Challenging Legacies of Exclusion: Exploring Narratives of Identity-based Conservation Corps Members in Public Lands

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ABSTRACT

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As environmental amenities and places to work, public lands remain inequitably accessible to priority populations. Fear of discrimination, economic marginalization, and structural barriers all play roles in reduced accessibility. Rather than wait for further federal action on these matters, some non-profit conservation corps have built relationships with public land agencies like the National Park Service (NPS) to create space and opportunity for identity-based crews representing women, communities of color, and disabled persons The Environmental Justice Paradigm (EJP), rooted in social justice movements aiming to reduce environmental harms in marginalized communities, provides the theoretical framework for this thesis. Through interviewing, an exploration of narratives from current and former corps members reveal themes related to EJ and issues over accessibility to public lands. Member narratives can inform future collaborations between federal land management agencies and priority populations, providing valuable insight into how a more equitable workforce and access to public lands can be achieved.

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Preface and positionality statement

My understanding of public lands, the workforces and visitors within them, and who can access them has been largely informed by a decade working with dozens of conservation corps crews all over the United States. Serving alongside corps members from intersecting backgrounds, I learned a lot about my own privilege as my work experiences progressed into leadership roles. As the years passed, however, I noticed fewer women and people of color as peers or in leadership roles, as well as a lack of indigenous presence in the national parks I worked in. Though I recognize these aren't universal truths, my immediate workplace was being shaped by forces that I conveniently did not need to consider as a white man – such as the implicit biases and nepotism of hiring officials that function as barriers to priority populations.

I worked for several more years as a trail crew leader at a few national parks, quietly ignorant to the reality that public land management is a club *and I was in it*. Indeed, as someone with privilege, I am able to ignore the inequities that do not immediately concern me, further implicating myself in these systems of oppression and exclusion in public lands. It took several more seasons to recognize how I could begin to unpack these systems for myself and how I might be of service to begin confronting oppression present in public lands. It remains a messy endeavor, though a worthwhile one.

Not long ago, I had an opportunity to work alongside an identity-based crew 27 miles deep in the wilderness of the Sierra Nevada. The crew was an all-female led trail crew operationalized from a local conservation corps serving priority populations. They helped us clear and repair a difficult and dangerous trail that descended a flank off of a

canyon wall. This trail needed to be absolutely safe for the eventual mule trains that were to follow us into the canyon. After all, the mules were our camp's resupply – our mail, our food, and additional tools. The mules were also delivering explosives to help us dispose of a 100-year old case of dynamite we found on the edge of the trail. It was a demanding season, to say the least.

With our crew, the mule packers, and the conservation corps personnel combined, there were three men and fourteen women that season, by far the largest ratio of women to men I had the opportunity to work in, especially in a maintenance organization. Though I worked with other crews like this– women-led, or community of color-led – what made this experience stand out was this conservation corps' intention to serve priority populations.

The corps was established by an old boss and mentor, who wanted to address the lack of diversity and inclusion in the public land workforce. They started the non-profit to be more flexible in recruiting from priority populations, something the state and federal organizations we worked for lacked. For several years, I observed them gather resources for the new corps, starting with fundraising efforts with former trail crews to outfit the crews. They opened our eyes as federal land employees in how the National Park Service can help make way for an experience like an all-women's crew, an LGBTQ+ crew, or an Ancestral Lands hike led by indigenous women – firstly by collaborating with community leaders to understand what the needs of the crews are.

This, along with many other experiences, conversations, and observations while serving with dozens of crews in the backcountry led me to research environmental justice and public land history. I was specifically interested in histories of exclusion, the legacies

of racism, and the settler-colonialist worldviews that continue to influence how public lands are managed and who can fully participate in them – either recreationally, or as workers. With my experiences as a trail worker, an immigrant, and an Army brat, I have maintained a tendency to want to know the full story of those on the ground working for structural and meaningful change. These trails won't build themselves, the foreman told us – so it goes with dismantling systems of oppression. My role in that effort has briefly morphed into writing a thesis that explores conversations from identity-based corps members working in public lands. Though these conversations have been at the forefront of our crews for years, I hope by engaging some of these narratives here public land managers and corps may gain a better understanding of their roles in confronting systems of oppression within public lands.

I should be content

to look at a mountain

for what it is

and not as a comment on my life.

David Ignatow, “Content”

Introduction

The crew began their day like most trail crews – wake up at 5:30 a.m., brew coffee, cook and eat breakfast, clean up the camp kitchen, pack a lunch and fill up water bottles, lace boots and gather tools for the day. Later that morning, they met up with the National Park Service staff to discuss the work plan for the rest of the week – brushing a trail corridor on a popular trail. Since the public would likely be hiking up and down the trail, the corps members were told to be on their best behavior. "Watch your language," they said. "Keep the tools out of the trail as much as possible. Be polite, have an elevator pitch ready to talk about why you are serving here. Be safe, have fun." They had been at the park for some time by that point, so public interactions were nothing new. Later in the day, a middle-aged couple walked by after lunch and gave one of the women on the crew a once-over. Seemingly annoyed they had nowhere to place their trash, the couple decided to hand the corps member an empty potato chip bag and two empty water bottles. No one knew what to say at the moment, but it did give rise to questions – why were they working out here? Who are the people they were maintaining these trails for? Eventually, folks laughed about it later. The work week went on.

What is going on in this story? The above-paraphrased account was heard from a National Park Service (NPS) employee that worked with a local conservation corps inclusion crew comprised mostly of Latinx community members. Known also as identity-based crews, inclusion crews operate with an understanding that identities are intersectional – that is, anyone may serve on them, with special attention given towards recruiting from historically marginalized communities (Rajagopal-Durbin, 2019). The Corps Network, of which this conservation corps is a part, is but one of many umbrella

organizations that provide a level of guidance and support for corps to secure funding and provide recruitment resources to reach out to communities that have been historically marginalized from participating in conservation and environmental work programs (*Moving Forward Initiative,* thecorpsnetwork.org). Efforts like these bring to light the need for greater participation in outdoor and environmental organizations by marginalized communities (Katcher, 2018; Taylor, 2014; Yogev, 2017).

The social dynamics embedded within the scene above illustrate the challenges faced by conservation corps in their efforts to promote greater representation and participation in the environmental workforce among marginalized communities. Also known as priority populations, communities that have been historically and systematically excluded from participating in environmental programs are the focus of identity-based corps recruitment and career development goals. Recognizing the contributions and the need for greater representation among priority populations is essential to gain a seat at the table regarding environmental decision-making within a community (Whyte, 2011). Increased participation in environmental decision-making also has implications on community health, especially regarding access to nature (Bowler et al., 2010; Hansen et al., 2017; Harding et al., 2014). In this way, identity-based crews promoting equitable access to an environmental amenity and the public land workforce are dimensions of environmental justice.

Conservation corps and land agencies in the United States continue to navigate through institutionalized and systemic racism and sexism, which present major barriers in recruiting and retaining participants from priority populations (Taylor, 2019; Yogev, 2017). Major barriers preventing an acceptable rate of participation include navigating

"unconscious biases, discrimination, and insular recruiting" by land agencies and environmental organizations, and a generally unmotivated effort "to attract and retain talented people of color" to the environmental workforce (Taylor, 2014; diversegreen.org, 2020). These particular studies not only point to metrics regarding the underrepresentation of communities of color in environmental organizations, but also articulate similar trends among people with disabilities, LGBTQ+, women, and indigenous communities.

Background of marginalization from public lands

The workforce comprising conservation corps serving in land management agencies has historically marginalized communities of color, the LGBTQ+ community, and vulnerable groups (Cole, 1999; Katcher, 2018; Taylor, 2014; Yogev, 2017). Legacies of marginalization partially stem from the fact that environmental organizations and land agencies have historically been led by middle-class whites, in which the environmental concerns, attitudes, and relationships with nature by marginalized groups were overlooked and ignored. Eurocentric social constructions of wilderness and environmental attitudes in the 19th and 20th centuries further alienated marginalized communities from participating in public lands, places supposedly set aside for all Americans (DeLuca & Demo, 2001; Finney, 2014; Ray, 2013; Taylor, 2016). Furthermore, the very construction (and management) of wilderness is rooted in preserving a land ethic serving the dominant American identity that continues to exclude groups "unfit" for the rigors of outdoor life and from participating in environmental institutions (Brechin, 1996; DeLuca & Demo, 2001; Ray, 2013). In the end, public lands

are managed in a way that perpetuates specific recreational opportunities with large upfront fees (such as wilderness backpacking, boating, or camping), alienating user groups that may not have the means or interest to access such recreation (Washburne, 1978).

The Conservation Corps

Providing access to wilderness and public lands became a priority when the first national parks and forests were established in the early 20th century. As public lands expanded across the West, so did a workforce of trail workers, road crews, railroad workers, and public facilities managers in state and federal parks. In the early 20th century, African American Army companies were some of the first trail workers in the new national parks. Known as the Buffalo Soldiers, several cavalry and infantry companies built the trails to the summits of Mount Whitney in California and Moana Loa in Hawai`I (Hoverson, 2015). Yet, the most famous and largest of these workforces was the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), having employed over 3 million men between 1933 and 1942. The CCC built roads, trails, and performed countless restoration and conservation-related tasks on public lands, ultimately providing the public access to national parks and forests. However, like the Army groups working the trails before, the CCC remained largely a segregated corps, and helped set the tone for how land agencies and the conservation movement were to exclude marginalized populations (Cole, 1999; Taylor, 2016).

Environmental Justice

Over the last 25 years, corps implementing identity-based crews have begun creating workspaces for priority populations to explore their unique identities and roles in wildlands (The Corps Network, 2019). The oldest of these initiatives is of the Youth Conservation Corps' foster-youth program – which provides opportunities for youth in foster care, or young adults transitioning out of foster care (youthconservationcorps.org). Other corps have written in their mission statements the importance of reaching priority populations to provide the environmental benefits to a community in need, while also helping to build principles of recognition within the environmental workforce. Corps and partnering agencies like the National Park Service have recognized this as a start to address deficiencies of diversity, equity, and inclusion within their workforce (Yogev, 2017; Katcher, 2018). Inclusion efforts can also bring awareness to environmental injustices – specifically inequitable access to health-promoting environmental amenities like parks, outdoor recreation, and work in the outdoors (Floyd & Johnson, 2002).

Priority populations are exposed to greater environmental harms and have less access to green amenities (such as wildland recreation) than dominant white communities (Bullard, 1993; Johnson, et al., 1998; Floyd, 1999). Thus, environmental justice scholars have concluded, though rather cautiously, that inequitable access to environmental amenities is an extension of environmental injustice (Floyd & Johnson, 2002). Indeed, recent research has shown that walking on trails has the potential to significantly lower cortisol levels in the body (Hunter et al., 2019). By providing opportunities for priority populations to participate in the environmental fields and outdoor recreation through identity-based crews and programming, conservation corps can be considered advocates of environmental justice (Katcher, 2018).

Theories and gaps

While some of the environmental justice literature has been devoted to the topic of inclusion programs in the environmental fields and investigations into equitable accessibility to wildlands (Yogev, 2017; Katcher, 2018; Taylor, 2019), as well as the histories of wildland exclusionism (Ray, 2013; Finney, 2014), few narrative-based studies directly investigate the participant experiences of crew members in wildland inclusion programs. Additionally, environmental justice literature is rich in examples of the three primary justice tenets – distributive justice, procedural justice, and corrective justice, especially as they relate to collaborations and decision-making regarding environmental harms (Wenz, 1998; Shrader-Frechette, 2002; Kuehn, 2000). The theory of recognition justice also emerging (Whyte, 2011) and may provide an additional lens for examining how identity-based crews relate to environmental justice.

Some of today's conservation corps are actively recognizing the exclusionary history of the original CCC and public land management (The Corps Network, 2020; Katcher, 2018; interview data). Additionally, studies exist that point to demographic characteristics and attitudes between ethnic groups while serving as corps members (Frumkin, et. al, 2010), as well as suggesting programmatic suggestions non-profit and government agencies in the conservation field ought to take to promote greater inclusion among priority populations (Yogev, 2017; Katcher, 2018). Though these studies bring up important questions about inclusion in the environmental workforce through interviews and surveys, aside from Cole's account of black Americans in the CCC, few narrative studies exist on identity-based conservation corps members (Cole, 1999).

This thesis seeks to document the participant experience of corps members serving on inclusion-based crews. Gaining an understanding of what is happening on the ground will continue to help program developers, collaborations, and land agencies see clearer on how their efforts are serving, or perhaps hindering, priority populations working public lands.

Research questions

This thesis will explore the following research questions:

1. What perceptions do identity-based crew alumni have as to the intersections of public land histories and their own stories?
2. How might these narratives inform the continued management of public lands, especially in the context of equitable representation?
3. How do the experiences of corps members align with partnership goals – that of land management agencies and the conservation corps?

Through semi-structured interviews, the research was guided by narratives from former corps members, staff, and partners involved in the conservation corps fields dedicated to promoting greater equity and participation in the environmental workforce.

Significance

Informed by theories in leisure studies, environmental history, and the environmental justice paradigm, this thesis helps readers understand the extent to which systemic marginalization has prevented priority populations from accessing environmental amenities. Theories within the environmental justice paradigm point to

marginalization, discrimination, and structural systems have limited the participation of marginalized communities in national parks and wildlands (Washburne, 1978; Floyd and Gramann, 1993; Johnson et al., 1998; Taylor, 2000; West, 1989). Additionally, this research contributes to a body of research covering the importance of identity-based crews as viable ways that begin addressing the history of exclusion. At the time of writing, much of the research on identity-based crews has been focused on recruitment and the effectiveness of programmatic strategies, such as equity training and relationship-building with land agencies, and offering relevant certifications for members (Katcher, 2018; Taylor, 2014; Yogev, 2017). By exploring narratives of participants in identity-based crews, this study will add to the literature of environmental history, outdoor recreation, environmental justice (via access to environmental amenities), and constructivist interpretations of the dominant definitions of wilderness.

