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**An Evaluation of Latino Outdoors San Diego
Fostering Latinx Connections with the Outdoors**

By

Cassandra Castillo

B.A., University of San Diego, 2005

Plan B Project

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master's of Science in Natural Science in Natural Science Education
in the Science and Mathematics Teaching Center and the Haub School
at the
University of Wyoming
2022

Laramie, Wyoming

Master's Committee:

Dr. Lilia Soto, Associate Professor, Chair

Dr. Kate Welsh Associate Professor, Outside Member

Dr. Frieda Knobloch, Professor and American Studies Program Director, Third Member

Dr. Mellissa Linton, Assistant Professor, Arizona State University, External Faculty

Abstract

The American environmental and conservation movement of the mid-nineteenth century to early twentieth century created a monolithic outdoor narrative which has made green spaces and outdoor recreation inaccessible for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Community-based organizations are emerging to address the critical need for underrepresented communities to have access to the outdoors by diversifying the outdoor narrative, breaking down real and perceived barriers, and creating bridges between institutional outdoor organizations and historically marginalized people. This thesis examines how Latino Outdoors San Diego (LOSD), a chapter of the national organization Latino Outdoors, creates connections in the outdoors with their participants.

I approach this research and discourse through an auto-ethnographic lens to ground my work. The literature review aims to provide an understanding of the limitations of literature, offers a theoretical framework to critically interpret the historical disenfranchisement of BIPOC in the American environmental and conservation movement, illuminates the shifts occurring to expand the dominant outdoor narrative, and provides a foundation for my investigation and analysis of Latino Outdoors' programmatic structure. Through an interdisciplinary approach, I maintain the authenticity and validity of my work as a scholar and activist.

The findings are based on a survey, including both quantitative and qualitative questions, which allowed for an evaluation process to be employed to assess LOSD's programmatic performance. The interpretations of the impact LOSD is having on its participants' perceptions and experiences with the outdoors are guided by three emerging themes in the data including (a) connection to self; (b) connection to place; and (c) connection to people. I undertook this study with the intent to contribute to the emerging body of knowledge of the experiences and

perceptions of Latinx peoples in the outdoors and provide LOSD information that may help guide and inform future programmatic goals.

Keywords: Latino Outdoors, Storytelling, auto-ethnographic research, outdoor recreation, interdisciplinary, Critical Race Theory

*Dedicated to my grandma Betsy, que en paz descansa, and all the abuelitas of this world-
human and more-than-human*

Acknowledgments

The essence of this project was seeded at an early age through the teachings and learnings I received from my grandmother, specifically in her yard filled with fruit trees, herbs, plants, and the freedom to explore within the chaotic and abundant ecosystem she nurtured. I learned early in life that nature provides beauty, solace, and adventure. Gracias to the plantitas and trees I met as a child. Through the comforting aromas, colors, medical powers, and sustenance shared, they sparked my love for nature and hold many of my cherished childhood memories.

From the University of Wyoming and Teton Science Schools: I would like to thank my committee, a powerhouse of mujeres: Lilia Soto, Kate Welsh, Frieda Knobloch, and Mellissa Linton. Thank you for the encouragement, guidance, patience, and reminders of the importance and validity of this project and my narrative. I am grateful for the new mentors and friendships I found in CC Aragon, Addie Dupree, Julia Spencer, Ana Houseal, and Sylvia Parker.

To my cohort Alex Martin, Daryl Aragon, Libby Graves, Gaby Thomas, Matt Bisk, and Emily Peters, thank you for the adventures, laughter, tears, and becoming family. To all the four-legged, winged, and plant friends of these new places I called home for two years, thank you for the lessons, grace, and endless smiles you offered my heart, body, and soul.

In my life I have experienced the most care and protection from the women surrounding me. Therefore, and foremost, I acknowledge the long line of women in my life and bloodline including my grandmother Betsy, mother Norma, tía Mary Cookie, tía Betha, tía Reina, Mama Anita, Chacha, and my sister Felisa, thank you for mothering, sharing life, and loving me and Nico unconditionally. To my sister Sasha, thank you for bringing humor to our lives. To my one and only, Nichole, thank you for choosing me as your mother and softening my ways of loving.

To my family members who have stood by and respected the women in our family, thank you for expressing and showing sensitivity and care. Uncle Bob, through your love of fishing and memories, my dad's good days lived on, thank you for sharing that connection and love with me. Tío Pichon, thank you for always being a rock, role model, and a home. Your art, murals, fruit trees, and Chicanoism have inspired creativity and activism from an early age. To my nephew Michael, thanks for teaching me patience and affection and sharing a passion for outdoor adventures. Alyssa and Ashton, thank you for the gift of being your Tía Raza.

For the maestras that expanded my world offering new perspectives, purpose, and spiritual connections including Evelyn Diaz, Viviana Enrique Acosta, and Nancy Rodriguez, thank you for creating loving spaces for growth and healing.

To my compas, chosen family, fellow brujx, and community who have helped expand ways of being, knowing, and radically loving. Thank you for challenging and encouraging me to embrace new language, leadership roles, and supporting my journey. Thank you to my special network of mujeres for helping me find words of expression and spending late night hours editing my work through this grad school journey. Andrea Gaspar, Leslie Quintanilla, Maria Celleri, Melli Linton, Alicia Lopez, Amrah Salomon, Caro Martinez, Carolina Correa, Gaby Koveats, Jill Linder, Julia Ris, Magda Ramirez, Mely Quiroz, Rebeca Lopez, Sarah Salcedo, Manuel Belmonte, Marco Guajardo, Mike Provencio, and Les Duncan, please celebrate yourselves, for this is a communal accomplishment.

To my Latino Outdoors familia, thank you for the collective empowerment, friendships, and joy you have brought into my life and our communities. You have flowered a path for sharing my love of the outdoors and amplified my voice to be heard and seen. Luis Villa and

Ruby Rodriguez mil gracias for your leadership, gentleness, and kindness. Jose, I am forever grateful for the vision you seeded for our comunidad y naturaleza.

Storytelling inspired and guided this work. To the storytellers (many of whom have already been mentioned): thank you for the wisdom, courage, entertainment, and lessons shared through your stories.

Finally, thank you to the Land and all who have shared camping, hiking, backpacking, biking, picnics, walks, ocean swims, gardening, plant and mushroom explorations, and the magic of storytelling, music, and dancing around an outdoor fire. I pray that we may continue to find joy and nurturing in the outdoors and succeed in our lucha for a more inclusive outdoors and healthy planeta. Que viva la Madre Tierra!

Preface

My love for the outdoors is grounded in my childhood experiences in my grandmother Betsy's backyard. Countless hours were spent climbing fruit trees, picking mulberries, and collecting flowers and leaves for non-edible soup concoctions made in my designated outdoor *molcajete*. I particularly remember marveling at the various plants my grandmother meticulously cared for and the many neighbors that stopped by to ask for cuttings, which they walked away holding preciously. At some point, I came to understand the medicinal value and reverence accorded to these plants and that there was order and intention behind the chaotic garden my grandmother cared for. Some of the trees and plants were older than me, my father, and even my grandmother. They held generational knowledge, and through generations of intimate relationships, knowledge was passed down.

My father, the son of the woman who influenced my love and spiritual connection with *la naturaleza*, was absent for most of my life. When he was present, unfortunately, he was hardly in a physical and mental state to teach me things. Yet, it was his absence and the fantasy of a relationship with him, and mostly the anger I felt at all the missed opportunities of camping, fishing, traveling, and recreational outdoor sports- all things he was passionate about that fueled my desire for exploring outdoor recreation. In my healing journey, I began to take charge of my narrative and create outdoor opportunities for myself and my daughter. I believe it not only helped me release the anger, take the initiative and claim autonomy in my own outdoor experience, but it created a sense of connection to the person I knew he once was. In short, my journey in the outdoors includes a search for him and a reclaiming of my relationship with the outdoors.

At some point, I stopped nurturing my connection with the natural world and engaging in outdoor recreational activities. I became a young mother during my first year of college. Fortunately, through my journey in parenting and love for my daughter, connections to the outdoors reemerged. Since then, there have been several moments that have influenced and strengthened my love for the outdoors. Many of these moments came from coordinating her birthday parties, attending other children's *piñatas*, *carne asadas*, and day trips to San Diego as we escaped the heat of the Imperial Valley to the cool San Diego shorelines- all moments of respite. It's an intentional time to get out of the house, spend it *afuera* with family and friends, and let the kids run free.

When my child Nichole (Nico) and I first moved to San Diego in 2003, it felt large and foreign. I was only familiar with a few outdoor spaces, like Mission Beach and a couple of parks close to the few families and friends we had around. As a single parent and undergraduate student living in a time before smartphones, resources for discovering outdoor spaces were limited. Our first home in San Diego, on the outskirts on the west side of the neighborhood known as Hillcrest, had a park within walking distance, a few blocks away. Still, I did not always feel comfortable among the more affluent white adjacent community which utilized the park.

On the days Nico and I visited our favorite beaches and parks on the bay to lay on the sand or grassy area to enjoy the fresh air, sun, and cold waters, we took an interest in observing people enjoying activities such as kayaking, surfing, and jet skiing. Though they caught our curiosity and amusement, these activities looked intimidating because we did not know anyone who engaged in them. Financially and culturally, these recreational activities were inequitable and non-inclusive. If programs were being offered connecting families and youth to the outdoors, accessible and welcoming to low-income people, the outreach efforts did not reach us.

San Diego County offers a vast amount of public green spaces—from beach fronts to city parks to urban trails that meander through canyons and mountain regions, offering a variety of recreational activities. According to San Diego’s Park and Recreation website (n.d.), they oversee 340 parks, 25 miles of shoreline from sunset cliffs to La Jolla, and approximately 40,000 acres of developed and undeveloped open space. Yet, many of these spaces felt inaccessible to me as a young, single Latina mother. The travelling distance to these green spaces, safety concerns, and unfamiliarity with the region and cultural, recreational activities felt especially intimidating as a new resident.

Though I eventually found confidence and the means through which to explore the outdoors, it came by way of community building and redefining what it meant and looked like to be *outdoorsy*. Storytelling, specifically by way of theatre and dance, became the pathway through which a sense of culture and deepening understanding of the human interdependence to nature empowered and reshaped my connection to the natural world. It helped me reflect, learn, and redefine my role as a mother and parenting skills. Storytelling sparked my curiosity about the more-than-human world. It sprouted the passion to engage in walks intentionally to seek solace and improve my well-being. Most importantly, it was the means through which memories of my grandmother's love and teachings of plants resurfaced and guided my understanding of the knowledge I already possessed and *re-membling* the organic relationship with the natural world that flowered as a child.

After completing my undergraduate studies in a private, predominantly white affluent university, the only meaningful mentorships and friendships I developed were with other people of color. The most profound experience and relationship during undergraduate school was befriending my mentor and theatre professor, Evelyn Diaz. Theatre, and most notably, *Teatro*

Campeño and *Theatre of the Oppressed* and its methodology stimulated critical thought of societal structures, injustices, as well as forms to engage in to reclaim and reimagine personal and communal realities. After graduating in 2005, I longed for cultural and spiritual practices to introduce and share with my child. I began searching for community centers and programs until one Sunday, Nichole and I walked into the *Centro Cultural de La Raza* (Centro) to watch a *Ballet Folklórico* performance, a Mexican traditional dance, put on by the *Ballet Folklórico en Aztlan* (BFA) dance company. The Centro, a Chicana/o community center in San Diego's Balboa Park, housed the BFA at that time. My heart was overjoyed and fascinated with the music, colors, and energy of the programming. The programming and community offered at the Centro were rich in culture, dance, family, music, and theatre. Our lives pivoted. We quickly immersed ourselves in programming and began to develop lifelong relationships, enriching our lives through *Ballet Folklórico*, *Danza Azteca*, and community theatre.

Theatre, specifically through the annual production of *The Night Sky*, written and directed by Viviana Enrique Acosta and Nancy Rodriguez, offered a new sense of belonging and connection with my ancestral roots as it “cracked open my genetic memory” (Enrique-Acosta, 2003). The play and teachings of *maestras* Viviana and Nancy have been so impactful that my daughter and I have participated in the play in one form or another for over 15 years. At the core of the theatre practice was a weaving of cultural traditions, storytelling, dance, and music embedded into the human interconnections with nature. Curiosity, a desire to connect with the land more intimately, and the opportunity to create experiences for myself and my child helped me embrace vulnerability and lean into the discomfort of finding people and expanding my ways of engaging in nature, *la naturaleza*, to reconnect and remember my cultural roots. *Mitelli Poblana*, *The Tree of Life* (Enrique-Acosta, 2010), another BFA annual production that

celebrates Cinco de Mayo and the cultural traditions of Puebla, Mexico, provided a source of motivation and commitment to rethinking what it means to be part of humanity and mutual aid efforts. As I accepted the responsibility, first as a dancer and then as a *flyer*, in the dance of the *Huahuas*¹, I took part in an Indigenous ceremony and committed to uplifting humanity or in *maestra* Viviana's words, to *aventar* (throw) ourselves forward, so our momentum raises the next person to their zenith.

