

A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF OUTDOOR
RECREATION FOR LATINX FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS
ATTENDING CALIFORNIA POLYTECHNIC HUMBOLDT

By

Juan Anzada

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Committee Membership

Dr. Michihiro Clark Sugata, Committee Chair

Dr. Anthony Silvaggio, Committee Member

Dr. Jennifer Eichstaedt, Program Graduate Coordinator

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ABSTRACT

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Historically, marginalized groups, including people of color and those from low socioeconomic populations, have been at a disadvantage in accessing outdoor recreation on public lands. This project explores whether this phenomenon is mirrored in undergraduate student populations, specifically within Latinx first generation college students. This project had a sample size of twenty undergraduate students who identified as first-generation Latinx students attending Cal Poly Humboldt. Utilizing a semi-structured interview, participants were presented with survey questions which were intended to elicit their response on how the natural environment, and their participation in the environment through outdoor recreation were significant factors in their decision to attend and remain enrolled at Cal Poly Humboldt. The survey research identified three significant finds including: (1) an expected difficult transition to Cal Poly Humboldt, (2) barriers to outdoor recreation, (3) and perceived exclusion and isolation. The findings in this research suggested Latinx first generation college students attending Cal Poly Humboldt found value and importance in the outdoor environment and outdoor recreation, however external factors such cultural shock, race based discrimination, and the lack of cultural representation were much more significant in shaping their experiences.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
LIST OF APPENDICES.....	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
REVIEW OF LITERATURE	4
Outdoor Recreation Defined.....	4
Outdoor Spaces Defined	7
Perceived Barriers to Accessing Outdoor Recreation.....	11
Latinx Outdoor Recreation Habits and Barriers	15
Outdoor Recreation and the College Experience.....	19
METHODS	21
Recruitment.....	21
Participants.....	22
Interviews.....	24
THEORY	27
Institutionalism	28
Recreation Commodification	32
Recreational Capital	34
DATA ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION	37

Expected Difficult Transitions..... 37

Experienced Exclusion and Isolation..... 48

Key Takeaways..... 51

REFERENCES 54

APPENDICES 64

 Appendix A: Introductory and Scheduling Email 64

 Appendix B: Interview Guide..... 65

 Appendix C: Informed Consent..... 66

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: Introductory and Scheduling Email 64

Appendix B: Interview Guide 65

Appendix C: Informed Consent 66

INTRODUCTION

This research project was inspired through my lived experiences identifying as a Latinx student in higher academia and my experience working as park ranger for the National Park Service. I have over a decade of experience working as a park ranger in various park sites including the Channel Islands, Yosemite, Grand Canyon, Redwood National Parks, Muir Woods National Historic Park, and Santa Monica Mountains and Golden Gate National Recreation Areas. For the greater part of my time working with the National Park Service, I held positions in education and outreach. My time spent working in these beautiful parks was often spent informing and educating the public on a wide range of natural, cultural and historic resources. Throughout these experiences, I could not help but notice the lack of ethnic and cultural diversity found in our National Parks, both within the staff and visitors. More specifically I had a difficult time seeing Latinx/Hispanic communities represented in any of the National Parks I staffed, which led me to begin to study how systemic racism affected National Parks and the conservation movement as a whole in the United States. The American conservation movement, from its humble beginnings to the early twentieth century, has been largely influenced by race, class, and gender. The conservation campaigns that help established outdoor spaces like parks and wildlife protections were initially led by white, urban elites whose efforts, both willingly and unwillingly discriminated against marginalized and lower-class communities (Taylor, 2016).

In addition to being a park ranger for the National Park Service, I also completed an undergraduate degree in the natural sciences at Cal Poly Humboldt in 2015 (formerly

Humboldt State University). Unfortunately, I had a similar experience in perceiving the lack of ethnic representation among the staff and faculty, specifically the lack of Latinx/Hispanic representation. During my time spent as an undergraduate student I naturally gravitated toward student community groups which identified as Latinx/Hispanic and began to question whether this specific population was attracted to Cal Poly Humboldt in part due to the geographic location of campus and its proximity to abundant natural areas like parks, forest, and beaches. Understanding that many Latinx/Hispanic students originated from areas in Southern California, I became curious about what specifically attracted students to enroll at Cal Poly Humboldt, and whether the natural environment and the potential of outdoor recreation activities was a major factor in their decision-making process. This research project was developed to better understand the level of importance outdoor recreation has with Latinx first generation college students attending Cal Poly Humboldt and whether their participation in the natural environment through outdoor recreation were significant factors in their decision to attend and remain enrolled.

This research project utilizes a comprehensive literature review to help define outdoor recreation, the construction of the conservation movement and how both of these elements interact with marginalized groups, and specific to Latinx/Hispanic populations. The literature review is divided into four sections which include: *outdoor recreation, outdoor spaces, barriers in accessing outdoor spaces, Latinx/Hispanic recreation habits and barriers, and outdoor recreation and the college experience*. This project follows a

description of the research methods used in identifying the surveyed population and techniques used in the survey implementation, which include the following sections: *recruitment, participants and interviews*. As part of this project's guiding framework, three theoretical lenses were utilized to help discuss the relationships between the institution (Cal Poly Humboldt), Latinx student populations, and the outdoor environment. Sarah Ahmed's work on *Institutional theory* was utilized to help frame diversity efforts by higher academic institutions, Marxist *theory on commodification* was used to help frame outdoor recreation as a commodity, and Bourdieu's *theory of cultural capital* was used to help frame the accessibility of outdoor recreation. The data analysis section in this project is used to showcase emergent themes that permeated the analysis which include: *expected difficult transitions, barriers to outdoor recreation, and perceived exclusion and isolation*. Lastly the discussion section helps this research reflect on the findings, how they relate with the principle research question, and considerations for future research.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Outdoor Recreation Defined

Outdoor recreation has historically been described simply as recreation that occurs in the outdoors. This was the predominant definition until the mid-1960s when the concept of outdoor recreation was given considerable academic investment and was divided into three separate sub-categories: resource-oriented recreation, intermediate recreation, and user-oriented recreation (Jensen and Guthrie, 2006). Resource-oriented recreation is based on available natural resources and includes activities such as camping, rock climbing, fishing, and hunting. The success of these activities is largely dependent on the natural resources found in National Parks, National Forests, Wilderness Areas, and areas of undeveloped natural landscapes. Intermediate recreation still occurs in a natural setting, however, there is significant human impact occurring simultaneously throughout the recreation activity. Examples include close-to-home camping, picnicking, bicycling, water and snow skiing; with many of these activities occurring in state parks or local recreation areas in close proximity to urban areas. User-orientated recreation lands fully on the opposite side of the spectrum, with facility-based recreation activity typically occurring in non-natural or significantly human-altered environments (i.e. developed landscape). User-orientated recreation occurs in urban areas and includes facilities such as playgrounds, municipal parks, golf courses, public swimming pools, and athletic fields.

Research from the mid-1960s also led to the development of a theoretical framework for describing the recreational experience. This framework outlines a multiphase description of the outdoor recreation experience consisting of five phases: (1) anticipation, (2) travel-to, (3) onsite, (4) travel-back, and (5) recollection. These phases were meant to be broken down as individual traits of the overall recreation experience, each phase resulting in a positive or negative experience. The combined experiences of all five phases ultimately determine the overall level of satisfaction for that specific outdoor recreation experience (Clawson and Knetsch, 1966). This multiphase experience model has been used to study how certain phases influence the overall outdoor recreation experience - the most notable, and most studied, being the on-site phase as it is most likely to have a significant impact on the overall outdoor recreation experience (Tarrant, Manfredo, & Driver, 1994). Researchers have been able to link the actual increase of environmental appreciation with increased time spent in outdoor recreation by participants in that on-site phase of the recreation experience. This simple, and maybe obvious, finding can better help park managers fulfill the expected experience outdoor recreation participants are searching for in terms of leisure experience and outdoor education (McKay, Brownlee, and Hallo 2012).

