

Special Issue

# Latino Outdoors: Using Storytelling and Social Media to Increase Diversity on Public Lands

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## Executive Summary

In 2013, for the first time in United States history, more than 50% of children younger than age one were minorities. Latinos are the nation's largest-growing minority group, and by 2050 are estimated to comprise 28% of the total U.S. population. Despite the exponential growth of minorities generally and Latinos in particular, land-management agencies have been slow in responding to these major racial and ethnic demographic shifts, particularly within the context of outdoor recreation activities. The purpose of this article is to show how Latino Outdoors is providing diverse and family-focused outdoor-recreation opportunities by using storytelling and cutting-edge social-networking technology to build avenues for access to public lands and a Latino-centered message of environmental awareness and belonging.

In the past four years, Latino Outdoors grew from one person to 180 volunteers, 44 of whom function as volunteer leaders, and two paid full-time employees, all of whom have together organized outings in 14 states across the country. Storytelling and social media work as mechanisms to communicate the value of nature and interaction with the natural environment as part of a modern Latino identity. Engaging with cultural and ethnic diversity, Latino Outdoors and its partners have built a national network that values and advocates for the wealth of experiences that the environment and recreation can provide to the over 57 million Latinos in the United States, who are underserved by public land-management agencies. Through its use of storytelling and its online presence, the organization is creating a space for new social and cultural meanings of the outdoors using counternarratives that question normative American

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outdoor experiences that privilege an able-bodied white middle-class user. Latino Outdoors' staff promotes shared narratives in the conversation about the nation's changing meaning of outdoor experiences within an increasingly diverse society. A storytelling focus could be applied within recreation programs for the purposes of creating more culturally sensitive services, understanding land-use differences both within and across racial/ethnic groups, and developing mechanisms for collaborative goal setting that includes diverse community voices.

### Keywords

*Latinos, recreation, social media, storytelling*

## Introduction

In 2013, for the first time in United States history, more than 50% of children younger than age one were minorities (Cohn, 2016). Moreover, owing to a history of racial and ethnic segregation in the United States, minorities are clustered in urban ghettos, barrios, reservations, and rural "poverty pockets," all of which place them most at risk of being confronted with environmental problems (Bullard, 1993, p. 7). Latinos are the nation's largest-growing minority group (Saenz, 2004), and by 2050, Latinos are estimated to comprise 28% of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). From 1970 to 2014, the Latino population grew by 592% (Krogstad, 2014), and according to the Pew Research Center, in 2015 an estimated 57 million people in the United States were of Latino origin (Krogstad, 2016).

Despite the exponential growth of minorities generally and of Latinos in particular, land-management agencies have been slow in responding to these major racial and ethnic demographic shifts (Allison & Hibbler, 2004; Bass, 2014; Floyd, 1998; Schelhas, 2002), particularly within the context of outdoor recreation activities (Chavez, 2012). Moreover, previous research on Latinos and outdoor recreation indicates that they have diverse expectations about natural resource recreation areas, varying barriers to participation in outdoor activities, and different recreation-site development preferences than whites (Chavez, 2001, 2002; Tierney et al., 1998). Differences in outdoor recreation can be due to diverse perceptions of land use, cultural beliefs about extended family participation, fear of discrimination, and/or lack of knowledge, experience, and equipment (Chavez, 2000). Given substantial current and future demographic shifts in the United States and the growing economic and political clout of racial/ethnic minorities (Lopez et al., 2005), feelings within these groups of marginalization and alienation from government land-management agencies could result in reduced political capital for land managers and park administrators in the future (Chase et al., 2016). Thus, a more nuanced understanding of how organizations are embracing the outdoor recreation patterns and motivations of today's emerging publics, could in part improve the success of land managers and park administrators in reaching out to, and providing services for, the racially and ethnically diverse audiences that are a growing force within society.