Inspired by the Land pedagogy framing that was taught at the Centro, which spoke of living in harmony with the earth- *La Madre Tierra Sagrada*, giving back and honoring the land and our ancestors by maintaining dance, songs, and traditions, and caretaking it for the next seven generations -I began hiking to reawaken, deepen my relationship, and fall in sync with the natural world. I spent weekends traversing the trails at one of the most popular San Diego parks, Mission Trails, after being introduced to them by a coworker. In those days, I rarely saw anyone else who resembled me. However, I quickly noticed that I did not own the basic attire most wore on the trail, such as hiking boots, specialized shorts or pants, hats, and camel packs. The questioning glances made by some as they surveyed me on the trail did not go unnoticed, and they made me uncomfortable, to say the least. I often questioned whether I was doing it “right,” and I wondered if I was safe among people who did not share my brown skin and whether I *belonged*. Being outdoors was a mixture of joy and insecurity.

¹ The dance or ceremony of *el huahuas* is said to be a Totonac ritual to celebrate the cosmos and duality of death, in particular the sun during planting and harvesting seasons in the regions now known as Puebla and Veracruz, Mexico. To simulate the rotation of the sun, four dancers climb up a wooden pinwheel device or *cruceta* in the shape of a cross, using their own weight they begin to rotate forward gaining momentum (Cordoba Olivares, 1991). *Maestra* Viviana asks flyers and those assisting to *be in ceremony* for 30 days up until the performance. To *be in ceremony* means to take a vow of celibacy, sobriety, prayer, and maintain harmonious relationships throughout the preparation. Only flyers are allowed to touch the sacred *cruceta*, which means they build, dismantle, and pack it for transport themselves.

However, I pushed on because spending time hiking, running on the bayside boardwalks, and picnicking in new parks offered emotional healing, physical health, and a spiritual connection. I noticed spending increased time outside engaging in physical or leisure activities was bringing fulfillment in life and improving my parenting skills and relationships with my daughter, community, and the land. Spending time outdoors offered the space for healing intergenerational trauma and deepened my understanding of mutual aid. Eventually, I found a group of people who took me under their wing and introduced me to car camping, new hiking trails, and green spaces in southern California. They shared their gear and knowledge with both my daughter and I. Slowly, I began to take more initiative in seeking out more hiking trails and outdoor training. During one of the most challenging and breaking periods of motherhood, a camping trip with my daughter helped provide an environment for communication and healing. Without competing distractions and a neutral space, we were able to hear one another, rebuild trust and affection, and move forward. I listened to my intuition and went against the advice of my daughter's therapist, a kind and compassionate white woman who lacked the cultural competency to provide the best course of action. Nature and our ancestors held us and walked us through the difficult moment.

As a single Latinx² mother, my story echoes that of others. There are many other single Latinx mothers and daughters who would benefit from this type of support and healing practice rooted in environmental humanities, if accessible. I knew I needed to share my experiences and increase access for people who looked like me, could benefit from the healing nature of the outdoors, and relate to values and relationships experienced by simply being outdoors. Sharing

² I identify as Latinx, Latina, Chicax and Chicana and use them interchangeably. As a US born Mexican American and *fronteriza* (from the borderlands), the term Chicana(x) embodies my experience as a third-generation brown person in the US. Latina or the gender-neutral term Latinx, is descriptive of my association with the larger diverse Latin population in the US and beyond.

my love for the outdoors and the healing power of nature would become the role in which I could create networks for servicing and caretaking my communities.

Through various community organizing efforts, I began to learn of other narratives and the need in Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities for healing spaces and experiences. One incident of note that expanded my understanding and illuminated the need for culturally welcoming centers, greater access to public green spaces, and a reimagining of what it means to be in the outdoors was when Black and Brown queer members of the community searched for one another to find healing after the 2016 violent and homophobic attack on the Pulse Club in Orlando, Florida. Folks didn't want to gather at a bar, they wanted safe cultural spaces for free expression and time outdoors rooted in nature to cry, heal, and find moments of joy and solidarity. Barriers to public centers and green spaces became apparent quickly. There were concerns for safety due to race, gender, and sexual orientations. There were issues of access due to transportation and financial restraints. Green spaces, specifically, were inaccessible by public transportation and if available, travel times easily exceeded an hour. Grassroots actions were vital, and a few friends gathered around my dining table to birth the creation of the San Diego Queer and Trans People of Color Collective (SDQTPOC Colectivo). As part of the collective, I helped organize an annual art show, the first of its kind for the local community, which included performances and visual artists. I also facilitated executive board meetings on a biweekly basis, networked with local organizations, coordinated workshops on conflict resolution, and produced cultural events to build community through storytelling, self-defense instruction, alcohol-free dance parties, and vendor showcases. I transitioned out of the collective after two years because I realized I wanted to focus my energy on creating and sharing outdoor

experiences. With the experience and confidence gained from being part of SDQTPOC, I ventured to form Hike Camp Cassie and then Latino Outdoors San Diego (LOSD).

On my thirty-ninth birthday in 2017, I received an REI gift card with a handmade birthday card from close and dear friends. Written on the top left of the inside were the words “Hike Camp Cassie,” an offering of a title for the conception and establishment of my outdoor leadership journey. A close circle of friends composed of grassroots activists, social and environmental justice advocates, and critical thinkers, had a vision that combined my love for the outdoors and a critical community need to access and enjoy green spaces in San Diego. The motivation to expand my engagement with the outdoors and create spaces for exploration, healing, and nurturing relationships with the natural world with community gained a new sense of urgency. My role as a leader and advocate for the outdoors began to shift with the critical awareness for reclaiming outdoor narratives, redefining what it means to be outdoorsy, and addressing the barriers keeping BIPOC from accessible and enjoyable outdoor experiences. This role shift circled back to my childhood experiences and created a path to embody my grandmother's teachings and values of collective care and reverence for nature.

As community organizers and leaders invested in social and environmental justice issues affecting underrepresented groups in our communities, our personal mental health and the fostering of spaces centered on joy are at the forefront of our radical communal-care practices. It is well documented that spending time in nature supports wellness. Due to a variety of barriers, public green spaces in San Diego and opportunities for outdoor recreation felt limiting to our community consisting primarily of Brown and queer people. My friends saw in me a leader to forge the way for people in our community into these spaces and experiences. Their encouragement and confidence in my ability to facilitate joy, knowledge shares, and experiences

in the outdoors led to the co-founding of *Hike Camp Cassie* six months after my 39th birthday. Shortly thereafter, we transitioned into a chapter of the national Latino Outdoors organization for San Diego. We realized through the groundwork already laid by the organization, leadership, and resources they offered we would be able to expand our reach. Their branding was already powerful enough to create opportunities for local collaborations and partnerships.

In my role as a program coordinator and ambassador for Latino Outdoors (LO), I had the opportunity to create outdoor experiences for a larger community as well as connect with mutually mission-driven organizations and people. I witnessed and experienced the power of different sectors and communities coming together through the lens of social and environmental justice. For example, I assisted in organizing and leading an LO event at Border Field State Park, located within the Tijuana River national Estuarine Research Reserve and along the heavily violent and metal-constructed US border wall in June of 2019. The event, which included a hike and various speakers from park rangers, local activists, and musicians was designed to connect the participants with the ecological wonders contained in the park and the human and more-than-human narratives that weave social, political, and environmental disruption through the border wall. By highlighting and connecting the various physical and cultural components that intersect in this landscape we were able to provide a visual of the harm and benefits created by structures of power and the privileges, or lack thereof, of the accessibility to natural spaces. While the group was guided on the trail toward Friendship Park, another historical landmark located in the park, participants were greeted and introduced to four different ecosystems, sensitive habitats, and assisted in identifying common and unique flora and fauna. Upon reaching Friendship Park, one of the only locations in the nation in which families affected by border policies can gather and see other physically through a fence between the US and Mexico, participants were invited

to listen to community activists from the Otay Mesa Detention Center speak of the work they facilitate to help migrants in a detention center just a few miles away. Participants were also encouraged and invited to share their personal stories, views, and relationships with the political and physical landscape. One participant shared fond memories of summer days in Playas of Tijuana, the section of beach just across the border fence, including fishing and swimming in the ocean with his father as a kid, reaching that part of the beach by crossing freely through the reserve before the imposed border fence was built. The event was also strategically scheduled to coincide with the *Fandango Fronterizo*, an annual event during which musicians, specifically those playing Son Jarocho, gather and play on both the US and Mexico sides transcending borders through music.

LO has provided hands-on leadership experience and community outdoors. It opened a pathway and passion for pursuing higher education and the encouragement for uprooting myself to learn new skills to enhance my community offerings and help pave the road for others alongside me. I may not know scientific names or be able to extensively explain the intricacies of ecosystems, or how organisms, plants, and animals exist and coexist in proper scientific western terms, however, I do understand that on a spiritual level we are all interconnected. My curiosity and respect for the land guides my efforts to connect and educate people. It's important to me to teach people that we can have fun outdoors while being mindful of our impact. Together we can dream bigger and experience a world where we can all enjoy the outdoors as a safe, inclusive, welcoming space and nurture a relationship grounded in mutual aid and interdependence.

My identities as a Mexican American, Chicana, Latina, single parent, and queer person in the U.S. have challenged my access to green spaces, dominant recreational activities, and ancestral relationships to the Land. These intersecting identities have also been my guides in

evolving my leadership methods, frameworks, and pedagogies for conservation, environmentalism, and outdoor experiences. Meaningful and just transformative change on this planet will not happen until Black, Indigenous, and People of Color are able to be directly involved and lead environmental and conservation efforts and enjoy and thrive in the outdoors. There is power in our stories, traditions, and histories. Connecting and sharing our narratives will strengthen environmental activism, climate justice, and create a more sustainable future for all our relations. I offer this work as a gesture of love to *la naturaleza* and *nuestra gente*. It is time for us to be seen and find belonging in the outdoors. May we continue to collectively lift each other to our potential and support each other con *ternura y amor*.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The lack of representation of the Latine³ community in outdoor recreation is a result of the conservation movement of the mid-nineteenth century to early twentieth that influenced and shaped the establishment of public park institutions, policies, and the dominant outdoor narrative (Taylor, 2016). The white-centric development of land management agencies and the constructed narrative of the Great Outdoors has created systemic barriers for Latine peoples and other people of color in accessing the outdoors. It is important to understand the dominant culture's historical narrative of land management and recreation to create momentous change in today's environmental efforts and outdoor recreation cultures. An expanded understanding of these structural inequities can aid in developing solutions to stop the perpetuation of oppressive land management policies and outdoor culture for meaningful equity inclusion and justice-informed work (Selin, et al., 2020).

The systemic barriers Latinx people face in accessing the outdoors is an issue today because it is keeping a large growing community from enjoying green spaces and engaging in the larger environmental discourse that impacts the design, management, and future of outdoor recreation and environmental justice. Leadership from communities of color and other underrepresented groups historically excluded from outdoor spaces and recreation are diversifying the outdoors by breaking down real and perceived barriers. Community-based organizations are emerging to address the critical need for underrepresented communities to have

³ I am adopting the recently presented term of Latine which is a more inclusive representation of the diverse population and connects with the efforts of Spanish speaking peoples. The term Latine represents all people from Latin American descent, is gender neutral, and offers a more universal pronunciation. I however still use Latinx as I feel it is more US-centric. I do not relate to the colonialist term "Hispanic" though it is used by other Latine identifying people and the U.S. Census Bureau to identify people relating to Spain or to Spanish-speaking countries and Latin America.

access to the outdoors, expand the narratives of the traditional park and recreation model, and create bridges between institutional outdoor organizations and historically marginalized people. Outdoor affinity groups such as Outdoor Afro, Latino Outdoors, Native Women's Wilderness, Melanin Basecamp, Unlikely Hikers, and Brown Girls Climb have emerged to create and reclaim outdoor spaces and recreation for welcoming, inclusive, and accessible experiences.

In San Diego, California the community-based effort of Latino Outdoors San Diego (LOSD), a chapter of the national organization Latino Outdoors, is engaging and connecting the Latinx community with the outdoors. It is important to ensure continued impact and sustainability within San Diego by evaluating the chapter's programmatic outcomes through the perceptions of its participants. This study provides a lens of evaluation through three emerging themes including (a) connection to self; (b) connection to place; and (c) connection to people. Though programming remains successful, what is reflected in the attendance and feedback from participants is the need for a deeper dive into participants' experiences and perceptions of LOSD. Feedback can illuminate areas that are meeting the expectations and desires of participants as well as where they may be falling short.

As a Chicana, Latina woman, founding Program Coordinator for LOSD, and outdoor leader on a personal and professional journey *re-connecting* and *re-membering* my relationship and interconnectedness to nature (Smith, 2012; Kimmerer, 2016), I bring lived experiences to this research and discourse on the reclamation of green spaces and outdoor narrative for the inclusion of Latinx peoples. Following the tradition of auto-ethnographers such as Carolyn Finney (2014), Robin Kimmerer (2016), and Martha Gonzalez (2020), I weave my personal experience to analyze the perceptions, relationships, and barriers Latinx communities experience in the outdoors within my role as a *scholar* and *activist* (Finney, 2014, p. 16).