A more contemporary description of outdoor recreation can be defined as an individual participating in leisure activity, typically in a natural setting that provides for the desired experience (Moore and Driver, 2005). In a more simplistic description – one widely accepted among government, private and nonprofit agencies - outdoor recreation

describes the enjoyment and participation people have in natural and semi-natural areas (Jensen and Guthrie, 2006). The definition of outdoor recreation can be subjective, sometimes described by the level of a physical challenge brought by the outdoor activity, or the work that has to go into truly appreciating nature; however, it is important to note that what defines outdoor activity has been ever-evolving and is significantly dependent on the individual, group, or community involved in the experience (Moore and Driver, 2005). In a study conducted by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife, open-ended questions were used to ask survey participants their definition of outdoor recreation. The researchers were able to determine that the participants defined outdoor recreation as “any fun, outdoor activity which may include but not limited to camping, hunting, and fishing” (Clemens et al., 2018). This is a great example of the simple - but specific - definition the surveyed population considered for outdoor recreation. The definition included the specific enjoyment of camping, fishing, and hunting, a likely recreation activity conducted by active Oklahoman outdoor recreation participants. In using Moore and Driver’s (2005) concept of the ever-evolving definition of outdoor recreation, it is possible to take the same survey and apply it to an urban setting. The definition of outdoor recreation would likely be influenced by the survey participant’s recreation activities in that urban environment – such as golfing, trips to the zoo, or use of municipal parks. While the definition of outdoor recreation is subjective to the participant, current themes across various definitions all seem to involve a participant’s sense of enjoyment and leisure taking place in – you guessed it - an outdoor setting.

Outdoor Spaces Defined

Defining outdoor space is an important concept in outdoor recreation as it sets the parameter by which outdoor activity can occur (Jensen and Guthrie, 2006). The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines an outdoor space as an open or green piece of land that is undeveloped and accessible to the public (US EPA n.d.). The Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention defines a green space as an open and undeveloped land with natural vegetation (Health 2017). Though it might seem redundant to define what an open, green, or outdoor space is, a study by Taylor & Hochuli (2017) reviewed over 125 different greenspace journals and found that less than half of the journals defined what the term green space meant. From the journals that did define the term green space, six definitions were identified by the research. This doesn't mean that there are six types of definitions of the term green space, rather that the term green space should be defined before any study of the subject is created in order to have a better contextual understanding (Taylor and Hochuli, 2017). This research paper will use the EPA and CDC descriptors of outdoor space, including areas such as parks, community gardens, playgrounds, public plazas, and other open green spaces which provide recreational opportunities for people and assist in enhancing the environmental quality of a community or area. There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that exposure to natural environments is associated with a wider range of health benefits, including a reduction in obesity, healthier birth weights, overall physical wellbeing, and lower mortality (Twohig-Bennett and Jones, 2018). The benefits to mental health with

proximity to a green space can be explained by lower overall stress (Thompson et al., 2012), and a reduction of depression symptoms (Beyer et al., 2014). Some direct examples of the benefits of outdoor recreation have been captured in multiple counties across the State of Oregon in which the significant reduction in adult obesity was linked to the direct availability of outdoor recreation (Rosenberger, Bergerson, and Kline 2009). Research involving combat veterans participating in multi-night outdoor recreation programs has shown a significant increase in sleep quality along with a notable reduction of perpetual stress and PTSD symptoms (Vella, Milligan, and Bennett 2013). Research focusing on the relationship between depressive symptoms and outdoor recreation has revealed that adults with disabilities who participated in outdoor recreation showed fewer depressive symptoms than non-participants (Wilson and Christensen 2012).

In the area of outdoor education, students in grade school who are exposed to outdoor education have showcased enhanced skills in community building, culture, and connectivity, with more developed positive feelings and memories toward school and the outdoors (James and Williams, 2017). Outdoor education in conjunction with outdoor recreation was thrust into the center stage during the Obama Administration roll-out of the Every Kid in Parks (EKIP) program. Effectively launched in September 2015, this program gave every fourth grader and their family free access to Federal lands which include National Parks, National Forests, and many other Federal recreational areas (National Park Service 2015). Research into the EKIP program found the program to be an effective tool for inquiry-based learning and assisted in increasing environmental

stewardship (Montero et al. 2018). Research-based on outdoor education science programs and high school students found that students were significantly more engaged, motivated, self-determined, and physically active when compared to previous indoor (traditional) science-based classroom settings (Mackenzie, Son, and Eitel 2018). For students attending a four-year university, courses focused on outdoor recreation have provided undergraduate students with a higher participation rate, an enhanced sense of community, and the ability to become a more well-rounded student (Clark and Anderson, 2011).

The benefits and allure of natural spaces have been described in American literature as early as the mid-nineteenth century, with one of the earliest publications of *Walden* (1854) by Henry David Thoreau - highly regarded as his masterpiece work and considered to be an influential work of naturalist literature. Soon after, publications including *The Pictures of California* (1888), *The Mountains of California* (1884), and *Our National Parks* (1901) by John Muir seeded the grandeur of the outdoor and wildland space into American audiences, launching the American conservation movement (Fox, 1985). By the early twentieth century, the 'great outdoors' idiom was well established and used to describe outdoor space, with a special emphasis on National Forests, National Parks, and Wilderness Areas. As the American conservation movement began to gain traction, so did the establishment of protected natural landscapes. With the founding of the world's first National Park in 1872, Yellowstone National Park would go on to become an incredible milestone for the creation and protection of America's natural

landscapes – including parks, preserves, and wildlife sanctuaries (United States and National Park Service 1998). Since the passing of the 1916 National Park Service Organic Act, there have been over 400 National Park units, 130 National Forests, and over 590 National Wildlife Refuges established. The era of natural landscape protection has also influenced the establishment of countless state, county, city, and local parks and natural spaces across this country. The creation of National Park systems by the United States government would prove to be one of the most renowned conservation movements, setting the standard for similar state, city, and local governments to protect natural landscapes for both conservation and outdoor recreation (Runte, 1997).

The identity of outdoor spaces – such as National Parks - has been described as an American conservation movement, a sentiment that has been echoed throughout the creation and management of the natural landscapes in the United States. Examples of this sentiment include statements such as – “There is nothing more American as our National Parks” (National Park Service, 2019) by former President Franklin D Roosevelt – “The parks contain the highest potentialities of national pride, national contentment, and national health” (National Park Service 2003) by the first NPS Director Stephen T. Mather – “National parks are the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst” (National Park Service 2003) by American Novelist and Pulitzer prize recipient Wallace Stegner. An analysis by Ross-Bryant and Lynn (2013) explores how the recurring themes of nature and outdoor spaces have shaped American politics, religion, and culture. These themes not only

affected the physical geography of the American landscape, but also the cultural geography of the American people - the idea of parks and the great outdoors has become interwoven into the fabric of the American narrative.

Perceived Barriers to Accessing Outdoor Recreation

The conservation movement in the United States created countless open and green spaces for the public to enjoy, and it is easy to assume that everyone participates in outdoor recreation equally. Unfortunately, this assumption could not be further from the truth. The American conservation movement, from its humble beginnings to the early twentieth century, has been largely influenced by race, class, and gender. The conservation campaigns that help established outdoor spaces like parks and wildlife protections were initially led by white, urban elites whose efforts, both willingly and unwillingly discriminated against marginalized and lower-class communities (Taylor, 2016). Public lands, by default, are areas of exclusion. There is a growing body of research that has been able to showcase perceived barriers by ethnic minority communities when compared to white communities. In a large survey study conducted by Ghimire et al. (2014), researchers utilized the National Level Household Survey with a sample size of over three-thousand participants - the survey examined whether ethnic minority communities perceived more constraints to outdoor recreation compared with white communities. The research found ethnic minority communities not only perceived more constraints to outdoor recreation, but the level of perceived constraints by ethnic minority communities had increased when compared to an earlier study (Poudyal, Cho,

and Hodges 2008). Reoccurring constraints highlighted money, time, transport, personal safety, and language as barriers to outdoor recreation (Ghimire et al. 2014). In a similar research study by Bustam et al. (2011), a state-wide Florida telephone survey was able to obtain over three thousand responses, in which the researchers were examining outdoor recreation participation constraints as it relates to demographic differences within race/ethnic groups. The research found significant constraints to outdoor recreation existed amongst racial-ethnic groups. For instance, Caucasian groups showcased differences in perceived barriers along with gender, age, education, and income while Hispanic groups showcased age and income as primary constraints. African American groups showcased income while Native American groups showcased differences across gender, age, and income. This study not only provided significant evidence of perceived outdoor recreation constraints, but it also highlighted how different racial and ethnic groups perceive barriers in outdoor recreation. There is no one golden outreach tool or land management decision that can suddenly increase access to outdoor recreation for every single community experiencing perceived barriers – rather, land managers and policymakers have to create specific initiatives to help target their desired population.