This work relies heavily on environmental justice and leisure studies literature. These intersecting fields have received scant coverage, however, especially in how they relate to conservation corps promoting inclusion programs. As Floyd and Johnson (2002) caution, care must be taken to not diminish the environmental justice movement by careless attempts to redefine principles of distributive and procedural justice. This same caution must also be applied to emerging themes of recognition justice (Whyte, 2011). Yet, it is clear that access to environmental amenities, including the ability to participate in a formative experience like a conservation corps, remains a challenge for priority populations and provide another dimension to environmental injustice.

At the forefront of this effort to promote greater diversity and inclusion are the participants themselves – the corps members. The interactions that corps members have

with the land agencies, their organization, and wilderness can reveal to what end inclusion programs are relevant to the members. As the anecdote above revealed, institutionalized biases remain challenging to navigate by the public and staff alike. These challenges manifest in the conservation corps world as subtle discriminatory behavior, a significant lack of mentors for members, or more often an unwillingness by partnering agencies to fully collaborate with participating communities (Taylor, 2014; Yogev, 2017; diversegreen.org, 2020; personal interview notes, 2020).

The participants in this study are not only striving for a more equitable and just representation of a diverse nation in the environmental workforce, but their stories also offer to consider alternative histories – stories deliberately removed and still undermined by the dominant white male culture that shaped these spaces, to begin with.

Literature Review

Environmental organizations continue to struggle to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in their workforces, educational programs, recruitment, and volunteer coordination (Schelas, 2002; Taylor, 2018). This literature review will help readers understand how identity-based crews in conservation corps work towards improving representation in land management fields (Katcher, 2018; The Corps Network Moving Forward Initiative, 2019) and provide an understanding of the connections between inclusion programs, the historical context around exclusion on public lands, and principles of environmental justice. Distributive, procedural, and corrective justice will be reviewed and how they relate to inclusion programs within conservation corps. Additionally, a review of recognition justice (Whyte, 2011) can help provide understanding over issues related to environmental attitudes held by both dominant and marginalized groups alike to identify the implications for effective collaboration.

Like the social-environmental movements surrounding them, conservation corps remain dynamic entities. Environmental movements, in particular environmental justice movements, have been socially constructed responses to environmental concerns experienced by marginalized communities (Taylor, 2000b). With much of the literature on the environmental justice movement citing adverse public health effects suffered by minority and poor communities directly related to their proximity and exposure to environmental hazards (Bullard, 1993a; Bullard, et al., 2008; Mohai & Bryant, 1992), research has also indicated that inequitable access to natural resources in the form of

recreational opportunities as a dimension of environmental injustice (Floyd, 1993; Loukaitou-Sideris, 2019; Lee, Scott, & Floyd, 2002; Rigolon, et al. 2014 and 2018; Tarrant & Cordell, 1999). Additionally, the environmental workforce is not excluded from these assessments of inequities – with less than 15% of the public lands workforce identifying as non-white (Taylor, 2018). Yet, conservation corps have provided job training to participants from diverse socio-economic backgrounds since at least the 1970's and well into the 1990's with the Clinton Administration establishing national AmeriCorps programs (Dempsey, 2012; Frumkin et al., 2009). Though participation among minority groups and women are respectively around 44% and 46% at the time of writing (thecorpsnetwork.org, 2020) the diversity indexes continue to fall short, and do not necessarily translate into continued participation in the public lands workforce after a corps member's service term has ended. With a growing number of corps programs implementing identity-based crews over the last 25 years, corps across the country are working to increase participation among marginalized communities with targeted outreach, representational leadership, and offering transferable skills and certifications (Katcher, 2018). In this way, the efforts to promote greater representation and participation in the conservation corps workforce may begin to address the underrepresentation of marginalized groups so rampant in the public lands workforce and environmental organizations as a whole.

Roadmap

To understand how conservation corps began adopting identity-based crews for engaging participants from marginalized populations, we must first review the exclusionary history of the mainstream environmental movement around public lands.

Because this thesis is concerned with crews serving in public lands and wilderness areas, the literature reviewed will generally cover the construction of the national park ideal and the "whitening" of the wilderness (DeLuca & Demo, 2002; Finney, 2014), as well how the evolution of public lands and environmentalism advanced tools for nation-building that deliberately alienated priority populations (Brechin, 1996; Kosek, 2006; Spence, 1996). It will also review the legacy of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), federal land actions (such as the Wilderness Act of 1964), the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP), and the Environmental Justice Paradigm (EJP) to provide additional context how identity-based crews operate within the public lands workforce. I will also spend time defining the intersections between leisure studies with environmental justice literature by reviewing barriers in accessing environmental amenities, such as parks and participation in environmental organizations (Finney, 2014; Floyd, 1993; Johnson, et al., 1998; Loukaitou-Sideris, 2019; Tarrant & Cordell, 1999; Taylor, 2014 and 2018). Finally, I will review studies of conservation corps members – quantitative and narrative-based – to provide context for my methodology of interviewing identity-based corps participants (Cole, 1999; Frumkin et al., 2009; Katcher, 2018; Yogev, 2017).

Clarity around terms

This literature review and the thesis as a whole will use the following terms quite often. I recognize there may be mistakes with these terms as ideas around identity and marginalization shift.

Identity-based crews create experiences for participants from priority populations that have been historically and structurally excluded from environmental organizations and the public lands workforce. For example, some conservation corps provide opportunities around members' identities, including American Sign Language, LGBTQ+, and indigenous inclusion crews.

Priority populations are defined as communities with their majority as non-white/non-cis-males that includes women, communities of color, persons with disabilities, members identifying as LGBTQ+, and indigenous people. The term also includes low-income communities. The author understands that intersectionalities exist between identities and places no assumptions about these intersections across groups and individuals. It is important to note that terms like marginalization and even "diversity and inclusion" are used by the oppressors, usually as a reflection of what their organization needs to do better (for example, organizations led by dominant-groups looking to promote inclusion may come off as self-serving, and may struggle to hold space for non-dominant groups to lead that effort). Therefore, the term priority population is preferred to terms like "marginalized community", as the latter tends to perpetuate marginalization. Additionally, "marginalized community" is seen as a technical, bureaucratic term used for federal grant proposals, while priority populations is a more active, on-the-ground approach that real people can relate to (interview with AV, February 2020).

Historical Background

With winding trails and remote destinations inspiring awe for those privileged enough to wander through them, wilderness areas have a complex and exclusionary history with marginalized communities (DeLuca & Demo, 2002). On the surface, the social construction of wilderness leads the typical user astray from the grim histories of forced relocation, extermination, and appropriation of indigenous lands that became the blank canvas for the national parks (Spence, 1999). This canvas has been painted over again and again with Eurocentric brushes, forming an image the National Park Service and other land agencies have maintained for over a century. The social engineering around public lands, therefore, have had the effect of excluding a vast portion of the U.S. population from participating while entire histories were erased.

Exclusion from public lands can be rooted in a number of factors. Socially constructed ideas around the use of open space – who gets to participate and who does not – greatly influenced how policies regarding the environment would play out throughout the 20th century. At the extreme, founders of protected federal lands and educational and interpretive tools (such as park ranger programs) aligned with prominent agendas of eugenicist and neo-Malthusian groups (Brechin, 1996). Environmental movement heroes like Edward Abbey harbored similar neo-Malthusian philosophies, specifically directed towards immigrants infiltrating Abbey's beloved desert wilderness (Abbey, 1968). In their breakdown of wilderness, DeLuca and Demo (2001) claim mainstream environmentalism's narrow views rooted in classism and racism led "the environmental movement to neglect people and the places they inhabit," an apt conclusion that applies to many national parks across the country. National Parks, are based on an ideal of wilderness that removed all traces of former inhabitants (tribal

nations) and this “whitening of the wilderness” replaced community-managed landscapes with Romantic Eurocentric ideals of nature into the mainstream American imaginary (DeLuca & Demo, 2001; Cronon, 1996; Finney, 2014).

Public lands as a socialization tool

This section reviews the historical and cultural contexts of defining and designating wilderness and public lands as exclusive to dominant groups.

The Woodrow Wilson administration formed the National Park Service (NPS) in 1916 to oversee newly protected federal lands. Steeped in Romanticism and a desire to hold on to the manly essence of frontier conquests, preserving newly acquired lands after westward expansion was not only important for preservationists and conservationists, but for the nation-builders themselves (Finney, 2014; DeLuca & Demo, 2001). Indeed, the landscapes in question were protected for the enjoyment of dominant groups privileged enough to know about them and who had the means to visit them (DeLuca & Demo, 2001; Ray, 2013). Visitation early on was scant and relied heavily on access to the newly built railroad network connecting the East and West coasts. In these early years, visitors to the newly established parks of Glacier, Yellowstone, and Yosemite encountered members of tribes in the process of being removed (Finney, 2014; Spence, 1999). Ignoring these unfortunate realities, prominent thinkers, poets, and politicians described the landscapes in ways that made them more palatable to the visiting public. The easiest way, of course, was to erase the history of the original inhabitants. Ultimately, the national parks became an important socialization tool, providing an exclusionary effect in the American politic since their establishment (Kosek, 2006; Ray, 2013; Meierotto, 2014).

John Muir was at the forefront of establishing wilderness in the American psyche. His account of Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada was influenced by a European version of wilderness as a separation between the developed urban centers and the wild. Muir's documented experiences, however received, were influenced by Transcendentalism of his Scottish heritage (Kosek, 2006) and that of Ralph Waldo Emerson (Brannon, 2006). The Transcendentalism of Muir and Emerson both considered humanity's spiritual potential to be fully realized by connecting "with a higher, non-physical reality" (Brannon, 2006). Unlike Emerson's meditations from his study in Concord, Muir sought actual physical experiences in the newly conquered West. Muir arrived in California in 1868 after the forced removal and massacre of over 234,000 Native Americans, which ultimately helped his writings reflect the "pristine" characteristics of the nature in which he was immersing himself (Spence, 1999; Kosek, 2006). In his seminal book *My First Summer in the Sierra* Muir mused:

> *A few minutes ago, every tree was excited, bowing to the roaring storm, waving, swirling, tossing their branches in glorious enthusiasm like worship. But though to the outer ear these trees are now silent, their songs never cease.* (Muir, 1911)

By willfully ignoring the original inhabitants of the lands in which they visited, and perpetuating the narrative of the lands as pristine, Muir and his contemporaries helped to erase the history of the original inhabitants while influencing policy makers on the importance of protecting pristine landscapes for the American public. Many of these conservation policies influencing the establishment of national parks and forests had their start in the Progressive Era.

Roughly between the 1880s and 1950s, the Progressive Era was defined as a period when political and social activists aggressively introduced federal regulations on

immigration, labor, food and drug production, elections (women's suffrage), and conservation policies. This period saw the birth of the nation's first three national parks, with Yellowstone in 1872, Yosemite, and Sequoia in 1890. Additionally, steady activism of John Muir, naturalists, and elites alike influenced Theodore Roosevelt's administration to establish the U.S. Forest Service in 1905 and, later, the National Park Service in 1916 under President Woodrow Wilson. Practically speaking, Garland Allen (2013) summarized the U.S. Forest Service as "conservationist" and the National Park Service as "preservationist", the difference being that conservationists manage resource extraction "sustainably" and preservationists hold fast to the absolute protection of established resources. These federal agencies continue to support conservation and preservation as their respective principles. It is within national forests and parks that, administratively, the designation of wilderness areas became possible, even though it was not until 1964 that the Wilderness Act was established. Indeed, wilderness in America won the imagination of the world over because the powerful, the federal government and a few high-brow Romanticists made it so – through distilling a story founded on misinformation regarding the expulsion and extermination of its original inhabitants (Spence, 1999). Wilderness, and by extension the mainstream environmental movement, has been defined as a "white space" (Finney, 2014; Floyd, 1999; Johnson, et al., 1998; Taylor, 2016). One way this white space became defined was through the policies enacted in the Progressive Era.

Designating stolen lands as places of natural beauty and wonder also were associated with an aesthetic popular among the Progressive Era elite that had ties to eugenics (Allen, 2013; Brechin, 1996; Kosek, 2006). At the time, conservation and preservation of nature,

whether as pristine or as a resource, had a close relationship with the pseudo-scientific study of the "natural hierarchy" of races. That is to say, many of the conservation policies between 1890 and 1940 were founded in "natural law." Eugenicists applied this view onto society, primarily through the hierarchy of races, with the Nordic as the "peak of civilization" (Brechin, 1996; Allen, 2013). Though support for eugenicist platforms eventually fell out of political favor in the United States after the Nazi death camps were discovered by Allied forces at the end of World War Two, the movement nonetheless influenced social policies, such as immigration policy and forced sterilization laws in the United States and Nazi Germany (Allen, 2013; Kosek, 2006).

Sterilization policies in particular targeted young, non-Anglo women in urban areas as well as people with disabilities. Where sterilization failed, anti-miscegenation laws passed at state levels. Federal immigration laws, like the Immigration Act of 1924, worked to exclude the genetic and cultural influence of "the other" on the white race. Rhetorically, the political strategies employed by eugenicists stoked fear over pollution of the white race by "inferior races" and "degenerative traits," which leveraged public policy to protect the American "gene pool" (Kosek, 2006). A similar logic was deployed to protect natural areas from the external influences of modernity and industrialization (Allen, 2013; Brechin, 1996).

With the political and social structure of the U.S. steeped in white supremacy, lands that were newly acquired from the expulsion and extermination of indigenous communities, and rhetoric touting the pristine and untrammeled wilderness, public lands were readied for all who had the means to access them.

Relief and physically constructed spaces

Once the canvas was prepared with a vision of empty and untrammeled spaces, the physical construction of wilderness had to take place. The National Park Service and other land agencies around the country began building roads and trails for the public to have greater access from the nearest rail stations. In response to the Great Depression, Franklin D. Roosevelt's creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) during the New Deal achieved just that. From 1933 to 1942, trail work, erosion control, conservation management, and facilities management at a landscape level became a part of American life (nps.gov, 2016).

CCC corpsmen served in remote and isolated camps and constructed critical infrastructure that gave access to the very people wilderness intended to win over – white, leisure, and upper-classes seeking to escape the crowded urban areas with growing immigrant populations (Brechin, 1996). This demographic was also more likely to vote for conservation policies, a momentum that continued into the mainstream environmental movement in the coming decades.

With social and ethnic divisions during the Progressive Era influencing public policies favoring white middle- and upper-classes, it is no surprise that public lands were managed in a way to provide access to these privileged groups. These divisions were also apparent in the public lands workforce, with the CCC generally segregated throughout its ranks at regional levels, even though federal policies forbade segregation (Cole, 1999) and the fact that lands are still managed in a way that serves the recreational needs of the privileged groups able to access them (Floyd, 1999). The legacies of the CCC and its

intersections with environmental justice and identity-based corps will be explored later on in this review.

Theoretical Background

Before discussing the legacy of conservation corps and their intersections with public land, this section aims to clarify the dominant paradigms behind environmental justice. Specifically, the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) and the Environmental Justice Paradigm (EJP) are important as context to equitable representation in the modern environmental movement.

The conservation policies since the Industrial Revolution have their theoretical roots in three phases of the environmental movement. Dorceta Taylor (2000) distilled four distinct historical paradigms of the environmental movement: 1) the exploitative capitalist paradigm (ECP), which occurred between the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in 1820 up until the damming of Hetch-Hetchy in 1913; 2) the Romantic Environmental Paradigm (REP), which evolved as a response to wonton exploitation of the landscape and continues as the basis of the American environmental movement; 3) the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP), which began incorporating activist aspects of social movements during the 1960s and 1970s to enact incremental changes for environmental causes; and 4) the Environmental Justice Paradigm (EJP), which emerged in the 1980s as a response to the NEP's inability to address social and racial disparities as they related to reducing environmental harm (Taylor, 2000).

New Environmental Paradigm and Environmental Justice Paradigm

Though not mutually exclusive, there remain differences between the value systems orienting the worldviews of NEP and EJP. Both paradigms have influenced public policies regarding environmental issues, such as laws regulating exposure to industrial toxins, air pollution, and nuclear waste (Taylor, 2000b). However, NEP's influence on the environmental movement remains narrow in the sense that human rights, racial and social justice, and the right to be free from environmental harm are not necessarily priorities (Taylor, 2000b). EJP emerged to address racial and social justice disparities that emerged within environmental issues.

Generally, NEP is not concerned with equitable access to environmental amenities such as parks and wilderness areas (Taylor, 2000b). However, the Sierra Club, widely known as an organization that subscribes to NEP principles, developed a supportive stance on immigrant rights as it relates to environmentalism after years of nearly adopting an exclusionary value system proposed by neo-Malthusian conservationists (Meierotto, 2019; sierraclub.org, 2017). This is indicative of the fluidity between NEP and EJP.

The principles of the EJP, like those of the NEP, are indeed concerned for the health of the environment, those that work in it, access to wilderness, and rejecting the influences of exploitative extraction (Taylor, 2000b). However, EJP takes the principles of NEP further, arguing that human and non-human rights deserve the attention of activists and communities – that the environment is where we work, live, and play and there is no separation from the rights of people and that of the natural world.

Environmental Justice Paradigm is the framework that begins to provide context around the disparity of accessing public lands, either through the workforce or recreationally. Identity-based conservation corps that are implementing programs to address this inequitable access can be seen as advancing environmental justice. The following sections will discuss the intersections between environmental justice and outdoor recreation.

Leisure Studies and Environmental Justice

Federal social scientists, as well as scholars of environmental justice and leisure studies, indicate that different ethnic and cultural groups hold a diversity of ideas around public land recreation and environmental values unique to each group, but may not make sense to other groups (Chavez et al. 1995; Floyd, 1993 and 1998; Ray, 2013; Washburne, 1978). These studies provide a baseline for understanding systemic barriers in place that prevent marginalized communities from engaging in the public land workforce and public land recreation (Allison, 2000). This section will review some of the main barriers to recreating and working in public lands, and more generally how inequities in accessing environmental amenities are dimensions of environmental injustice.

Overall, land and recreation managers have been generally unsuccessful in increasing diverse participation in their programs, hiring, and outreach (Taylor, 2014, 2018; Yogev, 2017). This can be attributed to an inability by land managers to provide relevant recreational opportunities to marginalized groups (Floyd, 1999; Yogev, 2017), which ties into theories around structural barriers that prevent an organization, such as a land manager, from engaging with user groups beyond those the structure is already built for (Scott, Lee, & Floyd, 2002). Yet, simply focusing on attitudes around relevancy,

recreation, and environmental issues overlooks systemic and structural institutions of racism that inform those perceptions at deeper levels (Delgado & Stefanic, 1995; Yogev, 2017). At the same time, leisure studies' efforts to address inequitable access to parks and outdoor recreational opportunities provide additional dimensions to principles of environmental justice (Floyd & Johnson, 2002; Taylor, 2000b).

Merging Environmental Amenities with Environmental Justice

Leisure studies and environmental justice provide major theoretical contexts for this thesis. In addressing inequitable access to environmental amenities, leisure studies offer general empirical approaches to understanding the relationships between intersecting identities, barriers to access, and preference for certain types of outdoor recreation by priority populations (Lee, Scott & Floyd, 2001). For example, in their study on the inequitable accessibility by communities surrounding Chattahoochee National Forest in Georgia, Tarrant & Cordell (1999) concluded that though it is possible to spatially represent distributions of marginalized communities, it remains a challenge to explain inequitable access based on distribution alone, with lower-income households being the only significant variable determining inequitable access. The authors recommended a collaborative approach with land managers and community members to assess the need for equitable access to environmental amenities, such as trailhead access and lowering housing costs (Tarrant & Cordell, 1999). Still, surface spatial studies have contributed to environmental justice literature, indicating that inequities to accessing environmental amenities, including public open spaces and recreation, are forms of environmental injustice (Floyd & Johnson, 2002; Stanfield et al., 2005; Tarrant & Cordell, 1999).

Of the studies mentioned above, the merger with leisure studies and environmental justice makes the barriers to environmental amenities clear. The following section discusses some of these prominent barriers at play that prevent priority populations from equitably accessing the environmental workforce and amenities, such as trails and public land recreation.

Identifying Barriers

In her ongoing analyses of environmental organizations, Dorceta Taylor (2014; 2019) identifies ethnic, gender, and identity disparities within environmental organizations, including conservation corps. Theories behind the barriers to outdoor recreation in public lands include marginality (Washburne, 1978), discrimination (Floyd, 1996), and structural barriers within institutions (Johnson, et al., 1998; Lee, Scott & Floyd, 2001).

Theories around marginality are partly socio-economic in nature, with lower-income populations lacking resources, like transportation or leisure time set aside to explore public lands. Washburne (1978) concluded that these economic disparities were historically built into systems of discrimination, which functionally marginalized vulnerable groups from accessing public lands, parks, and other environmental amenities.

Discriminatory factors also come into play as a barrier, though it remains unpredictable as to how discrimination plays out in group and individual behavior in accessing public lands (Floyd, 1999). Though important to recognize that perceptions around discrimination exist, marginality theorists may argue it is not the sole reason for "under-representation". As Floyd points out, "under-representation" is a term that generalizes use-patterns by land-mangers and user-groups alike, overlooking the varied environmental and recreational perceptions across cultural groups and how they intersect

(Floyd, 1999). Nonetheless, some groups maintain there is a discriminatory element in play that prevents meaningful access to public lands. Feeling unwelcome, hostility, and out of place in a space remain realities for some members of priority populations in public lands (interview with VM, March 2020).

Structural barriers in place generally appear as institutional patterns of hiring – like insular hiring or nepotism by the dominant culture in land management – which embed the management staff's inability to create relevant programming for the recreating public (Yogev, 2017). Many land agencies, and by extension environmental organizations, already serve the dominant population that is active in outdoor recreation or environmental work (Scott, 2000). Thus, an agency's inability to look beyond its current user, employee, or customer base prevents the development of a workforce that is representative of marginalized populations (Lee, Scott, and Floyd, 2001).

When connecting the environmental justice movement with leisure studies, caution is advised in amplifying the importance of access to amenities over historical environmental injustices (i.e. proximity to toxic waste; environmental racism) (Agyeman et al., 2002; Tarrant & Cordell, 1999). As it has been well-documented that access to trails or natural areas reduces stress and offers general health benefits to users (Bowler et al., 2010; Hardig et al., 2014; Hansen et al., 2017), inequitable access to health benefits from natural environments is another dimension of environmental injustice.

Recognition Justice

Connections between leisure studies and environmental justice principles can be best understood by recognizing the barriers addressed above, and by relating these barriers to principles of environmental justice– namely those presented by the First

National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991. Of these principles, those that connect to leisure studies' concern with inequitable access to environmental amenities include participatory justice (i.e. the right to be lead in policy-making and participation), ecological principles (education, access and promoting a land ethic), and autonomy (recognition of tribal treaties and respecting cultural differences between workers and the land being worked) (*Principles of Environmental Justice*, 1991).

Additionally, an emerging principle of environmental justice takes those tenets of participation, education, and autonomy, and offers the perspective of recognition justice (Whyte, 2011). Recognition justice describes a foundational approach to justice, equity, and inclusion in the environmental fields by acknowledging colonial exclusion and offer opportunities for historically marginalized groups (in particular tribal communities forcibly removed from public lands) to participate in the decision-making for management strategies, recruitment, and hiring of representational staff, and creating honest interpretive programming (Whyte, 2011). In other words, the approach of recognition justice as a principle of environmental justice acknowledges colonial harms and attempts to build greater collaborative relationships between land managers and excluded groups to bring those "environmental heritages" forward (Whyte, 2011). However, the recognition must also include the admission and rectification of a state that has not acted in the best interests of those that have been marginalized.

Building on these teachings of environmental justice and leisure studies, conservation corps are increasingly implementing identity-based crews serving on public lands. Though these crews are far from becoming a concrete solution to tackling environmental injustice related to accessing and participating in natural resource work,

their participation in managing public lands are a step in the right direction. Namely, environmental justice principles of procedural and recognition justice, as well as the leisure studies' approaches in identifying barriers to marginalized communities participating in outdoor recreation, serve as the closest theories that can help explain the experiences of identity-based crew members.

The continuing influence of the CCC

To understand the evolution of identity-based corps as a way for greater participation among priority populations on public lands, we must revisit how this "corps ethic" evolved from the original Civilian Conservation Corps and its implications on the corps world today.

Conservation corps in the United States trace their histories to the New Deal when Congress passed sweeping legislation in the 1930's and 1940's that provided millions of Americans economic relief. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was mandated through the Emergency Conservation Work Act, a program signed into law a few weeks after Franklin D. Roosevelt introduced it to Congress. The CCC provided structured opportunities for enrollees to gain skills in land management, leadership, and civic engagement while working in grueling conditions for low pay in outdoor settings. Whether for flood control, hiking trail construction, or invasive species management, the CCC allowed young men to connect with the landscape, masculinity, and American civic values (Cole, 1999). As the time of the New Deal was wrought with economic hardship and anxiety over the next war, passing on civic values was especially important to the federal government, a momentum essential for making strides to form a corps ethic for

the impending war (Cole, 1999). The corps ethic was instilled through a curriculum, as corpsmen participated in rigorous curriculum given by Army officers running the camps. Curriculums covered basic education in math, reading, writing, and civics as well as technical aspects of the jobs given to camps (Cole, 1999). Curriculums also provide a foundation for many corps today, though the content is often geared more towards work skills, naturalist studies, and cultural studies. In the case of identity-based corps, this curriculum may involve topics like racial and environmental justice, indigenous history and land acknowledgments, and community service (thesis interviews, 2020).

Marginalization in service

Cole's extensive research into the historical background of the CCC sheds light on the segregation prevalent in the crews and society as a whole at the time. By locating former corpsmen that served in African American crews, Cole was able to not only provide rich narratives of the corps experience serving in wilderness areas, but also shed light on the erased history of the 200,000 or so African American men that served in the CCC from 1933 to 1942. For example, promotions in the CCC from laborer to any leadership roles were not readily awarded to African American corpsmen, though often their crews performed the most intense, technical, and undesired jobs (Cole, 1999; Gower, 1976). In cases where there was racial integration in the camps, duties were often segregated, with kitchen patrol or cooking mostly delegated to African American corpsmen (Cole, 1999).

Cole also broke down how contemporary historians failed to fully represent the experiences of African Americans in the CCC by downplaying their roles and contributions and focusing on the legacies of segregation (Cole, 1999). However, by

providing former members an opportunity to give an accurate narrative, Cole achieved a more honest representation, and made visible the contributions of African American men in the CCC. Many of the corpsmen Cole interviewed served in California, where local backlash towards black corpsmen was less direct (as the camps were more remote). Black companies in California were assigned to build roads and campgrounds in National Forests and county parks but spent much of their time fighting wildfires (Cole, 1991).

Cole's research on the experiences of black corpsmen also revealed a glaring truth that environmental organizations continue to face today:

> […] *the CCC was simply too narrowly focused to meet the multiplicity of problems confronting African American youths in the 1930s. A wider ranging program of vocational education rather than work relief would have been vastly preferable. In the CCC, corpsmen gained no long-term job training. Once their corps duty was over, they returned home without new skills that would qualify them as workers in an increasingly industrial and technological world. Beyond that, these men's attitudes toward nature, or even the sense that they needed to have an attitude toward nature, was apparently completely unaffected by their experience in the CCC. This failure, critical then, remains a failure of many environmental organizations today.*
>
> (Cole, 1991)

Similarly, Native Americans were provided their relief program through the E.C.W. Act of 1933. In many ways, tribes had more freedom on how to spend the federal aid on emergency conservation projects, partly due to the new laws around tribal-self-governance from the Wheeler-Howard Act of 1934 (Parman, 1971; Gower, 1972). The Indian division of the CCC employed over 77,000 corpsmen from 1933 to 1940. Their crews built 7,000 miles of trucking trails, 2,500 miles of fire breaks, numerous stock and roadway bridges, dams, erosion breaks, and irrigation ditches in seventy-eight reservations in twenty-tree states (Gower, 1972). According to historical records of correspondence between then-Secretary of the Interior Ickes and the Bureau of Indian

Affairs Commissioner Collier and tribal leaders, the Indian Division of the CCC had a great economic impact on already impoverished communities (Gower, 1972). However, once the programs of the Emergency Conservation Work Act ended due to the U.S. entering the Second World War, corpsmen in the Indian Divisions and the communities in which they served faced an abrupt halt to government relief work and funding.

A renewed corps ethic

The legacy of the CCC inspired future conservation corps that sprang up in the 1970s, when greater attention was being paid to how Americans were accessing their parks (Bultena & Field, 1978; Lindsey & Ogle, 1972; Washburne, 1978.) Studies documenting inequities in park visitation in the 1950s and 1960s (Clawson & Knetsch, 1966) informed Lyndon Johnson to pay greater attention to not only the Civil Rights Act, but also the Wilderness Act and the National Trails Act as a way for building broader public awareness and support for wild spaces (Thomas, 2010). Byrne, et al. (2009) indicate that five of the nation's first urban national parks in the 1970s were created to provide greater access to diverse populations in areas around Los Angeles, New York, Cleveland, and others. Unfortunately, federal actions concerning public park access post-Civil Rights era did not necessarily translate to greater participation in parks by urban poor, marginalized communities, and communities of color (Byrne et al., 2009; Floyd, 1993; Thomas, 2010). With social justice and equity on the minds of some policymakers, the legacy of the CCC merged with this zeitgeist as the reimagining of conservation corps as a way to promote greater participation among priority populations (Bass, 2013).

Today's conservation corps

Today's conservation corps are typically part of a larger network of AmeriCorps community service programs (Bass, 2013; Frumkin, et al., 2009). The largest single network of these is the Corps Network, a national body of state and local corps (Katcher, 2018; corpsnetwork.org, 2019). Along with extensive job training and community service opportunities, corps offer AmeriCorps scholarships and educational perks to volunteers (Bass, 2013; Katcher, 2018). Educational benefits may include scholarships for college and loan repayments, GED for alternative high school students, certifications relevant to natural resource management, and other vocational training opportunities.

Many conservation corps programs try to immerse their members in the wildlands in which they serve (Katcher, 2018). Like the original CCC, the crews perform outdoor work related to wildland fire management, trail construction, and habitat restoration, to expose members to the health benefits by being outside in nature. By improving environmental amenities, such as trails and critical habitat, conservation corps play an important role in promoting participation and accessibility to all levels of park recreation and management – from local urban parks to the wilderness areas a quick drive away (Dempsey, 2013). Ultimately, participation in a conservation corps can be seen as a form of outdoor recreation, due to the amount of physical activity, team building, and immersion in the natural world. This relates to how leisure studies are concerned with outdoor recreation and the inequities in accessing outdoor recreational opportunities by priority populations (Floyd, 1996; Lee, Scott, & Floyd, 2002; Pease, 2011; Taylor, 2018).

Identity-based crews provide space for priority populations to explore public lands on their own terms within affinity spaces, and "seek to dismantle systems of injustice that

have been embedded in the environmentalism movement" (Katcher, 2018). Many of these crews are led by members of the community in which they serve under – such as an American Sign Language crew that has an interpreter as a crew lead; or an ancestral land crew led by tribal members (Katcher, 2018). However, in a study conducted with 10 different conservation corps, with over 100 survey respondents, some single identity-based crews still struggled to provide representative leadership roles for their crews (Katcher, 2018). That is, some of the crews still ended up being led by white males from middle-class backgrounds. Lacking a diverse set of role models also is partially to blame for the lack of retention by priority populations, as less upward mobility is often due feeling like one does not fit a mold in an already exclusionary workforce (Yogev, 2017).

Understanding corps member studies

Since the era of the Civilian Conservation Corps, scholars have attempted to quantify and qualify the experiences of corps members (Cole, 1999; Frumkin, et al., 2009; Dempsey, 2013; nationalservice.org, 2019). Frumkin et al. (2009) provide the most comprehensive of the studies, having surveyed 2,224 AmeriCorps and National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) members that served in 2007 alone (Frumkin, et al., 2009). The surveys measured levels of civic engagement, ability to work on a team, cultural relations, and employment outcomes among others. These surveys were administered to two crew types – AmeriCorps members in states (such as typical conservation corps) and the federal National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC). Though most results are typical of AmeriCorps studies measuring how national service gives members a sense of civic duty and potentially provides opportunities for personal growth, the authors found that NCCC members became "less positive in their appreciation for diversity during their

participation in the program" (Frumkin, et al., 2007). Though this was the result of a survey given to members during their term of service, a follow-up survey indicated that these negative responses were not long-lasting and possibly linked, the authors argued, to social identity theories (Frumkin et al., 2009 citing Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Essentially, being part of an isolated crew, the members were unable to fully connect to the various cultural areas in which they served (Frumkin, et al., 2007). By shifting all responsibility for cultural sensitivity and engagement onto the corps members themselves (instead of program leadership), the authors avoided any exploration of systemic effects of cultural insensitivity that may have affected corps member experiences. Indeed, when assessing why some NCCC members had negative views of cultural and ethnic differences in the areas they served in, the authors simplified this into principles around social identity theory, the process in which an "in-group" forms by responding to perceived systems of classification around them (Frumkin et al., 2007; Turner et al., 1987).

Additionally, the Frumkin et al. (2007) study is significant in that it provides the reader with a glimpse of the complexities around a government bureaucracy and how it operates within federal service programs, and consequently may be limited in its ability to effectively address issues related to cultural relevancy and diversity training. Conversely, non-profit organizations (which may still receive federal AmeriCorps grants) have a little more freedom to address the structural and environmental injustice barriers present in diversifying the natural resource management workforce (Agyeman, et al., 2002), as is evident by their mission statements specifically targeting underserved groups (Katcher, 2018). In short, at the time of writing, non-profit and smaller state-run corps are

likely able to provide greater intention towards addressing issues around promoting greater equity in the public lands workforce.

In terms of its methodology, the Frumkin et al. (2007) study remains one of the larger studies on corps members to date – with 2,224 participants completing a three-phase survey study in eight years (with 4,135 participants at its start). With such a large sample size, three surveys and one interview per participant, the study sought to generalize the experiences of a particular type of service corps (the study compares NCCC with more "traditional" AmeriCorps crews). However, by nature of its size and chosen survey methods, this generalization leaves out the nuances of specific experiences.

By generalizing the experiences of members, priority populations risk becoming overlooked within the conservation corps experience. Having a smaller sample size and emphasizing interviews (not unlike Cole's process in locating and interviewing black and white corpsmen from the CCC), may bring understanding to the nuances of individual or group experiences. This method of interviewing was chosen for this thesis to explore the experiences of identity-based corps members serving in public lands.

Methodology

I chose to frame my study design around principles of phenomenology, a sociological qualitative methodology that finds meaning between lived experiences of individuals in a particular setting or phenomenon (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). Interviewing members of identity-based corps fits with the principles of phenomenology well. However, I was unable to interview participants in the field like many traditional phenomenological studies due to the timing of participants' off-season and work seasons (most crews do not work in the winter months). Additional constraints due to the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic also discouraged face-to-face interviewing.

Phenomenology relies on distilled information about a specific phenomenon – in this case serving on an identity-based crew. It is important to note that each participant's identity is an intersectional phenomenon in and of itself, informed by the experiences they had on an identity crew. It was essential to include a diverse group of participants, even in a relatively small sample size. Indeed, 1-10 participants are sufficient for a phenomenological study to reach some form of data saturation (Guest, et al., 2006; Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). Most of the data in this study became "saturated" after about eight interviews.

Recruitment

Having worked as a trail worker in a variety of public land agencies and conservation corps before my graduate studies, I relied on personal and professional networks to help me recruit initial participants. I contacted former colleagues from

various conservation corps and land agencies around the country to gauge interest in participating. Additional recruitment was done through social media platforms, where interested persons could reach out to me directly. I sought participants that had a variety of experiences in traditional and identity-based conservation corps, including staff and directors of different organizations. After discussing the research and building a rapport, I asked each participant for recommendations on who to contact next, and if they were willing to introduce me and my research. Notably, a director of a corps sent an email introducing me and my research to their organization's alumni, which greatly helped the recruitment process. This version of snowball sampling allowed me to include 10 participants in this study.

Participants

Ten participants originated from a variety of conservation corps around the country and worked in a wide array of projects around the Western United States. Nine participants served in National Forests and National Parks, working primarily on wilderness trails. One member worked within regional tribal reservations, National Forests, Bureau of Land Management, and National Parks. The participants in this study offered narratives from serving on indigenous crews, LGBTQ+ crews, hard-of-hearing crews, all-women led crews, and "mixed" identity crews (a combination of the aforementioned). Additionally, two staff members from different corps (who were at one-time corps members themselves) participated in the study. Of these two, one was an outreach coordinator, while the other is a current director of their own corps.

Following the structure within the human-subjects review process and participant consent forms, all participants' names were given aliases and the names and specific locations of the conservation corps were omitted for the entirety of the project. Organizational and participant anonymity remained a priority to ensure the safety of the participants, as some of the members come from significantly disadvantaged communities that continue to face discrimination, violence, and escalating political pressure infringing upon their human rights.

Interview protocol

Interviews were semi-structured, with slightly different questions for each type of participant – corps member; agency or program staff; and director or supervisor. The interview questions covered the following topics: a) recruitment process, b) identifying barriers to participation in the environmental workforce, c) challenges and achievements, d) relationship with the crew and project partners, e) attitudes towards working in the environmental field, and f) attitudes over efforts towards greater equity in the environmental workforce. (For a complete list of interview questions, see Appendix A).

Each interview was recorded with a Samsung Android and deleted once transcribed. All identifiable information and affiliations with corps were changed during transcription to ensure confidentiality throughout this process. Before conducting any theme analysis, the interview transcriptions were emailed to each participant for accuracy. Participants were encouraged to write back if any concerns over the transcriptions arose.

Analysis of themes

After the interviews were transcribed and checked for accuracy and credibility, general impressions were noted following guidelines laid out by Creswell (2003). Again, time to reflect on my positionality was also important in this step, as the potential to follow-up with additional questions per interviewee became necessary. However, I did not find it necessary to follow up with the participants, other than keeping them informed of the thesis's progression and sharing resources and literature.

Themes were derived from the interview data by coding each participant's transcript in coding software Atlas.ti. Vaismoradi, et al. (2016) define coding as a way to reduce the amount of raw data in a transcription being assessed for themes. Therefore, Atlas.ti was chosen for its compact and streamlined interface allowing to easily manage the hundreds of codes labeling and organizing direct passages.

After several readings and note-taking over the interview data, I attached specific labels (codes) to particular passages that seemed relevant to the research questions and notable passages that stood out. Atlas.ti helped keep the passages matched to each code, for later reference and theme analyses. I assigned 357 different codes to 431 quotations, totaling to 1,876 assigned codes.

From the long list of initial codes, I consolidated redundancies into singular codes and then grouped them into coded groups. These groups contained several codes and relationships with other codes. By looking at mind maps and frequency tables of these relationships generated by Atlas.ti, I got a sense of the density of particular code groups. The strongest densities and frequencies helped me organize the entirety of the codes into a coherent list of potential themes (12 main groups). The denser the codes in each group,

as well as its potential to refer to the research question, the more important the group became to consider it for a theme (Figure 1).

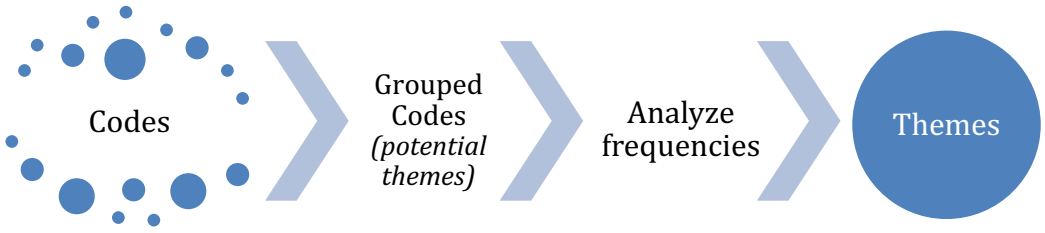

Figure 0-1: Coding methodology

Themes were selected from grouped codes that shared an aspect of an experience. For example, a conversation about race or gender discrimination in the wilderness may have been coded as "racism", "sexism", "barriers", "affinity space", "mentorship", or "formative experience" depending on the context. Contradictory codes per narrative were okay – they were later sorted and grouped into relevant code groups.