Statement of Problem

Outdoor recreation and the perception of the outdoors are not homogenous among US Americans (Flores & Sanchez, 2020, p. 61). The US conservation and environmental movement grounded in race, class, gender, and colonialism, constructed by white upper- and middle-class men and women, is still affecting the Black, Indigenous, and people of color outdoor experience today. This powerful and privileged group of people defined environmental activism, policy, and recreation as their social benefit and values system. According to Taylor, these leaders separated their understanding of the environment from social issues and injustices such as slavery, land appropriation from Indigenous peoples, and widespread poverty (2016). Thus, the policies, planning, management, and narrative developed around recreational land-use led to the design of inequitable parks and recreation, and in turn lack of access for underrepresented groups.

The homogeneity of literature validated as “nature writing” has influenced and confined our understanding of other ways of knowing, being in nature, and the outdoor identity. Though there is a wealth of literature on nature, it lacks the inclusion and validation of diverse voices and experiences of people in the US (Deming and Savoy, 2011). Therefore, discourse and an evaluation of the dominant culture’s outdoor practices are lacking in academic arenas, environmentalism, and the outdoor industry. To re-imagine how we think about nature and the outdoors we must widen the perspective of what counts as literature on nature and deem it valid in higher education and beyond. Broadening the ideas and understanding of the outdoors will allow for more diversity in the stories being shared and room for other practices of storytelling to enrich nature writing and be included in environmental histories. This increased visibility and inclusion in literature could also offer hope and encourage others to share their own stories, experience the natural world in their own ways of connection, and expand the outdoor identity.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this project is to establish a need to change the outdoor narrative by expanding the scope of recreation and what it means to be outdoors. The American concept of the “outdoors” is culturally narrow and does not recognize or value other forms of engaging in with the outdoors. Therefore, someone who likes to spend time picnicking in neighborhood parks, or gardening in their yard may not be seen as “outdoorsy” and will not find themselves represented, valued, or even considered in the mainstream outdoor narrative. I aim to highlight the re-imagining of the outdoors through an evaluation of the impact Latino Outdoors San Diego is having on its participants' perceptions and experiences with the outdoors. As the literature on the Latinx connection and experiences with the outdoors is limited, it is important to document the work and contributions Latine peoples are offering, and in this case Latino Outdoors San Diego. Through surveys, I gathered data to analyze if and how attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of participants have shifted through their connections and participation in LOSD events. The intention for gathering surveys was to collect quantitative and qualitative information on how this community perceives and engages in the outdoors.

Research Questions

This research was guided by the following questions:

1. Given that the context of white environmentalism and histories of colonization have affected the ways that various BIPOC communities form relations to the “outdoors,” How do the identities of Latinx affect their relationship with the outdoors?
2. What are the ways LOSD shapes opportunities of connection/reconnection to the “outdoors” and what are the impacts on the participants’ lives?

My hope is that these narratives will contribute to the emerging body of knowledge of the experiences and perceptions of Latinx peoples in the outdoors. Through the reflections and experiences of LOSD's participants, I generate more insightful and relevant outdoor recreation research that will expand the narrative of the outdoors, create pathways for culturally inclusive outdoor spaces, and increase public space usage by the Latine community.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review will provide a historical perspective of the environmental movement to explicate the structural inequities in parks and recreation experienced by underrepresented groups, specifically the Latine population. It will also interpret the impacts of shifting narratives of recreation and the outdoors among Latinx communities and provide a foundation for my investigation and analysis of Latino Outdoors' programmatic structure. Though my study looks at the impacts Latino Outdoors San Diego, a chapter of the national organization of Latino Outdoors, this literature review takes on a broader scope. San Diego is not exclusive in its green access and recreation inequities for underrepresented communities. The cultural, perceptual, and geographical systemic barriers are experienced nationally. Finally, a synthesis of the emerging literature of Latine peoples' perceptions and experiences in the outdoors with an overlap of more established Black outdoor perspectives, will offer insight into the potential and future of environmentalism, outdoor recreation, and management of public green spaces through direct and intentional actions of inclusivity.

As equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) efforts grow to address the inequities in land management systems, outdoor access, and representation it is important to understand the dominant culture's historical narrative of land management and recreational use to create meaningful change. Within the frameworks, theories, and epistemologies I examined, a critical race theory (CRT) is lacking in the analysis of the historical implications of the conservation and environmental movement in the US. To further deconstruct the systemic barriers to accessing the outdoors and participation in environmental leadership in land management agencies and environmental organizations, a CRT approach will be employed. Research and critical analysis

in this field can learn from how CRT is being used to challenge and reform education, environment, and place-based education models (Ho, 2020; Ladson-Billings & William, 1995; Miller, 2017). In addition, CRT, storytelling, and reframing as decolonizing pedagogical practices (Smith, 2013) provide my theoretical framework with another lens that helps illuminate strategies for empowering the individual and community construction of an environmental identity.

Critical Race Theory as a lens for examining the systemic barriers in outdoor recreation and land management illuminates the inequities and barriers the Latine community faces in accessing the outdoors. CRT's framework offers approaches to managers, leaders, and allies working to change the system and make the outdoors more welcoming and inclusive of diverse communities. I argue that without a critical lens of the historical disenfranchisement in the environmental movement EDI efforts in making green spaces and recreation more accessible to underrepresented groups will not create lasting meaningful experiences and connections with the outdoors.

Limitations of Literature

Race, class, gender, and colonialism have shaped and defined the American concept of environmentalism, parks, and recreation; a narrative that is still deeply entwined into the outdoor identity of today (Finney, 2014). In *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement: Power, Privilege, and Environmental Protection*, Taylor conceptualizes the historical implications of the conservation movement and environmental ideology through race, class, gender, colonialism, and the creation of the environmental identity, stating these factors are critical to our understanding of how discourses about the environment were developed, policies formulated, and institutions organized (Taylor, 2016, p.9). During the development of environmental

ideologies, the control of land and resources was being fought for through the forceful and violent removal of Native American peoples. White settlers did not understand Native American values and their relationship to the land. The stewardship and responsibility of caretaking for the land and being interconnected to nature were different from settlers' values of owning and commodifying the land and its resources. Black people, being seen as less than white people, were being enslaved and considered property. Latine populations were being pushed out of the Western territories of Texas, New Mexico, and California through military tactics and violations of civil and property rights, unable to hold on to their land ownerships they became low-wage earners (Taylor, 2016).

Upper- and middle-class white men, organizing early conservation and preservation efforts, created private clubs to address their environmental issues and recreational desires such as bird and game protection, conservation of resources, including timber, wilderness preservation- efforts associated with urban and social needs (Taylor, 2016). Though the early clubs and organizations were formed by white upper- and middle-class men, excluding women, upper- and middle-class women made their way into conservation and preservation activism, politics, and recreation too. They used their wealth and power to create private recreational lands and other inaccessible areas for the less wealthy and minorities. For instance, Indigenous and subsistence practitioners had their livelihoods criminalized through the privatization of lands, park regulations, and other restrictions imposed, they no longer were allowed to hunt, fish, and harvest from the land (Taylor, 2016).

The emerging literature on the new perceptions and experiences in the outdoor recreation and land management of public green spaces is offering insight into how these areas can become more inclusive on a larger and faster scale. Interdisciplinary approaches are slowly being taken

to look deeper at the needs of the community to engage and recreate in the outdoors more authentically. Research of park engagement and efforts to engage the Latinx community is providing more opportunities for the park systems to reach Latines in meaningful and sustainable ways. For example, Latines value experiencing nature communally. The outdoors is an extension of the home and a place to gather with close and extended family members and to be one with nature (Clarke et al., 2015; Flores & Kuhn, 2018; Flores & Sanchez, 2020; Johnson et al., 2021; Selin et al., 2020). In Clarke et al. (2015), the authors mention a study where it was found that Latine recreates in an average group size of 15. They also state that when Latine peoples are faced with inadequate facilities they make their own. For example, if there are not enough suitable tables for gathering in designated group sites, Latinx will fabricate their own space by bringing their chairs and tables and relocating to a more enjoyable location where they can set up their tables and grills comfortably (Clarke et al., 2015). To welcome Latine peoples into the outdoors, it is important to understand their attitudes, patterns, and values of family, nature, and recreation and provide adequate accommodations.

Critical Race Theory

Utilizing the five tenets of CRT can provide structure to the historical analysis as well as future actions to break down systemic barriers to the outdoors. Providing a historical account of the development and foundation of the environment and conservation can illuminate the *permanence of racism* in the outdoors. Public lands and urban green spaces have been created through the lens of *whiteness as property*, viewing them through this critical lens will further shed light on the historical inaccessibility and inequities of the park system and outdoor recreation. *Interest convergence* can aid in breaking down the dominant culture's idea of recreation and public land use and developing meaningful outdoor connections and programming

for the Latinx community. *Critique of liberalism* can offer a critical examination of the shifts occurring in outdoor equity initiatives and environmentalism. The practice of *counter storytelling* can further intervene to redefine the outdoor identity model and allow Latine peoples to express their diversity in ideology and values and reclaim their long-standing participation in protecting and valuing the environment and Nature.

Permanence of Racism

The concerns and attitudes for conservation, preservation, and recreational access from white elite men and women only center their own benefit, ideas, and entitlement. The lasting effects of institutional exclusion in environmental organizations and political processes are still visible and felt today by minority groups. Racial diversity in environmental organizations is still low to this day. A 2014 report released by Taylor showed the dismal results of a survey conducted on NGOs. Of those that responded, 88 percent of the staff and 95 percent of the board members were white (Taylor, 2015). In a later study examining 12,054 small, medium, and large environmental organizations, Taylor et al. (2019) found that only 3.7% of the organizations shared and released their diversity data. The failure to release diversity data reflects the disconnect within these organizations and lack of inclusion of peoples of color opinions and expertise on complex environmental issues and access to the outdoors today. In *Black Faces, White Spaces* Finney states that, “representations and racialization inform the way we approach the ‘business,’ the ‘science,’ and the ‘conservation’ of the natural world. They affect the way these spaces and places are constructed and the institutions that maintain these constructions” (Finney, 2014, pp. 4-5). Representation, then, matters.

Whiteness as Property

The settler-colonial approach of land appropriation, through the removal and relocation of peoples and domination of peoples through slavery, reservation systems, a denial of education,

and coercive assimilation have created the long-lasting effects of colonialism (Taylor, 2016, pp. 19-21). The practices of land appropriation and private property rights further created physical barriers for marginalized communities to have access to the park systems and urban green spaces. Land was seen as inanimate and as an object available to grab, own, and extract resources from. Through these circumstances, BIPOC did not have a voice in the development of the land management systems nor were their values and ways of knowing incorporated into the systems that constructed the outdoor narrative. Thus, the resulting public lands system was founded and rooted in colonization and violent and forced removal and genocide of Indigenous peoples from their native lands throughout the US. White supremacist land ideologies also influenced the urban planning model which has left many neighborhoods, typically inhabited by low-income and people of color, to be deficient in safe public green spaces.

Interest Convergence

There is currently a trend in the outdoor industry to support affinity groups (Duncan et al., 2022; Fisher et al., 2022). However, though these organizational and grassroots efforts are addressing outdoor equity and critical needs in underrepresented communities, they are only a tool not a solution to the problem. The outdoor industry, which includes the park systems, outdoor brands, and outdoor organizations cannot rely or put the burden on community-based organizations without fully supporting and understanding their capacities and limits in providing programming and other services. To create lasting material changes, systemic changes must be made. BIPOC have been bearing the brunt of the impacts of climate change and environmental racism for too long. They need more than just a seat at the table, they need to lead these conversations and projects.

For example, California legislature Assembly Bill 209 passed in 2019 (<https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov>), established the framework for the Outdoor Equity Grants

Program, to increase the participation of underserved and at-risk population in outdoor environmental educational experiences at state parks and other public lands. Though funding is being given now, barriers still exist. The process to apply for the grant is challenging and requires resources that many smaller programs may not have the capacity for such as time, grant writing skills, a grant writing manager, and the technical skillset and staff to follow through properly with reports and other deliverables. Further, this process can create a codependency between programs and more established white institutions with the resources. This is a reminder of the need for skepticism of policies that may benefit the oppressor more than the marginalized group. Being critical and cautious of the trend to promote inclusivity and access to the outdoors will help keep organizations and funders accountable and true to the initiative.

Critique of Liberalism

It is important to examine the conversations and programs supporting outdoor equity and environmentalism. Though shifts are occurring, progress is slow. Outdoor equity initiatives on the ground and running should be celebrated. Conserving, protecting, and restoring more lands, inland waters, and ocean areas in response to the climate crisis, such as President Biden's 30x30 executive order (<https://whitehouse.gov>), which states action will be taken to protect at least 30 percent of Americas land and 30 percent of its ocean areas by 2030. Though the intention is to fight climate change a more intentional focus on Land Back initiatives could be more impactful in protecting and conserving the health of the land and waters. These current policies are still too conservative and just a band aid if they are not creating Land Back actions. Environmentalism should be highlighting academics that talk about Land Back, theories of decolonization and the importance of centering Indigenous leaders and voices in discourses of diversifying the outdoors and making them more inclusive.

Counter Storytelling: A Need for Reframing the Outdoors

If the ignorance of stories can lead to ruin, perhaps the seeking out and understanding of stories can lead to rebuilding... (Deming & Savoy, 2011).