Perceived barriers to outdoor recreation are not only observed by minority communities but are created by the agencies and land managers that govern parks and outdoor spaces. A study with recreational professionals examined the barriers they thought inhibited recreation programs for diverse communities, particularly ethnic minority populations. The findings of the research project suggested that recreation

agencies often foster organizational barriers that inhibit recreational program accessibility or attractiveness to ethnic minorities (Allison and Hibbler, 2004). Additional findings also suggested organizational barriers are often unwittingly or unknowingly created, examples include providing outdoor recreation programming in English only and excluding English Second Language (ESL) groups, identifying shifts in cultural identity in communities served and a shift of management staff. The research project also identified negative attitudes and stereotypes held by land managers and staff that directly inhibit recreational program attractiveness to ethnic minority groups. The management of outdoor spaces inclusive to the leisure industry has not developed practical tools or strategies to effectively meet an ever-increasing number of ethnically and racially diverse communities in the United States (Ostermeyer, 2015). In order to address this lack of strategic implementation, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and the Council on Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) have incorporated accreditation standards and awards that encourage the consideration for diverse and underserved populations within park programming. The NRPA offers the Golden Medal Awards throughout the United States, which demonstrates excellence in planning, resource management, and innovative approaches to delivering park and recreation services which include social equity. The CAPRA certification is also provided by NRPA; however, it is certification of quality assurance for park and recreation agencies. The accreditation serves as a measure of the overall quality of operation, management, and service to the community. An in-depth content analysis research study by Ostermeyer

(2015) of parks and recreation agencies that have received both the NRPA Golden Medal Award and the CAPRA Certification was used to examine how these agencies were serving underrepresented and ethnically diverse communities. An analysis of policies, long-term master plans, and staff interviews identified the trend towards cultural competency within the sampled agencies, however, several key issues were found that suggested additional work was needed to increase service work to underrepresented and ethnically diverse groups. The findings found a lack of ethnically diverse representation in staff and management, restricted access to community input, a lack of measurable outcomes regarding diversity initiatives, and an inability to acknowledge areas of improvement in serving underrepresented communities. The research also suggested recreation agencies would prioritize revenue over the potential revenue sources overserving low-income constituencies.

Income has long been perceived as a barrier in outdoor recreation, specifically user fees associated with park entrances and recreational programs, preventing access for outdoor recreation participants. Research conducted by Lamborn et al. (2017) examined low-income outdoor recreational patterns in the outdoor activities and areas visited. The research suggested low-income recreationists tended to choose non-fee recreational areas as opposed to fee areas when conducting similar outdoor activities. The research found that low-income recreationists had the ability to pay associated recreational fees, however, they had an aversion to paying for fees when recreating in the outdoors. Additionally, low-income recreationists were found to travel three times as far to reach a

non-fee recreational area to access similar recreational services associated with fees. This study suggests associated recreation fees will impact the socioeconomic composition of visitors to outdoor spaces which require fees, thus a displacement of visitors is expected to occur into non-fee recreational areas. Recreational fees have long been considered a barrier to outdoor recreation, but there are communities that support user fees due to the beneficial implications of improved facilities, improved programs, and reduced visitor traffic in the associated fee areas. Though associated user fees can be widely supported by a community, there is evidence to suggest that reduced recreational participation will still occur within the community groups that support the associated fees (Thomas & Thomas, 2017).

Latinx Outdoor Recreation Habits and Barriers

Latinx/Hispanic groups are the largest minority group in the United States (Cilluffo and Fry 2019) and the fastest-growing population in the United States (Brown and Lopez 2013). There exists a large body of academic research focused on items like housing, education, wages, and employment affecting both Latinx/Hispanic and African American groups, however, outdoor recreation studies into these groups have largely been neglected (Johnson and Floyed, 2003). This study will concentrate primarily on the available research that has focused on Latinx/Hispanic groups in the United States. It is important to note that the term Latinx or Hispanic are often used interchangeably within research. The term Hispanic is thought to represent groups of people originating from Spanish-speaking countries while the term Latinx is thought to represent people from

Latin or South America (Rumbaut, 2011). It is important to note that Hispanics or Latinx are not a homogeneous group, in fact, there are large phenotypic, cultural, social class differences found within this grouping of people, however, the United States Census Bureau uses the term Latinx/Hispanic to identify this specific grouping of people (as different as they are) as a specific minority group in America (Rumbaut, 2011). Relevant research by Gordon (2010) on Latinx perception and recreational usage of outdoor spaces has suggested significant findings on specific outdoor recreation styles. The research study involved numerous Pennsylvanian Latinx groups and investigated recreation interests and attitudes toward the natural environment. The findings suggested that Latinx groups had a high level of appreciation for parks and natural areas, and overall practiced passive forms of recreation including picnicking, social gatherings, and playing sports in urban parks. Passive forms of recreation inclusive to picnicking and social gatherings, also known as socially orientated recreation (Ferriss 1970), have been suggested to increase park-based recreation participation among Latinx and African Americans. In a recent study on Georgian state parks and beaches, researchers were able to link the availability of social spaces like picnic areas, beaches, and facilities with an increase in outdoor recreation participation by Latinx and African American groups (Larson et al., 2014).

While available research on Latinx outdoor recreation emerges, recent research has suggested significant differences in outdoor recreation behaviors exist among Hispanic and White (non-Hispanic) outdoor recreation groups (Le, 2012). The research

compared multiple datasets on surveys taken on U.S. National Parks, the findings suggested significant differences between Hispanic and White recreational groups regarding their relative proximity to National Park sites, participation in backpacking, birdwatching, and outdoor education. The study also found that both Hispanic and White recreational groups rated the importance of park resources similarly, meaning clean air, water, land, but Hispanic groups rated the importance of park facilities like restrooms, picnic areas, interpretive exhibits, and staff higher than White groups (Le, 2012). It is important for park managers to understand the implications of recreational behavior differences among ethnically diverse populations in order to remain relevant in a changing cultural environment. In taking into consideration the previous studies of Latinx outdoor recreational habits and perceptions, it is false to assume that Latinx populations only choose to conduct passive forms of outdoor recreation. Research into this stereotype has suggested that urban outdoor spaces - such as city parks - remain a popular location for Latinx recreational groups. However, overall outdoor recreation habits are more likely to be driven by specific preferences and decision factors than by stereotypes (Madsen et al., 2014).

Barriers to outdoor recreation exist for Latinx recreational groups because the historic management of outdoor spaces like National Parks, National Forest, and Wilderness Areas have been predominantly managed for white audiences, subsequently excluding ethnically diverse audiences (Taylor, 2000). The champions of the American conservation movement discussed in the national narrative are figures like conservationist

John Muir, former President Theodore Roosevelt, former Park Director Stephen Mather, all of whom were white men who intentionally, or unintentionally, set the tone for outdoor spaces predominantly as white space (Finney, 2014). In a research study examining the perceived constraints for National Parks by Latinx and African American groups, significant barriers encompassing perceived racial discrimination were found (Robert, 2013). The study suggested that Latinx and African American groups found the inherited culture of the National Park Service, historical racism, perceived discrimination, safety, and early exposure to outdoor recreation as significant barriers when accessing National Parks. Perceived barriers by ethnically diverse communities are not only measured by visitor surveys in outdoor spaces but can be seen through contemporary media. A content analysis of over four thousand advertisements by popular magazines published between the mid-1980s to the year 2000, attempted to analyze how many advertisements taking place in the great outdoors or outdoor leisure activity featured models who were of color (non-white) in comparison to White models. The research found that the majority of all advertisements featuring an outdoor recreation setting featured White models, and rarely included models who were of color (Derek Christopher, 2004). In addition, models who were of color were predominantly featured in urban and suburban environments. This research reflects multiple facets of the advertisement industry. For example, it describes inequities that occur among ethnically diverse models in comparison to White models; however, in the context of outdoor recreation, the study highlights the popular narrative, shaped by the media, of the great

outdoors is a space for mostly White audiences, while communities of color are relegated to the urban environment.

Outdoor Recreation and the College Experience

Examining the effects of outdoor recreation participation among first-generation Latinx/Hispanic college students was an integral focus of this research project, however, very few studies have been conducted on this topic. There has been research that skirted this topic, take for example an analysis examining outdoor recreation experience by first-year college students at Oklahoma State University. This analysis suggested that students participating in recreational activities tended to have feelings of achievement, learning, autonomy and leadership (McKenzie, 2011). In a different analysis, researchers were examining the perceived sense of community by college students participating in outdoor pursuit trips. The study indicated that there was a significantly increased sense of community as a result of outdoor pursuit trip participation (Breunig et al. 2010). Additional research suggests direct environmental theme courses taken by college students significantly increased environmental appreciation and stewardship (Arnocky and Stoink, 2011). For college students pursuing an environmental or natural resource-related degree, the direct and continued involvement in outdoor recreation participation proved to be a significant influence in their chosen field of academic study (Haynes and Jacobson, 2015). The availability of outdoor recreation programs on college campuses has aided in student recruitment, retention, and overall satisfaction (Andre et al., 2017).