Within each potential theme, I checked the relationships between the code groups to see if there were any important overlaps worth bringing out in the discussion. Understanding the different relationships between themes and codes helped select the most important themes that can speak to the research questions.

After selecting themes, specific narratives that spoke to each theme were chosen after taking some distance from the data. Indeed, distance and data-immersion is an important step of qualitative theme analysis, as it allows the researcher to have fresh perspectives on their data, as well as time to reflect on positionality (Vaismoradi, et al. 2016).

The themes with accompanying narratives are presented in the following results section.

Results – Themes and Narratives

After each interview transcription was coded, each code was assigned to a group. These groups guided the themes I chose based on the research questions and the relative frequencies of certain codes in each grouping. A frequency table of the main themes and codes per participant is available in Appendix B.

Additionally, each of the interview participants discussed topics that were not necessarily shared by the group as a whole. Each participant had their own perspectives, life experiences, and relationship with their respective corps, coworkers, and how they identify. Though each narrative sheds light on a particular theme, the narratives are not intended to be generalizations of members from particular priority groups. However, narratives about the experiences of corps participants are important for program developers, land managers, and other stakeholders interested in promoting diverse and inclusive representation in public lands.

Another commonality shared by the majority of respondents is that they have had past experiences with other conservation corps and land management agencies before joining an identity-based conservation corps. Therefore, some responses concerning issues around each theme involved comparing their identity-based experiences with ones outside of that "affinity-space" (more on affinity spaces to follow). The six themes are identified in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Narrative themes

Main Themes	Topics discussed (sub-themes)
Hiring	Mission statements; outreach (word of mouth social media); retention.
Mentorship	The importance of representational leadership and peers.
Affinity Spaces	Shared backgrounds, experiences; making space priority populations.
Emphasis on Curriculum	Designing curriculum around indigenous, priority population, and colonial histories of public lands. Social and environmental justice. Cultural relevancy.
Community Development	Levels of trust and participation with priority and indigenous community groups and public land partners. Importance of collaboration.
Personal Barriers	Personal and crew barriers to participating in the outdoors; racism, sexism; relevancy; lack of representation in public lands or corps workforce.

Narratives from interview participants ground the themes and make up the bulk of this chapter. Names of identity-based corps have been simply changed to *the corps*. Specific locations, such as a National Park or Forest, have been generalized by naming the agency.

Hiring, recruitment, and retention

Several interviews delved into conversations about some of the challenges and successes faced during the hiring process, the recruitment strategy, as well as retention concerns. Specifically, these conversations referenced the importance of mission statements unique to an identity-based corps as an effective recruitment and retention tool. Additionally, various challenges were identified around securing funding, a critical factor that limited the capacity of corps to reach greater numbers of participants or further programmatic

enhancements (i.e., targeted outreach and recruitment towards priority populations, and effective diversity training).

Mission statements

Identity-based corps presenting strong mission statements provided potential applicants with a reference as to what the organization prioritizes – namely creating access to environmental work, outdoor amenities, and career opportunities for priority populations. AR compared her time in an identity-based corps with working for the National Park Service. The presence of a mission statement made a key difference in her experiences as a trail worker:

> *I was initially very attracted to working for (the corps) because of the mission statement. And I felt like for once I was sought after to work in this field. I mean trying to work for the Park Service, I really had to do a lot of work and convince people that I was a hard worker, which, I mean, I had to do that with (the corps' director) too, but I also felt like* ***she wanted me to work for her*** (speaker's emphasis) - *I wanted to work hard because she wanted me to be on her crew. Where with the Park Service, I felt like I've had to prove myself a lot, which is a different feeling*.

Indeed, VM describes how her previous experiences working in federal land management did not have a strong emphasis on mission statements and was reflected in the stifled diversity of those organizations, though expressed that an identity-based corps may be a beginning to greater diversity in the environmental workforce:

> *In all the (Forest Service) staff, like it's kind of ridiculous that I was the only black person there. And I know the past couple of seasons in (the Park Service), Sara in HR, was the only other black woman. I've never met her. But as far as I know, I'm the only other black woman that has worked there. So, seeing more diversity in the places that I work, and like I said, it's the easy answer. And I think things like (the corps' mission) are a part of that solution. And it's not going to be like, instantaneous, but making the pathways starting from (the corps) and into*

the NPS, or the Forest Service, or outdoor research work, how that could change over time.

For some participants, it was the first time they worked for an organization that continuously prioritized underserved communities in their mission statement – from the recruitment process, to interviewing, and throughout the life of their term of service. This foundational tenet, and guidance from mentors with shared identities, inspired some members to remain in the field. RB, a trail worker, reflected on what is ahead for her:

So, I can't see myself in the field for the next twenty years rolling rocks and stuff, but I do really like it. […] there's still a lot of work [in outdoor education] in terms of equity, diversity, and racial justice. I can definitely see myself getting more into that after hanging up my jersey from the field.

"Buying in" to the mission also carried over to further community involvement in equity issues regarding outdoor and environmental amenity accessibility. CT described how her supervisor asked her to attend local meetings around the outdoor tourism industry and listen in on their conversations about representing priority populations, as well as regional and indigenous needs).

JW – Is there concern that certain populations are left out of the conversation?

CT – Um, yes, there is. In fact, how I even got this job was by attending a public meeting on behalf of (the corps) last year. Like, (the director) asked me to go to this public meeting and I went, and it was bad. It was not structured in a way that was not even remotely informationally understandable. It was not – it was missing a lot of welcoming pieces for anyone that's not white. And during and after the meeting I connected with the organizers and mentioned that, "Hey, this is not good." And long story short they were like, "okay, you want to help us, you know, make that better?" So that's been a big part of my job, is to speak up for who's not in the room.

Outreach and recruitment

Word-of-mouth outreach remains an important recruitment tool for identity-based crews. VW, a former corps member working for the National Park Service, shared how she referred an identity-based corps to a volunteer she worked with in a National Park:

> *So, this woman on the field crew was talking about how she doesn't know she's gonna stay in trails because the men on her crew are like, super weird to her, and have been in the past. I don't know if it's a specific crew, but just like, generally, that's been her experience. And I was like, Okay, I have someone you should talk to (referenced the corps director). Like, if you're interested in staying in trails and want to build your skill set, like this would be a great person to contact. So, like, just the fact that (the corps) exists - that's something that I can say to someone. I can pull that out of my back pocket with an email address, like you should talk to this person. That's awesome, you know?*

Along with word-of-mouth, social media outreach and presence makes a difference in recruiting from priority populations. AR describes how she learned about a particular identity-based crew:

> *I had been at school for, I guess, a year at that point. And I'm studying environmental science. So, I was really eager to find a job that was working outdoors. And I didn't really care what it was. But (the corps) came up on my Facebook feed one day, which is how I found out about it*.

Social media presence also puts corps operating on smaller budgets under additional pressure, as their shortcomings may become public as they happen. CT discussed how an experience with an indigenous coworker, who had a large social media following, almost backfired on the corps' all-women backpacking trip, an important program that helps secure grant funding for this particular identity-based corps.

> *CT - Then we meet up with a backcountry crew. You know, this is another conservation corps, which is modeled after the Civilian Conservation Corps, which is modeled after more old white guys designing programs thinking that they have all the answers even though…you know -*
>
> *JW - And this crew was more of a traditionally recruited crew? Generally speaking.*

CT - Yeah, yeah, definitely. From what, what I think you and I have a shared understanding of conservation corps crews. So predominantly male, seemingly predominantly white, I think there were five female bodied people on the crew. And then, you know, a supervisor and cook and then there was another female bodied sponsor, so some female representation, but all white leadership. There's a lot of structure and a lot of regiment […] And so there's not a lot of, you know, creative expression. So, you can imagine how again, this would really amplify the negative experience of this person in particular, and of others on the crew, in our cohort of participants. […] so, this is happening over the Fourth of July. And so we had written a letter to the supervisor, before coming into the crew to say, "hey, just so you're aware, you know, we're coming in, we're very excited to come, but there are indigenous people, and we just want to be respectful of their experience during this time. And so, could you please not make a big deal about the Fourth of July?" And in hindsight, there are other things that we should have said that would have been better. But we didn't - that was kind of the message. And so, Fourth of July comes, and it's the morning, it's a Wednesday. And all of a sudden, the crew starts painting their face and calling it warpaint Wednesday.

JW - Oh, geez.

CT - Yeah. And keep in mind - this is one program going in to see another program. And we have a very outspoken individual in our cohort that identifies as an advocate that at that time, had a large social media following and now it's like two and a half times the size what it was. And so, you're like, I go to the woods to get away from some of this crazy stuff. And this was a time when it was like holy shit, this could destroy all of our programs, if we don't figure out how to do right by this –

Relevant curriculum and alternative histories

Several interview participants emphasized a curriculum as an important part of their corps experience. This curriculum covered an extensive history of colonialism, historic exclusion, the importance of indigenous land acknowledgments, and alternative histories of the surrounding communities in which they served. This curriculum, and by extension training and orientation, allowed corps members and partnering indigenous and community organizations to explore the barriers priority populations face when it comes to accessing the environmental workforce and amenities.

AV, an identity-based corps director, shared how corps members begin thinking about these barriers early on and into orientation. The corps tries to facilitate a personal and social connection with the environment, its history, and the populations they serve:

> *…one of the first things you're going to do is introduce yourself. It's not just where you're from, but who's on the land, of the place where you're from. What are your pronouns? If they're unfamiliar with those things, like, here are things to research before you join us. And then our orientation training focuses on the next levels of that, you know, like, again, trying to do the appropriate things. But we talk about a history that we were all taught that was wrong and we're going to go to the (indigenous) cultural center, we're going to donate resources to them, we are going to partner with them. And this is why these are the places we'll be working in, you know?*

Throughout a season in the identity-based corps above, members and leaders developed the curriculum specific to the needs of each crew. RB, a member of an inclusion crew in the same corps, described her experience with the curriculum as an extension of their mission statement and orientation:

> *Some of the programs also had a set curriculum, which was two to three days a week. Much of that was based on equity, racial justice, and things related to that. Some of the curriculum, either those things, or what someone wanted to bring in on another day, the crew members were able to teach people things they wanted people to know about. I think, because we had a pretty diverse crew, getting to see what people were passionate about – what they wanted to teach us - was, personally, another form of diversity training for all of us.*

Though the curriculum was important and meaningful for some, others saw its importance and noted a need for more curriculum-based programming. AR, who served on a technical trail crew in the same corps cited a need for greater emphasis in the curriculum around equity and inclusion beyond orientation:

> *There was a lot of talk about having evening classes during the season, but that kind of fell through a little bit. We were having to work in places that were pretty far. So we were getting back to camp late and things got busy, but I think it would have been nice if we addressed it more. We did talk about some things - VM was*

reading that book Black Faces White Spaces by Carolyn Finney. And I actually saw her speak at Western last year. So it was cool to talk with VM about all of those issues and see her (Finney) speak but really that was the extent of how we talked about what to do in those situations or how to handle them and I wish there was some more training I guess on how to address like, Oh, this man is not our crew leader. It's actually VM. And a way to do that didn't come off as, I don't know, bitchy or just condescending.

Additionally, CT described a need for a therapeutic component to a corps' all-women's backpacking and trail work trips she's led:

I think societally, people are not well, we're not okay. We're not okay. You know, and it comes from the concept that we should be going and producing and doing and doing and doing and doing all the fucking time. And it makes us super anxious and stressed out and worried and all these things. But specifically, for priority populations, the history of the oppressive, horrible things that colonizers have done to people of color deserves to be healed. And that healing comes from being. From just fucking being in what we know about nature, right? If kids can see a fucking tree from their window, and they are taking a test, they do better on their tests. You know, and we know that there's ideas of nature-play, I don't know how familiar you are with that. But the idea of unstructured time outside and what that does for us, to our health and our mentality and to our thinking and our creativity and our ability to thrive and forgive ourselves and heal. All of it. I think that access in that way is beyond a fundamental need. It is as critical and necessary as water and food and shelter and safety. It is. It's it. And, you know, we deserve to just give people time and space to figure it out and by their background. Because I don't know what other people's experiences are. And we shouldn't assume. And while people - it's great to say here's a career path if you want it, but I think that this program in particular would really benefit to just letting people spend time. And I think that's something we ought to do. You know, like this arts in the wilderness program. You know, just fucking look at the shit, draw the shit, and share feelings about how your drawing looks, you know, and just enjoy it.

VW, a corps member from an identity-based crew, shared how learning about the histories of exclusion and having strong mentors inspired her to remain in the trail maintenance workforce:

This was like, not a part of my understanding of the world a couple years ago, and so it's cool to be in a place now where I know a little bit more about, just like trails generally, and then like, I can see some of the ways that, like you said, it's

pretty exclusionary and it's kind of designed to be that way. And so yeah, I don't know, it makes me want to stay in trails more. Like I feel like I'm driven by, I don't want to say spite, but I want to be here, and I want people to see that different people can do this work. I had strong female role models in trails early on, and it would be cool to get to be that for someone else.

VM, another crew leader for an all-women's trail crew, after learning about the pivotal role the Buffalo Soldiers had in establishing Sequoia National Park, put it this way:

I scoured the visitor's centers for a book about the Buffalo Soldiers for a class as a good opportunity to learn the history. And there was a 10-page book about the history of the Buffalo Soldiers, where, I mean you can find tons of books on John Muir. It was super frustrating, because, it's like the history is not worth writing about or even having available at the book sellers.