The environmental identity formed during the American conservation and preservation movement still defines, in large part, how those within environmental agencies, education, organizations, research, and outdoor recreation conduct, interact, and view their positionality. American nature literature which emerged during the Romantic Age, highly informed the development of the outdoor identity. Though Romanticism saw nature and humans as innately good, it also created a sense of separation of humans from the natural world (Taylor, 2016; Demming & Savoy, 2011). Nature was therefore seen with awe through a lens of othering.

In addition, for the white elite leading the conservation and preservation movement, parks and outdoor recreation became a means of status to escape the city life. It also provided white men the escape to venture out alone or in small company to conquer and develop their manhood in the wild west (Taylor, 2016). To this day many white outdoor recreationists experience nature through a lens of individualism and solitude (Flores & Kuhn, 2018; Johnson et al., 2021). Experiencing the outdoors to reach a quiet retreat, solitude, and the conquering of the elements and land leaves little to no room for Latine peoples' collective and social outdoors experiences (Flores & Kuhn, 2018).

As the language and discourse of the outdoor identity are analyzed, a broader understanding of the impacts and limits the dominant recreation model has had on Latine peoples' outdoor experiences can be attained. The idea of recreation as leisure has shaped and limited the scope of policy and decision-making representative of Latinx values in public green spaces, specifically the National Park systems (Selin et al, 2020, Chapter 5). Selin et al., further state, "Current patterns of outdoor recreation use, how recreation is defined or socially

constructed, what we understand the values of recreation to be, and common knowledge about recreation may all contain cultural bias that is hidden in plain sight,” (pg. 43). The lack of diverse leaders in public land management agencies such as city parks, state parks, national parks, national forests, and monuments has created a limited understanding and cultural sensitivity to the needs of the diverse American public (Selin et al., 2020). As a result, Latinx people have felt excluded from participating in the outdoors within the confines of what is defined and constituted as *recreation* (Flores & Kuhn, 2018; Flores & Sanchez, 2020).

Selin et al. (Chapter 3, 2020), note that in addressing institutional barriers and cultural challenges in public agencies it is inherent for them to identify their cultural bias and create more racially and ethnically diverse leadership and outdoor programming (pg. 43). By shifting the recreational concept to one of recreation as human connections, the notions of traditional outdoor activities such as hiking, skiing, boating, hunting, and fishing can include other ways of experiencing and/or being in the outdoors such as picnicking and gardening. Further, redefining what it means to be outdoorsy by including the vast cultural and community connections nurtured and maintained through outdoor spaces will make people feel more welcome and part of the outdoor community. It can seem like a large undertaking for some organizations and people, but these initiatives do not need to happen overnight. Reflection of values, privileges, and the benefits of multiple worldviews can provide the motivation for finding ways to create bridges to connect people and organizations with each other to find common and/or shareable ground in the outdoors.

Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and Indigenous leaders are offering ways to guide us back to sustainable relationships with the land and more-than-human world. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Kimmerer offers a bridge for connecting Western Science and Indigenous ways of

knowing. For many cultures nature is a part of their spiritual belief system. Nature is sacred. Humans are a part of nature, not separate from it. For Latine communities, especially those with Indigenous ancestry, *la naturaleza* (nature) is rooted into their ways of living connected and spiritually with the natural environment (Johnson et al., 2021). By centering Indigenous voices and land pedagogy points of contact and convergence for pan-Indigenous connections can be empowered. Understanding and being open to different models of knowledge and cultural ways, especially Indigenous epistemologies, of engaging with the natural environment and with the more-than-human world will illuminate ways in which to create bridges for making the outdoors and land management policies inclusive, welcoming, and accessible to Latinx people.

American land management policies have severed human relationships with land. Decolonizing land management strategies are required to create social structural transformations that will move toward cultural practices that sustain the land. Richard Bugbee, a Payómkawichum (Luiseño) Southern California tribal cultural practitioner, says that one does not connect with nature by managing it, it is a relationship one develops (Baker et al., 2021). Therefore, we can rethink the settler colonial ideas of conserving pristine wildernesses and reenact for example, cultural fire burns and land cultivation through a lens of land relationships and practices of reciprocity (Kimmerer, 2016; Baker et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2019).

This last tenant off CRT, counter storytelling, then allows us to intervene and challenge the historical outdoor narrative by documenting more diverse and complete representations of Latinx engagement with the natural environment and outdoor recreation. Part of counter storytelling includes reconceptualizing literary works and cultural production in environmentalism.

Reconceptualizing Literary Works & Cultural Production in Environmentalism

The population of the United States is expected to become a majority-minority country by the year 2044 (Selin et al., 2020, Chapter 3). The Latine community makes up the largest growing ethnic minority population in the US (Flores & Sanchez, 2020; Johnson et al., 2021; Mackenzie et al., 2017), with most of the growth comprising US-born people (Flores & Sanchez, 2020). As the Latine population grows it is important to address the issues of outdoor equity and inclusion to ensure their voices are included in the policies and development of public green spaces and the outdoor industry. To put it into perspective, funding of national parks and the larger park systems could be detrimentally impacted without Latine peoples' support.

In environmentalism and nature literature, however, Latine authors are invisible among the Ralph Waldo Emersons, Henry David Thoreus, John Muirs, and Terry Tempest Williams. These authors and other American writers influenced by the Romantic Age, defined the outdoors and the idea of the Great Outdoors, which, along with the individualistic manner of experiencing the outdoors, informed the concepts of wild lands, pristine wildernesses, and summer cross-country travel to national parks (Taylor, 2016). Thus, under this model, experiencing nature means visiting these national parks and public lands. It means experiencing and seeing the environment without an active relationship of communing with the natural world in these spaces and all that entails in the environment and more-than-human world. This way has not fully resonated with me nor other Latinx people from my communities and connecting or finding ourselves reflected in these ideas has been challenging.

The Chicano/a and Latinx authors that have helped me develop and define my identity, deepen my sense of cultural pride, and connect to the natural world are not categorized under environmental or nature writing. Latinx and Chicanx that have weaved their stories of the land,

our connections, and our relationship with the land does not roll off the tongue of mainstream environmentalists. Yet, I have had to read the “influential” works of “great white men” such as Leopold and Muir in higher education environmental ethics and nature courses. Through the remembrances of distinguished Latinx and Chicax published literary works and reading new collective works that include BIPOC ideas, connections, and knowledge of the environment I was able to glean a broader context of the relationship and meaning between my personal experience and Latinx people within environmentalism, nature, and the outdoors.

For example, *Bless Me Ultima*, by Rudolfo Anaya is a novel that left a strong impression on my belief and values of the natural world. The story weaves connections, reflections, and a sense of reverence for the natural world through Ultima, a *curandera* (healer) who taught the young protagonist Antonio, how to gather herbs and roots for medicine, how to listen to the sounds of the earth, and see and appreciate nature. Fortunately, new literature is emerging to challenge the erasure of Latinx voices and offer new critical sources for expanding the values and knowledge within environmentalism and relating to the outdoors.

Adding to the discussion and argument for reframing mainstream environmentalism and understanding relationships long maintained by BIPOC with the natural environment are anthologies centering on BIPOC narratives including, *Latinx Environmentalisms*, *Colors of Nature*, *The Nature of Desert Nature*, and *American Studies, Ecocriticism, and Citizenship*. These collective writings offer multiple positions and perspectives on BIPOC and a critical analysis of the systemic impacts of mainstream environmentalism on people of color through the lived experiences and realities of BIPOC. To this study, these written works capture a broader picture of Latinx relationships to the environment and outdoor experiences. Through these voices and narratives, an expanded comprehension of how Latinx and other people of color see

themselves and relate to the environment can be attained. Further within the analysis, critiques, and narratives hopeful seeds of possibilities for sustainable living on this earth and equitable access to a clean and safe outdoors are planted. Through this wider understanding, a reimagining and reframing of environmentalism can water the seeds of hope by addressing the underlying issues and conflicts within white environmentalism.

Economics, politics, and race impact environmentalism, especially the lives and livelihood of BIPOC. Historical red zoning, environmental racism, public health, transportation, and exploitations of land have affected how Latinx and other BIPOC communities have experienced the outdoors and been impacted by the environment. The idea of public lands and American environmentalism is absent within the confines of urban neighborhoods, which is where most marginalized and low-income people of color live. Through the collective stories in these anthologies and emerging Latinx environmental literature, the urgency and importance of including conversations about the urban outdoor environment and state of health of urban areas within the environmental framework is evident. Environmentalism needs to expand its framework beyond conservation and preservation of recreational spaces and ecological habitats to address environmental racism and impact more climate justice and environmental justice efforts for the health and future of this planet and all its inhabitants.

Energy and resources can be allocated to the maintenance of public lands and designation of new ones, but without broadening the perspective and asking who and what will benefit and not benefit is a continual oversight and exclusion of large communities. For example, it behooves people in power to not question who will not be able to access public green spaces and what the resulting impacts are for those who are not able to access them. Another question to consider and address in the planning of public lands and environmental policy is, who does not live within a

reasonable distance of public green spaces and clean air and water? The lived-experiences and perspectives of these BIPOC authors calls for an evaluation of what deserves to be protected and preserved to uncover how white environmentalism has contributed to inequities in public green space access and high environmental and health risks in BIPOC and low-income communities.

Besides the absence of Latinx literature and voices in American environmentalism, there is a crucial absence of Latinx *cultural productions* that express and influence Latinx relationships with the environment (Wald, et al., 2019; Ruffin, 2010). Opening the discourse on environmentalism to include an interdisciplinary approach will add another layer to future research for viewing the complexity of the Latinx environmental identity. Theatre, dance, ceremony, and storytelling have informed my experiences in the outdoors and my relationship with the natural world. It has been both an individual and communal experience. Music, for example, is another cultural product through which Latinx communities share their interactions, connections, and love for the environment. Latinx communities have their John Denver and musical traditions to venerate nature and the expanse of the natural world which they feel they are indebted and responsible. Music outdoors and gatherings with friends and family outdoors offer a layer of *convivencia*- that is to share space lovingly and with care for each other. This care easily extends to the more-than-human world and ancestral presence. Including cultural productions in future analysis of the Latinx environmental identity, can further expand the current notions of how Latinx interact and perceive themselves within environmentalism and their value systems and experiences in the outdoors. Finally, the inclusion of these anthologies, other writings, and cultural productions can support and guide the challenging and reframing of environmentalism to be inclusive of BIPOC can be achieved.

Latino Outdoors: Expanding & Shifting the Outdoor Narrative

There is room for rethinking and reimagining outdoor recreation and the public park systems. A brief look at Latino Outdoors (LO) programmatic structure, including their 4Ps model (people to process, people to people, people to place, and people to policy, which will be further explained in chapter 3), and values can illuminate how more equitable and inclusive outdoor engagement can be attained through storytelling, cultural connections, and partnerships.

Storytelling

In *The Truth About Stories*, King offers that our stories are medicine, told one way they can heal, told in a different way they can harm (King, 2003, p. 92). Latine peoples' narratives in the great outdoors have been silenced or erased. Latino Outdoors is challenging the historical outdoor narrative through its *Yo Cuento* online storytelling initiative using images, stories, and other content. *Yo Cuento* translates as *I count, I matter, I tell a story*. As a vehicle for change, reconnecting and expanding the narrative of the outdoors, storytelling is offering diverse and more complete representations of outdoor recreation, land relationships, and the diverse ways the Latinx community engages with nature. Storytelling further provides an avenue for LO to succeed in its mission and vision of celebrating stories, knowledge, and culture while ensuring Latine people's history and heritage are valued and represented. According to the LO website, their online platforms, which include social media channels, have a combined following of over 77,000 and reach close to 100,000 when counting regional LO social media channels. In addition, their website has 200,000 visitors with over half a million views.

Flores and Kuhn's research (2018) on the impact of LO's use of storytelling found that "through its use of storytelling and online presence, the organization is creating a space for new social and cultural meanings of the outdoors using counternarratives that question normative American outdoor experiences that privilege an able-bodied white middle-class user" (Flores &

Sanchez, 2018, p. 47-48). Thus, through *Yo Cuento*, LO is taking charge by amplifying voices so long ignored and left out by using storytelling to engage the public, expand the outdoor narratives, and be more inclusive of the Latine communities' experiences in the natural environment. Through their case study of LO, Flores and Kuhn (2018) posit that the US Forest Service can apply a storytelling focus within their recreation programs to create more “culturally sensitive services, understanding land-use differences both within and across racial/ethnic groups, and developing mechanisms for collaborative goal setting that includes diverse community voices" (p. 48).

In 2020, LO expanded its *Yo Cuento* initiative by producing content highlighting intergenerational Latinx connections to the outdoors and conservation movement. Their first virtual conservation in January of 2020 hosted civil rights activist Dolores Huerta and playwright Luis Valdez. Later in July they facilitated a panel discussion with elders from the community, featuring Santiago Maestas and Jorge Garcia, co-founders of the Center for Social Sustainable Systems, and Margarita Flores, an immigrant, mother, pastor, and community activist. These conversations highlight conservation efforts deeply rooted in culture and a sense of community for Latinx.

Language is fluid and evolving. Language informs how individuals and societies view and understand their identities and thus how they interact with it. To encourage more equitable shifts in land management policies and outdoor programming, communication and language choices must be reevaluated and addressed. As researchers look to understand the Latinx outdoor experience and investigate ways to create more sustainable land management policies and diverse outdoor recreation opportunities, language should be at the forefront of their endeavors. In Selin et al., (2020) the authors Armstrong and Derrien state,

attention to language practices is about far more than publishing bilingual brochures or translating policy documents. The study of language must push us to create discourses that better serve the public, both by improving relationships between agencies and citizens and by creating agency cultures that work more effectively to steward public land resources (p. 59).