Outdoor recreation programs have become an important factor in a prospective students' decision to attend and remain enrolled within the education institution (Haines, 2001), in fact, students rate campus recreation programs as equally important to housing plans, food plans, and prospective internships and job opportunities (Forrester, 2015). In taking these findings into consideration, how do historically underrepresented student communities fit into this construction of desirable college campus features? Do national trends in outdoor recreation participation reflect the student population of college campuses? Do more White students on college campuses participate in outdoor recreation compared with other ethnically diverse student groups? Educational institutions across the United States are constantly competing for enrollment and student retention by providing excellence in academic fields and by providing extraordinary experiences to students in the form of outdoor recreational programming (Jefferies & Lepp, 2012). In order for an educational institution to stay competitive in the marketplace, outdoor recreational programming has become a selling point in attracting a diverse range of students. In doing so, can educational institutions provide outdoor recreation opportunities to student communities who have historically been marginalized in outdoor recreation? These are some of the questions this study is designed to address.

METHODS

Twenty-one participants identifying as first-generation Latinx students attending Humboldt State University took part in semi-structured interviews conducted between September 2019 and December 2019. This project considered a sample size of twenty undergraduate students (n=20), and had an average interview duration ranging from one to one and a half hours. In addition to the sample size of twenty, the research project had one additional graduate student who volunteered to be part of the survey, but will not be considered in the initial findings due to the participants' graduate academic standing. The intention of this project was to better understand the role outdoor recreation had among undergraduate Latinx first-generation college students (FGCS) in choosing Humboldt State University as their school of choice. Institutional Review Board was approved by Humboldt State University on September 4th, 2019 (IRB#19-022).

Recruitment

This study attempted to recruit participants from academic departments, offices, student clubs, and events on campus specifically promoting resources for Latinx students. These organizations include, The MultiCultural Center (MCC), “El Centro”- Latinx Center for Academic Excellence (LCAE), the Native American Center for Academic Excellence (NACAE), Queer Black Indigenous People of Color (QBIPOC) Club, Hermanas Unidas Inc. de Humboldt State University Club, Society for Advancement of Chicanos & Native Americans in Science (SACNAS) Club, and the Día De Los Muertos event.

In my recruitment approach, I utilized non-probability sampling methods including purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling methods in order to achieve my target audience (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981; Berg and Lune 2017). The purposive sampling method selects members of a specific group in which the researcher has prior knowledge or judgment (Charmaz 2014). For this study, I specifically targeted campus organizations that housed resources and programs for the Latinx student community. The convenience sampling method selects samples from a population that is relatively convenient to the research site (Charmaz 2014). This study was convenient because it was conducted with actively enrolled students on the same campus I was attending. The snowball - or word of mouth - sampling method describes the referrals selected from a previous participant to be part of the project (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981; Charmaz 2014), which occurred naturally during my process of combined sampling and interviewing methods. Once a student showed interest in being a survey participant, I contacted the student through their campus email address and gave a brief introduction to myself along with a description of the project and survey (Appendix A). Email correspondence was used primarily to schedule a potential interview time slot and location on campus.

Participants

Specific parameters were set in order for participants to be considered for this study, including three key requirements: (1) identifying as a Latinx, (2) identifying as a First-Generation College Student (FGCS), (3) identifying as a current undergraduate

student at Humboldt State University. Participants for this project identified under the term Latin(x)(o)(a), however, the term Latinx is generally used in this research project to describe a person of Latin American ancestry and used as a gender-neutral alternative to Latina or Latino (Salinas, 2020). The term FGCS is defined as a student whose parents (or legal guardians) have not completed a bachelor's degree (Toutkoushian et al., 2018). The sample size for this study includes 20 participants (n=20) who identified as current undergraduate Latinx FGCS, and one graduate Latinx FGCS who for the purpose of this study did not meet the initial parameters, but whose survey responses are being considered as supplemental information. Participants were assigned a sequential numeric number as they participated in the project, which will allow me to reference their participation while ensuring their anonymity.

Participants for this research project had diverse academic interests, this research project was able to capture participants from all three academic colleges found at HSU: (1) Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences, (2) Natural Resources & Sciences, and (3) Professional Studies. Research has shown a significant correlation between science-based majors and outdoor recreation participation (Haynes and Jacobson 2015). This project captures a broader range of academic disciplines, not just science majors, allowing me to test if outdoor recreation was a major contributing factor in the selection process for Latinx student groups, regardless of their major. Participants also included a variety of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors, with a mixture of transfer students and students who started at HSU. Recent research focusing on millennial-aged college

students and outdoor recreation found positive correlations between the length of time spent participating in outdoor recreation and the participant's overall comfort in the outdoors, enjoyment of nature, and time spent with peers (Mehlhaf 2019). Though this is not a primary question pursued in this study, the variety of academic standing or more specifically time spent at HSU will allow me to compare if time spent on campus has been an important factor in the participation in outdoor recreation. The age range for the participants did not differ significantly as most participants were between the ages of 18 and 25, however, there were two participants over the age of 40, one who was part of the survey and the second (graduate student) who is not being considered in the initial findings. There was a near-even split in the number of participants who lived on campus (HSU Residents) and who lived off-campus (did not live in HSU housing units).

Interviews

Once a potential participant confirmed an interview time slot, I was able to reserve on campus conference rooms using the 25 Live room reservation software for Humboldt State University. Three main buildings were used to reserve rooms on campus depending on where the student was located and room availability; these areas include the Library, Nelson Hall East, and Harry Griffith Hall. Prior to the beginning of each survey, each participant was presented with an Informed Consent Agreement (Appendix B), upon a detailed explanation, participants were asked to sign and confirm if they would like to proceed with the survey. After the Informed Consent Agreement was signed, I was able to introduce the survey questionnaire (Appendix C). The survey

questionnaire was divided into three main sections including Perceived Expectations, Outdoor Recreation, and Retention/Fulfillment, and each section had five questions with a total of fifteen overall questions. Prior to the survey start, the participant was presented a cognitive map of the interview process, which included a debriefing on the survey questions and a physical copy of the survey question to follow. I presented the audio recording equipment to each participant and gave the choice to opt-out of having the voice recorder present before beginning the survey interview; none of the participants opted out. Lastly, each participant was informed that they could refuse to answer any questions or stop the interview at any time if they felt uncomfortable.

This research project utilized both an Olympus handheld recorder and a Voice Recorder application located on an iPhone. Two instruments were used to audio record in order to back up data. Participants were informed that the survey timeframe would approximately take 45 to 60 minutes, however the participant always had the option to go under or over the allotted time frame. The majority of the interview time frames landed in the afternoon or late night due to availability and schedule conflicts. Participants were offered complimentary snacks along with water and were given the option to bring lunch or dinner. Each conference room was equipped with standard table chairs for participants, and considerable effort was spent in reducing the power dynamics between the interviewer and the interviewee during the survey interview. One of the main themes that was brought up between the interviewer and participant was the nature of being in an isolated room; the participant was given the option to choose a different location, keep

the conference doors open, or potentially have a third-party present in order to better reduce the influence or control the interviewer may present (Anyan 2013).

THEORY

This research project aimed to better understand how the role of outdoor recreation had among undergraduate Latinx first-generation college students in choosing Cal Poly Humboldt as their school of choice. Cal Poly Humboldt, being a higher education institution has relied on its remote geographic location and proximity to the natural environment (i.e. forests, beaches, rivers, mountains, etc.) to entice not only students who prefer a smaller, more remote college campus but have encouraged diverse student communities, especially in urban centers in California who have otherwise never been exposed to such a remote natural environment (Greenson 2018). The process of recruiting ethnically and racially diverse students to a mostly white campus and community has guided me to lean on the institutional theory and framework used in Sara Ahmed's work in *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Ahmed 2012). In this body of work, Ahmed takes a critical look at how higher education institutions like universities take on diversity work, however, often neglects the racist and inequitable practices and policies used by higher education institutions. The use of the natural environment to entice a person or community of people has long been used for recreational establishments and tourism (Dorsey, Steeves, and Porras 2004), and as previously mentioned in my beginning statement universities like Cal Poly Humboldt have long used the natural environment as a selling point to attract students (Cal Poly Humboldt 2022). The use of the environment as a selling point has led me to the concept of recreation commodification and naturally to Karl Marx's theory of commodification

(Avineri 1968). Understanding both the institutional and commodification barriers that obstruct student communities and more specifically student communities of color in accessing outdoor recreation is vitally important for this project and would argue that the inherent outdoor recreation knowledge or associated cultural capital is just as important in understanding how communities of color access outdoor recreation. Recreation capital lends itself to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital (Robbins 2005) which I am going to use to explain how increased outdoor recreation capital or acculturated experiences in the natural environment can lead to a significant increase in the participation in outdoor recreation.

