focus on others would detract from the personal development they were promised and paid for (Hall, 2011). Therefore, we argue that a focus on individual development at the expense of the group experience is a manifestation of neoliberal ideologies in OAE.

*Facilitation*

Debriefs and facilitated conversations are common approaches used to help students make meaning of their experiences and are often deemed critical to an effective OAE experience (e.g., Walsh & Golins, 1976); however, these approaches, if not intentionally nuanced, risk perpetuating a focus on only certain outcomes through use of standardized facilitation prompts and techniques (Loynes, 2002). For example, a formulaic discussion about leadership may inadvertently focus on one specific cultural view of leadership, while downplaying other potential types of leadership. Therefore, without careful consideration, this facilitation strategy may only meet the needs of certain groups of people (those who have historically had access to OAE programming; Rose & Paisley, 2012). In these instances, the debrief becomes more like a form of direct instruction that supports hegemonic norms more so than actually allowing students

to negotiate the meaning of their experiences (Brown, 2004). For example, without nuanced facilitation that moves beyond a standardized approach, a White woman from an affluent urban background and a Black man from a poor rural background are assumed to glean similar meanings from the same experience, despite the many ways in which the intersection of their identities influences the way they experience the world (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Warren et al., 2014). Without consideration of students' backgrounds, OAE risks continuing being a place of privilege (Rose & Paisley, 2012). Further, a primary focus on individual reflection limits the potential learning resulting from group reflections and dialogue (Brown, 2009). Therefore, given the diversity of students' backgrounds and needs, this prescriptive approach to facilitation may further draw upon neoliberal's individualization and therefore perpetuate injustices and assumptions about who belongs in OAE (Rose & Paisley, 2012).

### *Novel Social Environment*

Another pedagogical claim of OAE is the necessity of OAE programming as a novel social environment (Walsh & Golins, 1976). Others also suggest that OAE programming has the potential to be a microcosm of society that can lead to meaningful and relevant learning opportunities for social life beyond the course experiences (Hunt, 1995). However, if the societal issues and the socio-historical implications of students' identities and lived experiences are not considered, OAE loses its potential as a microcosm of society (Roberts, 2012). The influence of consumer demand, supported by neoliberal ideologies, moves OAE curriculum and pedagogy further from the acknowledgment of sociohistorical issues by de-politicizing the OAE student (Roberts, 2012). In doing so, this practice may cause continued marginalization through the stripping of fundamental aspects of the group's diversity and the failure to recognize the effects of institutional oppression (Rose & Paisley, 2012; Warren, 2012). We argue that continued use of OAE experiences as a place apart, subscribes to neoliberal ideologies of individualism, which supports hegemonic cultural norms and inhibits the field's social justice efforts.

## Creating Change through Systematic Collective Action

Just as neoliberal ideologies have become an implicit aspect of OAE, so too can social justice. One way to counteract the damaging effects of neoliberalism could be through more intentionally and systematically spreading social justice ideas and practices, including those that encourage reflection on and changes to practices influenced by neoliberalism (Liboro, 2015; Ratts & Wood, 2010). We argue that doing so will require the various OAE entities and professionals to acknowledge the influence of neoliberal ideologies, while at the same time demonstrate support for and implement changes through social justice-oriented practices. However, unlike OAE's adoption of many other ideas and pedagogies (Brown, 2009), adopting an idea such as social justice, will likely not come without obstacles (Warren at al., 2014).

Some of the earliest mentions of social justice and equity in OAE literature date back nearly 25 years (e.g., Warren, 1989), yet conversations about social justice have struggled to progress into action (Warren et al., 2014). Rose and Paisley (2012) suggest, "Experiential education, as a metaphoric practice, can be ideally suited to model and facilitate social justice and should work to do so" (p.151). Therefore, as a specific type of experiential education, OAE should aim to facilitate social justice by striving to

be more accessible and culturally responsive by leveraging aspects of programming with the potential to foster acceptance, teamwork, and compassion. Despite the field's potential to more fully enact social justice efforts, we argue that not only may there be a lack of support from all members of the field, there also continues to be areas of disconnect among various stakeholders and entities within the field.

Most ideas tend to spread in similar and predictable ways (Rogers, 2003). Once a new idea emerges, potential adopters learn about the idea and seek information to determine how it applies to them. Both the sources of information and the ease of accessing the information may be critical to the adoption of certain ideas (Ratts & Wood, 2010). We argue that there has been a breakdown in the spread of information about social justice that is necessary to create a broad, field-wide shift and that establishing communication networks with opinion leaders may be instrumental to more collective action that addresses this breakdown.

Identifying the critical opinion leaders and communication channels may be one effective strategy for supporting such a broad-sweeping approach to the adoption of social justice (Rogers, 2003; Valente & Davis, 1999). Without robust diffusion networks, the spread and implementation of social justice in OAE will continue to be a slow and effortful process (Ratts & Wood, 2010). Fortunately, the OAE field is comprised of a richly diverse formal and informal network of professionals that form countless communication channels that provide the structures necessary for the rapid spread and adoption of social justice (Rogers, 2003). Opinion leaders are individuals with influencing power in social groups and organizations across the field and critical components in communication networks (Rogers, 2003). We suggest that more intentional use of the professional networks and opinion leaders already in place, such as national associations, higher education programs, exemplary organizations, organizational administrators, and instructors, the field may more effectively embrace social justice despite the underlying effects of neoliberalism. In the following sections, we identify potential areas for improvement and provide brief explanations of how each of the above-mentioned networks and opinion leaders can contribute to the spread of social justice.

Academics and practitioners in the OAE field have been suggesting strategies for working toward social justice for decades; however, an information gaps exists. For example, field staff instructing courses may struggle to access academically generated information concerning social justice-oriented practices given the often high cost of access to peer-reviewed journals (Lawson, Sanders, & Smith, 2015). Conversely, scholars may struggle to learn of or engage with social justice-oriented practices created by field instructors. This disconnect between scholar and practitioner creates an information gap that is exacerbated by neoliberalism's influence on academic journal publishing (Lawson, Sanders, & Smith, 2015). Furthermore, it is also likely that social justice-oriented practices developed by specific organizations and programs may not be implemented by others organizations in the field if the knowledge is not easily available or systematically spread (Warren et al., 2014). We argue that in order for knowledge about social justice practices to spread across the field, information must be communicated more systematically among academics and practitioners alike.

National associations are critical to the spread of social justice because of their ability to connect academics and professional from across the OAE field. There are three distinct national associations that OAE organizations and universities may look

to for guidance and best practices, including the Association of Experiential Education (AEE), Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education (AORE), and Wilderness Education Association (WEA). These associations were created as a way to build more cohesion and consistency across the field with memberships that span the many sub-disciplines within OAE. Memberships in these associations range from first-year practitioners to seasoned instructors, from pre-service outdoor facilitators to university faculty (i.e., AEE, n.d.). These associations often host annual national conferences for their members, featuring keynote speakers, educational sessions, and research symposia. We suggest that it is because of these associations' visibility and wide-reaching contact across the field that they play an essential role in the spread of social justice. A quick look at any one of these associations' mission statements, websites, or national conference program agendas clearly demonstrate their commitment to creating greater equity across the field. For example, AEE lists social justice as a core value, stating, "Supporting people of diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and cultures is an integral part of developing successful experiential education programming (AEE, n.d.). These large national associations have the potential to function as opinion leading entities or change agents responsible for influencing the spread of social justice across the field (Ratts & Wood, 2010).

In similar ways to national associations, universities and college outdoor recreation and education programs are integral to helping the field disentangle from neoliberalism and embracing social justice because of their potential wide-spread influence (Warren, 2002). These programs have the responsibility of providing many instructors a first glimpse into the professional OAE field by exposing them to an array of theory, pedagogy, and experiences that will prepare them to be competent leaders in the field. Among the numerous necessary competencies, pre-service outdoor educators must become familiar with inclusive practices and how the OAE field can promote social justice (Breunig, 2017; Warren, 2002). Because of their influence on the future practices of pre-professionals, university faculty have the potential to serve as opinion leaders in the spread of social justice-oriented practices (Frazer, 2009; Warren, 2002). As such, we contend that university programs must play a vital role in preparing instructors to advocate for social justice through their work and can serve as invaluable change agents in the diffusion of social justice in OAE.

Unfortunately, even with information about social justice widely-available through professional associations and higher education programs, organizations and practitioners often must still be persuaded to adopt social justice practices (Ratts & Wood, 2010). A significant portion of this persuasion depends on understanding the benefits and shortcomings of integrating the idea into their current practice (Rogers, 2003). For example, when a person feels that adopting an idea has more to offer them than their current situation, they are more likely to make an affirmative decision and vice versa (Ratts & Wood, 2010). The OAE field is just now starting to take noticeable actions toward the adoption of social justice through efforts to increase access and make programming more accessible and culturally responsive to a greater diversity of potential participants (Warren et al., 2014). This limited action may be because OAE organizations and individuals are unclear about the potential concrete benefits of adopting such practices or believe access to programming to be the only inequity.

As the implementation of social justice-oriented practices often conflicts with the concepts of individual rights and the free market, implicit adoption of neoliberal ide-

ologies may also be another likely reason for the slow decision-making process (Harvey, 2005). As a result, neoliberal ideologies may be creating substantial challenges for organizations to see the benefits of taking more intentional steps toward social justice (Liboro, 2015). Despite these barriers, seeing other organizations work toward and successfully implement social justice-oriented practices may be both useful and motivating for those organizations unsure about change (Rogers, 2003). In these instances of uncertainty, administrators that need guidance may turn to organizations that are exemplars in the field.

Organizations can be exemplary for several reasons, including their historical and global presence, as well as their acute focus on providing cutting-edge programming. The OAE field is fortunate to have several larger organizations, as well as organizations engaged in cutting-edge, equity-promoting programming. For example, large organizations such as the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) and Outward Bound (OB) are often cited as model organizations because of their size, history, and practices (Breunig, 2008). Many smaller organizations may turn to these exemplars for direction and best practices when considering pedagogy and risk management (Meerts-Brandsma, Furman, & Sibthorp, 2017). As a result of their status and visibility, NOLS and OB are already opinion leaders in the broader OAE field. Based on their opinion leader status, we believe that if these organizations focused more explicitly on social justice, other organizations may likely follow in similar ways. In many cases, these organizations already have begun to demonstrate their commitment to diversity and inclusion through the use of specific staff positions focused on diversity and inclusion, as well as the inclusion of diversity and inclusion as core organizational values (NOLS, n.d.; Outward Bound, 2018). If the field's efforts toward social justice are to become more meaningful and lasting, larger organizations must recognize their role and take a more intentional stand by encouraging other organizations to engage in social justice work.

In addition to the larger organizations, many smaller, more regionally located organizations also could serve as social-justice opinion-leaders in OAE. While not opinion leaders because of their size, we believe these smaller organizations are exemplars for social justice in OAE, as they have taken intentional steps toward enhancing equity in their programming. For example, Wilderness Inquiry, a Minnesota-based organization specializes in providing inclusive programming for people of all backgrounds, and has begun to focus on providing experiences for youth from urban areas across the country (Wilderness Inquiry, 2019). As other examples, Out There Adventures and The Venture Out Project are recently established organizations focused on providing outdoor programming for people who identify with the LGBTQ community (Out There Adventures, n.d.; The Venture Out Project, n.d.). Similarly, cityWILD is another new organization focused on creating culturally responsive programming tailored toward serving members of different communities of color (cityWILD, 2019).

Helping all organizations implement social justice-oriented practices will be critical for collective action to occur; however, this is not an easy step. Once a person or organization has made the decision to adopt a new idea, they must put the new idea into action. For example, when OAE organizations decide to adopt social justice-oriented practices, administrators, managers, and instructors must create action plans, otherwise the idea is unlikely to move forward (Allison, 1999). This decision-making process can be the most challenging phase for organizations because it often requires significant compromises and adaptions to the specific needs or context it is being ap-

plied (Frambach & Schillewaert, 2002). In the context of OAE, each organization will likely need to implement and adapt social justice-oriented practices for their specific program and various stakeholders (e.g., administrators, the board of directors, staff, participants), while also staying within the parameters of their program purposes and organizational resources (Rogers, 2003).

Organizational changes are rarely the sole responsibility of those directly working with participants; instead, changes often occur as a result of a decision-making chain of command (Allison, 1999; Rogers, 2003). In many cases, administrators significantly impact the implementation of new ideas in the organizational setting, and are often the gatekeepers of practice, making them a critical element to the adoption of social justice-oriented practices (Allison, 1999; Theriault, 2017). Without support from administrators, the implementation of these practices may face unnecessary challenges (Allison, 1999) that impede their use by those working directly with participants and further prevent social justice-oriented changes.

One way that administrators can support organizational change is by engaging in routine program evaluations that focus on assessing norms, policies, and practices for the presence of neoliberal ideologies. These efforts might include evaluating the fee structures, examining the representation of diversity on the board of directors and staff, and critically assessing the intention, function, and impact of specific activities and the broader curriculum. Next, administrators should work to create organizational systems that support open lines of communication. For example, OAE organizations may benefit from introducing program-wide feedback and learning sessions intended to encourage conversations about what is being done at different levels of the organization to address inequities. These sessions may enable the creation, spread, and implementation of social-justice oriented practices throughout the organization and across the field. By strategically empowering opinion leaders, administrators can better educate their staff and give them the agency to make meaningful and lasting changes through the adoption of social justice-oriented practices. Administrators and instructors must remain hopeful that despite the challenging process of creating meaningful and lasting change, it is possible, but will take time and a sustained effort.

## Conclusion

Disentangling the OAE field from the pervasive effects of neoliberalism will be no small feat and will require all professionals and organizations to have a vested interest. Alas, acknowledging the fields' shortcomings will be painful and unsettling. Administrators and practitioners must move beyond a recusal of responsibility and accusations of nihilism to reflexively critique organizational and individual practices. Through this reflexive process, administrators and practitioners should take inventory of how their actions and organizational policies contribute to or fight against inequities in their programs and the broader OAE field. Administrators can no longer deny that their organizations are not social justice organizations; as to not be working toward equity is to be implicitly subscribing to the oppressive effects of neoliberalism.

This paper pointedly identifies neoliberalism's effect on the OAE field's efforts toward social justice by identifying areas in OAE that are most influenced by neoliberalism. In the spirit of contributing to the systematic spread of social justice, we also outline essential channels of communication for sustaining further social justice ef-

forts that include the use of existing structures, institutions, and opinion leaders. We argue that without clear steps forward, the field is less likely to change in ways that work toward social justice. OAE was once deemed an educational innovation that met the needs of a changing society and contributed to a more just society (James, 1995). Contemporary OAE organizations should heed our call and once again work for social justice; there is no time for complacency.

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