Language can create exclusivity or inclusivity. It's important to learn and incorporate language that resonates with the Latinx population to make parks and outdoor recreation welcoming, inclusive, and a space that values the Latinx experience and voice.

Cultural Connections through Language

Latino Outdoors not only uses storytelling methods to expand the outdoor narrative, but language is also used intentionally to connect with the Latinx community, decolonize nature, and remove real and perceived barriers to increase outdoor equity. One of LO mottos is that they are a community first and an organization second. Offering bilingual events and communications are integral to creating *comunidad* (community). Connecting culturally through language offers a safe and welcoming space. For example, using Spanish and English within event titles such as *Hiking y Paletas*, can extend a cultural connection with participants, creating nostalgia for adults and cultural connection for families. A *paleta*, or iced popsicle, can denote both fun and an invitation for all ages. Another example of cultural engagement through language can be inferred from the popular hashtag, #vamosoutdoors. *Vamos Outdoors* or let's connect outdoors, which is also the title of one of LO's programmatic pillars, bridges language between Latinx people who speak Spanish, English or *Spanglish*, there is no need for code-switching when you are at a LO event—English, Spanish, and Spanglish are all normal and accepted forms of expression.

Collaborations

Latino Outdoors also focuses on creating partnerships and collaborative outdoor experiences. In 2020, LO collaborated with over 180 community partners and groups during the year (Latino Outdoors, 2021). Partnerships with groups that have alliances with the Latine community are helping outdoor agencies and organizations understand the differences in attitudes and recreation habits of other underrepresented groups. These grassroots approaches are allowing the park service and other outdoor industry organizations to work directly with the leaders of the community and genuinely engage with respect and interest. Selin et al. (Chapter 3), found that “these types of local partnerships, community involvement efforts, and outreach approaches can potentially help public agencies improve access to outdoor recreation opportunities” (p. 45). Through the creation of genuine partnerships, Latines are being given the voice and the opportunity to influence (Clarke et al., 2015). In a study conducted by Falco et al. to help the US Forest Service toward cutting the equity gap, they recommended the agency “consider partnering with diverse community organizations regarding the inclusion of the following vital considerations: citizen science and data collection (Thelen and Thiet 2008), urban ecology programs (Barnett et al. 2006), storytelling (Arning 2009), planning and decision-making (Rodriguez and Roberts 2002); and moving beyond outreach to build and restore relationships with racial minority communities (Roberts 2015)” (p. 270-271).

The next chapter will offer a brief history of LO, the establishment of LO chapter in San Diego, and a description of their programmatic framework.

Chapter 3

A Brief History

This chapter tells a brief history of the founding of Latino Outdoors, their framework, and the need for a chapter in San Diego.

Latino Outdoors

Latino Outdoors (LO) was founded in 2013 by Jose Gonzalez in response to a lack of Latines he encountered in outdoor recreation, environmental education, and conservation. Initially taking form through an online blog, it quickly emerged into the organization of Latino Outdoors through its *Vamos Outdoors* (Let's Go Outdoors) initiative (Latino Outdoors, n.d.). Programming for families and youth began in 2014 with chapters in the Central Valley, San Francisco Bay Area, and Los Angeles. The California-based organization quickly grew to encompass chapters in different states. The national network in 2021 consists of over 140 volunteers/leaders in more than 25 locations around the US. According to their website (Latino Outdoors, n.d.), they have delivered more than 500 outings benefiting around 10,000 participants. Youth and children account for more than one of every four attendees. Nearly 80% of outings include participants attending together with members of their family and over 60% include the participation of someone new to the activity.

LO's mission is to "inspire, connect, and engage Latino communities in the outdoors and embrace *cultura y familia* as part of the outdoor narrative, ensuring our history, heritage, and leadership are valued and represented" (Latino Outdoors, n.d.) They envision the outdoors to be a place where the Latine community can enjoy nature safely, share and celebrate stories, knowledge, and culture. LO, is committed to growing outdoor Latino users, creating mentors, stewards, and developing leaders in conservation and outdoor education.

LO strives to enrich the community by focusing its conversations and amplifying the Latinx experience through its three programmatic pillars: *Vamos* Outdoors, *Yo Cuento*, and *Creceemos* Outdoors. *Vamos* Outdoors is centered on fostering outdoor engagement primarily through LO-led group outings which are free to the public. Outdoor engagement is enhanced through collaborations with other organizations, and recently, in response to COVID-19, increased engagement through virtual panels, guides, and short videos. *Yo Cuento* Outdoors objective is to amplify Latinx voices through storytelling and communications including images, stories, and other content that is shared on LO's website and social media channels. *Creceemos* Outdoors is specifically focused on providing its volunteer leaders training and leadership development opportunities, spaces for connection and networking, as well as professional development resources (Latino Outdoors, n.d.).

Latino Outdoors Outings Framework

Latino Outdoors provides a manual and training for volunteer leaders to guide event planning and facilitation of outings. This includes the LO Outings Framework⁴ (Latino Outdoors, n.d.) which weaves aspects of *cultura*, community, wellness, and connections into outings. To assist in creating welcoming, friendly, educational, and connections to place, and as mentioned in the previous chapter, LO provides the Four-P model: People to People, People to Place, People to Process, and People to Policy. People to people focus on building community by connecting people to each other. People to place creates a sense of place by connecting people to the place they are experiencing. People to process considers connecting people to the process of venturing outdoors and safely to develop their self-empowerment in getting outdoors and recreation. People to policy connects people to the actions and policies that affect the outdoors.

⁴ See Figure 1 in Appendix B

Latino Outdoors San Diego (LOSD)

San Diego resides on the traditional lands of the Kumeyaay Nations (or Tipai-Ipai as they refer to themselves) otherwise known as the southwest corner of California. The county borders include the US/Mexico border on the south, the Pacific Ocean on the west, the Imperial Valley desert to the east, and Orange and Riverside counties to the north. According to the 2020 US Census data (n.d.) the population in San Diego is 1.3 million. The median household income is \$83,454. Of its residents, 62.0% are white, 6.1% Black, .05% American Indian, 17.3% Asian, and 30.1% Hispanic or Latino (the census still categorizes Hispanics as any race therefore they may also be included in applicable race categories). 46.7% of people over the age of 25 have a bachelor's degree or higher.

San Diego is rich in open green spaces, yet many of these locations are not accessible to many underserved and low-income communities. According to San Diego Foundations 2020 *Parks for Everyone* report (San Diego Foundation, 2020), a follow-up to their 2010 report, there is inequitable access to green spaces for residents in San Diego County, especially for communities with “higher concentrations of lower-income households, as well as communities with greater racial and ethnic diversity.” The report includes a map⁵ of San Diego’s green spaces, and the locations of these communities highlight the inequities in green spaces compared to more affluent neighborhoods referring to these areas as “park-poor” communities. Though there may be green spots on the map in low-income and racially diverse communities, what the map cannot reflect is the quality of the park, which more than often cannot compare to the parks in white and higher-income neighborhoods. To reach safer and nicer parks or other outdoor points of interest such as beaches, transportation then becomes the barrier. Public transportation is challenging in

⁵ See Figure 2 in Appendix B

San Diego, therefore a trip from El Cajon, a neighborhood on the far east, to the coastal neighborhood of Ocean Beach, that could take 20-23 minutes by car could take up to two hours on public transit (San Diego Foundation, 2020).

San Diego has long been a place many Latinx call home, especially for Mexicans. California was at one point part of Mexico until Mexico sold a sizable portion of land to the US- which is why for many the slogan, “we didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us,” rings true. Being in proximity to the US/Mexico border also creates regular transnational commuters. Many people commute from Mexico to the US daily for work or school, one reason being that it is much more affordable to live in Mexico. Many people also move to San Diego or Mexico to be closer to family members or commute across the border regularly to visit loved ones, shop, and/or enjoy restaurants and entertainment.

San Diego is also home to many Latinx neighborhoods, including Barrio Logan, which houses the much-cherished Chicano Park- the focal point of the Chicano Movement in San Diego. The park and the many murals which hold the histories, *leyendas*, and values of the Chicano community are a testament of the resilience and cultural impacts Mexicans, Chicanx, and Latinx have had in the city.

The San Diego chapter of LO joined the movement late in 2018. As the founding Program Coordinator of Latino Outdoors San Diego (LOSD), I launched programming with the support of Manuel Belmonte, as our Outings Leader. Together we began to offer hikes and connect with outdoor organizations and local environmental initiatives. As a leader, Manuel provided a traditional scientific background and an understanding of how the environment and social forces like environmental racism affect people’s lives. In early 2019, a third volunteer, Mellissa Linton, joined the group as our Social Media Ambassador and quickly expanded our

outreach and number of followers through the social media content they developed. Mellissa brought important knowledge of the long-standing effects of colonialism in the United States which separated us from our understanding of land and time. We, as an American culture, often think of the removal of Indigenous peoples as happenstance, but our work in LOSD focused on encouraging deep thought about how we moved and recreated the land.

Building trust became the primary focus of the LOSD's first year of programming offerings. As a regional chapter of Latino Outdoors, LOSD adopted the infrastructure for event planning and community outreach developed by the national organization. As an autonomous group⁶ LOSD intentionally implements an Environmental Justice approach to their programming. LOSD highlights and brings the voices of Indigenous stewards, practices, and knowledge into their programming in solidarity. LOSD also supports and educates participants on policy, social justice, and environmentalism. In other words, their programming "connect[s] issues of race, class, indigeneity, gender, citizenship/nation-state, and sexuality with environment equity" (Sze, 2020, p.141).

LOSD closed out in 2019 providing 19 outdoor outings and events, with many selling out in a matter of days if not hours. Their 2020 programming projection was halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Their goal included two-three outings and events per month along with increased youth-specific programming and an increased variety of outdoor experiences. LOSD offered limited in-person activities toward the last quarter of 2020 and 2021 through the *Vamos a Pescar* project, a 3-part progressive fishing series for youth and families, in collaboration with Outdoor Outreach⁷. At the start of 2022, they began to offer their traditional in-person

⁶ Latino Outdoors provides a framework for outings and the infrastructure to support leaders and programming but does not micromanage a chapter's programmatic approach.

⁷ Outdoor Outreach is a San Diego based nonprofit that utilizes the outdoors to inspire youth to see possibility and opportunity in their lives, (Outdoor Outreach, n.d.).

experiences to the public. In all, LOSD has offered more than 25 in-person events and outdoor experiences in more than 16 locations. They have directly made over 400 connections with participants through their events, including approximately 60 youth and 75 families. They have also partnered with 15 community organizations and members throughout their programming. LOSD now consists of 7 volunteers and is offering programming through expanded collaborations, partnerships, and grant funding.

The LO chapter in San Diego is quite political. We approach programming through an awareness of the power of place, the importance of creating connections to place for belonging, and the necessity for navigating the landscape, including multiple cultures across imaginary lines. Place, therefore, informs our programming. The proximity to the US-Mexico border, and our recognition and acknowledgement that we sit on the traditional lands of the Kumeyaay Nations makes our chapter different from others. For example, we have engaged in bike rides and hikes to the border to intentionally offer a critical lens of the economic, environmental, and social effects of the border wall. We have also worked to develop relationships with local Indigenous nations and transplanted Indigenous people of the Americas to steward the land, support Indigenous decolonizing efforts, and reclaim our ancestral knowledge. Our chapter then isn't only about hanging out in the outdoors, we seek to engage our communities with the varied borders, boundaries, environmental, and social issues that surround San Diego County.

Chapter 4

Methodology

Introduction

To explore the stories of Latinx peoples and their relationships with the outdoors, I engaged in varied interdisciplinary approaches to begin their storytelling process. As noted in the literature review, the traditional literature on conservation, environmentalism, and outdoor narratives presents a selective set of experiences. I needed to explore Chicax/Latinx scholarship to understand the experiences of BIPOC in the outdoors. This required exploring novels and fiction alongside literature on environmentalism, justice informed work, and the inclusion of cultural productions as important and valid research artifacts. Such literature centers immigration, the land, and the border. This is a similar approach that Ruffin takes in *Black on Earth: African American ecoliteracy traditions*, where several genres of African American Studies are combined to understand connections to the environment that, for African Americans, have been there pre, during, and post enslavement. It just depends on where we look for them. For example, Ruffin identifies the long history of African American connections to nature through music and verbal art. To understand the ecological experiences and connections to the nonhuman world, Ruffin turns to the traditions of blues music and what they coin as “I Got the Blues” epistemology (Ruffin, 2010). For this research, to further understand storytelling and Latinx peoples in the outdoors required collecting data via surveys.