Institutionalism

Largely in part of the civil rights movement, many institutions including Higher Education have focused on attracting racially diverse communities to their organization (Anon 2005), for college campuses the need to attract racially diverse student communities was essential to help mitigate the discrepancy in higher education among racially marginalized groups (William Monroe Trotter Institute et al. 1991). Seeing that this project examines Latinx student communities at Cal Poly Humboldt a California State University, I wanted to take a closer look at the CSU's efforts in recruiting Latinx student communities. The CSU has used the institutional marker of Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) within its 23 statewide campuses, it is defined under the Higher Education Act (HEA) as colleges or universities where at least 25 percent of the undergraduate, full-time enrollment is Hispanic; and at least half of the institution's

degree-seeking students must be low-income (Nuñez 2013). In 2015, Cal Poly Humboldt became an HSI with over 30 % of its undergraduate student population identified as Hispanic, however the graduation rate for Hispanic students was much lower (Cal Poly Humboldt 2022). Cal Poly Humboldt is significantly successful at recruiting Latinx students, however, has fallen short in supporting this specific student ethnic group. In saying this I want to use Sarah Amehd's lens on institutional theory, and discuss how college institutions like Cal Poly Humboldt have taken on the work of student diversity and simultaneously neglected the underlying institutionalized inequitable practices and policies.

Institutional theory is a widely accepted theoretical posture that emphasizes productivity, ethics, and legitimacy (Scott 2014). As it relates to governmental organizations, Institutional theory has been described as policy making that emphasizes formal aspects of government structures (Kraft and Furlong 2013). In referencing the institutional school of thought, one of the only certain concepts that can be agreed upon is the fact that there is no single or universally agreed-on definition of an institution (Jönsson 1997). Institutions are composed of social structures that have developed a high degree of resilience, which are composed of a variety of elements inclusive of cultural-cognitive, normative and regulative practices that when combined with activity and resources provide stability and assign meaning to social structure. It is important to mention that institutions operate at different levels of jurisdictions, from global to

localized systems and for the purpose of this project, we are examining Cal Poly Humboldt, a California State University campus.

Sara Ahmed's work on Institutionalism in higher academia helps to describe how this concept can be applied to this project. Ahmed's published work *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (2012) examines how higher education institutions attempt to provide a place of inclusion and belonging for students through a variety of diversity policies and guidelines, and fall short of achieving these goals. A key finding that Ahmed's examination describes is race-based discrimination in higher academic institutions and the recruitment of racialized bodies into higher academia as largely a performative and legal compliance stance (Ahmed 2012). In regards to Ahmed's first finding, the concept of race-based discrimination is not a new concept, however, for the purpose of this project would like to define it as it relates to institutional theory. Institutional racism also referred to as systemic racism is a form of racism embedded in the laws and regulations of a society, organization, and evidently an institution. Institutional racism has been extensively reviewed within several of our U.S. institutions, from our criminal justice system, housing, healthcare, employment, political representation, and as it pertains to this project our educational institutions (Ahmed 2012). Ahmed's second and likely the most relevant finding in her work as it relates to this project is their description of higher education as an Institution. More specifically, examining the irony in which educational institutions recruit students of color in effort to support diversity, while the same institutional body's policies and practices fail to support

the very same diverse student bodies they aimed to recruit (Ahmed 2012). In other words, higher education institutions seek and recruit diverse and marginalized student bodies, however fail to support them through a variety of factors from support services, representation, inclusion efforts and continue to re-create the same systemic and institutional discrimination that primarily affect people of color.

Universities, as described by Ahmed's research, are “continuously being institutionalized” by the recruitment of students and the employment of faculty and staff, however, a significant discrepancy exists in that the majority of incoming bodies (students, faculty, and staff) to higher academia are white opposed to non-white bodies (i.e. people/communities of color) (Ahmed 2012). This disproportionate assemblage of race and ethnic representation in higher academia or as Ahmeds describes as this “whiteness” found in higher education becomes the norm, as white bodies become fixed to higher academia while minority bodies, communities of color become the “other” in these academic institutions.

To better help explain this concept, Ahmed introduces several legislative efforts introduced to academic institutions that tackled the very issue of whiteness. Ahmed's utilized the British Race Relations Amendment Act, which places a general directive on all British schools to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination, promote equal opportunity, and build good relations between people of different racial groups (Ahmed 2012), the (British) Equality Act that provided discrimination protections, and promoted a more fair and just society, and it's the most recent amendment this legislation that focuses on the

unlawful ability for any education provider to discriminate against students based on disability, race, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, or sex (Hand, Davis, and Barker 2015). Though Ahmed did not use American legislation in her body of work, there are plenty of examples of U.S. legislation that aimed at tackling inequity in educational institutions including the title VI of the Civil Rights Act that banned racial discrimination in public schools, which applies to admissions, financial aid, student services, academic programs, grading, and housing (U. S Department of Labor 2022). Title IX of the education amendments banned sex discrimination, a popular piece of legislation which covers collegiate sports and mandated colleges to offer both men and women equal access to participate in organized athletics and this provision also protects victims of sexual harassment and assault (CA Department of Education 2022).

Affirmative action (part of the Civil rights Act) has made a significant impact on diversity in higher education through the ability to introduce race-based admissions into historically white colleges (Garrison-Wade and Lewis 2004). Ahmed used these pieces of legislation to highlight how educational institutions like universities institutionalized the concept of diversity. Through the passing of laws that target race and equity, academic institutions by default had to create diverse offices, committees, coalitions, and staff positions to enforce and regulate diversity laws and regulations (Ahmed 1969).

Recreation Commodification

In addition to our discussion of institutionalism this project is attempting to highlight the commodification process that occurs among higher education institutions

(Shumar 2013). The concept of commodification is derived from Karl Marx's political theory in which he describes the utilization of goods or services in exchange for money or capital gain. If we imagine a marketplace (real or virtual) we can visualize objects or experiences (commodities) and the transactions that occur among the seller and the customer. Once that transaction occurs it crystallizes the value of the commodity between two individuals and the marketplace (Avineri 1968). When looking at higher education institutions there is likely no bigger commodity than the knowledge that is of students; however, there has been a significant increase in other commodities, besides knowledge, that higher education institutions advertise, package, and sell onto prospective students (Kauppinen 2014). Specifically, this research aims to introduce the concept of recreational commodification that occurs in higher institutions like Cal Poly Humboldt through its advertisement and recruitment strategies used to entice prospective students (Cal Poly Humboldt 2022). A recreation commodity, better described as leisure commodification describes the process in which leisure converts to a merit good. Meaning the action of leisure, described as "free time" or time not dedicated to working or earning income gains value within society due to its intrinsic benefits. Identifying leisure commodification has gained in popularity due to its economic potential, and due to the growing inequality that individuals face in purchasing or earning such a commodity (Soule 1957). Considering the value of leisure, specifically the allure of outdoor recreation leisure, universities like Cal Poly Humboldt rely on recreation commodities to attract prospective students. In fact, research on recruiting strategies by higher institutions

have shown that universities ground themselves behind central identities as part of their recruiting strategy, while at the same time responding to external concepts like academic excellence and diversity (Frølich and Stensaker 2010). Though Cal Poly Humboldt was initially founded as a teacher's college in 1913, it has increasingly gained recognition for its natural science programs and its geographic location near ancient redwood forest, beaches and mountains (About Cal Poly Humboldt 2022)). Cal Poly Humboldt has used these natural assets to attract students to its location which in turn have commodified the surrounding natural resources and its recreational opportunities.