Crew leaders like VM spent time designing a curriculum to include relevant histories of the priority populations she has served with and facilitates a deeper conversation about her crew member's reflections in the wilderness. VM continues:

And even some of the talks that are led by interpretive rangers, that's not a huge talking point, as far as the park's history. And if I can get those stories kind of brought to the surface, like those role models are formed in the history of the relationship with black people or POC's in the wilderness then that representation will inspire other people to follow in their footsteps. But if you're a young black kid visiting a National Park, and the ranger's white and talking about a white guy named John Muir, it's hard to find a way to relate to that. It just makes you feel kind of out of place in general. I like to kind of research for the classes some history that's not necessarily talked about. And also talking about just how people personally feel being in that kind of space. Whether it's like the fact that they're just in the middle of a national park, or they feel racism has something to do with that and kind of talk about it and express themselves, whether it's with me or in front of the crew.

Additionally, indigenous land acknowledgment and community involvement of indigenous groups remain paramount to the curriculum of the identity-based crews in this study. In addition to providing an educational component to the members' experience,

land acknowledgments are a part of building partnerships with the surrounding indigenous communities. For example, LH, a crew leader for an identity-based trail crew, described how the corps she worked for maintains these partnerships to make the land acknowledgment impactful.

> *Before we even entered into the land to work, something I found to be very important that I've started to make an effort to acknowledge more on the crews I work on now, is the history of the land and the original caretakers. And so, before we entered the land before our projects in the summer of 2018, we actually went to the (local indigenous) center and did a land acknowledgement with their community. And that was really powerful for the corps members and myself. For us to understand that our camp wasn't our camp. It wasn't our home. It was home for them. And they're doing good work, and we're guests and visitors on this land. And just kind of acknowledging that on a daily basis and recognizing that. I think that was really powerful.*

Through partnerships, corps members, and tribal community members alike learned about the cultural resources that were stripped away by the federal land agencies. LH continues:

> *I would like to say that (the corps) was allies for those indigenous communities. Some of those alliances and partnerships were built wanting to educate our members and acknowledging ancestral land and history. In the same sense that – I know we had women-in-wilderness trips and a few participants were from the local native community there and joined the (the corps). So that was a collaboration. They brought a lot of their history and knowledge to that program as they went on this trip through the backcountry.*

Indeed, this partnership also served as a way to recruit members from the tribal community into the corps itself. Reflecting on the collaborative relationship built out of the corps partnering with the local indigenous community, LH continued:

> *And again, (the corps) wants to be allies for those communities as well. And they have their own missions, too. One of them is the Indigenous Women Hike. It was a group of indigenous women hiking the Nuumu Poyo Trail, also known as the John Muir Trail – I call it the Nuumu Poyo Trail now (laughs). And so, they hiked it, and our corps offered to help fund it and donate gear if they needed it. And that was a big part of why one of the leaders of the hike wanted to join the women-in-*

wilderness backpacking groups – in preparation for the big trip. So those are some of the relationships being built – they're still being built.

Building these partnerships in and around a corps' community is not only important for developing a relevant curriculum for the members, but also for building a community network focused on regional and local needs. Community engagement, development, and inclusion is another theme that emerged from the interviews.

Community Development and the Importance of Collaboration

Affinity spaces rely on having some form of community collaboration between the inclusion-based corps, the members themselves, and managers of public lands where the crews serve. JT, a former coordinator for another identity-based crew, discussed some of the obstacles the corps faced when attempting to be inclusive.

They attempt to expand inclusion and equity, but I don't think that they do that in a way that is like in partnership with community. So, the way I feel is that the corps that I worked with came up with ideas on its own of what it should be doing to increase like equity and inclusion without input from communities nearby. So, they would try but it wasn't really community informed. At one point there were signs on the bathrooms that were meant to be gender inclusive. But signs on the bathrooms ended up being like half man, half woman signs for like, male or female bathrooms. And there weren't any people who are transgender or any kind of representatives of that community who were consulted for those signs.

JT also pointed out what a lack of meaningful collaboration looks like between priority populations and with a corps seeking to be more inclusive. It begins with the tone the corps sets in orientation:

I think it was very grit focused, which I think was kind of problematic. So, it was like you had trainings that were almost set up more like hazing than they were like actual trainings. And you would like, send people out, you would have them work like the normal workweek have them rush, rush, rush everywhere. They were almost set up in this militaristic way. And those trainings would include talks on equity and inclusion, right? But there are no experts involved. There is no one

from that community who is giving these talks on equity inclusion, and diversity and things like that. So, I think it had a lot to do with whether or not communities were being substantively represented in leadership or even reached out to. I think that is the main thing. There weren't partnerships being made that allowed community members to shape what the programs should look like, in order to make them more friendly. So, it was like bringing in people of color, bringing in people who are LGBTQ plus-identifying, and then trying to mold them into our standards rather than saying, how can we make a program that fits this more?

Land managers hosting a crew and corps leadership may also struggle with an inability to collaborate with communities from priority populations on best management plans and inclusion strategies. JT described how an identity-based youth crew was received by a land manager:

JT - You end up with project partners who are gonna feel the way that they do about diversity, equity and inclusion, completely unwedded to the organization sending in these crews. So, I think what often happens is, we as a corps, we're trying to create some sort of safety for the crews internally. But when we send crews out to work with project partners, they are now completely under the purview of the project partner. And so, we don't necessarily vet the project partner or talk to the project partner about how they're expected to behave or handle this sort of situation. So, there were times when the project partners would like refuse to give out their pronouns or showed some kind of similar dissent to that sort of work. And we have no control over that. But we also didn't have good conversations about that with the crew leaders and with the youth involved about how you're not necessarily entering a safe space. So, I think we could have, we could have done a better job to have been realistic with the youth and with the leaders, leading the youth about the type of world, the type of greeting that they might get from the project partner as opposed to us. So, we create the safe space we're all for it, we're all for them, and then we send them into environments that are not necessarily as progressive, and potentially hostile.

JW - Do you feel comfortable describing any of those scenarios?

JT - Yeah, I mean, at one point there were comments being made about a crew who was camping in a more public area. And the crew was made to feel pretty unsafe, but they didn't have another option for a campsite. So, it was one of these situations where we realized these crews needed to have more privacy. And it's not like the project partner didn't want to give them their privacy. But it was a shortcoming on our end that we hadn't really communicated before. We hadn't really communicated with the crew leader who identified as a member of the LGBTQ plus group on what were the needs, like what are the needs for this crew

to feel safe? Rather, we just kind of said, okay, you will lead but we (the corps staff) do all the coordination. So we'll put you into the spot where there might be people there who will say whatever they will, as the public does, about your group, which happened, and now we know, okay, there needs to be a little bit more privacy for these groups. But before that, had we just consulted the actual community members who are leading our crews and brought them in we probably wouldn't have run into that problem.

JT concludes that the corps leadership should have more of an active role in communicating some of the challenges identity-based crews may face when entering public lands to work:

I think (seeing) continued conversations with crew leaders and with corps members on the side of the corps world. Bringing community members into the coordination level of things. Like if you are setting up a campsite, if you're setting up a worksite, having community members present during that part of the process…

Identifying the regional needs of the community building intentional partnerships allows the identity-based crews and corps to build a support network that help with outreach, recruitment, and mitigating some of the pitfalls of not having a representational leadership guiding the programs. For example, AV's corps in particular spends a great deal of time providing resources, including funds and gear, to a local indigenous organization that puts on an all-women's hike through the wilderness (LH, VM interviews, 2020). According to CT, it is this sort of participation and collaboration with the communities they serve that goes beyond a typical corps experience:

It's not just about access- it's three pronged. It's about access, engagement and extension. So, you know, breaking down those barriers, providing transportation, food, someone to have the knowledge and skills to take care of people in the wilderness. The engagement part is about engaging with you peers, the cohort of people having that shared experience – they're your people in one way or the other. And also engaging with the resource – just having unstructured time outside, yeah, connecting to the land in some way. And the extension piece is, you know, during our conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion in this

space, during these trips, and in that time, we have some intentional discussions of what that looks like and how it is a privilege and because of this trip we now have some of that privilege and so what are we going to about it? How are we going to share that with our communities? How are going to take that and let it carry on throughout our lives?

Barriers

All of the participants referenced some form of barrier that either prevented them or others they know from participating in the public lands workforce or within environmental amenities. In discussing barriers here, it must be noted that a wide variety of literature that has been reviewed in this thesis discusses barriers faced by communities of color, women, and people with disabilities. All of the participants interviewed did not identify with a physical limitation from participating in the outdoors, therefore it is important to recognize that the barriers identified by these individuals are informed by their individual experiences. Most of them served in the field, in wilderness areas far from any modern convenience or amenity. Below are the most significant barriers that individuals in this study have faced and recognized while working in the public lands workforce.

Racism was a barrier that emerged in several discussions. VM recalled an experience she had while working for the Forest Service in the Midwest that turned towards the violent:

VM – …in the forest service, somebody literally tried to hit me with their car.

JW – What?

VM – Yeah, I'm not making that up. And I literally had to jump into the ditch to avoid getting hit by their car and they circled back into the road and I heard them yell out of their car, "nigger". So that was kind of like that wow-moment where it wasn't even like, I'm uncomfortable. I was completely not seen here because I was black. I felt like I had zero allies. And it was just like a really scary place. And it

wasn't the first time somebody called me that word. And I just [indecipherable] thought Minnesota was super liberal and like super welcoming, but in like super bumfuck nowhere northern Minnesota, it just wasn't. And so definitely it doesn't matter what my intentions are, sometimes I just don't fit in. And at first, I was like well fuck that, I'm not gonna let this scare me away. I love this job. I love the nature aspects and like my coworkers are amazing and like I learned a lot.

JW – Yeah.

VM – But then it was like, how much harassment is this job worth? So yeah, I definitely faced racism and prejudice during my job, like when people were saying these things to me, I was in full uniform.

In some instances, her authority as a park ranger was undermined. VM continued:

It was my job. And because I asked them for their permit, they felt like that land didn't need to be regulated in any way. And automatically it was my fault, and my skin color became a factor within that. Yeah, it was crazy. I mean oftentimes people thought those lands were their; but I stopped them for specifically violating like leave no trace (policies) or just like an actual law while being out there. And it was just immediately tense. Like I didn't have a right to tell them that they were wrong, even though it was the law. Like it wasn't just me making it up [indecipherable]. It was absolutely bizarre. But I learned a lot from that experience, even though it was challenging.

Sexism was also discussed by interviewees. While leading an all-women's crew, CT described an interaction with a maintenance crew at a National Park:

CT – I should have disclosed this at the beginning, but I am a white female body person. So, my experience of things is different than some of our participants.

JW – Sure.

CT - Yeah. And so even just the side comments. That same trip when we met up with our park service crew - it's funny to even say this out loud, but they started calling us girls like right from the beginning. And I had to pull their leader aside and be like, "Listen, we're women. We're all grown. Adult. Women. We are not children. We are not tiny girls. Please do not call us girls." And even that, like they respected that but there were definitely some comments like, "Oh, can I even call you, you know, Lady?" You know, it's just shitty.

JW - Were they kind of like making fun of the fact that they were called out on it?

CT - Yeah, like kind of like that was something that we wanted them to be mindful of. You know, so again, just having to build up the nerve to, like, address it, and then have to deal with that, like, you don't even take this seriously? You know, the whole point is like, we are about creating the space, you know, and you agreed to have us, you agreed to take us as your volunteers - and again, they were respectful. They respected the wishes. But there were definitely some comments about it, that were joking, and not taking it seriously.

Other barriers that participants mentioned come down to practical issues regarding access to outdoor spaces in general. These involve a lack of resources, either money, transportation, housing, food, and other means to even gather the things one needs to work or recreate in the outdoors. Family and culture may also affect whether one will work in public lands. Before a member joins a crew, VM makes an effort to reach out, sometimes to an applicant's family if need be:

And being part of that first experience for people and cultivating, or helping develop their relationship with the outdoors that they haven't necessarily had in the past, which is pretty specific to (the corps). For example, you don't need any experience. And we do everything we can to provide despite all of the barriers. Like the gear – we have a huge gear cache in (town) where we can outfit every corps member, where all they need to bring is appropriate clothing. They get a travel stipend. I talk to people's moms. Because being an Hispanic woman – there are a lot of Hispanic moms and abuelas that don't like their female daughters going out into the middle of the woods. Like it's a cultural thing. And [indecipherable] I would talk to the parents, grandparents, and like, reassure them that like, I will do everything in my care to make sure they're safe. And like just speaking their language and being female, like, give them peace of mind. And so the corps member doesn't worry about their family being pissed at them for doing this. And so cultural things that people don't think about can be a barrier.

Finally, barriers around different interests around the idea of recreating and working in public lands. In addition to the generally homogenous land management workforce, simply recreating on public wildlands is a leisure activity mostly experienced by the dominant (white, male) group. Thus, hiking, kayaking, mountain climbing, and trail or habitat restoration work are mostly what public lands design their facilities and

programs around. It becomes, as Yogev (2017) concluded in her narrative study of inclusion in the NPS, an issue of relevance. JT reflected on the importance of providing more relevant amenities, with a cautionary tone on the risks of creating an alienating experience:

> *JT – My main thought is that I think the scope of the activities that can be done in the outdoors are considered outdoor activities and are reasonable for like being at a park or in the forest. I think if those can be expanded – I feel more this way about the National Park Service - like I think that there could be more buy-in from communities in the outdoors if the only activities available in the outdoors weren't these like traditional more European-American looking activities like hiking and mountain biking and all these activities that have a pretty high fee to start this kind of thing. I think if land management agencies want to see a more diverse public, they need to do a better job of changing themselves to reflect the public rather than trying to draw in these scattered groups of people and including crews and such, trying to make those people kind of assimilate to their ethics to their land management point of view, you know?*
>
> *JW – And that's, that's another like, problematic thing too. About assimilation on the public lands is linked to forced assimilation and removal. And to me there's like a fine line there…*
>
> *JT – Yeah. I mean, so many indigenous people and poor rural people were removed from their lands so that things like the national parks could exist. And so, you know, I think if you're now saying, oh, now we need those people to be involved to care about these spaces. And your strategy to get them involved in the care about them is to try to take them back to these spaces and now make them assimilate to those spaces - You're kind of just on a smaller scale doing what you were doing in the first place. Like the ethic of what you were doing.*

Importance of Affinity Spaces

Participants spoke about the importance of affinity spaces in the environmental workforce. Since the spaces are made up of members from priority populations, corps members can discuss the impact barriers have had on their experiences working in public lands and identify other forms of disparity within the group. Affinity spaces also provide cultural context and relevancy for formative experiences in the outdoors.

AV, as director of an identity-based corps, defines affinity spaces to potential public land managers or potential donors.

> *We provide transformative wilderness experiences for priority populations. And then depending on my audience, I define that like, what do we mean by priority populations? So, I go into women, women of color, black indigenous people of color, LGBTQ plus. And that our focus is on affinity spaces and the power of affinity spaces. We try and be inclusive in our language. And there can be mistakes with that. The relationship building starts right away…*

VM, reflected on her experience leading the corps first all-women's crew:

> *We got a very specific donation from one of the private donors (for) an all-female crew. And so, I was the supervisor for that. And I remember talking to, and I can't remember, but (to them) the idea of a bunch of females in the wilderness, like I remember the words "cat fight". Like everyone thought this will be a huge disaster, because there would be too much bickering. I was just like, there's all male trail crews all the time. Like, as soon as there's an all-female crew, it just seems like people couldn't comprehend it and didn't know what it would look like, because that's not something you see very often. Like ever. But it was super successful, we got a lot of work done, I kept all of my members for the length of the season. And I think now having (led) mixed crews and that all-female crew, and it could have just been the specific individuals in that group, but it was especially – there was just a connection within the community. And I don't know if it has anything to do with being all-female, but I haven't replicated that feeling.*

Within affinity spaces, members of identity-based crews make space for conversations around exclusion, public land management, representation, and identifying disparities in the environmental workforce. VM, a leader of an all-women's trail crew as well as a mixed-identity crew, facilitates discussion around these topics with her crews:

> *A lot of times I like to just have this conversation about….we're out here right now and a lot of you are a part of the demographic that has the lowest participation rate in national parks, with African Americans being the absolute lowest in like national parks and green spaces. And I want to talk about how people feel about it. Because it's okay to be insecure and have feelings of doubt. But I also think it's empowering to know that you're kind of like a trailblazer, no pun intended. But even though it's more challenging as a black woman or*

whoever it is, I've been talking to - the fact that we're still doing it, I think that really inspires people to go out and potentially, like, continue doing outdoor work in the future.

VW, a corps member on the mixed-identity crew, describes how the role of an affinity space drew her to serve with an identity-based corps:

And so, I feel like knowing that (the corps) was very intentional in that. And it seemed like, I maybe would have been surrounded by people who wouldn't be surprised that a woman could do trail work. And that definitely drew me to her corps.

Ultimately, the corps' affinity spaces seek to recognize shared and differing experiences within and outside of the group and to hold space for perspectives around the exclusionary history of public lands. Returning to an earlier account shared by CT, their all-women led wilderness immersion crew visited a traditionally recruited conservation corps in the backcountry. The all-women crew contained members from intersecting identities including nonbinary identities, people of color, and indigenous identities. The corps they visited, by contrast, had a crew of mostly white males who, unironically, were painting their faces for "warpaint Wednesday". CT recounted how she was asked by an indigenous member of her crew:

"What if it was indigenous youth that I was here with and we walked into this camp. What would I say to them?"

The account's resolution as understood from CT:

It was just really interesting how everyone in that space hearing the same things was just totally interpreting everything so differently. Um, and then what we ended up doing with the big group (was) having community meeting that night. And (the other corps') supervisor was very considerate to give me time during the community meeting to talk about what was going on and, and ultimately, you know, there was some difficult choices to make about how to approach that because not everyone sees it as the same land because not everyone understands and because, you know, the main demographic in that group is one that isn't gonna - you wouldn't expect - to fully understand why we're talking about the

things that we're talking about. And why it matters, and why "warpaint Wednesday" is not okay. And so, what we came to in that discussion was about community, you know, and the reality is, is that when you commit to being in community, part of that commitment is realizing, asking yourself, asking each other how we're influencing each other. And then to ask yourself, is that you want to do? Are you showing up in a way that you want to? And are you aware of the way in which you were showing up?

Implementing affinity spaces is met with bureaucratic and structural challenges - from a lack of understanding by project partners to build a collaborative work relationship, to the cultural homogenization of the federal land management workforce. AV, described how their corps faced these familiar obstacles in working with project partners:

AV – I was looking at the intention with (the corps) as an opportunity to do it differently - to focus on different groups, to focus on inclusion, to focus on opportunities to better support, you know, quotation marks, non-dominant backgrounds. Which is an oxymoron, right? Because minorities, whatever, however you want to call it - California is already majority minority. People in the global (minority-community) are the majority. But yeah, there is a disconnect. […] And at the same time, it's like, how do we better support these young people? Because stuff is falling through the cracks.

JW – Right. There's a disconnect. What do you mean by that?

AV - Yeah, I mean, I guess just like, stuck in the ways of this is how we've always done it. Like, why couldn't in 40 years of the backcountry program - Why was there never a women's crew? And why couldn't there be one? I mean, there wasn't a rule or a policy against it. But, the pushback was like, Oh, we can't do that. Well why, you know, why not? Has anyone asked it? It just wasn't considered.

JW - What was their logic then? You know, like, we can't do that. Why? Why would they say that?

AV - Yeah, I mean, I guess I've more encountered that when I… you know, so when we were asked to provide a women's crew for the first crew ESCC when we went to Sequoia-Kings, and that was in some ways supported by the donors of that particular year. But then when we went back, you know, there was pushback for supporting an all woman's crew again. In the end, the reasoning was along the lines of, you know, that might be in violation of our EEO policies. That was sort of a theme, which I don't understand at all. It's not discriminatory. It's, you

know, there are multiple layers right? Like history and oppression, disadvantages to certain populations. But it was a legal - it was a fear-based. My assumption is that they didn't want to answer questions to someone who would be suing, saying it's unfair that you're not offering me this opportunity.

Mentorship

The importance of mentorship was another major theme that emerged from the analysis. Several of the participants spoke to how having a mentor in the workforce during outreach and onboarding motivated them to begin working in the field. Others mentioned how that experience in having a mentor inspired them to be a mentor. VM describes how shared experiences with her mentor shaped her view of herself in the environmental workforce:

I guess the difference that I have seen in my experience with the Forest Service, and then with (the corps) was having my direct superior, a POC woman, because I have been able to be super open and honest about things that have happened in my experiences as a supervisor. And it just feels like she can relate to me and just the communication is a lot stronger. […]. But I think it has a lot to do with the fact she is a POC and that's how she became my mentor in the first place. Like I could connect with her on a more personal level. And so, I'm hoping that I'm kind of keeping that cycle going, and maybe I could be that person for somebody on my crews in the future.

AR points out how a lack of representation and mentorship pushes people away from an experience like trail crew, but that simply knowing someone with a shared experience in the field can make all the difference in deciding to participate:

When I talk to other people about doing this kind of work, they often feel like nobody that they know or that they've seen has been someone that they connect with and actually works in the same field. So, yeah, I think (the corps director) does a really awesome job in eliminating that fear when you actually interview with her. She's just an awesome person. I've never met someone that I've looked up to more than her I think, but it definitely takes someone like her to show other women and other people of color that it's possible to work in this field, even though there are not very many role models in it.

AR continues:

I think it's important to show people that anyone can do this, that you don't have to look a certain way. And it's important because a lot of the people we see out on the trail tend to be from one single demographic, and so if we can try to penetrate that and explain to people why - not only do they want to be out here, but we also want to be out here I think it can be beneficial to put those role models for the future in the field.

Since conservation corps usually partner with a land manager, it becomes tricky building a collaborative relationship where the work partners can also serve as mentors to the corps members. However, VM and AV both describe how shared experiences with agency staff and corps leadership offers a unique experience for identity-based corps members. VM emphasized how her project leader (sponsor) for the National Park Service affected her crews:

The (NPS) sponsors that were assigned are just huge role models for the crews. We worked with Marissa for the first two seasons, and she's just amazing. And she's a woman of color and a certified badass that people can look up to. And she's also somebody that people go to for personal issues and like open up to. And so, I think, like the sponsorship works really well because not only do (the crews) get a role model, but it's a good dynamic between authority - between the sponsor and supervisor - somebody that members can go to that is not necessarily me

.

AV, often seen as a mentor to some of the interview participants, shared some of their process on why equity and inclusion matters.

AV – Okay, so basically, I was invited to be on a on a panel about sort of like, why did I create this thing in a world of conservation corps that already existed? So, in preparation for that panel, I listed every supervisor that I've ever had, from my first job doing samples in the grocery store, up to that point. And I've never done that before. And the list was like, two females - one of them being Evelyn. I think one male of color. And like 22 white male supervisors.

JW – And these were environmental jobs or just all jobs?

AV – So, these are all my jobs, but all my jobs are since college, you know, minus the food and beverage stuff were all (the National Park and state corps program). You know, so as I'm working my way up to NPS lead, still, you know, there

haven't been and still haven't been many female work leads in Sequoia-Kings ever, in the history. Like it just makes it so much more like you know how messed up it is. But yeah, 10 years ago was I thinking that like, Man, this is so messed up that there aren't more females. No. I just was going along with it, it was the norm. But now it's, you know, it's built in. Like when I pitch, the pitch includes like, we have five alumni that went to leadership positions from our program that are women or women of color. We are on the ground, changing the face of who's in this position.

Discussion

The following discussion will explore to what extent the themes answer each research question and conclude with reflections over identity-based corps as leaders for environmental justice.

The questions guiding this research can be recalled as three-fold. Firstly, how do the narratives from members participating in identity-based corps intersect with the history of public lands? Secondly, how do the narratives inform the continued management of public lands in the context of equitable representation? Thirdly, to what extent do member narratives align with the programmatic goals of a partnering agency and a conservation corps? The narratives that speak to each research question provide an understanding of the study's limitations while pointing to implications for environmental justice. The narrative themes also offer greater clarity around identity-based corps as relevant leaders challenging the dominant histories that perpetuate exclusion in the environmental workforce.

What are the intersections of personal narratives with public land history?

Considering the first question, I explored narratives that discussed the relationship identity-based corps members had with the histories within public land. The narrative themes that best informed this question center around the intersections between curriculum, the importance of affinity spaces, and identifying barriers.

Interviewees referenced a curriculum where they learned about public land histories and how this impacted their experiences serving on an identity-based crew. For example, RB and VW both mentioned that histories of exclusion and forced removal

were not necessarily what some of their cohorts thought about before joining the identity-based crew (interviews with RB and VW, 2020). Upon arriving at orientation, members recounted their meetings with local indigenous leaders and learned about the histories of indigenous removal and expulsion. With a curriculum designed around these histories and encouraging varying perspectives of the crew, members explored different dimensions of exclusion that emerged across intersecting identities. VM's reflection emphasizes curriculum as a way to understand the structural barriers priority populations face when accessing green spaces.

> *One of the things that I do as a supervisor, is I teach a class as part of our curriculum. And a lot of times I like to just have this conversation about the fact that we're out here right now and a lot of (us) are a part of the demographic that has the lowest participation rate in national parks, with African Americans being the absolute lowest in like national parks and green spaces. And I want to talk about how people feel about it.*

The curriculum also provided a framework for recognition justice in the workforce. Not only were the crews working in a white, male-dominated field, there were also structured discussions on how to advance their roles and understandings of how to best change the dominant culture, or as Whyte (2011) suggests, meld the various environmental heritages. Effective curriculum revolved around making space for and respecting a variety of viewpoints on how public land is experienced by different groups, including the affinity group within an identity-based crew. Again, CT's crew came away with this point in mind:

> *…what we came to in that discussion was about community, you know, and the reality is, is that when you commit to being in community, part of that commitment is realizing, asking yourself, asking each other how we're influencing each other. And then to ask yourself, is that you want to do? Are you showing up in a way that you want to? And are you aware of the way in which you were showing up?*

How might the narratives inform public land managers to promote equitable representation?

The second question points to how the management of public lands can be informed by the narratives in this study – especially in the context of equitable representation. The narrative themes informing this question centered around mentorship, targeted outreach and hiring, and an emphasis on community development.

Members spoke at length about mentorship – either an abundance within an affinity group, or a complete lack of it in other corps settings– and its role in retaining and motivating a new generation of a more representational environmental workforce. Indeed, the presence of mentorship provides a strong foundation for shared experiences among peers and promotes retention (interviews with VM, VW, AR, & RB, 2020).

Effective outreach through word of mouth and social media groups were the most effective way the corps represented in this study recruited their crews. Additionally, members discussed a variety of community development projects they were a part of, including building partnerships and collaborations with local indigenous communities during their time of service. The intersections of community development, hiring, outreach, and mentorship gave rise to an intentionality that was reflected in the corps' mission statement to serve priority populations. The collaborations between the community groups and the corps made it possible to recruit from people that may not necessarily have an interest in working on agency land or, in the case of the local indigenous community, excluded them since their establishment.

Yet identity-based corps still face challenges once they enter a land manager's domain. For example, some members cited pushback from NPS maintenance personnel

towards providing space for an all-women's crew and fear of violating Equal Employment Opportunity clauses of Title VII Civil Rights Act, (interviews with AV, AR, and VM, 2020). However, there are federal policies in place that support the advancement of affinity groups (epa.org, 2020). AV points out how the NPS might have been trying to protect themselves from legal action:

> *My assumption is that they (NPS) didn't want to answer questions to someone who would be suing, saying it's unfair that you're not offering me this opportunity […] but that didn't even necessarily happen.*

AR, who worked on AV's technical crew the following year, considered the male-dominated barriers in play that informed this pushback to host an all-women's trail crew:

> *…maybe the men in power who have worked in trails for so long, are intimidated by people who look different than them encroaching on their territory is kind of what I presume it is. Like, it is really easy for someone like (a male trail supervisor) to hire a bunch of men. And he knows that he gets along with those men and can treat them like he's treated everyone else who's worked under him before. But you know, if he has these women and people of color and people that don't look like him coming in and working for him, I think it's maybe weird for him or something. He doesn't know how to interact with these people because he hasn't really had to work with people who come from different backgrounds than him.*

This narrative suggests is that there is a disconnect from the land management staff on how to effectively interact with members of an identity-based crew. Regardless of this supervisor's actual capacity and willingness to work with groups from different backgrounds, the perception of the corps member suggests that the NPS leadership has work to do around providing a welcoming space for priority populations. When faced with this type of resistance towards their crews, identity-based corps ought to look into federal policies around supporting affinity spaces as leverage when negotiating projects with a land agency. Programs like Employee Resource Groups within the NPS are

actively engaged in this work and can be critical allies for improving workplace relevancy, equity, and inclusion (nps.gov). In the meantime, federal land partners should do their best to provide effective mentors to reduce alienating interactions as well as include the crews in discussions over project planning, logistics, and identity-based program needs.

Providing access to priority populations is considered, as the policies around supporting affinity spaces suggest, an optimal goal by federal land managers (epa.gov). Yet when considering the recreational opportunities that occur in public lands, such as a national park where identity-based corps often work, the workforce revolves around "traditional" recreational activities like backpacking, boating, and fishing. Aside from the financial barriers that prevent people from enjoying these opportunities, these activities may alienate members from priority groups since they are mainly enjoyed by dominant groups (Floyd, 1999). The construction of wilderness, therefore, is not seen with the same lens by different cultures (DeLuca & Demo, 2001). Though NPS and land agencies doing their part in promoting inclusivity, without any real community collaborations to explore the recreational and management needs of the communities they serve, land managers may run the risk of perpetuating a homogenous recreational experience. To illustrate this point, JT cautions land agencies to consider how their inclusion efforts mirror a perpetuation of assimilation when the work assigned lacks cultural relevancy:

> *… if land management agencies want to see a more diverse public, they need to do a better job of changing themselves to reflect the public rather than trying to draw in these scattered groups of people and including crews and such, trying to make those people kind of assimilate to their ethics to their land management point of view[…]so many indigenous people and poor rural people were removed from their lands so that things like the national parks could exist. So, I think if you're now saying, oh, now we need those people to be involved to care about these spaces and your strategy to get them involved in the care about them is to*

> *try to take them back to these spaces and make them assimilate to those spaces - You're kind of just on a smaller scale doing what you were doing in the first place. Like the ethic of what you were doing.*

How do narratives intersect with corps-agency partnerships?

The last question guiding the research seeks to understand how the narratives align with the programmatic structure of the identity-based corps and their partnering agencies, such as the National Park Service and the Forest Service. Are the partnering agency and corps on the same page regarding the mission of inclusion and equity in the environmental workforce? How does this playout for the members working in the field?

Participants described a spectrum of support levels experienced from their corps staff and partnering agency personnel. The themes that best inform this question are the intersections between effective community development, mentorship, and the level of support offered to affinity groups and spaces. These themes intersect with the programmatic structure of the corps and the land management agencies seeking to provide work opportunities for an identity-based crew.

Returning to JT's account of a corps staff with good intentions to offer inclusion training for their crews, members were still alienated from creating an inclusive environment during orientation.

> *…those trainings would include talks on equity and inclusion. But there was nobody who is from (the community) - there are no experts involved. There is no one from that community who is giving these talks on equity inclusion, and diversity and things like that. […] There weren't partnerships being made that allowed community members to shape what the programs should look like.*

Another account offered by CT described how the maintenance staff at a National Park were dismissive of her crew's basic request to respect their all-women's crew.

> *…they started calling us girls like right from the beginning, and I had to pull their leader aside and be like, "Listen, we're women. We're all grown. Adult. Women. We are not children. We are not tiny girls. Please do not call us girls." And even that, like they respected that but there were definitely some comments like, "Oh, can I call you Lady?" You know, it's just shitty.*

Disconnects between the program and agency staff and the corps members can be seen as cultural and hegemonic. Some park staff may not consider the term affinity space in the same light as an identity-based crew. And so, when a mission statement from a corps informs the inclusion goals for their members, and that same crew is met with a lackluster effort by park staff that, for example, refuses to give out their pronouns when the crew arrives, one can see the disconnect (interview with JT, 2020). JT describes a potential solution to this disconnect as being completely transparent to the members and the leaders preparing to work in a potentially unwelcoming work environment.

> *…we could have done a better job to have been realistic with the crews about the type of greeting that they might get from the project partner as opposed to us. So, we create the safe space we're all for it, we're all for them, and then we send them into environments that are not necessarily as progressive, and potentially hostile.*

Though some agencies and corps still struggle with respecting the needs and development of an affinity space, such as providing adequate camping that feels safe to the crews (interview with JT, 2020), participants shared examples of how corps staff and agencies were more welcoming. For instance, the presence of mentors within the corps and land agency staff have had positive impacts on members. VM recounted her experience with a mentor within the NPS she had known for a few seasons.

> *…she's a woman of color and a certified badass that people can look up to. And she's also somebody that people go to for personal issues and like open up to. So, I think the sponsorship (park leadership) works really well because not only do (the corps members) get a role model, but it's a good dynamic between authority - between the sponsor and supervisor - somebody that members can go to that is not necessarily me.*

Building effective relationships between a corps and a partner agency is nothing new (Frumkin, 2008; Katcher, 2018; Yogev, 2017). To validate the importance of such relationships, the narratives reference to effective collaboration, the presence of mentors, and ultimately the support needed to welcome and guide an identity-based crew to the workforce. Further, involving members in conversations about camp-placement, work-pace, and general strategies related to the workflow and the relevancy of that work are critical to motivate the next generation of leadership in the environmental workforce.

Themes as they relate to environmental justice

The inequitable access to recreation and outdoor amenities, such as national parks, is a dimension of environmental injustice (Floyd & Johnson, 2002; Tarrant & Cordell, 1999). Further, increased participation and exposure to environmental amenities such as trails have physical and mental health benefits (Jennings, et al., 2015). Therefore, identity-based corps serving in greenspaces and the public land workforce can be seen as leaders in promoting environmental justice. This form of justice may be best understood within the context of recognition justice in Whyte's discussion around building participatory dimensions between tribes and governments (Whyte, 2011).

In discussing how dominant environmental heritages have pushed out indigenous heritages from public lands, Whyte (2011) suggests the way to justice is to recognize the heritages present in a place, and to include members of local indigenous tribes in the environmental decision-making process. Members of the identity-based corps present in this thesis have extended these principles around the recognition of environmental heritages through building partnerships between priority populations, public land

agencies, and local indigenous organizations. From these partnerships, a collaborative effort to promote greater outreach and recruitment strategy emerged. The themes of recognizing exclusionary histories through curriculum-led and community development strategies serve as a form of environmental justice.

In the narratives, some of the participants offered words of caution over community partnerships dedicated to inclusion that are not led by priority populations. Without leadership and participation of priority populations, land managers, and corps staff may perpetuate historical traumas around assimilation (see narratives with JT on pages 56 & 67).

Providing accessibility and participation by priority populations in public lands is where many organizations working towards equity begin. However, without representative leadership guiding conversations around recognizing "environmental heritages" of indigenous nations and the current stewards of public lands, how effective are these efforts at promoting recognition justice? As some of the participants mentioned throughout the interviews, some of the crews collaborated with local indigenous communities to recognize indigenous history and sovereignty in the lands they served, a partnership guided by the priority and indigenous communities themselves (interview data, 2020).

Beginning the conversations and relationships around recognition during recruitment and orientation – and continuing them throughout a term of service, the corps members in this study shared how these experiences were formative in how they viewed public lands. Namely, the participants discussed the legacies of exclusion present in public lands with one another, with corps leadership, and indigenous community

members. Learning how dominant history perpetuates exclusion within public lands motivated some to remain in the workforce and to be mentors themselves, and to educate more people about the nature of the exclusionary history of public lands.

Conclusion

This thesis explored narratives to help understand the role identity-based conservation corps play to include priority populations in the public lands workforce. It relied on stories shared by ten corps participants that served on three different identity-based crews to help explore three research questions: 1) What perceptions do identity-based crew alumni have over public land history and their own stories? How do these narratives intersect? 2) How can these narratives inform the continued management of public lands, especially in the context of equitable representation? And 3) How do the experiences of corps members align with the goals of the partnerships – that of land management agencies and the conservation corps?

Coding analysis in Atlas.ti helped organize narrative themes to provide subjective context to the research questions. The themes most of the narratives overlapped with were 1) hiring and recruitment; 2) the importance of mentorship and representative leadership; 3) supporting and developing affinity spaces; 4) community development strategies; 5) identifying barriers in fully participating in the environmental workforce, and; 6) the importance of a curriculum around public land history.

Though the narratives informing these intersecting themes were relevant to the research questions to varying degrees, the interviews also pointed to future research and policy implications outside of the scope of this thesis. For example, policy questions around equal employment opportunity clauses (EEO) emerged in three of the interviews. These participants spoke at length about an instance where the NPS was reluctant to renew a contract with an all-women's trail crew. Future research could be directed to interview the NPS on related issues and provide the evidence that validates or refutes

their concerns of violating EEO policies by contracting with an all-women's crew. At the time of writing, federal land agencies have programs in place that work to provide a more equitable workplace ("Employee Resource Groups", nps.gov/orgs).

This thesis was limited to interviewing ten participants from three conservation corps with a few degrees of separation between myself and the initial contact for this thesis. The generalized approach of the narratives was intended to be exploratory while providing a platform for stories to emerge around the phenomenon of identity-based corps. Finally, limitations persisted throughout the research due to my position as a member outside of the communities I researched. Though some commonalities between class and employment overlapped between myself and the participants, recruiting participants outside of my immediate trail crew network needed more time to develop. With this in mind, future narrative analyses about specific identity-based corps would be best conducted by community members themselves.

As demographics in the U.S are shifting toward a minority-majority population, it is crucial to create a representative workforce leading the effort to protect the remaining wildlands and ancestral lands. Without this representation, histories of exclusion, expulsion, and contributions of priority populations in public lands will remain obscured by the dominant group's (white) interpretations of wilderness. Land managers can help the collective healing from historical traumas associated with racism and settler-colonialism by stepping aside and allowing space for priority populations to lead the management, operations, and interpretation of public lands. Identity-based conservation corps and community groups led by priority populations are bringing this conversation forward and can be leaders to facilitate this long-overdue conversation.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview guidelines

Corps members

a) How did you find out about the opportunity to join this crew?
   i) **Follow up:** What was the application process like?

b) Can you think of any barriers that might have prevented you from accessing this kind of work?

c) Tell me about the challenges you faced while working on this crew.

   i) **Follow up** with clarifying questions, but be sensitive to what has been shared.

d) What were some of your achievements?

   i) **Follow up:** Can you tell me about your attitudes towards environmental work and outdoor recreation before you joined this crew? What about after? Was there an experience that you can pin-point where you saw a shift?

e) Describe your relationship with the partner agency staff.

f) Was there a particular moment when you noticed disparities in the environmental workforce/corps workforce? Can you talk about that shift?

g) How do you feel about the way your *organization* works to provide opportunities to work in the environmental field?

h) What would you have liked to have happened during your time serving on this crew?

i) Do you see yourself working in the environmental field in the future? Why or why not?

j) Thank them for their time and ask if I may follow up with additional questions in the future.

Corps staff

a) Warm up questions: How long have you worked within the conservation corps world? What responsibilities do you have now?
b) How many crews are involved in promoting equity and accessibility – either through identity-based or otherwise?
c) What challenges do you face when recruiting members and leaders?
    i) **Follow up:** How about retention? (either by remaining or moving into similar work).
d) How is your organization's mission of equity in the environmental field going?
    i) **Follow up:** What challenges stand out to you?
e) Describe your relationship with your partners (agency or corps).
f) Describe the level of collaboration you experience (or would like to see).
g) Can you talk about how the corps members are doing within your programs?
h) Describe the equity trainings your organization puts on.
i) Thank you for making time to speak with me. Is there anything else you'd like to discuss?

Appendix B: Code-frequency table

Number of coded quotations per participant relative to selected themes

	Affinity Spaces	Barriers to Participation	Curriculum-Alternative History	Community Development	Hiring-Retention-Recruitment	Mentorship
Participant 1	20	25	17	6	43	47
Participant 2	12	19	23	4	26	19
Participant 3	16	11	12	6	26	20
Participant 4	23	23	25	14	31	33
Participant 5	38	43	36	27	51	57
Participant 6	19	21	25	13	26	22
Participant 7	16	19	16	11	21	20
Participant 8	16	10	16	8	25	19
Participant 9	9	10	11	9	16	11
Participant 10	13	10	18	9	13	23
Totals	182	191	199	107	278	271