This chapter explains the methods and methodology I utilized to conduct research on Latino Outdoors San Diego (LOSD). As the founding Program Coordinator for LOSD and a Chicana woman invested in diversifying and expanding the outdoor narrative through firsthand experiences, my role as a community organizer, and an advocate for the natural world is

personally significant to this research study. Informing the tools and process of my work was the motivation to offer LOSD and the larger Latinx community outdoor programming insight in return for the joy, inspiration, and connections in the outdoors I have received from them. As an educator, leader, and outdoor experience facilitator, I build shareable knowledge about the needs of Latine peoples to enjoy the outdoors and nurture their relationship with the natural environment and more-than-human world. Gathering quantitative data should influence how experiences are designed for participants, offer more collaborative and diverse partnerships, and support future programming culturally and financially. As a community organizer, the utility and application of research projects typically takes precedence over traditional research. However, my work is intended to not only remain authentic and purposeful, but also valued and beneficial within higher education.

To guide this part of my research, I employed an evaluation model (Weiss, 1998) to examine the merit and worth of LOSD's program outcomes (Alkin & Vo, 2018). By evaluation, we mean, "the systemic assessment of the operation and/or the outcomes of a program or policy, compared to a set of explicit or implicit standards, as a means of contributing to the improvement of the program or policy" (Weiss, 1998, p.4). LOSD is a volunteer-powered organization and thus has limited resources and valuable, unpaid leaders. By focusing my study on the value of programming outcomes, rather than the operation of the programming through the lens of participants' perceptions, I collected and analyzed informative data useful in guiding future programming design. The source of data was gathered using a survey that included multiple-choice, rank order, and open-ended questions.

A descriptive coding approach was used to analyze and interpret the data gathered reflecting participants' expectations and perceptions (Vanover et al., 2022). The data gathered

and presented illuminates where LOSD program initiatives are providing rewarding experiences while also offering insight into future programming enhancements. As a reminder, this research project is guided by the following questions:

1. Given that the context of white environmentalism and histories of colonization has affected the ways that various BIPOC communities form relations to the “outdoors,” how do the identities of Latinx affect their relationship with the outdoors?
2. What are the ways that LOSD shapes opportunities of connection/reconnection to the “outdoors” and what are the impacts on the participants’ lives?

Position

As a current LO ambassador and founding member of LOSD, my position took the form of an *internal-external* evaluator, defined as someone “not specifically within the program to be evaluated, but from the larger organization that encompasses the program” (Alkin and Vo 2018, p.42). My affiliation with the San Diego chapter remains active and familiar with past participants and my role as an ambassador maintains my connection with LO participants and supporters. Though I still hold a strong connection with LOSD, there is also a level of separation as I left my role as a program coordinator and active participation in August 2020. The utility of the research, therefore, holds a level of investment directly associated with my dedication and commitment to creating a more representative Latinx outdoor experience and expanding the leadership tool set for cultural outdoor education that resonates with Latine peoples. Though my insider position may have influenced some respondents to take part in the survey, I did not find it affecting the quality of their responses.

Under the limiting constrictions of time and resources in conducting this research, looking at the larger organization of Latino Outdoors, and/or other agencies working to make the

outdoors more inclusive of Latine peoples was not feasible. Through the reflections and experiences of LOSD's participants, I aim to generate insightful and relevant outdoor recreation research that will further expand the narrative of the outdoors, provide more inclusive spaces, and increase the usage of public green spaces by Latine peoples. LOSD's programming approach is reflective of the growing attitudes and recreation habits of Latine peoples. Helping agencies understand the differences and similarities between the dominant outdoor enthusiast and a sector of the population long underrepresented in the outdoors can provide direction to the changes they need to make their programming and parks more inclusive and welcoming of Latine peoples. Additionally, it can inform more beneficial collaborations with community organizations such as LO.

Data Collection

To help answer my research questions and ensure data was gathered systematically, I employed a survey. The intention for gathering data through a survey was to collect factual and descriptive information in an accessible and quick turnaround (Thomas, 2017). A survey provided a platform to ask both open-ended and closed questions, and with the use of the online survey program Qualtrics, respondents completed the survey at their own convenience. Twelve questions were formulated and structured to collect information on how LOSD participants have engaged with outdoor recreation through LOSD and beyond. Further, questions were formulated with the intention to analyze if and how their attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of outdoor recreation and relationship with the outdoors have shifted through their participation in LOSD outings and online interactions. Finally, I wanted to understand their personal views and relationships with the outdoors and used open-ended questions to allow freedom with thought sharing. I used the Qualtrics program because it provides a professional and intuitive survey

construction platform, and it was available free of cost through the University of Wyoming. Qualtrics shared the survey online via a secure link with instant results of the survey progress available. Results can be downloaded in different formats such as Excel and CSV while also providing other report options such as graphs and data calculations.

I approached the distribution of the survey as an invitation for participants to contribute to the future vision of LOSD. In the email and online social platforms posts, I asked people to offer a few minutes of their time to provide constructive feedback so their experiences and perspectives could be considered in the design of future LOSD programming. It was important for participants to be aware that their time and opinions were valuable and used for the direct benefit of LOSD. The survey was provided in both English and Spanish and was open for 17 days. The survey was structured with closed questions, in the beginning, to help ease respondents in and remind them of the LOSD activities they have participated in and their experiences before inviting them to engage in the open-ended questions. I first wanted to know how they learned about LOSD and offered multiple responses for them to select. Next, I asked a yes or no question to screen respondents who had physically attended an LOSD event from those who had not. The dichotomous question was intended to filter those who had not been on an LOSD to a different route of questions. Unfortunately, I noticed my survey design was flawed after receiving a few responses without additional input. Rather than filtering respondents to subsequent questions, for example asking them why they had not attended an LO event, their survey participation ended. I corrected the survey glitch, but in the process, lost potential data from 12 respondents.

Open-ended questions allowed participants to speak more directly to what they resonated with and wished for in LOSD offerings. To glean at the attitudes and relationship LOSD participants have with the outdoors, I selectively used the term “outdoors” as a neutral term since

it is part of LOSD's title. This way I did not lead respondents to use any specific terms I personally use to describe or be in *relation with* the outdoors such as nature, natural environment, more-than-human world. I included demographic questions at the end of the survey for all respondents but chose to make them optional to allow for privacy and further anonymity. Though the additional dimension of data would provide a better description of LOSD participants, and thus non-participants, I wanted to ensure an additional layer of comfortability and trust. My personal ethics in protecting the Latinx community from being seen and treated as mere subjects as well as maintaining credibility and trust within the community.

Population and Participants

The sampling of participants in this study was open to people ages 18 and older who have participated in any programming provided directly through LOSD or in collaboration with them. People who follow LOSD on their social media platforms, and are 18 years old and older, were also invited to participate in the survey study. Past LOSD participants were reached directly through email. People who wish to participate in LOSD events are required to register for events through the online platform Eventbrite; prior to adopting this platform across the organization in 2019, events were created on Facebook. For events in 2019 and prior, I directly accessed participants' emails by pulling reports LOSD google documents and Eventbrite from there on after, compiled them, and sent a mass email to just over 100 past participants. Participants who have engaged with LOSD primarily through social media were invited to participate in the survey through Facebook and Instagram posts. Anyone who responded to the direct email or through the links provided on the social media platforms was included, whether they were physical or virtual LOSD participants. It was important to include people who have not participated in events to obtain a view of potential participants LOSD might not be reaching and

understand why. A filter was designed in the survey to send these respondents to a narrower set of questions. Of the 54 respondents, 34 stated they had attended and participated in an LOSD event, while 20 did not.

Data Analysis

The data acquired through the survey provided valuable and measurable insight on the impact LOSD has had on its participants' perceptions and experiences with the outdoors. LOSD also connects with people who have not attended any of their events through their online social media platforms. The survey questions, which were designed to assess participants' perceptions and experiences with LOSD including if they were new to the recreational activity, repeated the activity afterward, and if their expectations of the outing were met, provided answers to my research questions. In addition, the survey intended to identify who LOSD was reaching and thus, who it was not. Although some data from respondents who had not been to LOSD was compromised by my error in survey design, the complete responses collected illuminate program modifications that can be more inclusive. I will discuss these specific results and subsequent program suggestions in the next chapter.

Analyzing the open-ended questions took more care and consideration in the inference process. To provide validity and reliability, I used thematic analysis to guide my process in coding patterns and analyzing the written survey responses. The flexibility and intuitive nature of the thematic method provided a straightforward yet nonlinear process to generate interpretations from the data (Vanover et al., 2022). There were three major themes and patterns that I found in the surveys in terms of the meaning of the outdoors for Latinx peoples: connection to self, connection to place, and connection to people, including the social and communal component. The thematic analysis also offered a digestible method to process the variety of

responses and find similarities and relationships between them. Using a constant comparative method (Thomas, 2017, pg. 245) I compared themes and patterns for similarities and differences. Additionally, I created codes and categories and mapped them out to make connections and ground my interpretations. The reflective nature of the decision-making process allowed me to narrow down themes and patterns that offered the most insight and utility to LOSD programming.

The survey and descriptive coding methods complimented each other and provided the base for a deeper analysis of the participants' perceptions and expectations of their experiences with LOSD as well as a deeper understanding of their values and relationship to the natural world and outdoor recreation, allowing for a more thorough evaluation of LOSD's programming value.

Limitations of the Methods and Methodology

An evaluation model offers insight to program outcomes. It is not typically employed to conduct research that adds to a body of knowledge and/or makes inferences beyond what the evidence of the study reflects (Alkin, 2018). Through the larger scope of my research project, which includes a literature review and reflections on my firsthand experiences with and in the outdoors, I supplemented some of the limitations to include a broader picture of the Latine experience outdoors and its relationship with the natural environment. Bias also exists within the use of an evaluation model as the lines between my role as an evaluator and client cross. Also, within the limitations of time and the methodology, the focus was placed on the perceptions of LOSD participants. I could not consider how the operation of programming and specific internal roles of LOSD leadership impacted the design of programming and thus the experience and perceptions of LOSD participants. The scope of my project was also narrow in that I only

surveyed a portion of people who have participated in LOSD events and followed them on social media. With fewer constraints on time, more time could have been allotted to reaching a larger number of past participants. Interviews could also have been conducted to look deeper into why participants return and why some participants have only attended one LOSD event. The Qualtrics program also came with its challenges. The algorithms embedded in the program discouraged more than 3 open-ended questions, alerting a decrease in response rates. Taking this into consideration, I reduced and combined questions into sections, therefore, leaving it more to the discretion of the respondent to answer any or all the questions in a set. As mentioned earlier, the program was new to me, and I made some design errors which caused the loss of potential data.

Chapter 5

Results and Discussion

To organize this chapter, I will first provide my research questions for context. Next, I will discuss the results of the quantitative data. This will be followed by the three emerging themes of (a) Connection to Self; (b) Connection to Place; and (c) Connection to People. Finally, I will discuss the programmatic framework through which LOSD guides its participants to foster meaningful connections to the outdoors.

Research Questions

To recall, this research was guided by the following questions:

1. Given that the context of white environmentalism and histories of colonization has affected the ways that various BIPOC communities form relations to the “outdoors,” how do the identities of Latinx affect their relationship with the outdoors?
2. What are the ways LOSD shapes opportunities of connection/reconnection to the “outdoors” and what are the impacts on the participants’ lives?

Quantitative Data Analysis

I initially received 61 survey responses, yet I identified 7 incomplete responses and removed them from the total dataset. Surveys deemed incomplete were those that did not have responses beyond the first three questions. Of the 54 surveys in the study, 34 of the respondents stated they had attended and participated in an LOSD event, with 85% (29) answering the open-ended questions. Respondents were filtered into different sets of questions depending on whether they had attended an LOSD event or not. All respondents who were successfully filtered to the fully functional survey questions were asked to provide responses to demographic questions at the end voluntarily.

Demographic Results

Out of 54, 36 responded to the demographics section of the survey. Dropping to 32 on the final question about their household income.

Age. Table 1 shows the age distribution of the respondents who chose to answer the question. I created age groups: 18-24, 25-30, 31-36, 37-42, 43-50, 51-60, 61-72, 73 and older. Out of 36 respondents, 12 (33.33%) said they were between the ages of 37-42. 9 (25.00%) said they were between the ages of 31-36.

Gender. Out of 36 respondents, 25 (69.44%) identified as female, 9 (25.00%) as male, and 2 (5.56%) as nonbinary.

Ethnicity. I asked two layers of questions concerning ethnicity. I first asked if respondents considered themselves Latinx or Hispanic. Out of 36 respondents, 30 (83.33%) said yes and 6 (16.67%) said no. Those who replied yes were navigated to an additional question to further categorize their background. Respondents were allowed to select more than one option. 64.86% said they were Mexican, 10.81% Salvadorian, 5.41% Indigenous, with 2.70% for Colombian, Cuban, Ecuadorian, Guatemalan, Honduran, Nicaraguan, and Puerto Rican each.

Family History in the US: To have a sense of generational connection to the US, I asked respondents if they were first, second, third, fourth or more generations to live in the US. 15 (41.67%) said they were they were the first generation of their family to live in the US. 10 (27.78%) said their parents were the first generation to live in the US. Please view Table 2 for more details.

Education. Interestingly, over 80% of respondents have received higher education degrees. Out of 36 respondents, 16 (44.44%) hold a master's degree and 13 (36.11%) hold a bachelor's degree.

Income. Out of 32 respondents, 13 said they had a household income between \$60,000-\$79,999. 11 respondents had a household income of more than \$80,000 with 8 below \$59,999.

I posed a variety of questions to measure first impressions of LOSD, behavioral actions resulting from those impressions, and identify specific impacts. When asked how respondents first heard of LOSD, social media (48.28%) was the top selection, with word of mouth coming in second (32.76%). I also asked how likely respondents were to participate after their first event. 74.29% of respondents said they had been to more than 1 outing. Although only 31.43% of respondents reported that they had engaged in an activity for the first time with LOSD, 88.57% said they were inspired to repeat the activity or do something similar because of their experience. This demonstrates that LOSD can introduce participants to a new activity or skill and inspire the participant to retain or continue engaging in that activity.

Qualitative Data: Connections to Self, Place, and People

The historical implications of the US white environmentalist movement have influenced a dominant culture's outdoor identity that is not accessible to Latinx people. However, through a literature review and evaluation of LOSD, culturally relevant programmatic frameworks are reflecting a movement toward increased opportunities for Latinx to access public lands and engagement in the outdoors, as well as providing measurable impacts. In using a CRT framework to analyze the historical implications of the environmental movement and recent literature on Latinx engagement in the outdoors, along with participant surveys, I understand the valuable impact LOSD has on the Latinx community and the intentional practices through which it is achieving meaningful and transformative experiences. Further, I will provide LOSD with recommendations based on this study in hope that it will strengthen their programmatic structure,

reach larger audiences, and further dismantle the idea that the outdoors is engaged in a homogenous American prescribed manner.

The survey revealed that Latinx people have diverse experiences and ways of engaging the outdoors. According to participant data, there are three ways in which *connection* becomes the overarching goal in participants' relationship to the outdoors. These themes include (a) Connection to Self; (b) Connection to Place; and (c) Connection to People. *Connection to Self*, individualistic in nature, reveals a very personal experience benefiting the physical, mental, and/or spiritual body. For example, several of the respondents associated the outdoors with physical activities that could be practiced solitary such as hiking, running, and biking. Others spoke of engaging in the outdoors to disconnect from the stress and constraints of work and family responsibilities for the purpose of recentering themselves, taking moments of reflection and/or meditation, peace, and relaxation. Other respondents mentioned fueling their spirit through the wonder and discovery of nature and connecting with their ancestral roots and knowledge of mother nature. Responses included the following:

“Being outside is liberating for me. It’s about reconnecting to nature, the land, and thus ourselves.”

“It means to reconnect with the knowledge of my ancestors.”

“It feels like home, being outside in nature connects deeply with my heart.”

Though I chose to separate ideas of the physical, mental, and spiritual experiences I categorized them under *connection to self* because they all emphasized a similar value of personal benefit. In other words, the outdoors is valued, though not always exclusively, because it provides the space for physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing.

Connection to Place reveals both a physical association with place and a more intimate relationship with place through a mental and spiritual awareness of their interconnections. To explain further, the physical *connection to place* stems from a more materialistic gain such as the

enjoyment of physical sensations including the warmth of the sun and the senses that accompany exploring varying terrains such as beaches, lakes, and trails. The physical *connection to place* also includes the collection of knowledge, facts, and history of a location such as when a park was developed, and ecological knowledge such as flora and fauna. On another level, *connection to place* takes on a more spiritual and emotional communal experience. *Connection to place* is interconnected with nature and ancestral knowledge. Below are a few examples:

“Being outdoors means returning to my ancestral roots. There has been a disconnect from the land by previous generations and I want to heal it.”

“Being outdoors connects us back to our natural state and our standing with nature.”

“I feel a re-connection to my environment, less competitive, less concerned about possessions...”

The respondents’ experiences entail an intimate relationship with the natural world. For example, they describe their connection with the outdoors as “being one *with* nature” and/or connecting intergenerationally through ancestral knowledge and the more-than-human world, thus understanding place as a larger entity, like “nature” they are interconnected with.

Connection to People also takes on two different dynamics. On one level the outdoors provides a strictly social component, it is a space to enjoy company, be that of friends, family, or acquaintances. On a different level, *connection to people* outdoors means *being in* community. Some respondents shared that the outdoors provided a space to foster and strengthen community. One respondent said that their time outdoors was an opportunity to “learn to interact with others.” Another respondent said that by learning to trust nature they learned to trust others with whom they experienced it. By experiencing the outdoors on a mental and spiritual level, trust, healing, and intimacy, one can develop meaningful relationships.

The analysis of the survey data reflects three ways in which *connection* becomes the overarching goal in participants' relationship to the outdoors. These include a connection to self, connection to place and connection to people. The analysis I conducted on respondents'

relational identities and values of the outdoors and their experiences and perceptions of LOSD's provided the ability to assess LOSD's programmatic outcomes. In particular, I was able to show how their programmatic framework shapes connections and reconnections with the outdoors for their participants and provide a narrative of the impacts they are having on participants' lives.

LOSD's Programmatic Approach Creates Meaningful Connections Outdoors

LOSD also introduces people to new locations in San Diego and the resulting data speaks to their place-based impact. 65.71% of respondents said they visited the LOSD event site for the first time during the outing with 54.29% returning to the location after the outing. To begin to glean a better understanding of LOSD participants' value systems and how to retain and attract a larger number of participants on LOSD outings, the final closed question asked respondents to rank in order from 1 to 6 who they most preferred to share an outdoor outing with. Going outdoors with friends was ranked as the number one choice at 63.64%. Ranking as the second most preferred option was with friends again at 27.27%. However, there was a tie in this ranking that came in at 24.24% for both family preference and LO preference. LO was the most popular selection ranked at number 3 with 54.55% (Figure 3).

According to the survey data, LOSD offers connections that resonate with and enrich the lives of the participants. By looking at the quantitative data along with thematic analysis of the data and comparing it to LO programmatic framework it is evident LOSD is creating meaningful outdoor experiences by removing real and perceived barriers. To recall, the LO framework weaves culture, community, wellness, and connection into outings by connecting 1) people to process, 2) people to people, 3) people to place, and 4) people to policy. Through the guided framework, LOSD is employing practices that enable them to remove perceptual, physical, and functional barriers, their participants feel welcomed, empowered, and connected to place and

people during and after outings. Although I break data into these categories, it is important to note that many of these practices intersect the resulting connections.

People to Process

To understand the ways that LOSD creates methods of connection/reconnection to the outdoors and the impact on participant's lives I posed the following collection of questions in one open-ended question to respondents:

“What ideas did you have of the LOSD outing before attending? In other words, what did you think the event would be like? What was it actually like? If you could change something about the outing, what would it be? If you could design your own LOSD experience, what would you want?”

The responses varied but it was clear LOSD was removing real and perceived barriers through their welcoming, inclusive, and educational programming. LOSD practices not only made participants feel safe, but it also developed participants self-empowerment in getting outdoors and recreating. This practice, part of the first tenant *People to Process* of the LO framework, impacts first impressions, ease of integration into the group, and feeling a sense of belonging.

The responses included the following:

“My impression about attending an LOSD outing before going was that it was an opportunity to get out of the house without the effort of having to do research. I often have the desire to do an outdoor activity but the dread of investigating routes and organizing logistical details oftentimes becomes a preventing obstacle.”

“I was nervous because there is so much diversity within the Latinx experience and being second generation I have my own insecurities about my identity within that community, but everyone at the event was so supportive and I found that it was so much easier than I thought it would be to focus on the similarities within our experiences that have limited our access to outdoor activities.”

“What I liked about LOSD is that it is an active event. Even if I didn't want to have awkward conversations, we'd be active which makes it more enjoyable and easier to ease my anxiety.”

Part of LOSD's process at the beginning of outings is to ask participants to share their pronouns, though many did not specify the sharing of pronouns, several offered descriptions of LOSD events being inclusive and open. Two respondents, however, highlighted this practice

specifically. One respondent said, “Sharing my pronouns was nice so I didn't have the anxiety of being misgendered.” It is clear to infer from the data that for many of the respondents, feelings of safety and belonging play a significant role in their experience. This can provide insight to the fact that 68.57% of respondents who attend an LOSD outing are not engaging in an activity for the first time. However, LOSD’s focus on breaking down real and perceived barriers is still providing new experiences for some with impact. One respondent said,

“Before going I expected an opportunity to get to do an outdoor activity I usually don’t get to do on my own or with family. The experience was very enriching in learning to be in the outdoors through a cultural relevant lens.”

LOSD’s programmatic approach creates a sense of belonging during outings by breaking down real and perceived barriers which can limit Latinx participation in the outdoors. These inclusive practices include gender and cultural sensitivity to deepen connections in and with the outdoors.

People to People

The data also reveals that LOSD’s practice of connecting *people to people* shapes meaningful and transformative experiences with the outdoors by extending the sense of communal belonging for participants. The welcoming, inclusive, and cultural practices LOSD employs increase a participant's comfortability to meet and connect with people. Connecting participants to each other also supports the high return rates (74.29%) of participation. One respondent said, “I got to meet new people as I continued to participate.” Another respondent said,

“At my first event, it seemed that everyone there knew each other so I felt a bit like an outsider. Yet at the same time, everyone was welcoming, and continuing to show up to other events, I felt more connected.”

Fostering community was both an expected outcome and an empowering sense of belonging. For example, one respondent said,

“It was more than a hike; we were building community. I didn’t expect that. Everyone was very welcoming and made me feel like I’d finally found my people.”

This sense of community also fosters a support system as one respondent shared,

“I was also worried that I wouldn’t be experienced enough for the activities, but there were so many people with varying levels of experiences that made the events even better because we were able to support each other from those differences in strengths.”

Creating a social atmosphere during outings is an important factor of the programmatic vision of LOSD, far more visible within participants experiences and values is the intention LOSD sets for fostering community.

People to Place

LOSD extends the sense of belonging to a community to include a sense of belonging in the outdoors. *People to place* offers connections to place through place-based practices. A participant is not only learning or practicing a recreational skillset, but through education and knowledge shares, they are connecting to deeper sense of place. To exemplify, one respondent said,

“What I've loved about the outings is that they are catered experiences meant to not only introduce you to new places and activities but deepen your understanding of the geographical location or our relationship with that place.”

Another respondent spoke of the plant knowledge they gained which connected them to place, “I feel a re-connection to my environment... [through] the understanding of uses of plants.”

Reflecting the intersectionality of people and place connections made on LOSD outings is articulated by this respondent's answer, “I have specially appreciated seeing SD Latino Outdoors do events in which the relationship to local Native peoples is a fundamental part of the cultural programming.” By incorporating place-based stories and knowledge, LOSD participants’ connections and relationships to place are deepened and empowered.

People to Policy

Although the last component of the framework was not strongly specified in respondents' connections, I was able to interpret some of the impacts made through LOSD’s practice of

connecting *people to policy*. Respondents generally spoke to the benefits of the educational aspects offered during LOSD outings like learning about the flora, fauna, and histories of the land and Indigenous stewardship. However, one respondent said they liked the “educational/call to action components.” This respondent alluded to the *people to policy* connection by saying, “I appreciated the small talks about orgs in the area.” The data I collected reveals only a glimpse of LOSD’s environmental and advocacy programmatic practices. However, a more comprehensive analysis is possible, if necessary, by incorporating past outings, more specifically the locations and programming of those events.

Implications

Through a case study of LOSD’s programmatic outcomes and a literature review of the historical implications of the environmental and conservation movement of the mid nineteenth century to early twentieth century and resulting dominant outdoor narrative the importance for an intervention to the hegemonic environmental and recreation discourses is illuminated. The idea that the outdoors is an individual experience, and that environmentalism should be valued and practiced through the constructed white dominant lens is detrimental to the experiences and inclusivity of BIPOC. Latino Outdoors, Latino Outdoors San Diego, and other affinity groups programmatic success is reflecting the connections in and with the outdoors matter most.

Affinity groups and the expansion of the outdoor identity and narrative are imperative in creating a more equitable and inclusive outdoors. Therefore, the importance of investing in a knowledge shift of the outdoor paradigm through the following programmatic aspects must be valued and supported culturally, financially, and academically: (a) Affinity groups, (b) Storytelling, (c) Centering of Indigenous knowledge, and (d) Collaborations.

Affinity Groups

The increasing number of outdoor affinity groups is a testament to the need for welcoming and inclusive spaces outdoors. It is a reflection that there are substantial physical and perceptual barriers in accessing the outdoors. Affinity groups, however, are not the resolution for addressing outdoor equity. Affinity groups are a tool for enhancing and creating unique outdoor spaces and experiences. The systemic barriers creating inequities in accessing public green spaces and outdoor spaces must be addressed on the policy level.

Storytelling

Storytelling is also another tool that can be employed to challenge the dominant outdoor narrative and celebrate the voices of people long silenced who have always had a relationship with the outdoors but through systemic beliefs and structures their engagement with the outdoors has been impacted negatively.

Indigenous Knowledge

As a person of color and Latinx identifying in the US, there is a responsibility to stay aware and grounded in learning and practicing decolonial language and most importantly supporting and fostering Indigenous relationships with tribal communities and stewards of the land. The mission and vision of the public park systems, outdoor industry, and environmentalism require a shift in perspective and action that centers Indigenous knowledge and Land Back initiatives to heal the land and human and the-more-than-human relationships.

Collaborations

Collaborations play an important part in sharing resources, building trust, and expanding opportunities for building allyship. Partnerships connecting environmental and park organizations with groups and leaders aligned and representative of the Latinx community increase Latinx engagement in the outdoors. Akiima Price, Thrive Outside Washington D.C.

director and community organizer connecting underserved communities to the outdoors, stressed in a recent conversation that you need someone “who speaks community in the community” to bring and lead impactful outdoor connections (Fisher et al., 2022). Local community leaders and groups are not only trusted by members of the community, but they also understand the needs of the community, allowing genuine partnerships with outside organizations.

Recommendations for LOSD programming

It is challenging to make certain programmatic recommendations to a group that is run solely by volunteers. However, considering the experiences and opinions shared by respondents LOSD could increase their connection outcomes through these three measures: (a) diversifying outings, (b) increasing partnerships and collaborations, and (c) extending their presence in the North County region.

Diversifying Outings

According to the survey results, respondents engage and are interested in a variety of outdoor activities. To expand on the community building component, attract new participants, and increase retention, I recommend LOSD include more social gatherings such as picnics, bonfires, and outdoor film screenings.

Increasing Partnerships and Collaborations

As a volunteer powered organization resources and the capacities of leaders are limited. Through partnerships and collaborations networks of support can increase volunteer bandwidth by sharing the energy and time needed for planning and facilitating events. This also offers a way to empower resources by filtering them to benefit new communities.

Extending Presence in North County San Diego

The data of this study and conversations I’ve had during my leadership role with LOSD have revealed a strong interest from residents living in San Diego’s North County to participate

in LOSD events. Potential participants have stated challenges with long commutes and transportation from North County locations. To make it more accessible and increase participation of North County residents, it would benefit LOSD to host events in the north county region. Partnerships and collaborations with organizations and groups in North County can prove especially beneficial to LOSD in this area. The increased visibility and programming in the region may also be the link needed to recruit new leaders to foster and maintain outdoor connections for communities in those areas.

Future Research

Future research through interdisciplinary approaches should be supported and conducted by Latinx outdoor affinity groups and/or those collaborating or wanting to collaborate with Latinx outdoor affinity groups to gain more insight into Latine peoples' perspectives and experiences of the outdoors. By gaining a deeper understanding of the values and experiences influencing Latines' outdoors experiences and preferences, organizations and groups can create relevant programming for meaningful experiences. It is also critical to note that Latinx youth were not included in this study, it would be not only beneficial but important to include Latinx youth voices in future studies.

Another focus on future research should look at expanding literary and cultural productions categorized under the environmentalism and nature writing umbrellas. For example, there is extensive literature on the historical cultural perceptions and relationships Latines have with nature in Chicano/a and Latino/a Studies literature but since it is not deemed under environmentalism, important narratives and details of these communities have not been included in the American story of the Great Outdoors. We also cannot assume that the available literature in these departments is in English, a deeper dive in Spanish literature will enhance and contribute

to the collection of knowledge. Looking deeper into other fields such as Chicano/a Studies scholarship for nature appreciation stories, environmental ethic value systems, and ancestral connections and relationships with the natural environment can help build the Latine community's own environmental identity.

Epilogue

This project was a personal journey and reflection of lived experiences and legacies which ignited my love for the outdoors, and the ways in which I engage with the more-than-human world. I often feel challenged by language, especially in the academic world, however I understand I cannot remain muted or intimidated by rules and structures because I carry the stories of past generations, the voices of my communities, and that of future generations. *Yo cuento*, I matter. It matters that I show us as a Latina, Chicana, queer, mother, friend, student, leader... in these spaces of conversation, movement, collective action, and radical love for ourselves, community, and planet. *Yo cuento*, I tell my story. I tell my story to keep my grandmother's spirit alive. I share my story to contribute to our collective story. I share my story as a reminder to be flexible—to adapt, pivot, evolve. A reminder to be open and compassionate. It is the responsibility I have chosen. It is how I root myself in my work. It is how my role in this world and current life cycle has manifested itself. Therefore, with tenderness and vulnerability, I approached and presented this contribution in the evolution of conversation around environmentalism, Latinx intersectionality and narratives in the outdoors, and interconnections with the natural world.

In June of 2021, my family flew into Jackson Hole, Wyoming, to attend my graduation ceremony from Teton Science Schools. During that trip, my older sister, at 45 years old, visited her first two national parks. While driving from the Tetons north toward Yellowstone I played an episode of *The Experiment* (The Atlantic, 2021) exploring the creation of the national park system and what it would be like to return the land to Native Americans for them to manage. To my surprise, my family was attentive and engaged in genuine conversation and I was able to share more of the historical knowledge and pose critical open-ended questions so that as a family

we were able to visit respectfully. As I create bridges in my work connecting people to the outdoors, creating partnerships between Latino Outdoors and other organizations, developing relationships with Indigenous leaders and communities, I want to practice patience and vulnerability with my immediate family to share the love and advocacy I nurture for the outdoors with them. I also want to remain grounded in joy, pleasure, and rest.

Latino Outdoors San Diego, and the community I belong to through the Latino Outdoors network, has helped strengthen my voice through the collective nurturing of healing and joy in the outdoors. It is through the affirmations of belonging that resonate with me the most as we engage participants in advocacy, environmental action, healing, and joy for the future health of us all. I offer you, the reader, an invitation to become leaders to uplift each other, cultivate solutions and collective action, and support community groups and organizations advocating for the right to fresh air, clean water, green spaces, and a sustainable future.

How can we, as a human race, ask the questions that will embrace change, be flexible and adaptable, think and live with multiple ways of thinking, and live in relationship with the land?

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Appendix A

Survey Questions and Tables

Survey Questions

- Q1 - Details of research project and consent to participate
- Q2 - How did you first learn about Latino Outdoors San Diego?
- Q3 - Have you participated in an outdoor outing with Latino Outdoors San Diego?
- Q4 - If you have NOT participated in an LOSD outing, why have you not participated?
Please explain.
- Q5 - If yes, how many times have you participated in outings with LOSD?
- Q6 - Which type of activities did you engage in?
- Q7 - Did you do an activity for the first time on an LOSD outing? For example, did you hike for the very first time on an LOSD outing?
- Q8 - Were you inspired to repeat the same activity or do something similar after your LOSD experience?
- Q9 - Did you visit the location where the outing was held for the first time with LOSD?
- Q10 - Have you returned to the location since the LOSD outing?
- Q11 - Rank from 1 to 6, with 1 being the most important. Who do you most prefer going on an outdoor outing with?
- Q12 - What ideas did you have of the LOSD outing before attending? In other words, what did you think the event would be like? What was it actually like?
If you could change something about the outing, what would it be?
If you could design your own LOSD experience, what would you want?
- Q13 - If you could design your own LOSD experience, what would you want?
Please elaborate.
- Q14 - Finally, what does it mean to you to be outdoors? Please elaborate.

Table 1***Demographics: Age reported by respondents***

Age Range	Count	Percentage
18-24 years old	1	2.78%
25-30 years old	6	16.67%
31-36 years old	9	25.00%
37-42 years old	12	33.33%
43-50 years old	4	11/11%
51-60 years old	1	2.78%
61-72 years old	3	8.33%

Table 2***Question 21: Which best describes the history of your family in the United States?***

Answer	Count	Percentage
I am the first generation of my family to live in the US	15	41.67%
My parents were the first generation in our family to live in the US	10	27.78%
My grandparents were the first generation in our family to live in the US	5	13.89%
At least four generations of my family have lived in the US	3	8.33%
Other/I don't know	3	8.33%

Appendix B

Figures

Figure 1

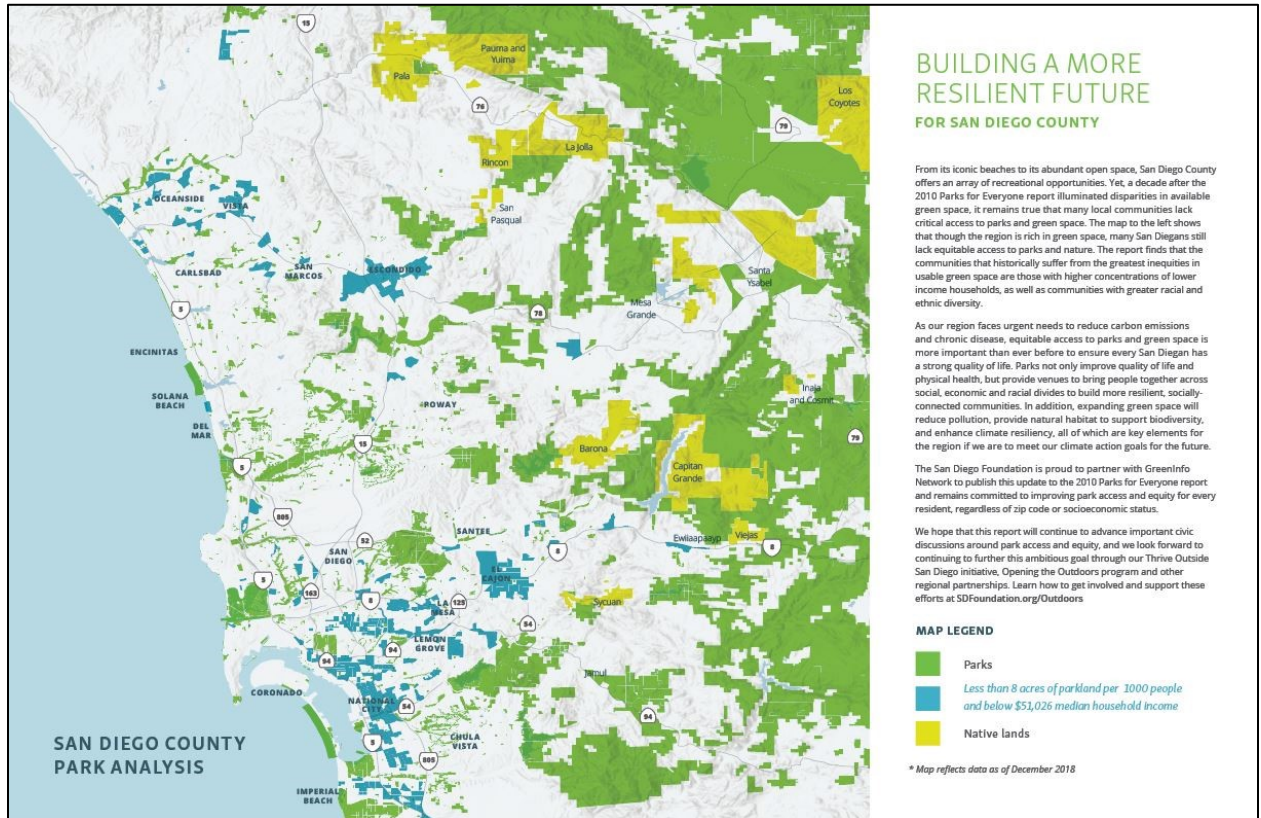
Latino Outdoors Theory of Change (Latino Outdoors, n.d.)



Note: The LO Outings Framework provides LO volunteers a guide for structuring points of connections in programming.

Figure 2

Parks for Everyone 2.0.: An Update to the Parks for Everyone Report (San Diego Foundation, 2020)



Note: This image is from the 2020 Parks for Everyone Report published by the San Diego Foundation. The map reflects data from December 2018. While more than 45% of San Diego's County's total land area is green space, many communities have limited access.

Figure 3

LOSD Participant Survey Results for Question 11

Q11 - Rank from 1 to 6, with 1 being the most important. Who do you most prefer going on an outdoor outing with?

#	Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total						
1	With family	15.15%	5	24.24%	8	12.12%	4	30.30%	10	9.09%	3	9.09%	3	33
2	With friends	63.64%	21	27.27%	9	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	3.03%	1	6.06%	2	33
3	Latino Outdoors	0.00%	0	24.24%	8	54.55%	18	15.15%	5	6.06%	2	0.00%	0	33
4	<u>Other</u> outdoor group	6.06%	2	6.06%	2	3.03%	1	30.30%	10	48.48%	16	6.06%	2	33
5	On my own	9.09%	3	15.15%	5	15.15%	5	21.21%	7	15.15%	5	24.24%	8	33
6	People who I do not know	6.25%	2	3.13%	1	6.25%	2	0.00%	0	25.00%	8	59.38%	19	32

Note: 21 Respondents selected they preferred going on an outdoor outing with friends (option 2). 5 respondents selected family as their top preference (option 1).

Author's Biography

Cassandra Castillo (she/her) is a Chicana with deep connections to the California borderlands of Calexico and San Diego. In 2018, Cassandra co-founded the Latino Outdoors chapter in San Diego County. As the Program Coordinator, she spearheaded outdoor experiences through a social and environmental justice perspective to reconnect Latinx communities to land and nature. Cassandra graduated from the Teton Science Schools place-based graduate program in June of 2021. She is currently a Master of Science student pursuing concurrent majors in Natural Science Education and Environment and Natural Resources at the University of Wyoming. Prior to that, she dedicated close to 15 years working for San Diego's public media station, successfully managing the organization's largest departmental budget, overseeing the fulfillment and receiving department, coordinating the volunteer program, and providing valuable experiences for members. Cassandra has been an active organizer within San Diego's Latinx and queer communities since 2005, amplifying actions and voices through various modes of art, dance, theatre, and storytelling. For Cassandra family, community, y la naturaleza are motivations for finding joy in life, creating healing spaces, inspiring curiosity in nature, and influencing a better future for the land and the next generations.