Recreational Capital

As mentioned in the previous section, Cal Poly Humboldt is located in close proximity to a variety of natural resources found in California's North Coast (forest, mountains, rivers, beaches, etc) and their respective outdoor recreational and leisure opportunities (About Cal Poly Humboldt 2022). One of the key questions this project set out to answer is how do students attending Cal Poly Humboldt interact with the outdoor environment, specifically through outdoor recreation opportunities. In asking this question, it is integral to this research to define how individuals come to understand the process of outdoor recreation. In order to help answer this fundamental question I want to adapt Pierre Bourdieu theory of social and cultural capital. Bourdieu's social capital is described as the social connections one makes through everyday processes while cultural capital refers to gained knowledge through institutions like schools. Bourdieu describes the process in which one learns social and cultural capital as *Habitus*, which typically

occurs unconsciously, at an early age of life and is influenced by the environment one is surrounded by (Sablan and Tierney 2014). Social and cultural capital benefits individuals as it allows them to move and interact within a society. The greater or abundance of these concepts found within an individual the greater opportunities they might have in gaining social and economic wealth (Monkman, Ronald, and Théràmène 2005). We can apply this concept to the outdoor environment specifically to environmentalism advocacy and outdoor recreation. Research supports youth who participate in outdoor environmental base learning courses, also known as outdoor education, develop a higher appreciation and advocacy of the natural environment (Neill and Richards 1998). Research also supports that youth who are exposed to outdoor recreation opportunities can predict a stronger connection to the outdoor environment (Szczytko et al. 2020). Furthermore, we find that childhood and adolescent exposure to outdoor leisure can be a good predictor of future participation into adulthood (Jose et al. 2011). The research supports that individuals who have a higher environmental social and cultural capital have a higher appreciation of the environment and environmental literacy. The research also suggests that individuals who have a higher accumulation of environmental social and cultural capital are likely to participate in outdoor leisure and recreation opportunities.

Knowledge of the natural environment, appreciation of nature, and experience in outdoor recreation opportunities are all experiences that suggest an accumulation of social and cultural capital specific to the environment and outdoor recreation. These specific accumulated experiences are what I am referring to as the recreation capitol

which allows an individual to move with ease through environmental and outdoor social and geographic spaces.

DATA ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

Through participant surveying, this research was able to capture insightful feedback on the lived experiences of first generation Latinx college students and their relationship with the outdoor recreation at Cal Poly Humboldt. A grounded theory approach was utilized to identify major themes throughout the surveyed population. Three major themes were identified as being consistent throughout the survey research which included (1) an *expected difficult transition to Cal Poly Humboldt*, (2) *barriers to outdoor recreation*, (3) and *perceived exclusion and isolation*. These themes demonstrate participants' lived experiences and perceptions of their relationship with not only the outdoor environment but their relationship with the institution of Cal Poly Humboldt.

Expected Difficult Transitions

Through open-ended questions participants were surveyed on a variety of topics relating to their perceived expectations of Cal Poly Humboldt and their interactions with campus, the broader community, and how it affected their association with the outdoor environment and outdoor recreation. The first emergent theme centered on perceived and difficult experiences participants had surrounding the experience of geographic distance from home, expected academic rigor and culture shock. 18 out of 20 surveyed participants responded that the remote geographic location of the California North Coast and distance from their respective homes was a significant factor in choosing Cal Poly Humboldt. Almost all participants, 19 out of 20, came to Cal Poly Humboldt from urban city centers, and described “*wanting to apply to Humboldt knowing that it's completely*

different from the city” (respondent #19), some participants visited campus from areas like Southern California and were inspired to apply to Cal Poly Humboldt, *“I grew up in the valley, SoCal, specifically San Fernando valley area, I came up here to visit, and saw nature and everything, that's what caught my attention - It's just a whole new experience”* (respondent #20). By-in-large the majority of participants *“loved that it was extremely rural”* (respondent #3), however 17 out of 20 participants found that the same element, meaning the remoteness and distance from home was also a felt and perceived barrier that they encountered. Participants noted that the *“distance from home to here (Humboldt) was a big factor”*, and *“felt like I was pretty much, just isolated”* (respondent #9). Though homesickness is a normal part of moving away to college, participants within this study carried lifelong fears and concerns with them. Specifically, on the issue of citizenship and deportation, 8 out of 20 participants described their concerns about family *“my mom's undocumented, being undocumented scares you”* (respondent #10), and described their own situation, *“I don't know if I could go back and forth, because, how would I? What about ICE?”* (respondent #9). I.C.E referring to Immigration and Customs Enforcement branch of the Department of Homeland Security, and the participants' concerns about their ability to visit their home in Southern California and the risk of being deported through an I.C.E checkpoint.

As stated by respondent #9, their transition from an urban setting coupled with fears surrounding citizenship and deportation facilitated intense feelings of isolation and confinement as a result of their transition to Cal Poly Humboldt. Such fears are rational

and represent legitimate concerns of students such as respondent #9. Thus, as a higher education institution, it's important to ask what level of consideration or thought was given to students who were recruited from families and homes who grappled with the issue of immigration and citizenship? Ahmed describes the institutionalization of higher academia through the recruitment of diverse student bodies and the inequitable policies that accompany them (Ahmed 2012). The recruitment of students like respondent #9 represent diverse recruitment efforts by Cal Poly Humboldt but also the failure to provide support services for these students. Diverse student bodies are often an exploited market used to help reach a diversity quota in higher education. This process sees the student as a commodity rather than an individual, and does not fully consider the needs of the student in order to fully participate within the institution.

The vast majority of my participants discussed some aspects of not belonging or not feeling ready to belong at the institution. Nearly all participants, 19 out of 20, expressed a perceived academic rigor coming to Cal Poly Humboldt, "*when I thought of college, I thought, hunger, no sleep, and lots of reading and lots of stress*" (respondent #10), and many participants described external perceptions of academic rigor, "*other people would advise me that it was going to be difficult, and those expectations were, they were true*" (respondent #19). 13 out of 20 participants described concerns over their readiness as a college student which included the lack of preparation by their school district and their GPA "*I went to public school in L.A., I didn't have the best grades and I didn't feel like I was prepared for college*" (respondent #20).

Respondent #10, #19 and #20 represented a perceived lack of college readiness by their home environment prior to arriving at Cal Poly Humboldt. Respondents indicated the lack of academic rigor mainly from high school, college readiness courses and the lack of experience by family members. The time a student spends in k-12 school, the extracurricular courses one is able to access, and the knowledge that is passed down through familial relationships are benefits and resources which allows or hinder a students ability to move through social and education institutions, we can refer to these benefits as cultural capital (Sablan and Tierney 2014). It's important to note that the surveyed population (n=20) identified as first generation Latinx students, meaning their parents or caregivers did not have a four-year degree and did not necessarily have the cultural artifacts that are associated with college readiness or lived experiences. A population whose parents or caregivers do not have college degrees would present a higher disadvantage in navigating higher academia simply because they wouldn't have access to inherent knowledge passed down to this population, as opposed to students whose parents or caregivers had working knowledge on higher academic institutions.

In addition to academic readiness, 18 out of 20 participants expected some level of cultural isolation and described significant cultural shock, specifically noting the absence of cultural and ethnic diversity on campus and surrounding community. Participants noted, *"I was aware that it was a predominantly white area, but I don't think it crossed my mind as it should have"* (respondent #10), 13 out of 20 participants described their apprehension in being in a mostly white space *"I understood that there*

were white people here, I just didn't know to what extent, and I didn't know how I would fit in" (respondent #19), and some participants expressed concerns about simply meeting other people and making friends *"I think the biggest worry is probably like trying to meet people trying to make friends"* (respondent #8).

Participants in this study described the difficult transition into the broader campus community. Respondent #10 and #19 described their apprehension and experience being in a mostly white community as opposed to racially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods they were accustomed to. This might be a clearer example of how the institutional policies in higher academia seeks out diverse communities through recruitment efforts and expects diverse student bodies to conform to a space that is a completely different, and often a difficult cultural landscape to navigate. Higher academic institutions like Cal Poly Humboldt, recruit diverse student bodies without considerations of the collective cultural competencies from the community. Though higher academic institutions like Cal Poly Humboldt don't necessarily have a choice in the geographic and cultural landscape they are established in, they do have a choice in the policies and practices they continue to operate in. Cal Poly Humboldt knowingly operates in a mostly White space, it knowingly recruits diverse student bodies, and it knowingly continues to provide insufficient support services to diverse student bodies. In demand support services for diverse students is represented in the experience provided by respondent #8, as they describe their apprehension and concern over making social connections - "friends" - in a mostly White environment. The recruitment of diverse student bodies shouldn't be a one

directional movement by the higher academic institutions, but a continuous investment that supports diverse students throughout their academic career.