Latino ideological and cultural values are varied and complex, owing to several within-group differences, such as region of origin (i.e., Mexico, Central America, the

Caribbean, and South America), levels of assimilation and acculturation, and, of course, characteristics such as age, gender, education, and income. At the same time, Latinos in the United States share a political identity that exists within the tension between their national belonging and exclusion from American mainstream society. The positionality of Latinos in the United States as racialized subjects, historically excluded from mainstream society, is often expressed through storytelling that emphasizes their identities as both unique individuals and members of a collective political, cultural, and social group of resistance (Padilla, 1993). Storytelling works as a mechanism by which alternative notions of national identity emerge from the historical and social circumstances of what it means to be Latino in the United States (Vásquez, 2011). In other words, through storytelling, individual representations of the self are expressed and linked to such larger social structures as sense of place and national identity. On national public lands in particular, Latinos describe unique barriers to participating in outdoor recreation, such as limited access to nearby urban national forests with characteristics like high use, competition for space, concerns about safety, and social ills that migrate from urban social problems to public lands (Chavez, 2009; Chavez & Olson, 2009). Additional barriers include perceived discrimination, historical inequality, cultural differences, and varying levels of acculturation and assimilation (Chavez, 1993; Feagin, 1991; Floyd & Gramann, 1993; Floyd & Nicholas, 2008; Stodolska & Alexandris, 2004). Notwithstanding the residue of constraints to public-land use and the historical exclusion of Latino narratives about the meaning of public lands, storytelling works to disrupt a “dominant field of discourse” (Foucault, 1972, p. 23) based on rugged individualism, solitude, and whiteness, and instead creates a more diverse narrative of the multidimensional relationships that Americans have with their national parks and forests.

Despite the growing demand from Latinos who want to participate in outdoor recreation on public lands and such recent policy efforts as the Healthy Kids Outdoors Act (H.R. 3353/S. 1802) and the No Child Left Inside Act (H.R. 2547/S. 1372) that work to increase diversity on public lands among minority groups, Latinos remain underrepresented at national parks, forests, and public lands throughout the country (Clarke et al., 2015). The persistent gap between access to public lands and growing demand for Latino participation in outdoor recreation is further complicated by within-group differences that show different recreation-participation patterns between men and women, their recreation environments, and types of physical activities in which they participate (Stodolska et al., 2010). The purpose of this article is to show how an organization known as Latino Outdoors is bridging this complex gap by providing diverse and family-focused outdoor recreation opportunities, using storytelling and cutting-edge social-networking technology not only to create avenues for access to public lands but also to build a Latino-centered message of environmental awareness and belonging.

## Latino Outdoors

Latino Outdoors has been gaining momentum since its conception in January of 2013, when its founder, José González, a Mexican-born California resident and trained environmental educator, found himself searching for Latino organizations focused on conservation efforts. After networking and searching for organizations aiming to

connect Latinos to the outdoors and finding no such national organization, González created a blog and Facebook page to address the underrepresentation of Latinos within conservation efforts. In March 2014, Latino Outdoors shifted from being a concept on Facebook to an officially established nonprofit organization. Over the past four years, Latino Outdoors has grown to comprise 180 volunteers, 44 of whom function as volunteer leaders, and two paid full-time employees, all of whom have together organized outings in 14 states across the country. Moreover, the organization's savvy social media network has grown vastly, creating greater environmental awareness and providing a platform where social media followers post their outdoor experiences (Nelson, 2016). The online capacity of Latino Outdoors, along with its breadth of volunteers throughout the United States, who do outreach in underrepresented communities, organize outdoor recreation trips, and maintain their own Facebook groups, have laid the foundation for addressing the need for greater Latino representation on public lands (Krogstad & Lopez, 2015). During functions, volunteers intentionally schedule a time for participants to share their stories of how they feel about the outdoors. The process of storytelling within this context works to communicate the value of nature and interaction with the environment, not as something separate from daily life but as a dynamic entity intricately woven into the different meanings of being Latino in the United States. By directly engaging with the complex meanings of cultural and ethnic identity, Latino Outdoors is building a national network that values and advocates for the wealth of experiences that nature and recreation can provide to the over 57 million Latinos in the United States who come from diverse backgrounds.