Interestingly half of the surveyed population, 10 out of 20, overestimated the frequency they would be visiting family and friends “*I wanted to come the furthest from the city, and I thought I was going to be able to see my family at least once a month*” (respondent #19), and nearly all participants 19 out of 20, had an expectation of having readily available access to the outdoor environment “*the way Humboldt was painted to me was not at all the way it actually was for me, I don't have the beach in front of my doorstep*” (respondent #10), and several participants described their expectations towards outdoor recreation “*I expect to be like more outdoorsy, exploring, crazy adventures and just doing a lot more*” (respondent #20) and “*I thought I would be going on crazy hikes, going to cool beaches, going with friends, picnicking every weekend, and it just wasn't that experience, it was just more serious*” (respondent #4).

Some of the most evident recruitment efforts that Cal Poly Humboldt utilizes is the expectation of outdoor recreation participation. Respondents #10 and #20 described both an outdoor setting and outdoor recreation expectations that were sold to them as part of the higher education experience, however, as their description reveals to this study, their expectation fell short of their reality. Higher education institutions readily apply affective emotions and experiences to the extracurricular programs and resources a campus can offer. For Cal Poly Humboldt, the affective dimensions relating to the outdoors is often the selling point for diverse student populations who come from urban

areas like Southern California. The institutional practices and policies that encourage diverse recruitment take advantage of these affective emotions, however do not consider the inherent knowledge of outdoor recreation needed for diverse student groups to fully participate. Taking into account, the lack of college readiness, the lack of exposure to White spaces, and the lack of experience navigating the outdoor environment all of these factors can be attributed to the low levels of cultural and recreational capital such students possess when they arrive at higher education institutions like Cal Poly Humboldt.

The second emergent theme, barriers to outdoor recreation, was an item that I expected to find as it was a prominent theme in my literature review, however I did not know at what level of significance it would appear in the surveyed population. This centers the experiences of participants towards transportation, cost and safety barriers. Interest in conducting outdoor recreation was evident throughout the surveyed population, all (n=20) of the participants in this study described positive feelings and attitudes towards spending time in the outdoors. Participants described their experiences going to local beaches *“It’s just a common place where I get to feel very spiritual, I guess you can say where I can just be myself and just be with nature”* (respondent #10), their experiences hiking through forest *“entering a forest makes me so happy, seeing all the greenery, it’s so different from home”* (respondent #7), and experiencing self-reflection *“I like looking for a good view to watch the sunset, I go with friends, we find a spot, and we*

just sit there and like we talk for a bit but for a moment we just sit there and look at the view and take it in” (respondent #20).

Considering the level of appreciation and admiration to the outdoor environment 19 out of 20 respondents described significant barriers in accessing outdoor recreation. Transportation was cited as being a significant barrier described by 16 out of 20 of the surveyed population. When asked about what barriers exist towards accessing outdoor recreation, survey participants described “*the number one thing that I would like have to say is transportation*” (respondent #9), and “*not having a car, it is one of the biggest barriers, um, just because you kind of need a car to go anyone in Humboldt*” (respondent #10), and “*the bus system isn't reliable, and it doesn't even take you near any hiking spots*” (respondent #12). Participants also discussed the cost of conducting outdoor recreation activities, including purchasing gear or paying for guided outdoor recreation programs and activities. One of the research participants discussed her inability to participate in a guided tour through the campus Activity Center due to the lack of hiking boots “*it took, money, gear, resources and hiking boots! - I was basically ready, I was all packed, and I realized that I didn't have hiking boots and they said, Oh, well, you can't go if you don't have them*” (respondent #19), another participant discussed their inability to afford park entrance fees “*we drove to Patrick's Point, and when we got there we were stopped and had to pay to park, it wasn't super expensive but I didn't have the money, I barely have enough gas to get there let alone pay for parking, we just turned back*” (responded #13).

The commodification of the outdoor environment and its participation are experiences that are packaged and sold by institutions like Cal Poly Humboldt and are the very same barriers participants in this study experience. Respondents in this study described the need and benefits in accessing the outdoor environment. Benefits that have been described by respondent #10 as a place to feel spiritual and at peace and benefits as described by respondent #7 as feeling happy, these are all sought-out benefits of recreating in the outdoor environment and affective experiences sold to students by Cal Poly Humboldt. Packaging the outdoor environment as an added benefit of enrolling to Cal Poly Humboldt creates a commodity which can benefit students who are able to afford to experience them. Respondent #9, #10, and #12 and many other participants expressed their inability to benefit from these recreational commodities because they simply couldn't afford them. These specific respondents cited transportation as their biggest barrier in accessing outdoor recreation, a resource that is difficult for many students to obtain. Whether it's the acquisition of a car, a ride share service or utilizing mass transportation, all of these avenues are not financially or physically a viable option in accessing outdoor recreation for many participants in this study.

In addition to the affordability, many participants in this study described their lack of experiences in recreation in the outdoor environment, a barrier which can be attributed to the lack of cultural or recreational capital. Respondent #19 described their inability to participate in a guided outdoor tour because they didn't have hiking boots, a common-sense item for the avid hiker or naturalist, however an item that was not within the

peripherals of the respondent due to their previous lack of exposure to such activities. Respondent #13 described their experience in gaining access to a vehicle, having enough gas to drive to a local state park, and after overcoming these major obstacles, did not consider having to pay a park entrance fee, which ultimately restricted them from visiting the state park. To an avid state park visitor, this would have likely been a common-sense item to plan for, however it was not an item that was at all considered by the respondent. These seemingly simple but impactful examples are part of the recreational capital one gains from lived experiences participating in outdoor recreation, an item for which many of the participants in this population did not acquire prior to their arrival to Cal Poly Humboldt.

15 out of 20 participants in the surveyed population perceived outdoor spaces as being unsafe and unwelcoming. One participant explained *“I have experienced racist and xenophobic slurs while riding the bus, which made me feel unsafe and not want to leave campus”* (respondent #8), other participants discussed their distrust of the surrounding community *“I don't think I trust any person here, especially if they are white”* (participant #6), and many participants indicated that they would only go to outdoor spaces with other people *“first you need friends to go do all that stuff, especially if you go to the forest, beaches are OK, but there's so many white people in the forest, I wouldn't go alone”* (respondent #4). Though many participants indicated their discomfort in being in a mostly white community, participants in the surveyed population generally worried about racism, race base discrimination and violence. Several students in the surveyed

population cited the 2017 murder of Josiah Lawson, a Black HSU student who was fatally stabbed to death while attending a house party in Arcata. Several mishandled and grossly negligent police investigations have not led to any arrest by the responding police agency (Arcata Police Department), which has highlighted racial injustice and racial tension between diverse student communities and the community.

Outdoor recreation participation by diverse communities, like participants in this study, have in large part been revered as spaces of exclusion and discomfort. Participants in this study like respondent #8 described distrust in the community due to racial discrimination experience while riding mass transit, and respondent #6 identified White demographic groups in the community as being untrustworthy. These experiences, compounded with the historical perception of outdoor spaces seen as White spaces (Taylor, 2016), create an environment where participants in this study experience both perceived and experienced fears of participating in the outdoor environment. An example of these perceptions can be seen in respondent #4 description and warning to other students of color, they cautioned against entering a forested park alone because of the potential of encountering White people, meaning they perceived racial discrimination and fear physical acts of violence by White individuals. These examples contribute to an overwhelming distrust in the community, and institutional structures which represent a majority White space.

Experienced Exclusion and Isolation.

The third emergent theme found within the surveyed population was exclusion related to discrimination and a feeling of isolation. 19 out of 20 of the surveyed respondents described perceived and felt microaggressions on campus. Participants described not feeling comfortable on campus “*it's the strangest thing being the only Latina in a classroom, sure you hear about the lack of women in STEM, but add a the fact that you are the only POC*” (respondent #9), respondents described their hesitancy in speaking a different language other than English. “*I would never speak Spanish here, why? I'm not sure. Was I embarrassed? I'm not sure - It felt weird*” (respondent #12). And 17 out 20 of the surveyed populations described their microaggressions outside of campus, examples include “*there are situations where we go somewhere in the community like a restaurant or go shopping, and there's always someone staring at us*” (respondent #20), and “*Not very welcoming, people stare at me on the bus, at the mall, at target probably because I'm brown*” (respondent #8). Participants reflected on their positionality as a student and member of the larger community, they explained “*I think people in the community disassociate, because we're not all locals, we're all POC's coming and they are not POC's friendly*” (respondent #10), and though many participants did not feel welcomed by the community at large, many participants express their desire to belong “*okay, I am a woman of color, and no one here looks like me, but that doesn't mean that I don't have a right to be here*” (respondent #19). Several participants in this survey population reflected on the culture shock that was uninhibited racism, they

described the shock of experiencing of microaggressions and discrimination, *“I didn't expect facing things like racism, you learn about it in high school, you hear about it in the news, but you never think it's going to happen to you”* (respondent #8).