### **Mission and Vision**

The mission of Latino Outdoors extends beyond connecting individual Latinos to the natural environment. The organization considers Latinos part of a larger unit in which family and culture are intimately linked to conservation and identity. Work is carried out through events, initiatives, and online forums with the explicit mission to

bring *cultura* [culture] into the outdoor narrative and connect Latino communities and leadership with nature and outdoor experiences. We connect *familias* [families] and youth with nature, engage and inspire Latino leadership, empower communities to explore and share their stories in defining the Latino Outdoors identity. (Latino Outdoors)

This practice is envisioned as making connections between outdoor experiences and the cultural, national, and diverse meanings of being Latino in the United States, as well as the ebb and flow between their feelings of inclusion and exclusion on public lands. The work of Latino Outdoors functions to bring Latino families and youth to the natural environment in order to build greater environmental awareness and belonging, which is expressed in the organization's mission statement:

With roots in the past, a presence in the present and vision for the future, Latino Outdoors is a network of leaders committed to engaging Latinos/as in the outdoors, connecting familias and youth with nature, and empowering our community of storytellers to explore and share their personal experiences. Our growing online platform allows participants to creatively document

their cultural connections to conservation, the environment, and the Great American Outdoors with the world. (Latino Outdoorsb)

While the presence of Latino Outdoors is recent and the organization's work in connecting Latino families to the outdoors through a growing online platform is new within the Latino community, the group's mission and the work that volunteers do unfold within a context of uncertainty about the level of entitlement Latinos have to public lands. Since the majority of Latinos in the United States migrate to urban areas, connecting to rural public lands in the United States involves using new forms of communication (social media) and long-standing cultural practices (storytelling) that work as mechanisms to develop a social space where Latinos can feel included and represented in the national narrative of who belongs on America's public lands.

While the stories of Latinos and their love of the outdoors are for the most part muted in the national narrative and "public memory" of America's public lands (Stewart, 2012, p. 203), Latino Outdoors promotes a shared diverse narrative in the conversation about the nation's changing meaning of outdoor experiences within an increasingly diverse society.

In providing conservation activities, outings, mentorship, and other programs, Latino Outdoors encourages people of all ages, races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations to participate. In sum, Latino Outdoors works to offer young and old an opportunity to engage with nature and gives Latinos an outlet for sharing their experiences, beliefs, and unique perspectives through storytelling, art, and other forms of cultural expression (Amor, 2015).

While previous literature shows that Latino recreation patterns are associated with day-use amenities related to picnicking and large, family-focused events (Chavez, 2002; Chavez & Olson, 2009), Latino Outdoors is building new patterns of Latino outdoor recreation, such as hiking, camping, snowshoeing, rock climbing, kayaking, and taking trips to national and state parks. At the same time, these outings provide young members with mentorship opportunities to learn about pursuing conservation and work in environmental fields as a career.

### **Organizational Structure**

The characteristics of Latino Outdoors are based on a regional structure within which much of the planning, coordinating, and implementation of events are developed by its 44 volunteer leaders throughout the United States. Its founder, José González<sup>1</sup>, currently serves as the primary ambassador for the organization and keeps a jam-packed schedule, meeting with other organizations, government agencies, funders, and prominent federal officials (he even met with President Barack Obama during his term in office) to spread the word about the growing demand for Latino representation on public lands (Nelson, 2016). Meanwhile, Graciela Cabello serves as the organization's national director, implementing a national strategic vision, building infrastructure, growing capacity, and cultivating strong partnerships. The remainder of the organization is composed exclusively of volunteers who serve as regional coordinators

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of this writing, Jose Gonzalez served as the organizational leader and Graciela Cabello served as national director. While both have stepped down from these roles, they remain active in the organization, and organizational leadership roles continue to evolve.

(who outreach to communities and other organizations), outing leaders (who organize outdoor events), ambassadors (who represent Latino Outdoors throughout the United States), and social-media contributors. Six volunteers also serve on the advisory board.

A noteworthy pillar of this structure is the way in which planning, collaboration, and communication are primarily conducted online among employees, volunteers, and constituents. With a robust online presence, Latino Outdoors utilizes Facebook groups, Twitter, Instagram, blogs and other online media and smartphone applications to inform members of upcoming events, advertise services, spread a message of conservation, and share Latino experiences with nature through forms of expression such as pictures, videos, tweets, art, essays, and poetry. Specifically, members use social media to tell their stories of the outdoors. Such stories function as a mechanism to expand their community, share the organization's mission, and connect constituents with new information. On Facebook and Twitter, followers can expect to see Latino Outdoors posting status updates on programs, articles and features about the organization, and information about the broader environmental movement in which Latino Outdoors is taking center stage. At numerous social-media outlets, participants of Latino Outdoors events or members/followers of the organization can tag their own status updates or post to Latino Outdoors.

By offering participants the ability to express insights and opinions about activities related to the outdoors, Latino Outdoors' social-media outlets provide an important method of fostering community and developing environmental awareness for its constituents. Moreover, the Latino Outdoors webpage, blog, and Facebook groups make available important information about organizational aims and biographies of the employees and volunteers who make up Latino Outdoors. The website also provides scholarly articles and other resources for individuals interested in educating themselves about the environment, conservation, and recreational opportunities. Facebook groups are used as a means to connect interested participants to events and functions and as a source to post specific information about outings, lectures, and film viewings. In sum, using social media as a primary means of communication, Latino Outdoors organizes outreach programs, advertising, recruiting, events, and social connections. With neither brick-and-mortar presence nor particular regional area to limit its exponential growth, the organization's powerful online presence is more than just a mechanism for bringing together a group of outdoor enthusiasts. The group's virtual platform is working to create environmental awareness across the 57 million Latinos throughout the country and to foster a sense of belonging for Latinos on America's public lands.

## **Programs in Action**

While connecting Latinos to the outdoors via virtual platforms works as a cornerstone of the organization's growth and connectivity, it is in its hosting of tangible outdoor events that deep connections are made to the natural environment and to the organization itself. The organization's outings and engagements with Latino families throughout the country are building respect and trust with the community. Outings are grounded in introducing public lands, as well as in showing how participation in the outdoors is harmonious with Latino identity and culture. Latino Outdoors is reclaiming spaces on public lands for communities that are disconnected from the natural environment because of issues related to migration and urbanization. In other words, Latino Outdoors is leading an effort to build a powerful sense of belonging

in which Latinos refuse to remain excluded from physical and social spaces beyond their neighborhoods. Borrowing from the National Park Service motto, “This Land Is Our Land,” Latinos are asserting their right to access America’s public lands. Hence, outings include trips to the sequoias of the Calaveras Big Trees State Park in California (Bass, 2014), Snoqualmie Pass recreation area outside Seattle (Nelson, 2016), the Muir Woods National Monument in California, the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail, stretching from Arizona to San Francisco, Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, and San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge in California (O’Brien, 2015). Outdoor events also have been held in Texas, New York, Colorado, and many other areas with large concentrations of Latino communities. Breaking out of the traditional patterns of Latino outdoor recreation, organized activities include snowshoeing, hiking, bird watching, rock climbing, water sports and swimming, walking, trail running, and several other activities that create new opportunities and experiences for Latinos to develop their own physical and social spaces in the outdoors and greater social consciousness of their role in environmental conservation.

Combining a strong online presence along with real experiences of the outdoors creates a bonding relationship between the organization’s founder, executive director, and volunteers throughout the United States. Event participants share their experiences, stories, photos, art, and creative expressions through Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, with a common interest in connecting Latinos to the natural environment. Moreover, participants post landscape photos and selfies of Latino Outdoors trips (using the hashtag #LatinoOutdoors), expressing their fun, adventure, and excitement of being with friends and family. On the multiple Facebook group pages attributed to Latino Outdoors, participants communicate information about upcoming events and share their impressions of events in which they have participated.

In addition to national networking, Latino Outdoors focuses on growing personal relationships with youth and families. By providing opportunities for Latino families to interact with nature together, the organization encourages participation beyond the single person and acknowledges the importance of family in Latino culture. The outings and experiences that Latino Outdoors organizes afford a social space for groups of relatives and friends to bond and foster connections with the environment, cultural practices, and conservation (Amor, 2015).

An additional focus of Latino Outdoors is to offer mentorship for youth who are interested in conservation efforts. By creating a large network of conservation organizations and individuals, opportunities for youth education, training, and volunteer work have increased dramatically within the past two years. Therefore, with a focus on underserved communities, Latino Outdoors is fostering intellectual development, a passion for outdoor resources, and increased recreation to engage young people and inspire their professional and personal participation (Amor, 2015).

### **Making Professional Connections**

A major aspect of the Latino Outdoors mission is to create professional as well as personal connections. Owing to the scarcity of Latino conservation organizations that existed before the founding of Latino Outdoors, a deliberate effort has been made to connect environmental professionals within the Latino community. The intention is to encourage communication and collaboration among Latino leaders who work in conservation and whose commitment to the Latino community influences their

work and experiences. By connecting and sharing resources, expertise, and goals, these collaborations build a platform for establishing a greater presence in outdoor recreation and public land use.

Professional groups are organized both in corporate and outdoor settings to bring together Latino environmental professionals, who often lament that they are among the few Latinos working within their profession and organization. The groups help build a community throughout the country that is driven by people who desire to network with each other, have a passion for the outdoors, and are working to bring outdoor experiences to the Latino community. In addition, community members are often asked by mainstream environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society to speak at meetings and conferences about how to engage underrepresented groups. Hence, although these environmental professionals often represent the broader Latino community at events, until recently they were disconnected from each other and working in isolation. Social media is the primary mechanism in forming a Latino environmental professional community. Through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and LinkedIn, Latino Outdoors is building a national network of Latino environmental professionals throughout the country.

### **Encouraging Storytelling**

In addition to inviting, involving, and including Latinos in outdoor recreation, Latino Outdoors employs a method of storytelling during outings that is designed to help Latinos fully engage with the natural environment. The act of storytelling works as a mechanism to develop genuine *confianza* (trust) and *respeto* (respect), which are very important in any social relationship with Latinos (Clarke et al., 2015). Storytelling creates a space for families, friends, and new acquaintances to share their feelings and reactions to outdoor experiences and the natural environment that surrounds them, building a sense of community for the participants, and encouraging a feeling of responsibility for and identity with the natural environment. Storytelling also extends to social-media sites and blogs, where Latino Outdoors provides virtual spaces for participants to share their impressions and experiences both within the group and in a public forum. Several virtual stories are of personal interactions with recreational activities, the environment, and natural resources or spiritual connections to the outdoors that flourish during outings. For example, a father by the name of Juan details his son's experience at Kirby Cove Campground, part of California's Golden Gate National Recreation Area, on the Latino Outdoors blog. Affectionately called "Little Tigre," Juan's son, Julian, had the opportunity to investigate his natural surroundings during a camping trip with his father and two uncles. The four of them set up camp, built a fire, cooked together, and explored their environment, making the two-night trip an excellent opportunity for bonding and an impactful way for a father to introduce his curious son to the awe of nature (Telles, 2016).

Stories on the Latino Outdoors blog also include accounts of the role of the natural environment in overcoming insurmountable challenges, such as Maricela's struggle with chronic pain and her discovery of rock climbing. Maricela describes that although her family life did not include a great deal of exposure to the outdoors, she had always enjoyed physical activities and playing outside. As she grew older, a physical problem caused her so much pain that she could rarely participate in the kind of activities that she typically enjoyed, but in college she was introduced to climbing. She fell in love



with the sport and used climbing along with alternative medicine to heal her mind, body, and soul. Her connection to climbing and the outdoors has played an important role in her recovery, and the story that she shares on the Latino Outdoors blog is meant as a sign of encouragement for others who struggle with physical disabilities (Rosales, 2016).

Other stories are grounded in identity and culture. Gabriela writes about her perspective on the environment and how her ethnicity, identity, and upbringing have influenced her views. She describes visits to her grandparent's home in Baja, California, and highlights the culture of minimalism, dependence on nature, and respect for natural resources. Growing up with an understanding of where her food came from, why it's important to conserve resources, and what it means to live simply shaped her own identity and the ways in which she interacts with nature and the outdoors (Worrel, 2016). For bloggers on the Latino Outdoors website, and for those interacting with Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other virtual forums sponsored by the organization, storytelling builds an "autobiographical community" (Thomas, 1969), which works strategically to establish new cultural narratives of the outdoors that are often missing across mainstream outdoor organizations. As Efraín described in his post titled, "A Chicano's Experience Outdoors":

I traveled down California in a black, rented, soccer team van with six people I had only ever previously met through emails. We were on our way to the first ever Latino Outdoors Leadership Campout, which was being hosted at Malibu Creek State Park. With the van's windows down we drove into the parking lot just outside of our campsite with La Chona by Los Tucanes de Tijuana playing. The fatigue in our bodies was replaced with nostalgia and excitement as the fast-paced accordion, the slightly funky bass line, and the flashback-inducing chorus shook the cheap plastic interior of the van. For a nature-loving Chicano, this was a rare moment where two parts of my identity were able to transcend the border that regularly divides them. At the campout, I saw people wearing huaraches, people's skin tones matched my own, and I heard conversations conducted in colloquial Spanglish. We shared stories of being the lone person of color in our professional settings while we mulled ideas on how to reconnect the Latino community to the outdoors. José González, the Founder of Latino Outdoors, wore a faded black shirt with "Tierra y Libertad," a slogan from the Mexican Revolution that translates to "Land and Liberty," printed across the front in an old English font. Latino Outdoors provided validation of my Chicano identity (Delgado, 2016).

The stories of Latino outdoor experiences in rock climbing, camping, hiking, and participating in collective events with other Latinos open a "complex field of discourse" (Foucault, 1972, p. 23) within which the Latino outdoor experience can be defined outside the boundaries of mainstream outdoor recreation experiences. For example, as Efraín describes his experience, he is "nostalgic" as he arrives at the campsite in a van full of people listening to Mexican ballads and sees other Chicanos like himself creating their own social, cultural, and political space in an environment where he is accustomed to being the only person of color. His experience is "a rare moment" in which he no longer feels that his racial and ethnic background is separate from his love

of the outdoors. At this moment, his sense of place on public lands is validated along with his “Chicano identity,” which is at the core of what Latino Outdoors is working to achieve on a national scale.

The collective stories throughout the Latino Outdoors online forum are replete with shared experiences that work as counternarratives to traditional meanings of the outdoors historically tied to elite white males who live in urban areas (Cronon, 1995; Nash, 2001). For participants in Latino Outdoors events, hiking, camping, climbing, and other outdoor activities are part of a communal experience in which preconceptions such as solitude and the image of the lone white backpacker are foreign (Abby, 1971; Oravec, 1981, 1996). In addition, Latino Outdoors events are designed to create much broader experiences with the outdoors beyond historical patterns of Latino outdoor recreation, such as participating only in day-use and picnicking activities on urban national forests (Chavez, 2009; Chavez & Olson, 2009). With an emphasis on developing environmental awareness and a sense of belonging, Latino Outdoors provides a social space where Latino identities are validated and in harmony with the natural environment. Expressions of personal connections to the outdoors, both in group settings and through an online community, advance *confianza* and *respeto*, which are necessary pillars for inviting, involving, including, and developing environmental awareness for communities historically underrepresented on America’s public lands (Clarke et al., 2015).

## Implications

The work of Latino Outdoors is new in several ways, including its notable online presence and its use of storytelling. Through these mechanisms and the organization’s mission, Latino Outdoors is creating a space for forming new social and cultural meanings of the outdoors using counternarratives that question normative American outdoor experiences that privilege an “able-bodied white middle class user” (Taylor, 2000, p. 178; see also Bullard, 1993; Mohai, 1985). While Latinos remain underrepresented in outdoor recreation (Cordell, 2012), and their stories are excluded from the national narrative and “public memory” of America’s public lands (Stewart, 2012, p. 203), Latino Outdoors promotes increasing participation through developing shared experiences and narratives about the nation’s changing meaning of outdoor experiences. The broader voice for environmental awareness that Latino Outdoors represents speaks directly to developing inclusion and greater concern for the outdoors among Latinos through events, open discussion forums, and a growing online presence. The group’s mechanisms of engaging the Latino community through storytelling and social media deserve recognition and consideration from mainstream outdoor organizations and government agencies working to make recreation and outdoor experiences more relevant, accessible, and enjoyable for the growing number of diverse groups in American society.

A key component of Latino Outdoors’ uniqueness and a mechanism that can be applied by other groups and organizations is the use of storytelling. By providing a physical, virtual, and social-cultural space for participants to share their diverse experiences, Latino Outdoors offers a look into the various interpretations of the outdoors, recreation, and nature, and this approach solidifies an important sense of place that Latinos share while still representing the dynamic and varying beliefs under

the collective rubric of a Latino community. A storytelling focus could be applied within recreation programs for the purposes of creating more culturally sensitive services and understanding land-use differences both within and across racial/ethnic groups to develop mechanisms for collaborative goal setting that includes community voices (Milstein et al., 2011).

Storytelling also works as a mechanism for establishing a sense of place for communities historically marginalized in outdoor-recreation programming (Milstein et al., 2011; Stewart, 2012).<sup>z</sup> Acknowledging the variability of sense of place for minorities in outdoor recreation is an important component for understanding how underrepresented groups are engaging with the outdoors at various levels of recreation beyond simply picnicking, swimming, and other traditional recreation patterns previously identified in the literature. Because spaces for outdoor recreation are not simply physical but also have social dimensions (Lin & Lockwood, 2014; Stokowski, 2002; Williams & Stewart, 1998), the process of valuation and emotional attachment is dynamic and can be remade over time through collective stories of outdoor experiences. Furthermore, while previous studies in outdoor recreation ascribe sense of place and place interpretations to individuals (Stokowski, 2002), they can also be identified by a group based on group ideals and shared necessity of the space (Stokowski, 2002). For Latino Outdoors, developing sense of place and group identity through storytelling is the essence of its work connecting Latinos to outdoor recreation. By inserting counterhegemonic Latino narratives, dominant notions of citizenship and outdoor experiences are disrupted, offering “new imaginative communal spaces that facilitate a rethinking of social relations” (Vásquez, 2011, p. 10) and that redefine sense of place as well as meanings of outdoor experiences on public lands.

Furthermore, via an online platform, their narratives connect individual Latinos’ experiences to their community and national identity through what Chicana feminist scholar Chela Sandoval (2000) describes as a horizontal network of mobile resistance strategies where oppositional narratives challenge conventional meanings and systems of power. The assortment of stories use a broad spectrum of historical, geographical, social, cultural, and political utterances that disrupt either/or dualities between people and the environment. Moreover, the robust online platform speaks directly to urban Latino millennials, who post their everyday experiences and bridge those experiences with their multicultural background to build new narratives that diverge from dominant hegemonic narratives of solitude and rugged individualism. Social media provide a virtual space where “new social relations are envisioned and discursively enacted” through narratives that negotiate the mix of characteristics that define a Latino identity, such as being multicultural with strong family values and mixing English and Spanish to more clearly describe how they feel about the outdoors (Vásquez, 2011, p. 7).

Narratives that are posted to social networking sites and blogs reveal how outdoor experiences are socially embedded within individual perceptions, beliefs about community formation, and a sense of national belonging that emerges in social spaces typically defined by white mainstream society. Social media offer a platform for posting experiences that become mutually dependent and challenge doctrines of individualism and solitude. As Susan Stanford Friedman (1998) pointed out, the emphasis on individualism in autobiography is “a reflection of privilege, one that

excludes from the canons of autobiography those writers that have been denied by history the illusion of individualism” (p. 75). Rather than showing their experiences to be solitary, the interdependent representations included in online postings suggest shared and mutually dependent ideals of the outdoors that challenge mainstream concepts of individualism in outdoor recreation. Furthermore, their online postings work to create a new discourse about outdoor recreation that incorporates often contradictory aspects of their own multicultural and multilingual identities; as Lourdes Torres (1991) suggested in relation to Latina autobiographers, members of Latino Outdoors are “acknowledging the contradictions in their lives and [working] to transform difference into a source of power” (p. 278). Using social media, Latino Outdoors creates a virtual space for Latinos to negotiate their own representations of their selves with their outdoor experiences and the tension between individual and communal identities.

Practitioners can borrow from Latino Outdoors and its approach of combining modern day social media communication with cultural practices, such as storytelling, to create greater awareness about the outdoors. Marketing practices that advertise communal and familial outdoor experiences can perhaps break down perceived barriers that exclude people from public lands. Advertising the diverse experiences and meanings that underrepresented groups draw from outdoor recreation, also creates an avenue for open dialogue. Moreover, by combining social media with storytelling, land management agencies can demonstrate greater sensitivity to the different meanings that cultural groups draw from recreating outdoors. By facilitating the development of broader narratives beyond solitude and rugged individualism, land management agencies can engage with a significant portion of the population that has yet to build a sense of identity with America’s public lands. Practitioners can market public lands as both physical and social spaces where diverse cultures have the freedom to build their own connections and sense of belonging to the outdoors.

## Conclusion

By 2044, the United States is projected to become a majority-minority country where the number of people who belong to one or more racial/ethnic groups will exceed the number of non-Hispanic whites (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Latinos are the largest racial/ethnic group within this growing minority demographic, and Latino millennials are the largest and youngest racial/ethnic demographic group in the United States (Patten, 2016). While Latino perceptions toward outdoor recreation are shaped by diverse within-group differences, such as age, race, gender, sexuality, and country of origin, outdoor recreation programming can engage commonalities through storytelling and social-media outlets. Public-land managers can include programming through which participants are open to sharing familial connections, communicating, using their own language, developing professional networking, and, most importantly, telling their stories of the outdoors, to create a broader communal sense of self or “sense of self-in-place” (Milstein et al., 2011, p. 489). In this way, outdoor experiences would include history, identity, and community (Carbaugh, 2007), rather than requiring participants to ascribe to the individual constructs of self typically attributed to such activities.

Shared experiences in the outdoors are an important aspect of recreation that creates meaning and opportunities for bonding in nature. For this reason, work that acknowledges the varying meanings that can be ascribed to a place is vital for creating inclusive services and outdoor recreational spaces. Through the organization's online forum for storytelling, growing partnerships and constituent base, and continual events, Latino Outdoors interacts at the crossroads between public lands and the diversity of Latino identities in the United States.

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