Participants in this emergent theme described perceived discrimination while navigating through campus and surrounding communities. These experiences as described by respondent #20 include perceived microaggressions as they navigate through the surrounding communities, or being perceived as an outsider as described by respondent #10, and facing blatant racism as described by respondent #8. These experiences may result from racism in the community, and/or the experience of inhabiting a whole new space that is significantly less diverse than what the participants have been accustomed to inhabiting. Unfortunately, systemic racism exists throughout institutions, regardless if it's an urban city center or remote area like Humboldt. It is very likely that participants in this study have faced racism in their neighborhoods and communities, however the parameters and contextual frameworks were likely very different. When participants described their experiences in confronting microaggressions, racial slurs and epithets, they also described the lack of resources or support services Cal Poly Humboldt provided. Higher academic institutions, like Cal Poly Humboldt, have an inherent obligation to provide a safe space for students and an environment where students can feel they can truly belong.

The experience of isolation was heavily influenced by the lack of Latinx/Hispanic representation among the staff and faculty at Cal Poly Humboldt. 18 out of 20

participants in the surveyed population described feelings of isolation in the classroom “*the worst part is the feeling of being the only person of color in class, I feel like I can’t really say anything*” (respondent #9), compounded with their perceived inability to approach a predominantly white faculty “*a lot of people, like professors, faculty and staff were white, and it’s just kind of hard to get connected with school*” (respondent #8). Several participants, reflected on the lack of diverse faculty throughout their time at Cal Poly Humboldt “*all of my professors, and really everyone have always been white*” (respondent #20), and “*I’ve only had one Hispanic professor throughout all my courses, and that was my sociology professor*” (respondent #10). Though participants expressed their barriers in connecting to campus faculty and staff, they also expressed their desire to want to establish a meaningful connection to campus “*I feel like they should hire more professors or staff or faculty, that are more like from other ethnicities, I know it would help a lot of students*” (respondent #4), and one participant suggested logical steps in helping diverse students feel welcomed “*Humboldt recruits from areas like L.A. but doesn’t consider hiring Hispanic, or more diverse professors or staff, it doesn’t really make sense? You know? How do they expect students to feel welcomed?*” (respondent #12). The open-ended questions provided during the survey research were intended to elicit perceptions and experiences of belonging and support services by Cal Poly Humboldt which in turn gave a significant proportion of participants an avenue to highlight the lack of support services and exclusionary experiences at Cal Poly Humboldt.

Ahmed describes the disproportionate assemblage of race and ethnic representation in higher academia or as “whiteness” (2012), which describes the disproportionate representation of white faculty and staff and diverse student bodies. The concept of “whiteness” is seen throughout participants responses in this emergent theme which describe a mostly white faculty and staff at Cal Poly Humboldt (respondent #10, and #20). The lack of Latinx representation has been described as a significant isolating event, which creates significant barriers for students of color to connect and relate to their professors (respondent #8). The inability to connect with faculty and staff is also compounded with the inability to authentically express oneself in a mostly white space as described by respondent #9, in which they feel the inability to speak or fully express themselves because they are sometimes the only person of color in their class. It is vitally important for higher academic institutions like Cal Poly Humboldt to understand the disproportionate representation of faculty and staff and diverse student bodies in higher academia. The institutional policies which aim to recruit diverse student bodies should reflect the recruitment of diverse faculty and staff as suggested by respondent #12, to better help represent the student communities being served.

Key Takeaways

Outdoor recreation assumes privilege, meaning participants who engage in outdoor recreation participation have the financial resources to do so. Considering multiple factors like cost, transportation, and necessary gear, outdoor recreation for many of the surveyed participants required financial investment, which for many did not have

or could not afford. Seeing outdoor recreation as a commodity and an item that is packaged and sold by higher education institutions, future research is recommended towards how the cost of outdoor recreation is factored into the total cost of enrollment into higher academic institutions and how it impacts prospective students' choice in enrolling into the school of their choice.

Outdoor recreation assumes recreational capital, meaning participants who have inherent knowledge and experience in conducting outdoor recreation activities will likely have a higher frequency of outdoor recreation participation. Considering the majority of the surveyed population originated from urban city centers, many participants indicated the need for support services in accessing outdoor recreation as they did not have the inherent knowledge to do so. Future research in the field of recreation capital is needed to better understand how inherent knowledge of outdoor recreation allows students to better access and participate in outdoor base leisure activities.

Outdoor recreation does not consider past or generational trauma especially for multicultural groups. Outdoor recreation exists in outdoor spaces which have largely been established through an era of conservation which was primarily led by White and affluent conservationists (Taylor, 2016). Past and present racial and environmental injustice have largely left multicultural groups excluded from the conservation movement which have had lasting impacts today. Many participants, in this research project described race base discrimination which affected how they interacted with the surrounding community and outdoor spaces. In considering historical marginalization of people of color in outdoor

spaces, it is vitally important for higher academic institutions like Cal Poly Humboldt to provide support services to diverse student communities in accessing outdoor spaces and aid their participation in outdoor recreation. Elements of support services and institutional policies that benefit diverse student populations include having racial and ethnic representation among staff and faculty, institutional facilitation of cultural competency evaluation and improvement among community stakeholders, and academic support services aimed at developing inclusion and a sense of belonging. Future research examining higher academia recruitment strategies towards diverse student groups and available support services is needed to better understand how institutional policies and institutional resources can determine whether a campus is adequately equipped to support diverse student populations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Introductory and Scheduling Email

My name is Juan Anzada, and I am a graduate student in the department of sociology. I am conducting student interviews as part of my thesis project this semester and currently looking for potential candidates for my project.

My project is focused on Latinx first generation college students and their experience in outdoor recreation here at Humboldt State University (accessibility, barriers, and experiences).

If you think you would like to take part in the interviews, I would greatly appreciate your contribution.

You can contact me at jq41@humboldt.edu, or call/text (000) 000-000 for scheduling potential interviews.

Please note that this is completely voluntary, and in no way are you obligated to do this.

Hope to hear from you soon!

Juan Anzada (*he/him*)
Graduate Student, Department of Sociology
Humboldt State University
jq41@humboldt.edu
(000) 000-000

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Part 1. Perceived Expectations

1. Can you tell me about some of the interests that brought you to HSU?
2. Can you tell me about the experiences you expected to have while attending HSU?
3. Can you tell me about some of the worries you had coming to HSU?

Part 2. Outdoor Recreation

4. What do you like to do when you aren't working or in class?
5. Can you tell me more about your interest in recreating in the outdoor environment?
6. Can you tell me about how often you engage in outdoor recreation?
7. Can you tell me more about the specific outdoor activity you enjoy doing the most?
8. Can you tell me about some of the barriers that exist for you in outdoor recreation?
9. Can you tell me how you overcame barriers to outdoor recreation?

Part 3. Retention-Fulfillment:

10. Since your arrival to HSU can you describe how welcoming your experience has been?
11. Since your arrival to HSU, have you felt represented among the community?
12. Since your arrival to HSU, how has the university helped you connect with the campus and local community?
13. Since your arrival, can you tell me what barriers prevent you from participating in the local community?
14. Since your arrival to HSU, have your perceived expectations match your lived experiences?
15. Since your arrival to HSU, have your lived experiences advanced your academic goals?

Appendix C: Informed Consent

The Level of Importance of Outdoor Recreation for Latinx First-Generation College Students

You are invited to participate in a research study that will involve the Latinx undergraduate student population. My name is Juan Anzada, and I am a graduate student in the department of sociology at Humboldt State University. The purpose of this research is to better understand the role outdoor recreation has on Latinx first-generation college students.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to answer a series of 15 interview questions. Your participation in this study will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes.

There are minor possible risks involved for the participants. These risks mainly include possible discomfort or embarrassment when answering a select few of the survey questions.

There are some benefits to this research, particularly benefiting HSU's understanding of the Latinx student population.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You have the right not to participate at all or to leave the study at any time.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.

The data obtained will be maintained in a safe location and will be destroyed after the study is completed. This consent form will be maintained in a safe location and will be destroyed after a period of three years after the study is completed.

If you have any questions about this research at any time, please me at (000) 000-0000 or email me at Juan.Anzada@humboldt.edu. If you have any concerns with this study or questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at irb@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-5165.

Please print this informed consent form now and retain it for your future reference. If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research as described, please sign and date the form below.

I have read and understood this consent information, and agree to participate in this study.

Signature:

Date: