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Fernandez, Alina I'vette

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
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**UNCONQUERABLE SOUL: LATINA SORORITY POLITICS**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

LATIN AMERICAN AND LATINO STUDIES
with an emphasis in SOCIOLOGY

by

**Alina I'vette Fernandez**

June 2020

The Dissertation of Alina I'vette Fernandez is approved:

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Jessica K. Taft, Ph.D. chair

_____
Catherine S. Ramírez, Ph.D.

_____
Sylvanna M. Falcón, Ph.D.

_____
Veronica Terriquez, Ph.D.

_____
Quentin Williams
Acting Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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Abstract
Unconquerable Soul: Latina Sorority Politics
Alina I'vette Fernandez

Young Latinos are the fastest growing portion of the U.S. electorate and make up 44% of eligible Latino voters (Krogstad et al. 2016). However, research finds that they tend to score lower on measures of civic knowledges (Torney-Purta, Barber, and Wilkenfeld 2007; Levinson 2007; Rogers, Mediratta and Shah 2012) and are generally less politically engaged than their Black and White youth counterparts (Cohen 2010). This is one narrative of young Latino political engagement.

Feminist research finds that narrow conceptualizations of the political have erasing and minimizing effects on the political contributions of marginalized communities (Hardy-Fanta 1993; Cohen, Jones, Tronto 1997; Bedolla 1999). From this research a second, contrasting, narrative of young Latino political participation has emerged. It finds that this portion of the population participates in a variety of social movements and explicitly political organizations, including the immigrant rights movement, the Black Lives Matter movement, and Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanx de Aztlán (M.E.CH.A.) (Ortega 2001; Seif 2004; Zimmerman 2011; Galindo 2012; Negron-Gonzales 2013; Beltran 2015; Cruz 2016; Heredia 2016; Gamber-Thompson and Zimmerman 2016). Similarly, sociological studies of youth political participation have consistently framed young people as politically engaged and significant contributors to the political realm (Cohen 2010; Taft and Gordon 2013; Nenga and Taft 2013).

This study considers a third possible narrative of young Latino political engagement with a specific focus on Latino Greek Letter Organizations (LGLOs).

Greek letter organizations are widely contextualized as primarily "social" organizations (including by their membership) comprised of "ordinary" (as opposed to explicitly self-identified activist) youth (Hanisch 1969; Clarke 2010; Harris,Wyn, and Younes 2010). However, research has shown that Women of Color sororities are important socio-political spaces (Giddings 1988; Whaley 2010; Crossley 2017). Leveraging this insight this study asks the following: (1) What are the forms of political engagement present in the supposedly "apolitical" space of a Latina sorority? (2) How do the social, institutional, and organizational contexts of this organization shape these engagement practices? (3) How do the undergraduate members of a Latina sorority define politics and make sense of the sorority's political engagement practices?

*For Mama and my ancestors with love and gratitude*

# Acknowledgements

Today is March 17, 2020, and the global community is facing the COVID-19 pandemic. In my home state, New Jersey, "social distancing" has become our new normal. The entire State has a mandated curfew and must remain inside between 8 p.m. and 5 a.m. daily. All parties and group gatherings have been cancelled, and schools, gyms, libraries and retail stores have been closed. Restaurants have been limited to takeout and delivery, and we are only permitted to leave our homes for essential business (groceries, medicines, etc.) and solitary exercise. Many other countries, including Ecuador, China, and Italy, have implemented similar measures. For me this means spending my days away from many of the people I love, adjusting to the reality that my dissertation defense is now a Zoom session, and clinging to the hope of a June commencement. It has also made sending my husband to work an emotional ordeal. Rolando is a nurse on a floor that has been designated to treat patients with COVID-19, and they are running out of critical supplies. At the time of writing, Rolando and his colleagues have been limited to two masks per 12+ hour shift.[1] During this time of loneliness, fear and uncertainty, I am awed by his strength and dedication, and I am grateful for the sacrifices of those who provide essential services and continue to work outside of their homes. From this space of gratitude, I offer my sincere thanks to the following individuals and communities whose support has been crucial to my growth and success.

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[1] May 4, 2020: We have now lost 69,128 people in the United States and more than 248,000 worldwide, with death tolls estimated to be much higher than current counts. Rolando is now limited to one N95 mask every three days and five gowns per shift. Commencement has been cancelled.

Jessica Taft: Thank you for dedicating approximately one trillion hours to my development. Day after day, you talked me through everything from framing research questions and fellowship applications to the implications of specific terms. During these conversations, I never felt talked over or undervalued, instead the questions you asked and ideas you suggested often felt like roadmaps to my own voice. Week after week (after week), you were consistently in my corner guiding me through writer's block and crappy first drafts. My colleagues marvel at the support I receive from you, and I can only beam and say "Jessica is incredible" for the thousandth time. You stood with me and for me in so many circumstances that I have lost count. I came to rely on you and you never failed me, not once. You are rare and precious and so dear to me. It has been an extraordinary privilege.

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unsaid in that exchange is that you are my special form of magic, the thing, or in this case person, that encouraged me to go after new experiences and made me believe in myself. You have been a mentor, friend, and a personal and professional inspiration. I am so grateful for our time together.

Sylvanna M. Falcón: Thank you for pushing me to grow as a scholar, writer, and professional. I have often found your comments on my writing among the most difficult to work through, as if the answers to the questions you asked were just out of reach. I would read and reread them, talk myself into circles and then suddenly, as if by design, an idea or concept would stand out, and I would be writing once more. This is not always the prettiest process, but it has forced me to engage with new scholarship, consider my arguments from fresh and exciting perspectives, and ultimately grow as a scholar and writer. I am grateful for your feedback because it sparked some of the writing of which I am most proud. I am also extraordinarily thankful for your guidance. Many times I have asked for your counsel, especially when navigating difficult situations, and each time you facilitated my decision making process by explaining the implications of different courses of action. I am so appreciative of the clarity you have helped me find.

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Benjamin Goldfrank: Thank you for helping me transition from an undergraduate to a graduate student. It was you I first told about my desire to pursue graduate study and you who patiently listened when I excitedly described the LALS program. You did not have to mentor me from 3,000 miles away, but you shared your time with me anyway. Thank you for consoling me when school overwhelmed me and for teaching me how to manage my course load. You have been my advisor and trusted confidant for nearly a decade, and I am forever indebted to you for helping make my dreams my reality.

Wally Goldfrank: Thank you for making UC Santa Cruz feel like home. Early in our relationship you took me around the LALS department introducing me to faculty and staff as your *nieta*. It made me feel so special, like this institution that you helped create was equally mine. You shared your spirit with me over walks and meals, each time gently reminding me to be an active participant in my life and education. I take more time to admire birds now—their colors, shapes, sounds, and communities. And

every time I stop to look a little closer at them, I think "Hey Wally, I'm thinking of you too."

I am fortunate to have a community of faculty who supported this research and my development as a graduate student. Gabriela F. Arredondo, thank you for making class smell like baked goods, intellectual debate feel like kitchen conversation, and for feedback on these words of gratitude. Hiroshi Fukurai, thank you for turning statistics into words and sharing my excitement over secret societies. Steve McKay, thank you for demonstrating the possibilities of community collaboration and taking me along for the ride. Miriam Goldberg, thank you for consistently honoring my friendship with Saugher and patiently explaining Marx again and again so I could discover that I am not a classical theorist. Martin S. Edwards, thank you for teaching me that game theory and comedy are one in the same and that Ph. D.s are for first gen scholars. I also express my gratitude to the faculty of Latin American and Latino Studies and Sociology Departments. Your classes, programming, and presence have helped to shape the researcher I am today.

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Mommy Aguirre: We did it Mommy! We did it! Thank you for spending hours on the phone with me patiently listening while I read and edited my chapters and applications out loud and for carefully tracking every chapter's components. Thank you for sending your love in "if it fits it ships boxes" and for saving all of your pennies to visit me to make my Santa Cruz rental livable. Thank you for filling my fridge with love in the forms of sofrito, habichuelas, soup and pasta sauce and for taking care of our loved ones when they are most vulnerable. You've made every joy from first drafts to chapter submissions sweeter and every sorrow that much more bearable. Every word on each page is for you, a small gift to somehow convey how

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Women of Wisdom: For the last few years Rolando has repeatedly told me that my dissertation should say Alina et al. in reference to the support I have received from my committee, family and friends. I agree; I did not author this work alone. I wrote it with you. When I was lost in this process, I would listen to your voices over and over, learning from your stories and trusting your insights to guide me. *Hermanas de mi corazón,* thank you for giving this project your time and allowing me to share our community with a broader audience. Thank you to Cynthia A. Marino, Lauren Quiñones, and Jay Skye for their interest in and support of this research. I'd also like to thank Glenda Gracia Rivera and Lilian Deniza for finding and sharing answers to my questions. Special shout out to Miggie Acquino, who never failed to ask me how the writing was going or to tell me how cool she found this research. Lastly, thank you to Glorious Gamma, my home and my heart.

A&F
Prometheus
Gamma/Alpha Beta
FA'11 #2

Chapter One: Introduction
"What Does She Really Have to Say?"

> Having my voice heard [is a challenge]. Just because they automatically see a Latina woman, so they think "ok what does she really have to say?" and then furthermore being a Latina sorority woman "ok what does she really have to say? As she clearly thinks about having letters on her chest and not actual problems so why should we listen to her because what she says probably doesn't matter or it's not as important" *-Karina*

What women and girls say is frequently dismissed as frivolous, and in Karina's experience her insights are dismissed because she is both a Latina and a member of a Latina sorority. Similarly, as a graduate student I have seen the organizing potential of Greek letter organizations and the political practices of sorority girls dismissed on multiple occasions. Unfortunately, the notion that Latinx youth political insights and contributions "don't matter" or are "not as important" as their peers is often perpetuated by headlines like "Latino Millennials Have The Power, So Why Don't They Use It?" (McLaughlin 2016). This headline and the research it is based on emphasize the size and growth of the young Latinx electorate and frame Latinx youth as "potentially powerful" political actors (Krogstad et al. 2016). Similarly, other studies have found that Latinx youth tend to score lower on measures of civic knowledges (Torney-Purta, Barber, and Wilkenfeld 2006; Levinson 2007; Rogers, Mediratta and Shah 2012; The Nation's Report Card 2014) and are generally less politically engaged than their Black and White youth counterparts (Cohen 2010). Young people, more broadly defined, are frequently seen as politically apathetic, and their lack of civic participation is described as a contributing factor to America's political decline (Delli Carpini; 2000; Putnam 2000, Henn, Weinstein and

Wring 2002; Williamson 2002; Youniss et al. 2002; Thomson et al. 2004). However, this is but one narrative of young Latinx political engagement.

Sociologists, in particular, have broadened conceptualizations of political engagement from narrow understandings that focus primarily on voting and direct contact with the government (like those described above) to a variety of behaviors and practices, such as organizing and activism, that target institutions, like corporations and universities, in addition to the state (O'Neill 2007; Cohen 2010; Terriquez 2015a; 2015b; Verduzco-Reyes 2015). From this research a second, contrasting, narrative of young Latinx political participation has emerged. It finds that this portion of the population participates in a variety of social movements and explicitly political organizations, including the immigrant rights movement, the Black Lives Matter movement, and *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanx de Aztlán* (MEChA.) (Ortega 2001; Seif 2004; Zimmerman 2011; Galindo 2012; Negron-Gonzales 2013; Terriquez 2015b; Beltran 2015; Cruz 2016; Gamber-Thompson and Zimmerman 2016; Heredia 2016; Hope, Keels, and Durkee 2016). Similarly, sociological studies of youth political participation have consistently framed young people as politically engaged and significant contributors to the political realm (Smith, Lister, Middleton and Cox 2007; Cohen 2010; Nenga and Taft 2013; Taft and Gordon 2013).

This study intervenes in this discussion and suggests a third possible narrative of young Latinx political engagement. Feminist research has found that state-centric constructions of political engagement have erasing and minimizing effects on marginalized communities' political practices, and that women, in particular, engage

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in political behaviors and practices that are excluded from these constructions (Hardy-Fanta 1993; Cohen, Jones, and Tronto 1997; Bedolla 2000). Building from this research, I understand political engagement as behaviors, practices, and actions that maintain and/or contest existing distributions of power.[2] I argue young Latinxs are politically engaged, and that even seemingly "apolitical" young Latinxs participate in a variety of political practices. To make this case, I look to Latinx Greek Letter Organizations (LGLOs), which are widely understood as "social" organizations (including by their membership) comprised of "ordinary" (as opposed to explicitly self-identified activist) youth (Hanisch 1969; Clarke 2010; Harris, Wyn, and Younes 2010). Latinas, more than Latinos, have been found to understand and practice extra-state political engagement (Hardy-Fanta 1993, Bedolla 2000).[3] Leveraging this insight this study asks: (1) What are the forms of political engagement present in the supposedly "apolitical" space of a Latina sorority? (2) How do the social, institutional, and organizational contexts of this organization shape these engagement practices? (3) How do the undergraduate members of a Latina sorority define politics and make sense of the sorority's political engagement practices?

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[2] My framing of political engagement differs from my use of the term politics, which I use to refer to the power relations that structure and inform the way a specific behavior or practice is carried out.
[3] Leveraging interviews and participant observation, Hardy-Fanta finds that Latinas and Latinos understand politics differently and because of this are politically engaged in ways that mirror their respective definitions of the political. While Latinos expressed a state-centric understanding of politics, Latinas viewed politics as the "interpersonal connections" and "interactive process[es]" "embedded in their daily lives and culture" (1993: 3). She articulates a collaborative, process-oriented definition of the political that frames community building as practice of political engagement.

*Conceptualizations of the Political*

One of the central differences between these narratives of Latinx youth political engagement is the construction of politics and the political that the studies rely on; many focus on what I term state-centric politics and others consider politics more broadly similar to the definition of political engagement that guides this study. Narrowly defined, politics is that which "is handled directly in the institutions of the official governmental system" (Fraser 1989: 166). Research that deploys this construction of politics frequently uses deficit framings to describe Latinx, youth, and/or women's political participation like those mentioned at the opening of this chapter.

Differently, many feminist scholars have conceptualized politics broadly. For example, Wendy Brown offers, "politics refers always to a condition of plurality and difference, to the human capacity for *producing* a world of meanings, practices, and institutions…" (Brown 1995:38). These constructions of politics are often used to highlight the contributions of children, youth, and other politically marginalized communities (Hardy-Fanta 1993; Brown 1995; Cohen et al. 1997; Beaumont et al. 2006; Taft 2006; 2019; Cohen 2010; Crossley 2017). As children are ineligible to vote and voting is one of, if not the, predominant measures of political engagement presently, children are not frequently understood as political, and their contributions are often excluded when narrow conceptualizations of political engagement are operationalized (Bedolla 2000; Smith et al. 2005). Scholars of children and youth politics work to combat this exclusion, and the narrative that young people are under

engaged that comes with it, by focusing on how youth are politically engaged or come to be politically engaged (McFarland and Thomas 2006; Taft 2006; 2019; Cohen 2010; Loader, Vromen, and Xenos 2014; Terriquez 2015a). Examples of youth political engagement practices include lifestyle politics, like buycotting[4] and hairstyle choices, and participation in counterpublics,[5] like People of Color Greek letter organizations (Cohen 2010; Whaley 2010; Loader et al. 2014). However, studies of Latinx youth engagement frequently examine their political participation practices that target institutions; this includes activism that addresses health and reproductive issues, legislative immigration reform, which has been particularly well studied, and the preservation/ implementation of ethnic studies courses (Gonzales 2008; Otero and Camarota 2010; Seif 2010; O'Leary and Romero 2011; Weber-Shirk 2015; Terriquez 2015b; Bloemraad and Terriquez 2016; DeAngelo, Schuster, and Stebleton 2016; Heredia 2016).

In the literature, placement between these poles is raced and gendered, with many White male scholars favoring narrow constructions of the political (Milbrath 1965; Verba and Nie 1972/1987; Putnam 2000; Delli Carpini 2000; Davis, Elin, and Reeher 2002/2018) and Women of Color, members of marginalized communities, and their allies favoring broader conceptualizations that bring into relief participation

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[4] Buycotting is the practice of purchasing a certain product or service because an individual likes the social or political values of the company that produces or sells the product.

[5] I understand counterpublics as "'discursive arenas' where historically marginalized groups 'present counter discourses on their identities, interests and lives'; they act as competing publics to the dominant society and emerge as a response to particular social conditions at specific historical moments" (Whaley 2010:40). See also Nancy Fraser's "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy."

outside of the ballot box (Hardy-Fanta 1993; Brown 1995; Cohen et al. 1997; Beaumont et al. 2006; Taft 2006; 2019; Cohen 2010). Most contemporary studies of political practice conceptualize "politics" and "political behavior" as somewhere in between these two constructions. Similarly, my understanding and analysis of the political also fits within this spectrum and actively shifts between these two polarities. It is informed by sociological framings of the political, advanced by scholars like Bedolla (2005) Cohen (2010), and Terriquez (2015b; 2017) that center community and institutions, like corporations, as important targets of political action (in addition to the state). Additionally, in this study, I build on the work of Collins (1990; 2017), Hardy-Fanta (1993), Nenga and Taft (2013), Falcón (2016), and understand the political as inherently tied to the social and mediated by individual and community relationships to power and the contexts in which these relationships exist. I interpret the spectrum of the political as woven into itself in an ordered yet dynamic pattern where state-centric practices inform other forms of political practice, such as personal presentation, and vice versa.

My fluid understanding of the political calls attention to the ongoing contestations of the meanings of politics, the political, and political engagement and allows me to consider a spectrum of political practices that provide a more holistic view of young Latinas' politics. This flexible approach is necessary in order to engage with the Cussies'[6] multiple understandings of politics. Mirroring the scholarly

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[6] Cussies is the plural form of Cussie, a name used to refer to members of Chi Upsilon Sigma National Latin Sorority Inc., a Latina sorority.

literature, their responses to "In your view, what makes something political?" ranged from the very broad to state-centric with others located between these two poles of the political spectrum. For example, during our interview I asked Elena, a 21 year old Ecuadorian Sister of Chi Upsilon Sigma National Latin Sorority Inc. (CUS), responded: "That's tough. I feel that everything is political. Your identity, your race, your sexuality, your family, your legal documentation. I feel like everything is political." Differently, when I asked the same question of Elena's chapter Sister,[7] Vera, she said "talking about certain issues, controversial issues, politics and the government, with laws." Elena and Vera's responses highlight two different conceptualizations of the political (broad and narrow). Somewhere in between their views lies Araceli's response that "something is political if what is being seen or said has any connotation to policy or how things work systematically." In order to account for these variations in their understandings of the political, my analysis moves along the spectrum of politics in tandem with the Sisters' insights.

POWER

This dynamic conceptualization of politics and political practice hinges on how power operates; in other words, I understand politics and power as co-constructing phenomena, where changes in the experience and/or use of either concept necessarily impacts the experience and use of the other. This means that I consider politics (in all its forms) in relation to the power dynamics its structures and

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[7] A member of the same sorority who attends the same university

practices represent and signify. In terms of this study, my examination of the Cussies'

political practices is an analysis of how these young women[8] experience and navigate

their various relationships to power. Following Collins, I conceptualize power as a

multi-dimensional and intangible entity that is responsive to human agency and

understand that an individual's relationship to power is felt and lived as it continually

shifts throughout the course of their life (2017;1990). I applied this construction of

power in relation to a fluid conceptualization of politics in order to analyze the

Sisters' behaviors that claim (Ch. 3), deploy (Ch.4), and preserve (Ch.5) power. I

chose this application not to collapse power and the political, but rather to emphasize

the central role of their mutually constitutive relationship in the lives of young

Latinas.

In order to facilitate my analysis of power I relied on Collins' domains-of-

power framework, which is "a set of conceptual tools for analyzing and responding to

intersecting power relations" (Collins 2017:22). Collins identifies four primary

domains of power: structural, disciplinary, cultural and interpersonal domains (2017).

The structural domain of power emphasizes the power held by and within social

institutions (governments, schools, banks etc.), their policies and practices; these

institutions create and maintain social hierarchies. The disciplinary domain of power

comes into play when individuals and communities use the rules, regulations and

policies established by these social institutions to maintain or challenge social

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[8] I use the terms "women" and "girls" interchangeably when referencing the Cussies. This "switching" honors the Sisters' multiple understandings of themselves and highlights how their experiences of woman and/or girl hood are often context dependent (Taft 2011).

hierarchies. The cultural domain of power refers to the production of ideas within social institutions that reify and/or challenge or resist social inequality. Lastly, the interpersonal or experiential domain of power "encompasses the myriad of experiences that individuals have within intersecting oppressions" (Collins 2017:26). I selected this framework because it allows me to focus on specific power dynamics while simultaneously considering the overlapping and related contexts of power that also inform the use or experience of power under examination.

In this study, I used this analytic tool to map multiple forms of power as the Sisters interacted with, exercised, and experienced them. However, throughout this dissertation my primary emphasis is on the experiential domain of power as I am interested in what power looks and feels like from the Sisters' unique vantage points. By prioritizing their insights as situated knowers I position myself to learn how their experiences of power mediate and shape individual and collective political practices. In other words, I do not select which power dynamics are most influential to their expressions of politics; instead, I rely on the Sisters' insights and focus on the iterations of power that they see, think about and interact with most.

INTERSECTIONALITY

This process of centering the Sisters' voices is a key aspect of intersectional analysis. The intersectional knowledge project includes a variety of interventions on intersectionality as a field of study; intersectional sensibilities, methodologies, politics, analyses, and praxes; intersectional identities; and distributions of power. For the purposes of this study, I am particularly interested in intersectional methodologies

and analytic approaches. Patricia Hill Collins argues that the practice of intersectionality is foundational to intersectional analysis (2015). Intersectionality as critical praxis (Collins 2015) underscores how practice *is* the method, and method and theory are mutually constituted. In the field there has been sustained interest in understanding and developing intersectional methodologies (McCall 2005; Keating 2009; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981/2015; May 2015). These interventions, in combination with this framing of practice as method, allow me to identify four aspects of intersectional analyses: intersectionality (1) centers the voices and experiences of individuals from marginalized communities, particularly Women of Color; (2) recognizes that identities are mutually constitutive and therefore inextricable; (3) locates these identities and experiences in relation to structures of power, privilege, and oppression; and (4) highlights difference as a valuable lens for understanding individual and group experiences (Stewart 1832 via Richardson 1987; Truth 1851; Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1991; McCall 2005; Jordan-Zachery 2007; Keating 2009; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981/2015; Collins and Bilge 2016). These four dimensions are central to the construction of my study and inform my analysis of the Cussies' political practices.

There is an ongoing debate in the field over the utility of categories that can be mapped by disciplinary boundaries (McCall 2005; Nash 2008; Keating 2009). Leslie McCall argues that social categories are useful tools of intersectional analyses because they are shaped by power dynamics, thereby facilitating the researchers' work locating the structures of power that operate in a given context (2005). I find

this argument compelling and use categories in my analysis because the Sisters frequently locate themselves within and in relation to social categories, and, in line with intersectionality's interventions, I believe their lived experiences are spaces of knowledge production.

CIVIC AND SOCIAL PRACTICE

In addition to power, politics and political practice are also frequently examined in relationship to civic engagement (Tocqueville 1835; Milbrath 1965; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Glanville 1999; Putnam 2000; Beaumont et al. 2006; McFarland and Thomas 2006; Terriquez 2017). Civic engagement does not have a singular operational definition (Adler and Goggin 2005); however, civic practices include a wide variety of formal and informal social activities, such as bowling with a local league or volunteering, and provide insight into how the term has been understood and used.

Central to these varied constructions of *civic* engagement is the social. Nina Eliasoph clearly highlights the connection between the social and the political by defining civic engagement as "the fundamentally sociable processes by which citizens create contexts for political conversation in civil society" (Eliasoph 1998:22). In her assessment, individuals actively create and recreate ideas and practices of the political through conversations, which she sees as inherently tied to the public sphere. Eliasoph understands "the public sphere [as] something that exists *only between*

people," and argues that meaning making power lies within it (1998:16).[9] In this construction of the political, "the power to create the contexts of public life itself" is found in the public-spirited conversations of individuals (1998:17). Eliasoph's framing is reminiscent of Brown's earlier assertion, referenced above, that politics refers to "the human capacity for *producing* a world of meanings, practices, and institutions…" (Brown 1995:38).

Studies that deploy a more narrow definition of civic practice also emphasize the importance of social connection highlighting how existing relationships and social networks, like those developed within politically salient organizations, are leveraged for political aims (Tocqueville 1835; Putnam 2000; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012). Read together, the relationship between the social and the political, whether interpreted via behavior and practice in state-centric studies of politics, or through human agency and meaning making processes in studies that consider politics more broadly, indicates that the political does not exist outside of social relationships. Social interaction mediates how we understand our histories and communities, how individuals and groups make sense of themselves and navigate their individual and collective relationships to power (Hardy-Fanta 1993; Eliasoph 1998; Blackwell 2003; Bedolla 2005; McCall 2005; Kulick 2013). It is in relationship to others that we are best able to understand our own relationships to power and the structures that represent it. Scholars of youth, Women of Color, and other marginalized community politics have long emphasized the interwoven relationship between social and

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[9] Emphasis in original

political practices; their work has focused on the political practices derived from or informed by social media, participation in social clubs and organizations, and interpersonal relationships (Hardy-Fanta 1993; Mendoza-Denton 2008; Cohen 2010; Nenga and Taft 2013; Jenkins et al. 2016; Taft 2019). This scholarship highlights the persistent and consistent presence of political practice in spaces, like Latinx Greek letter organizations, that are not always understood as political and frequently misinterpreted as apolitical. This study builds on these findings and offers insight into how the culture of a social organizations can mediate political practices in multiple contexts.

LATINX GREEK LETTER ORGANIZATIONS

To contextualize the Cussies' political practices, I turned to studies on Latinx Greek letter organizations (LGLOs). Unfortunately, few published academic texts exist that focus exclusively on LGLOs (Guardia and Evans 2008; Muñoz and Guardia 2009; Moreno and Sanchez Banuelos 2013; Fajardo 2015; Guardia 2015). Presently, this developing area of study is primarily focused on establishing the historical trajectories of these organizations and examining the roles they play in the academic successes of their membership. There are no existing published academic texts on the politics of Latinx fraternities and sororities and/or exclusively on Latina experiences within these spaces of which I am aware. My research addresses this gap in this literature by providing the first analysis of political engagement in these vital spaces.

That said, the field of Black Greek letter organization (BGLO) studies has been further developed (Hughey and Parks 2011). As LGLOs were informed by

BGLOs, it is a relevant point of departure to review some of the literature on BGLOs.

Similar to LGLOs, a significant portion of the BGLO studies have focused on the

histories of these organizations and the impact participation has on education

experiences (Giddings 1988; Kimbrough 1995; Taylor and Howard-Hamilton

1995; Kimbrough and Hutcheson 1998; Harper, Byars and Jelke 2005; Bonner 2006;

McClure 2006; Parks and Bradley 2012). Others have examined BGLOs relationships

to hazing (Kimbrough 1997; Ruffins 1998; Foster 2008; Govan 2011; Scott 2011;

Jones 2015). More recently, studies of the implications of gender and gender

performance in BGLOs have examined appearance enforcement, the gender politics

of Black fraternalism, and "the production of sexuality and femininity in sorority step

performance" (Whaley 2010:v; Anderson, Buckley and Tindall 2011; Dancy 2011;

Hernandez 2011).[10]

Deborah Whaley's book *Disciplining Women: Alpha Kappa Alpha, Black*

*Counterpublics, and the Cultural Politics of Black Sororities* (2010) examines

BGLOs as spaces of Black cultural production and preservation. Whaley finds that

through intake processes and stepping performances these women simultaneously

resist and reinforce a politics of respectability. [11]She understands AKA as a "social

and political space" and argues that it is a counterpublic or "a site that converges

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[10] "Stepping is tap dancing without tap shoes...It is jazz, funk, rhythm and blues, and rap without instruments...The music comes from the synchronized interplay of hands and feet, from chants and hollers. It is a way to make music using the body as instrument" (Nelson 1990).

[11] A politics of respectability is the practice of "linking worthiness for respect" to a set of valued characteristics and behavioral practices, such as neatness and politeness, which in turn establishes "a behavioral 'entrance fee' to the the right to respect and the right to full citizenship" (Higginbotham 1993; Harris 2003:213).

cultural and social spaces with political platforms" (2010:8). Similarly, Alison Crossley finds that POC sororities are "active sites of feminist organizing" (2017:75) These interventions are important for this study because they situate the POC sorority as a cultural, social, and political space.

*Looking Ahead*

Together the scholarship on Black and Latinx Greek life, intersectionality, and Latinx youth civic and political practices ground and inform my study. My mama always says "take what you like and leave what you don't," and I approach the research process in much the same way. I rely on the relevant fields to facilitate my understandings of Latina sorority girl politics while simultaneously "leaving" those studies whose contributions do not make space for the Sisters' realities. In this way I place the Cussies' insights in conversation with the literature and contribute to the existing scholarship an analysis that is both grounded in their experiences and informed by my own (which includes my academic training). I understand the Sisters as my research partners, equal contributors in this academic endeavor; it is my hope that throughout this dissertation you encounter our voices in equal measure.

In Chapter 2, I provide a brief overview of some sorority systems in the United States, debunk commonly held misconceptions about Latina sorority experiences and explain the study's methodology. In Chapter 3, I argue the Sisters' bridge the erotic and hegemonic masculinity in their public performances in order to claim power (and space) and assert themselves as a powerful group. In Chapter 4, I move to a discussion of the ways the Sisters use power to advance a pro-woman, pro-

immigrant, pro-POC political platform and examine the ways university contexts mediate the Cussies' political expression. Later, in Chapter 5 I argue the Sisters preserve power as a means of resisting a pervasive context of threat that spans national, institutional, and interpersonal contexts. Lastly, in Chapter 6 I provide a brief summary of the dissertation and highlight its scholarly contributions and practical implications. Read together, these chapters offer two primary insights. First, that political practices are mediated by context dependent relationships to power. Second, that seemingly apolitical organizations, communities, and individuals, like those represented by CUS, are political actors that leverage their experiences of and relationships to power to advance political objectives.

## Chapter Two: Methodology
## "But What About Their Houses?"

On September 30, 2005 Dolores Huerta became an Honorary Sister of Kappa Delta Chi Sorority Inc. (Kappa Delta Chi Website 2020). In 2010, a video of Huerta proclaiming in both Spanish and English that she is "so proud to be a Sister of Kappa Delta Chi" was posted on the organization's Youtube channel (Kappa Delta Chi Youtube). Dolores Huerta is one of the best known activists of our times, and the woman behind the phrase "*Sí Se Puede*" (Huerta 2015). How is it that a woman of her stature came to be a proud member of a sorority, organizations frequently associated with Whiteness and elitism? Kappa Delta Chi is a Latina sorority, and like many Latinx Greek letter organizations, it is a political and activist space[12] committed to serving the Latinx community. As a researcher, and Sister of CUS, I know that misconceptualizations of Greek life, particularly People of Color Greek life are frequently the first obstacle in explaining my research and experiences. In this chapter I address this issue by providing a brief overview of sororities in the United States. I then discuss the study's methodology, including descriptions of the case study and field sites. Lastly, I close the chapter with some reflections on my relationship to CUS and its implications for this research.

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[12] Although, like Cussies, the Sisters of Kappa Delta Chi may not all consider their organization political and/or activist.

WHAT IS A SORORITY?

Sororities are national federated organizations chartered on specific college campuses. They are social spaces where women build relationships, hone leadership and civic skills, and have fun. These organizations value sisterhood, service, and academic achievement. Most members of sororities begin their affiliation with the organization during their undergraduate careers. Some women join their organization as graduate students or professionals as well. There are many kinds of sororities, including faith-based and professional organizations, which are designated for specific fields, like engineering and agriculture.

The most popular types of sororities are social sororities that are organized either implicitly or explicitly around race and ethnicity[13]. For example, *Corazones Unidos Siempre*, Chi Upsilon Sigma National Latin Sorority, Inc., where the word "Latin" is used to signify its Latina roots.[14] Understandably, there is a great deal of variation in these types of organizations; some examples are Pi Nu Iota, a Filipina Sisterhood, Beta Delta Epsilon Afro-Latina Sorority Inc., and Alpha Pi Omega, a Native American sorority. The largest of these organizations are generally affiliated with an umbrella organization such as the National Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) Panhellenic Association (NAPA). In this study I primarily

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[13] Sorority counts are inconsistent. In this study, I observed and/or interacted with approximately 45 sororities.

[14] The Spanish phrase that precedes the Greek letters is not always an identifier of a Latinx organization. For example, the Sisters of Mu Sigma Upsilon Sorority, Inc. a Multicultural organization, use the leading phrase *Mujeres Siempre Unidos* to pay homage to their Latina founders.

interacted with members of the National Association of Latino Fraternal

Organizations (NALFO), the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), and the

National Multicultural Greek Council (NMGC). I also shared space with the National

Panhellenic Conference (NPC) and discuss them in relation to these groups.

NALFO is comprised of 16 Latinx fraternities and sororities, including CUS.

These organizations were founded between 1979 and 1992 and their membership is

predominantly Latinx.[15] Similarly, the NMGC is comprised of ten Multicultural

fraternities and sororities founded between 1981 and 1997. Their membership is

primarily people of color, and these types of organizations attract members of a wide

array of racial/ethnic experiences who are interested in a shared space. NALFO and

NMGC were both founded in 1998. Differently, the National Pan-Hellenic Council

(NPHC), founded in 1930 is the oldest contemporary[16] POC Greek letter organization

umbrella organization. Its membership is comprised of nine Black fraternities and

sororities. These organizations are often referred to as the Divine Nine (D9) and were

founded between 1906 and 1963. NPHC organizations have a global presence with

chapters in the Americas, Europe, Asia, Africa and the Caribbean.

Although each umbrella organization and individual Greek letter organization

has its own distinct culture, these groups share a collective POC Greek culture as well

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[15] There is an ongoing debate surrounding the authenticity of one organization's claim to have been founded during the 1930s.

[16] Here "contemporary" is used to acknowledge the existence and contributions of what Oliver Fajardo termed termed "Latin American Student Fraternities," which came into existence during the 19th century. Little is known about these organizations and their history; Fajardo is one of the only scholars to have published on them to date.

(described below). POC Greeks are commonly referred to as multicultural Greeks,[17] or cultural Greeks. In the student affairs literature (and by many practitioners) these organizations are referred to as culturally-based Greek letter/ Fraternal organizations (Shalka and Jones 2010; AFA 2018, 2019; Garcia and Duran 2020). In my work I refer to these types of organizations as people of color Greek letter organizations. I do this for two primary reasons: to avoid confusion with this umbrella term and Multicultural Greek letter organizations (NMGC), and to problematize the persistent framing of POC as "cultural" and White people as culturally lacking thereby reinforcing the invisibility and standardization of Whiteness (Flagg 2005; Sue 2006; Combe 2019). Following Collins, I understand "people of color" as a political identity, which when applied to the relationships between POC Greeks (and their respective organizations) indicates the presence of a "coalition of conscious," or a community committed to long term solidarity that is informed by both commonalities and differences (2017b).

Returning to our discussion on types of sororities, founded in 1902 the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) [18] is the oldest umbrella organization in contemporary Greek life. There are 26 member sororities[19] located on over 670

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[17] multicultural Greeks, a term used to describe many types of POC Greek letter organizations including Black, Latinx and Asian fraternities and sororities; it is not to be confused with Multicultural Greeks, which denotes a specific type of Greek letter organization.

[18] Not to be confused with NPHC, the umbrella organization for the largest and most established Black sororities and fraternities.

[19] Some older members, like Kappa Alpha Theta and Pi Beta Phi, refer to their organizations as women's fraternities.

campuses with more than 400,000 undergraduate members (NPC 2020). Different

from their POC Greek and IFC[20] counterparts, NPC sororities use a uniform

recruitment process, which generally functions to introduce all NPC organizations to

all interested women through a series of large multi-organization events. At the end of

these activities, the organizations and potential new members rank each other in

accordance with preference. If a potential new member is invited to join an

organization (not always her first choice) she is initiated into that organization and

becomes an active member.

In the field, these organizations are referred to as "mainstream." In the

academic literature, NPC organizations are referred to simply as "sororities"

(McCarthy 2015; Peterson et al. 2018; Graber and Whipple 2019) or in rare cases

"White sororities" (Berkowitz and Padavic 1999; Hughey 2010). However,

practitioners frequently distinguish them from other types of organizations by calling

them "NPC sororities" (AFA 2018, 2019). These are *implicitly* White (and wealthy)

spaces. There are members of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, but the

majority of participants are White women. For example, on the NPC website, which

features 3-5 pictures of happy sorority girls on each page, there is only one image of a

Woman of Color.[21] She is pictured behind two White women with a caption running

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[20] The North American Interfraternity Conference, commonly referred to as IFC, is the largest umbrella organization for fraternities (IFC 2020), the majority of which are implicitly white organizations. "IFC" is commonly used by the POC Greek community in place of "White fraternity."

[21] The website also features another Black woman's arm and a light skinned racially ambiguous woman with straight light brown hair.

across her forehead; her hair is worn straight and loose in a dark ombré that shifts from deep brown to copper. This picture appears in the middle of the site at the bottom of the page. Similarly, the women featured on this site, and member organization's websites, are always photographed in locations that suggest wealth, like large sitting rooms with marble fireplaces, or in front of large houses with double sets of French doors. These organizations were founded from 1851 to 1917. At the five campuses I studied, their chapter sizes ranged from approximately 35 to over one hundred members. These organizations sometimes have houses, like those found on Tubman and Mitchell's campuses.

POC GREEK CULTURE AND MISCONCEPTIONS

The media frequently portrays members of NPC type organizations in unflattering ways (Graber and Whipple 2019; Ortiz and Thompson 2019). These negative stereotypes often shape the responses I receive when I tell people I am interested in the way sorority girls "do" politics. Given these experiences and for the sake of clarity, before I introduce CUS as a theoretically significant case, it is important to provide basic information on POC Greek culture and debunk common misconceptions about Latina Sororities.

*POC Greek Culture*

Different than the stereotypes surrounding NPC sororities, Black Greek letter organizations are often reduced in the media to performance centered organizations (*Drumline* 2002; *Stomp the Yard* 2007; *Step Sisters* 2018) and Latinx Greek letter

organizations are excluded all together from dominant constructions of Greek life. It is crucial to recognize that Latinx, Black and other POC Greek letter organizations are distinct types of organizations that represent different communities comprised of unique members and organizations. That being said, they do share *some* similarities. POC Greek chapters tend to be small: in my experience, usually 1-15 members[22][23]. POC Greek culture cultivates and sustains multiple forms of community through alumni involvement, supporting other POC Greeks at their home institutions, and travelling to other universities to support their sisters and brothers. This consistent contact fosters close connections, and it is not uncommon for students at one university to spend time with and know POC Greeks inside and outside of their organization at another university. These strong social ties reinforce organizational involvement and disaffiliation is rare, especially for members of younger organizations (read non-Black POC Greek letter organizations). Greek culture is nuanced and complex, but there are several visible markers of their shared culture. Most obviously, they only wear para in their respective organization's colors.[24] For example, CUS colors are red, black, and beige so a sweatshirt with Chi Upsilon Sigma on it could only be one of those three colors and could only feature writing in one of those colors. Differently, NPC sororities (White) can wear their letters on any

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[22] NPHC chapters, particularly at HBCUs and in the south can be quite large.

[23] Many universities create and maintain policies that apply White Greek norms, including larger chapter sizes, to POC Greek culture (Ch. 5). These policies that privilege White modalities of Greek life mean that for many POC Greek chapters, including all the Chapters of CUS in this study, losing their charter or dying out is a persistent risk.

[24]Para is short for paraphernalia and is the primary word used to describe clothing and accessories marked with references to a specific organization.

shirt in any print. For example, I once saw a sister of Alpha Sigma Tau, whose colors are Emerald Green and Victory Gold (AST 2020), wearing a shirt with AST stitched across the chest in zebra print with hot pink outline.

In addition to similar paraphernalia regulations, POC Greeks also step, stroll and/or salute (SSS). SSS are public performances that mark POC Greek letter organizations' shared culture. They are rooted in African and Indigenous traditions and are a celebration of unity, power, and ability unique to each organization. "Stepping is tap dancing without tap shoes...It is jazz, funk, rhythm and blues, and rap without instruments...The music comes from the synchronized interplay of hands and feet, from chants and hollers. It is a way to make music using the body as instrument" (Nelson 1990). Strolling "is an energetic and synchronized dance" that "functions by having members of a particular [POC] Greek organization line up one after another and dance the choreographed stroll" (Alpha Chapter Website 2020). Lastly, "Salute/Saluting is a unique art of reciting information in a line formation. Put quite simply, it's "poetry in motion." [It] involves a ~~line~~ [group] of members performing intense, in-sync, sharp hand & body movements with greetings attributing to others, honoring past and current accomplishments, or cherishing the cultural history, heritage, and traditions of the entire organization" (Oregon State University 2020). CUS was the first Latina sorority to step and stroll, and today the Cussies take part in

all three of these activities.[25] Adriana, a Sister at Mother Teresa, explains the shared

role of these practices for CUS and the broader POC Greek community.

> Step, Strolling, and saluting is a beautiful part that makes the multicultural
> Greeks different. That something that we can say is ours that goes back to our
> roots.That we can be proud of and not only just as our organization
> specifically[CUS] but as a Greek council as a whole that's something that
> binds us together, and I think it's beautiful…..Again, I think it really binds me
> to my organization and to what being a multicultural Greek is going back to
> our roots, our history, knowing that we are different from IFC and NPC
> [implicitly White fraternities and sororities], and that not to forget where my
> ancestors came from cause it all goes really back to that.

These practices and their implications in CUS are explored in detail in the next

chapter.

*Debunking Common Misconceptions*

Cussies do not have a sorority house. The Sisters have a variety of housing

arrangements that include, living in dorms, with parents or other family members or

in on or off campus apartments. They do not have keggers.[26] The Sisters do not

consume alcohol while wearing para. CUS does not serve alcohol at its public events,

except in the case of fundraising club parties or happy hours which must be pre-

approved by the chapter's respective Regional Board. The Sisters do not have trust

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[25] The history of saluting is more ambiguous, and no single Greek letter organization makes claim to
the title of first to salute. Founding Mother Maricel Rivera's comments seem to imply that saluting was
just always done or a natural derivative of other organizational behaviors. The official CUS salute was
written in 2005 by Dalma Santana. The Cussies practice other forms of saluting, primarily at new
member presentations, but Santana's writing is by far the most prevalent. See Chapter 3 for more
information.

[26] A kegger is a party where beer is served from a keg.

funds. The Cussies I interacted with primarily identify as working class. The Sisters do not pay exorbitantly high dues (membership fees). The Cussies help potential new members fundraise in order to cover their membership fees, which can be paid off with a few bakes sales or raffles. Their membership fee is significantly less than their Black and White counterparts. In addition to the day to day business expenses (insurance, website maintenance, accountants etc.), this fee covers the costs of organizational paraphernalia for new members, Regional Conference and Retreat (food, entertainment, speakers, lodging) and offsets the cost of National events like the annual banquet and biennial convention. Lastly, they do not become members by eating dog food, sleeping with fraternity members or undergoing an ugly duckling transformation. CUS is a non-hazing organization committed to empowering women and their communities. They are also an independent organization, meaning they do not have a fraternity counterpart (brotherhood affiliation).

These stereotypes are inaccurate portrayals of young Latinas' and many other women's sorority experiences. Women of Color sororities operate as counterpublics, which, following Whaley (2010), I understand as "'discursive arenas' where historically marginalized groups 'present counter discourses on their identities, interests and lives'; they act as competing publics to the dominant society and emerge as a response to particular social conditions at specific historical moments" (40). In this description Whaley also implies that historical contexts continue to inform and shape counterpublics, like WOC sororities, long after the specific historical moment

that sparked or mediated their creation has passed; this is most certainly the case for CUS.

CASE SELECTION

I selected Chi Upsilon Sigma National Latin Sorority Inc. for study because it is the oldest independent Latina sorority[27] and one of the largest Latina sororities in the country. Its size and age facilitated a comprehensive examination of regional and generational political practices. Moreover, CUS, with its emphasis on sisterhood, scholarship and community, holds a value system that is similar to many POC sororities, while simultaneously providing a readily identifiable organizational culture for analysis. Lastly, this organization was selected because as a sister of CUS, access to CUS membership and spaces are readily available to me (See Researcher Positionality*).*

*CUS History and Structure*

The Latina Greek Movement began at Kean College[28] and Rutgers University campuses between 1979 and 1981. During the 1970s-80s, Rutgers University was in the midst of political turmoil. The university had just become co-ed (in 1970) and marginalized communities were organizing against tuition hikes, de facto segregation, and the militarization of campus police (Green 2003; Rutgers University Yearbook Collection). The Founding Mothers of CUS' schooling experiences were also shaped

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[27] They do not have a related male organization.

[28] Now Kean University

by the larger national sociopolitical climate marked by the aftermath of Vietnam. In this context, six first-generation undergraduate Latinas (five Boricuas[29], a Cubana and a Colombiana) met at CASA Latina to provide a support network for Latinas like them (first generation, working class) whose families may not support or fully understand their decisions to pursue higher education and whose institution did not provide adequate support for their academic journeys. CUS sought to empower Women, particularly WOC, by providing them a space on campus that supported and celebrated their identities, passions, lived experiences and shared pursuit of education. The Founding Mothers recognized that access to resources and longevity were tied to university recognition and therefore created a sorority, an organization type that was legible to Rutgers' administrators.

This history is a key component of CUS' present day organizational culture and has a distinct impact on how its members understand and execute their roles on their campuses and within their broader communities. Delia, a junior at Mitchell University, explained to me

> I mean it [CUS] was founded like during a political time, it was when Rutgers just recently let in women, let alone Latina women, and they needed their sp-- a lot of people say want, but *no* they needed their space on campus. They needed a space that wasn't dependent on men. They needed a space that wasn't dependent on...um the caucasian narrative (nervous laughter).

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[29] One of the Puerto Rican Founding Mothers was a second generation college student.

Delia, who has been a sister for just over a year, tells the story of CUS founding in 1980 as if she intimately knows the feelings and needs of her Founding Mothers. This knowledge comes from her ownership and analysis of their legacy. Nowhere is it written or repeated in oral tradition that the Founding Mothers were in need of space.[30] The documents and conversations consistently refer to CUS as a home away from home, a place to be supported when family was unwilling or unable to understand academic demands, and a place to celebrate their cultures. In these materials CUS is framed in terms of desire rather than the necessity that Delia states. In our interview, Maricel Rivera, one of CUS' seven founders, shares that the Founding Mothers "wanted" a family, a space to get together to share our culture, to study and be Latina and supported; "we didn't want brothers; we wanted the university to recognize us." Delia has used her ownership of CUS to shift a given narrative of desire to that of necessity. In her framing, CUS was formed to meet an intra-institutional need that Rutgers failed to provide its Latina students. Delia's analysis is historically supported by the establishment of 3 new Greek letter organizations by Latinas, and the chartering of another on Rutgers' campus between 1980 and 1988.

In the past 40 years CUS has grown significantly. In the 1980s CUS was chartered at several universities throughout NJ, and in the 1990s an influential group

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[30] I have spent two afternoons reviewing the founding of CUS with Founding Mother Maricel Rivera, attended a two hour Q&A with Founding Mothers Nancy Collazo, and Evelyn Burgos, and reviewed several hundred internal documents on the history of CUS during my tenure as a member of the organization's historical committee from 2017-2018.

of Sisters in their early twenties articulated a national vision for CUS. During this time (1992), two of these Sisters, Glenda Gracia and Lea del Rosario, wrote the CUS mission statement. It reads:

> We, the members of, Chi Upsilon Sigma National Latin Sorority, Incorporated, aware of the prejudices and obstacles facing the minority women of our communities, dedicate ourselves to improving these conditions and to working towards the betterment of all women. We have unified ourselves through the sisterhood of *Corazones Unidos Siempre* and by our Founders' ideals of open communication and community service, as well as the development of political, educational, cultural and social awareness. We devote ourselves to this challenge, to be achieved through hard work, patience and the collective effort to educate, as is exemplified in our motto, 'Wisdom Through Education'.

As I will show in the rest of this dissertation, this mission statement continues to inform undergraduates' political practices and their understandings of their relationships to power.

Today CUS has 76 undergraduate chapters and 13 graduate chapters chartered in 17 states with nearly 2000 members. CUS is run by and for Sisters. Its leadership includes a Board of Trustees, a Board of Directors, five Regional Boards, and half a dozen service committees. (For example, the historical committee which is charged with preserving and documenting CUS history.) At the undergraduate chapter level, CUS follows a relatively non-hierarchical model of leadership. Although they hold formal positions (president, vice president, treasurer etc.) the majority of the Sisters' programming is executed using collaborative models of leadership that take into account individual Sister's workloads, abilities, and desires.

Women typically become members of CUS during their undergraduate careers, but some women do join just after graduation or as graduate students. In my study, all the Sisters interviewed had become members during their undergraduate careers. While the process of becoming a member is sacred to CUS, women generally meet a Sister and learn more about the organization and/or attend an informational meeting.[31] The Sisters and interested individuals get to know each other (and the chapter and organization) and then mutually decide that membership is in both parties' best interest. In order to keep an undergraduate chapter running, the Sisters must meet their university programming, intake, and GPA requirements. Additionally, every undergraduate chapter of CUS has the same programming and fundraising requirements they must complete each academic year. For example, the Sisters must host one program on each of their awarenesses (political, educational, cultural, and social) annually. In addition to working together on programming the Sisters also spend time together doing homework, sharing meals and going out (dancing, parties, etc.).

After graduation, Sisters have many opportunities to stay involved. They can participate in Graduate chapters which run like undergraduate chapters without the university affiliation; these chapters primarily focus on undergraduate support, alumni outreach, and philanthropy. Alumni can also serve on Regional or National Boards, or

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[31] Commonly referred to as an "informational", it is a term used to describe a specific type of public event where a single POC Greek letter organization teaches unaffiliated and potentially interested people about the organization's history, mission, values, philanthropy and legacy on a specific campus as well as about the undergraduate and/or alumni members in attendance.

specific committees (undergraduates can in some capacities as well). Another option

for alumni is to join the organization' s national SSS team (also available to

undergraduates).[32] There are also less formal ways for alumni to stay active in CUS

including supporting undergraduate chapters, hosting annual social events, and

attending informal regional bonding events like family friendly visits to the pumpkin

patch.

Although the culture and practices of CUS, at both the alumni and

undergraduate levels, are nearly uniform,[33] each undergraduate chapter has its own

culture that is informed by its university and community contexts. In this study, I

analyzed the political practices of five undergraduate chapters, all located in

northeastern and central New Jersey: Belpre, Dandara, Mitchell, Mother Teresa, and

Tubman Universities.[34] In the following sections, I offer some insights into the

specific cultures of these universities and their corresponding CUS chapters[35].

*Belpre University*

Belpre is a regional public university and a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI)

that was once rumored to be losing its academic accreditation. It boasts a sprawling

campus in a suburban area approximately fifteen minutes from Mother Teresa. This

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[32] CUS' national performance team, Seven, is regionalized and primarily represents the organization in national competitions.

[33] I have spent time in formal and informal capacities with Sisters all over the country including, NJ, NY (upstate and city), DE, CT, VA, FL, TX, PA, RI and CA.

[34] School names have been changed to protect participants' identities.

[35] For detailed information on each of these university's demographics please see the appendix.

means that these two chapters are close to one another and spend a good deal of time supporting each other's programs. The campus has buildings from several different eras: some 1950s chic, some more modern, and others constructed or renovated somewhere in between. In its lifetime, Belpre has gone through several different names, and it moved to its current campus a few years after the start of the Vietnam War. Most of Belpre's students are commuters (84%) and it seems like anywhere you enter campus from you arrive in a massive parking lot.[36] Every time I visited this campus I got lost. Many of the buildings look similar, and I only found names on some of them.

In order to attend CUS events on this campus I had to be in the know. It wasn't enough to have a building location. I'd have to know that the building split in half and had two different room 102s or that it's named Benezet, but everyone calls it the tower. Belpre feels like an institution without a core identity. Some students are there to do their work and get home. Others enjoy hanging out and give themselves an on-campus experience without the cost of room and board. Some faculty are award winning scholars and others rarely publish research. When I came here to do some archival work in 2016 the university had hired their first university archivist only weeks before, and their archive, dating back to the mid-1800s, was yet to be established.

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[36] That you don't have permission to park in, but that's another story.

This university gives off a pro-Greek feel. Not only does it host the largest Meet the Greeks in the region, it also gives Greek organizations valuable space on campus. There is a Greek lounge inside of the relatively new University Center, and every Greek letter organization has a professional sign attached to the fences along the tennis and basketball courts. Belpre also has a Greek rock garden where every organization was permitted to decorate a small boulder to represent their organization. The Cussies' rock is bright red with black Greek letters (XΎΣ) and the words "Women of Wisdom."

Belpre has a veiled reputation for being a "safety" school, meaning that potential students apply just in case their preferred institution(s) prove inaccessible. In CUS, this chapter, like its university, has an ambiguous reputation. There was sometimes an undertone that implied these Sisters were less organized than others and at other times it was praised for having long standing annual benefit for cancer[37] and many alumnae with advanced degrees. The two Sisters I interviewed from here were very warm and nice. While this is true of many of my interviewees, I was particularly taken by their eagerness to help me and provide me with candid in-depth answers before I had firmly established my support for their chapter (via event attendance-participant observation).

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[37] Disease has been substituted to protect chapter's anonymity.

*Dandara*

Dandara is also a regional public university and an HSI. It feels huge when you first arrive, but it is actually relatively small and easy to navigate. The buildings are brick and designed with accessibility in mind; they all have automatic doors and ramps and elevators are easily found both inside and out. You have to drive through the hood[38] to get there, but it is firmly in the suburbs on a beautiful hill with a lot of greenery at the rear of the campus. Dandara is a commuter school and parking lots line three of the university's four perimeters. Dandara is also marked with large seemingly out of place abstract statues made of metal and concrete.

Dandara has a reputation for being in the middle, not so much mediocre as fair. It is not considered a bad school by undergraduates, but it is also not the best in their view. There is not much to do in the immediate area, but it does not impact Dandara's culture in the same way it does student experiences at Mother Teresa and Tubman. Many students transfer to Dandara, but few (including those who did not transfer) seem deeply connected to the campus. The library is full during the day, but it is also very quiet. In fact, it is the only library in the study that a Sister naturally whispered in as we walked through to the study room she'd booked for our interview.

In CUS world, Dandara is a young but large chapter, and I never went to an event that every undergraduate was able to attend. CUS events are usually held at

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[38] I learned long ago that the hood (in this area) is readily identified by the presence of bullet proof glass at the White Castle drive up window.

night, and aside from a few stragglers and those attending the CUS event, Dandara was eerily quiet by 9:00pm. The few times I visited during the day (including during a large tour) it was also pretty quiet. It seemed that everyone had a rhythm they maintained, that centered around a midday stop at Starbucks. Similarly, the Sisters here are good at keeping time. I never saw them rush before an event or lose their composure. They seem calm even when talking about stress, which is in line with their CUS reputation. They are known for being cool and a little scrappy. In this context, cool means stylish with a bit of a fly girl attitude. Here I use scrappy to mean kinda gangsta, like a chip on the shoulder without the negative connotation. They are social butterflies and although they do not often travel as a chapter to support other chapters their Sisters are frequently seen across the region spending time with Sisters and/ or chapters they have individual connections to.

This chapter commutes to school primarily from parents' homes with one or two off campus apartments in the mix. They spend their time between classes hanging out in groups of 2-3 doing homework, chatting and sharing meals. At the time I was in the field, Dandara was singularly committed to improving their chapter GPA and supporting Sisters who were having a more difficult time in their classes. They were also trying to navigate an internal issue about a Sister's response to her ex-boyfriend and new girlfriend. While they were candid with me in social spaces and during events, Dandara Sisters were the most difficult to schedule interviews with and seemingly the least interested.

*Mitchell University*

Mitchell is a massive public research university and a Primarily White Institution (PWI). It has all but consumed the city it calls home and has additional campuses in neighboring townships. Some of its campuses are historic with Victorian homes serving as administrative offices; others are extraordinarily modern featuring angular architecture and metal facades. Mitchell has houses for (implicitly)White fraternities and sororities (Ch. 5) in a popular location, but they are not run by the university. The Cussies, who do not have a house or a space to call their own on campus, spend a fair amount of their time travelling between campuses. Bus rides are part of their daily routines and sometimes the Sisters opt out of on campus events because of the travel time.

Mitchell is one of the oldest and largest undergraduate chapters in the study (and in CUS), and, much like their campuses, the Sisters are spread all over town. One Sister lives alone downtown, and two others live in single dorms on a newly renovated campus. Another few share an apartment on a popular dorm-heavy campus that features a few chain restaurants, a diner, and a movie theater. Two more Sisters live in "Little Mexico" with some other girls (not Cussies) and so on and so forth. Their housing options highlight some internal class differences. The majority of the chapter has at least one parent with an undergraduate degree, and three of the Sisters interviewed have at least one parent with a graduate degree.

Mitchell runs well researched programs, and they, unlike the other chapters in the study, solicit feedback from the audience via comment cards. The Sisters report that their chapter has an on-campus reputation for taking themselves too seriously

which they attribute to their commitment to professionalism. The Cussies at Mitchell have a reputation within CUS for being insular. They travel less to support other chapters and in turn receive less support. However, they are well supported by their recent and older alumni. At nearly every event they host at least one alumnus is in attendance and/or playing an active role in its execution. This chapter took time to get to know, but they were remarkably interested in this study and my research process.

*Mother Teresa*

Mother Teresa is a private Catholic college and, like Mitchell and Tubman, a PWI. I am only able to enter the iron and stone fencing after speaking with a security guard. She asks me a few questions about my business on campus, writes down the make, model, and license plate number of my vehicle, hands me a parking pass and then lifts the parking lot gate, allowing me to proceed. When I took the university prescribed directions I drove through a lovely upscale village with magnificent historic homes and a quaint downtown. When I followed my GPS home, I drove one block south of campus straight into the hood. The wealth gap is on full display in this area, and students are encouraged by university administrators and their peers to only turn left into the "safe" small village when leaving the campus gates. There is not much to do in this "safe" area and most students' recreational activities are limited to campus, local commuter apartments and weekend trips into the city (NYC). The university addresses this issue by providing a shuttle to the local grocery store and on the weekends, to a mall and a complex with a Best Buy, Target and Whole Foods both located a 25 minute drive from the school.

The campus itself looks like the quintessential college brochure. It features perfectly manicured lawns, flowering trees, a beautiful chapel, and a magnificent library with quotes etched in stone on the outside of the atrium. Then, largely out of place with the classic look and feel of the campus, a massive state of the art gymnasium with floor to ceiling glass windows on the second floor comes into view. Mother Teresa is well known for several of its Division I sports teams who can be spotted throughout campus seemingly always sporting brand new Mother Teresa branded gear.

Although Mother Teresa is a Catholic University, the students are generally no more religious than their peers at other institutions in the study. That being said, Mother Teresa did put out a public relations campaign in 2017 highlighting their growing Muslim student population citing that this group of students was attracted to Mother Teresa's commitment to faith. According to the Sisters, Mother Teresa has a reputation for being easy to get into and hard to graduate from, and many students transfer out of the institution after their first or second year citing its expensive tuition. Mother Teresa attracts a range of students including those from incredibly wealthy families, talented athletes, and local commuters. At the end of my fieldwork, Mother Teresa became a Research Level 2 university, but the prestige indicated by the designation is contradicted by some of their alumni in the social sciences calling the education they received "a joke." Overall, Mother Teresa works hard to maintain an elitist culture by hosting a legacy day, white tie fundraisers, and alumni weekends that quite literally bring an amusement park to campus.

In line with this characterization, tuition at Mother Teresa is more expensive than every other university in the study, save Tubman, and the Sisters are paying for it with a mix of grants, scholarships, work-study and off-campus jobs, and quite a few loans. As a whole, the Cussies at Mother Teresa and Tubman are more concerned about money than their Sisters at other chapters. Every Sister at Mother Teresa works at least part time and two Sisters held two part-time jobs while maintaining a full-time course load. On campus, the girls are known for being serious students and reliable Greeks (support other chapters, meet their requirements etc.) who know how to have a good time on the weekends. In CUS world, this chapter is known for being smart and well-traveled as many of their Sisters go on to graduate school and/or study abroad. Mother Teresa Cussies are also known to be extremely supportive of other chapters, including those further away and take 3-5 long distance trips a year to support small chapters in neighboring states.

*Tubman University*

Tubman is a private liberal arts college located about a 30 minute drive from Mitchell. It is in an obviously wealthy community, and its campus is a mix of classic brick buildings and dated then modern structures from the second half of the 20th century, and one or two newer additions. Tubman requires all students to spend two years living on campus with certain exemptions. Tubman also requires that all (White) Greeks who live on campus live in their respective fraternity and sorority houses. These houses are non-descript brick dorms on the outskirts of the campus that are run by the university. The Cussies and other POC Greeks are not required to live

together or in specific dorms. Tubman has old money but a waning legacy feel to it. At the surface, the campus looks well-kept with its sweeping lake and brand-new cafeteria, but on the inside the classrooms, desks, facilities, etc. are in need of updating and repair.

There are two Sisters at Tubman, and they, along with their recent alumnae, have formed what for all intents and purposes is an actual family. Like Mitchell, alumni attend all of their programs. One Sister who is a graduate student on their campus and works in the Housing and Residence Life Office even runs a program or two a semester. After many of these events, this group gets dinner together or makes plans for the next few days. This is not unusual for CUS; many Sisters are as close as family. However, Tubman is unique because the entire chapter is involved in this type of relationship. Granted, Tubman is the smallest chapter in the study (from founding to present), but Tubman's university contexts, namely the isolated location and residency requirement fosters these types of relationships. Tubman is a small university (under 5,000 students) in the suburbs sandwiched between a park and a country club. There is minimal public transportation in the area and save one off campus restaurant that is a 30-minute walk from the nearest point on campus there is little to do off campus. Tubman, like Mother Teresa, its liberal arts college counterpart, does offer students shuttle transportation to a local mall, but the likeness ends there. Tubman stands in sharp contrast to Mother Teresa, which has nearly 5,000 more students (over 10k), a large commuter population, and quick access to NYC and the rest of NJ via train or bus.

Tubman's programs are unique, well researched and presented, and taken as a whole a bit more formal than some other CUS chapters. Instead of collaborating on a program's development (as is more common in larger chapters) the two Tubman Sisters develop and execute a program on their own with minimal day-of support from their chapter (fellow undergraduate and alumnae in attendance). Similarly, in lieu of formal meetings the two undergraduates frequently plan their semester on the phone. This dynamic was explained to me as "We work well together. We don't have to have a lot of discussions." In CUS, this chapter is known for being on point and tight knit, maybe even a little insular. However, that designation does not carry the same negative connotation for Tubman as it does for Mitchell. In my experience, the Sisters were warm and open to my study. I was invited to after event "family" (my word) activities several times. I was also excluded several times.

Belpre, Dandara, Mitchell, Mother Teresa, and Tubman and their corresponding CUS chapters represent unique demographic and cultural settings. Their differences include institution type, chapter age, and relationships to Greek life. The divergent racial/ethnic and class contexts represented by the individual universities facilitated my analysis of academic institutions' roles, particularly within the disciplinary domain of power, in mediating and shaping young Latinas' political practices. The five chapters in the study were also selected because of the historical relevance of Northeastern and central NJ to both CUS and the Latinx Greek Movement. This area also has the highest concentration of undergraduate chapters of

CUS in the nation. This concentration provided the opportunity to understand the

Sisters political practices at the heart of their spread and development.

METHODS

This study uses three primary methods to provide a holistic picture of Cussies'

politics. Specifically, it uses a systematic content analysis of CUS national

organizational records, in-depth interviews with current undergraduate members from

five chapters of CUS, and participant observation at 75 events held at these chapters.

*Content Analysis*

In late September 2016, CUS made ten years of organizational records

available to me and my research team, participants in UC Santa Cruz's Chicano

Latino Research Centers' Undergraduate Research Apprenticeship Program

(URAP).[39] These were used to identify patterns in the activities and practices of CUS

nationally. These records contain images and descriptions, including lists of co-

sponsors, of the majority of events hosted and co-sponsored by every chapter of the

organization nationwide 2005-2015. A description of the national requirements that

each chapter must meet in order to remain in good standing with the organization was

also provided at this time.

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[39] URAP is a mentorship program that provides undergraduates with hands-on research experience and
supports their pursuits of graduate and professional studies. The Chicano Latino Research Center has
since been renamed the Research Center for the Americas.

Analysis of CUS's chapter level records provided me with insight into how undergraduates represent their engagement practices. A close reading of these materials and an inductive approach were used to generate specific codes for event type, target audience, topic addressed, engagement practices represented in the report (such as volunteering, hosting a workshop, or protesting), institution type, and the narratives the Sisters create around these practices. These records are incomplete, but they provided more than enough insight to inform the development of the interview guide and contextualize the study. I used them as a launching point and placed their insights in conversation with the data I collected from participant observation and interviews to inform my analysis.

*Participant Observation and Interviews*

I began my participant observation by attending as many CUS events as possible. I had been away from the community for several years and needed to acquaint myself with a few new generations of Cussies. Despite its size, CUS is incredibly close knit, (perhaps because of its frequent regional and national events) and it is normal to see Sisters from one chapter supporting another chapter's event. For example, when I went to Mother Teresa it was fairly common to see Sisters from both Dandara and Belpre Universities, even though their universities were 35 and 20 minutes away respectively. In this way I also spent time with and learned from the insights of Sisters from chapters and States not included in this study's design.

I spent 18 months in the field attending chapter, regional and national CUS events. In total, I attended over 75 public CUS events hosted by undergraduates. I also attended over 200 casual/social gatherings, 2 regional retreats and the 2018 biennial national conference. The events hosted on campus included informationals, Meet the Greeks,[40] events on various Latinx cultures, state-centric political issues, and gender topics. I was provided access to over 200 informal social gatherings which took place in dorm rooms, off and on campus apartments, alumni's homes, restaurants, and on campus hang out spots. The conversations in these spaces deepened my understanding of the undergraduates and their thought processes.

In the field, I kept notes in a notebook when acceptable, made voice memos after the event and/or jotted down notes as soon as I was able. The patterns that emerged from these notes frequently corresponded with codes from content analysis and were added along with new codes to the codebook I used to tag the audio clips of the one on one interviews I conducted with undergraduates. In total I interviewed 25 undergraduate Sisters who attended 1 of the 5 universities in the study. In some cases this was and remained the chapters' size (Tubman and Belpre), while in others the number of Sisters fluctuated from semester to semester (graduation and intake). I leveraged my status as a Sister to make connections and invited every undergraduate

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[40] Meet the Greeks is a large event that's primary purpose is to acquaint unaffiliated undergraduates with the various Greek cultures and organizations their university has to offer. It is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

at these schools to meet with me. Everyone I asked responded positively, but as is the case with busy people, some of these plans never came to fruition. As a general rule of thumb I never asked a Sister about scheduling an interview more than twice. My interviews with undergraduates were typically between 60-90 minutes and covered topics such as interest in CUS, activities of the organization, individual and chapter relationships to the university, constructions of the political and personal demographics. Examined as a whole, the majority of the Sisters are first generation undergraduates, working class, Latinas between the ages of 19 and 22. The Cussies demographics alone challenge stereotypes of sorority women and provide insight into CUS' culture.

I also conducted two interviews with a Founding Mother. During one of my interviews with this Founding Mother, a Sister from 1983 (three years after founding) stopped by, and I completed the second half of the interview as a joint session. My interviews with these women provided detail and story line to the narrative of the emergence of CUS and CUS practices that I had pieced together from a pre-dissertation study of the archival materials at several universities related to the emergence of Latinx Greek life. I also had several informal conversations with campus staff about Greek life and campus climate at conferences, on campus, and at social gatherings.

*Limitations*

This study's broader applicability is limited as its central argument is that multiple overlapping contexts play mediating roles in political expression indicating its findings are less easily applied to other organizations and other young women's experiences. Similarly, its focus on CUS within New Jersey does not answer questions about organizational cultures' role in mediating Latina politics when policing (deciding what is and isn't part of the organization's culture and practice) is done within smaller groups outside of the nucleus of activity. While some of this policing is still performed via social media and regional/national meetings 2-3 times a year the loss of external (extra-chapter) in person daily interactions might very well change the experience of CUS. Additionally, my insights on the role of institutional culture are also bounded by the number of cases in the study. I have also excluded the Sisters' critiques of CUS, which primarily expressed concern over internal operating procedures, such as when and how paperwork is due. I will share these findings with CUS, but this information did not provide rich insight into the role of organizational culture in shaping the Sisters 'political practices and was therefore omitted. Lastly, some might also understand my relationship to Chi Upsilon Sigma National Latin Sorority Inc. as a limitation of this study. Differently, I understand my positionality as an asset to this investigation.

## Researcher Positionality

I am a Cussie, an insider, and I have spent nearly nine years immersed in the culture of CUS, Latinx and POC Greek life. I understand and naturally navigate the language, symbols and expected behaviors of the community. This experience uniquely qualifies me to analyze and interpret the actions and responses of the women in the study. However, I am also an outsider, as I am no longer part of the daily operations of an undergraduate chapter. This insider/outsider status places me in an intersubjective space (Whaley 2010), which can sometimes feel like walking a tightrope. I want to provide a thorough analysis of the political practices in the CUS space while simultaneously protecting CUS and my POC Greek community from unnecessary and potentially harmful exposure.

As a scholar I, following the tradition of many scholars and activists involved in the intersectional knowledge project, do not believe in objectivity (Crawford and Marecek 1989; Collins 2015; Thomas 2017; Taylor 2018). It is my view that a scholar's lived experiences and relationships to power mediate and shape the questions they ask, the studies they design and the arguments they craft. In line with this framing, I understand that my experience as a Cussie and my relationship to CUS have played a significant role in this study. We[the Cussies] always say "You get [from CUS] what you put into it." I have put a lot into CUS, not only as a member of the Historical Committee or my brief time as Director of Parliamentary Procedure, but as an undergraduate, alumna, and Sister. In turn, she has given me a great deal. In terms of this research, my relationship to CUS provided me with access that had been

denied to other researchers (Reyes 2018). It also facilitated the recruitment of research participants and streamlined my analysis. Few researchers can recall key aspects of their observations verbatim, but CUS has given me this privilege. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, my relationship to CUS helps me to protect the privacy of participants in my study (Name withheld 2017).[41]

I am committed to a feminist analytic, that centers the voices of women, and looks to engage with the nuances and intricacies of their lived experiences. In other words, in this project, my work as a scholar is to frame, analyze, and place in conversation with existing theories the Cussies' multifaceted insights on power and politics that are informed and mediated by their distinct individual and collective relationships to power. My academic training and sorority membership facilitate this work as I am intimately familiar with the language and practices of both spaces of knowledge production. In some ways, this dissertation is a work of translation as I seek to frame CUS and scholarship in new ways that facilitate both communities' understandings of the other. To this end, I explain basic CUS practices in terms of theoretical and empirical insights and use casual language to develop and expand academic findings. It has been fulfilling and frustrating in equal measure as some things are inevitably lost in translation, but María Lugones reminds us that the closest we come to understanding (a concept, a theory, each other) is from repeatedly engaging the work and insights of others (2015).

CONCLUSION

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[41]This unaffiliated scholar, published details in their book that provided sufficient context to identify the organizations and some of the members they interacted with during field research.

In this chapter, I've provided a general overview of sororities, explained some aspects of POC Greek culture, shared a basic history of CUS, and explored individual chapter contexts. This "background" information is crucial, not only to understand the subsequent chapters' arguments, but more importantly to better understand the political practices of sorority women. The organization of Greek life, POC Greek culture, CUS history and university dynamics all play significant roles in the Cussies' experiences; in many ways they mark the contours of CUS, one of the Sisters' most important communities. Collins argues that "people use the construct of community to think and do politics" (2017: 28); she also offers that political knowledges of ordinary people are often present in "hidden transcripts" found in the "specific language or cultural practices of community" (Santos, Nunes, and Meneses 2007; Hill 2010:10). Applied to CUS this framing suggests that the ability to learn from and engage with the political knowledges of ordinary (as opposed to explicitly activist) young Latinas is contingent on an understanding of the cultural practices of their sorority. In the next chapter, I examine how the Cussies leverage their cultural practices (step, strolling, and saluting) as political tools to claim power by shifting their relationships to matrices of domination.

Chapter Three: Claiming Power
Meet the Greeks: "You Want to Go Where the Hype is"

I'm about one block away, and I can already see the line for Meet the Greeks (MTGs) forming around the University Center. When it's my turn to enter, I slide my phone and keys across a plastic fold up table and walk through a metal detector. I am not wearing any metal, and I am waved past the additional screening section that features hand-held wands and gloved pat-downs. I pick up my belongings and walk to the box office where I exchange five dollars for a ticket. I continue down the hallway to another plastic table. I hand over my driver's license and sign-in. My license is photographed and then returned to me. My ticket is exchanged for a neon orange wristband, and once the stranger smoothed the adhesive against my skin, I am allowed to enter the gymnasium.

The music is so loud the blood in my ears follows the baseline. In the center of the massive space is a temporary stage facing wooden bleachers already filled with Greeks and unaffiliated undergraduates. I've entered into the open area behind the stage. It is lined with tables that have been decorated by each Greek letter organization chartered at Belpre University, a regional public school. The CUS table is draped with a black tablecloth and an afghan with the CUS shield. On top of the table is a trifold the Cussies have created to display pictures of the Sisters and information on the organization's mission and values. There is also candy, a signup sheet, brochures, a small handout with upcoming programs, and a few awards highlighting programming and academic accolades the chapter has received from

both CUS and their university. The Sisters welcome me and introduce me to a handful of other Greeks with whom they are socializing. The show has already started behind us. A young White woman from a NPC[42] sorority is on stage in sky-high heels and a fresh blow out talking about her organization, but none of the Greeks, including her own council, seem to be paying attention. When other POC Greek letter organizations take the stage to perform, the Cussies turn around, watch, clap, and sometimes yell out to support their friends. When CUS is on deck (next to perform), a group of about 35 Cussies moves to crowd the stage and the front rows of the bleachers.

Finally, a young woman takes the stage and says: "Hi my name is Cynthia, and I am a PROUD Sister of Chi Upsilon Sigma National Latin Sorority Incorporated. We were founded on April 29, 1980 and chartered here at Belpre on month, date, year[43]. We are the first INDEPENDENT Latina organization; that means that we do not have a brotherhood organization. We are also the first Latina organization to step and stroll. If you would like to learn more about us stop by our table and talk to any Sister." Cynthia steps off the stage and gets in line with other Sisters. These five women are wearing matching CUS baseball jerseys (open with black tank tops underneath), black leggings, black combat boots, bright red lipstick, and their hair in big natural curls or flat iron straight. Led out by alumna from their

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[42] National Panhellenic Conference is an umbrella organization for 26 "mainstream" sororities; it is not to be confused with the National Pan-Hellenic Council, the umbrella organization for the nine oldest Black Greek Letter Organizations, commonly referred to as the Divine Nine.

[43] This information would identify the chapter and creating a date might accidentally implicate another.

chapter, these women line up in height order as a single unit, nose to hair, arms locked under the arms of the Sister in front of her and march into the center of the stage where they begin to salute.

For CUS, saluting is a militaristic recitation that is performed in public spaces to honor the Founding Mothers and the organization. It is also used to assert the exclusive status of CUS and the work it takes to be a Cussie. A salute is performed in unison and is punctuated by vocal inflection and sharp movements like stomping and punching the ground. It's recitation includes references to the founding of a "dynasty" (CUS), their motto "wisdom through education," and CUS symbols like the owl and colors (red, black and beige). The salute also include boundary setting and status maintaining language like "step aside, and let us through," "imitated, never duplicated" and "you know it aint easy, haaaaaard work and sweat." It closes with language that nods to the continuity of CUS and an emphatic reminder of its exclusivity: "As we pass down the torch, we stand with our heads held high/As the PROUDEST Sisters of Chi Upsilon Sigma, National Latin Sorority Incorporated/Where only the STRONG survive; weak hearts need not apply."

After the salute has concluded, two Sisters leave the stage, and the three remaining begin to step. These coordinated, staccato movements, create a rhythm with slaps and stomps that seduces the audience into an expectant lull. As the Cussies move they chant:

WE! ARE! THE!
Sisters of CUS, and we're here to say, we are gonna rock it tonight, in each and

eeevery way

it's clear to the eye, as you can see, that we're the hottest Sisters that you'll eeeever meet

so sit back and relax as we give you a taste,

we'll take a beat so sweet and throw it all in your, all in your, all in your face,

YOUR FACE

As soon as they finish, trap music begins blaring from the speakers, three Sisters rush the stage, and the six Sisters begin to stroll--a dance performed in a moving line[44] with distinct movements that characterize an organization. In total, they perform three strolls to three different songs. The combination is equal parts high energy, toughness, and sensuality. Their bodies move seamlessly from liquid body rolls to marching band precision, sharing the narrative they've created of Latina womanhood. In their story, Latinas are part warrior, part sensual fantasy and all pride. It takes work to create and put on this show, but that's the point. Not everyone can do it; they are there to bring attention to their existence and by extension their work. A Cussie is not separate from her mission, and their performance is laced with references to this identity as demonstrated by their chants, calls, and hand signs.

Finally, the Sisters on stage beckon to the crowd and the majority of Sisters in the audience join them on stage and around the platform. Samir's Theme (start at 7 seconds), a techno song that builds anticipation and crescendos into a hype baseline, starts playing from the speakers, and all 30 plus Sisters begin to stroll on and around the elevated platform. Once the stroll is performed a few times, the music is turned

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[44] During MTGs performances moving in a line is not a necessary practice.

off. And all present Sisters (including those who did not partake in the final stroll) begin to shout, many jumping up and down and looking up at the ceiling and cupping their mouths:

SO WE WEREN'T THE FIRST, DAMN SURE WON'T BE THE LAST, BUT CUS SISTERHOOD, WAS MADE TO LAST, WE ARE THE WOMEN OF WISDOM, THE SISTERS IN RED, AND IF I COULDN'T BE A CUSSIE THAN I'D RATHER BE DEAD. CHIIIIIII-HOOOT.

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Meet the Greeks is *the* event of the semester. It is an opportunity for POC Greek letter organizations to share their culture, attract interests, and show off their membership and performance skills. It is a space to meet potential interests and socialize that is attended by unaffiliated undergraduates, university officials, mainstream Greeks[45], and undergraduate and alumni members of POC Greek letter organizations.  Nowhere is Sisters' curated CUS identity better on display than MTGs, where each chapter works to showcase their organization in a 3-7-minute time slot[46].

In all its spectacle the Sisters' MTGs performance is the physical display of the Cussies' internalized political identity, and Sisters use it to express who they are

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[45] At some universities, like Mother Teresa University, mainstream MTGs and POC MTGs are held separately and are not attended by their Mainstream counterparts.

[46] Time alloted for the performance is determined by the university and/or Greek council.

as an organization and sisterhood. Their performance is virtually uniform across campuses, and the salute, closing stroll and chant are known by every single member. Aspects of MTGs performance are replicated in interest meetings, in social spaces, and at graduations. In these spaces Cussies quite literally shout they are exceptional, strong, capable, sexy, and their movements, unity and numbers showcase the power they have to be heard, to empower, and to survive. Through repetition this CUS identity is internalized, and it becomes part of the Sisters' individual identities as they are "always wearing their letters" (figuratively). For example, Chanel[47], a proud Afro-Dominican, and I were in her dorm living room when she explained strolling to me:

> I feel like it's in me, innate or something. I don't want to say strolling is a part of me because it is not. But for me, dance tells a story, my feet tell stories that I can't really explain in words. Strolls have different messages. The message I'm trying to give off is this is me and my Sisters. It's a simple message. But the unity that we have it's synchronized, and we're synchronized. It relates to the bond we have. My purpose[for strolling] is I'm proud to perform, to be here, a sense of pride to be part of an organization and what it stands for. I'd rather stroll than tell you.

These constructions of the organization go beyond branding as the CUS's Board of Directors has consciously moved away from language and symbols like "only the strong survive, weak hearts need not apply" and black combat boots. Despite these efforts, undergraduates and alumni[48] alike cling to these identifiers as markers of a shared powerful independent internalized identity.

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[47] Chanel selected her own pseudynm she wanted to "make it fancy."
[48] CUS is a women's organization, and the sisters interviewed identified as women. However, not every sister of CUS identifies as a woman.

In this chapter, I use MTGs as a representative example of the ways in which Cussies, across university contexts, affirm the nexus of womanhood and *Latinidad*[49] as sexy, intelligent, and strong. I argue Cussies use these identities to claim space and power in a university context that too often does not see or value them (Ch. 5) and assert themselves (young Latinas) as a powerful group. I begin by demonstrating how the Sisters express confidence via sensuality in order to harness the erotic as power and amplify their collective voice (Lorde 1984/ 2007). Later, I analyze how Cussies' claim power by embodying celebrated aspects of hegemonic masculinity. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the relationship between confidence, sisterhood and collective power. To facilitate this analysis my examination of power (in the context of MTGs) focuses on the Sisters' ability to create, define and claim both power and space within the interpersonal domain.

CLAIMING POWER

MTGs' purpose is for Greek letter organizations to introduce/showcase their organization. For Sisters, Cussies are identifiable only by their confidence, their willingness to draw attention to themselves and strategically use their voice in service of their shared mission. Candelaria, a Dominican Social Work major, explained this

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[49]Following Cristina Khan, I reference *Latinidad* "as a tool to recognize women's capacity to embody and express alternative knowledges and realities while contending with the  U.S. black–white racial binary" (2019).

to me over $12 acai bowls. She is home for the weekend from Mother Theresa

University, and she suggested we try this new spot downtown. She tells me

> Cussies are all just very very different. We say you know when a Cussie walks into the room because you kinda see like the way they are [by] how they walk in. If there's a situation, if there's an issue, they'll be that person to speak up and say something about it, voice their opinion and not [be] scared. They're like that one person that needs to say something, and they might be the only ones and they don't care. They kinda just do what they have to do in order to have their voice be heard.

Candelaria's description of Cussies as confident women in command of their

presence and voice is representative of a shared collective identity (Melucci 1995;

Polletta and Jasper 2001). I've heard many derivatives of her answer, including this

one from Delia, who attends Mitchell University, an hour south of Mother Teresa:

> A lot of people have their own perception of what a Cussie looks like. No Cussies are not these domineering women with big curly hair. Yes, Sisters have curly hair. Yes, Sisters come in all different shapes and sizes. We also have straight hair, and we are also small [describing herself]. But we are super tall and really curvy, and sometimes we are skinny. And sometimes we are imperfect.[She grows quiet while saying imperfect, pausing in a moment of reflection. She continues at a normal volume, looking directly at me, deliberately choosing her words.] A CUS Sister looks like a CUS Sister because of how she carries herself not what she actually looks like. They are women who are very confident, and it doesn't always mean someone who is loud that's like very in your face. There's no problem with that if that's the kind of person you are, but even if it was a quiet confidence. If something was going to happen if they wanted to speak up in appreciation or opposition of that, they would.

The Sisters indicate that physical and intellectual confidence are markers of

CUS membership by highlighting how a Sister carries herself and shares her

thoughts, even her unpopular opinions. Self-assurance is central to Cussies'

understanding of themselves, which Candelaria signals by drawing attention to the

Sisters' courage of conviction with the phrases "voice their opinion and not be

scared" and "do what they have to do in order to be heard." Similarly, Miguelina, a Sister from Tubman University states matter of factly "I truly believe that every Sister looks like a strong, very intelligent woman." At MTGs, this confidence is conveyed through the Sisters' bold performance, which stretches constructions of femininity and masculinity as it seamlessly juxtaposes the erotic and militaristic as sources of power.

*The Most Captivating Sisters You've Ever Met*

While saluting the Cussies refer to themselves as the "most captivating Sisters, you've ever met." This description is not unique to saluting, and at many Greek events it is commonplace for Sisters to introduce themselves as My name is \_\_\_\_, and I am a *captivating* sister of Chi Upsilon Sigma. The Sisters' consistent use of "captivating " to describe themselves suggests that in their view, outsiders (people who are not Cussies) are struck by their presence, enchanted by their performance and enthralled in their spectacle. Similarly, while stepping at MTGs Sisters chant "it's clear to the eye, as you can see, that we're the hottest Sisters that you'll eeeever meet" and encircle the entirety of their bodies with sensual arm movements that mark their every curve as desirable further emphasizing their ability to hold the room. Following this pattern, while saluting they roll their neck and chest to caaaaaaptivate the audience with their cascading hair and long necks. Read together the Cussies' emphasis on physical captivation suggests a specific practice of self sexualizing via stepping, strolling and saluting that is intended to claim the power of the erotic for themselves.

Lorde defines the erotic "as an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives" (1984/2007:55). In line with Lorde's framing these women are harnessing this power through their performances which combine dance, history, love, work, and daily life into a celebration of Latina womanhood. This celebration of Latinas' power via disciplined organizational performance is an empowering process through which they "express and control their image in this public space in order to assert themselves as sexually confident women" (Whaley 2010:83). This practice of consistently celebrating themselves builds the confidence that becomes the marker of the collective organizational identity the Sisters described. In this way gesturing to the parts of themselves that have been sexualized by patriarchal society and mainstream media (Arrizón 2008; Guzmán 2010) the Sisters resist pornographic "suppression of true feeling" and instead reclaims the power of the erotic as "deeply female and spiritual" (Lorde 1984/ 2007:53-54). In their performance sensuality, the erotic, represents joy and freedom and is used to upset structures of domination that work to subordinate and marginalize Latinas. This pattern is seen in Maya Angelou's poem "Still I Rise" in which the hypersexualized Black woman conveys confidence via "sexiness" and "sassiness" to assert her self-worth and challenge the "you" that seeks to physically, emotionally, and spiritually harm her (1978:41-42).

For young Latinas, within a patriarchal society "you" comes in many forms, including the government, their universities, and interpersonal and professional

relationships. Many media representations of women are also especially harmful (Behm-Morawitz and Mastro 2008; Grabe, Ward and Hide 2008) and frequently sexualize and subordinate women (Ali and Shahwar 2011; R.Collins 2011; Randazzo, Farmer, and Lamb 2015; Shaikh, Bughio, and Kadri 2015). In Western popular culture, Women of Color are especially likely to be understood in this way as historic and ongoing processes of racialization and colonization converge in the fetishization of bodies of color (Beltran 2002; Patel 2008; Rojas 2010; Gammage 2016). For young Latinas these stereotypes are reinforced through both English and Spanish language media, which frequently idealize whiteness as the standard of beauty and encourage Black and Brown women to see themselves as less appealing, less sexy, and less worthy of attention (Molina-Guzmán 2010; Rivadeneyra 2011; Griffin 2014).The Cussies' assertion of power through hypersensuality might be characterized as reifying these distributions of power that exoticize and commodify brown women's bodies. However, power and the practices used to signify it are context dependent (Collins 1990).

In the layered context of their public performances, the Sisters' coupling of sensual physicality and direct, unambiguous language, simultaneously resists hyper-sexual stereotypes of Latina womanhood (by harnessing the power of the erotic) and strategically leverages the attention their bodies draw to introduce a broad audience to their mission and pro-woman, pro-POC, pro-immigrant programming. In this way, their bodies serve as a megaphone to amplify and distribute their voice rendering Latina sorority public performance a significant political practice. Marginalized

communities' voices are less likely to be heard than privileged groups (Verba et al. 1995; Cohen et al. 1997; Cohen 1999; Bernard 2016; Jenkins et al. 2016). The Cussies challenge this distribution of power by "making the voices of ethnic women louder" and in doing so shifting who gets heard and who tells their stories. They create and display their own understanding and construction of Latina power that works to displace silencing mechanisms like pervasive stereotypes and institutional regulations.[50]

This practice of body as loudspeaker should not be read as a strategic use of "erotic capital" as their performance does not convey "grace, charm or social skills" or beauty as Hakim defines it (2011:12). Instead, Cussies' performances explicitly challenge their objectification. For example, when new members are welcomed into the community they recite "Women united by a vision, strengthened by love friendship and a mission because we are not an object, face or image, because we know where we are from and where we are headed. Because we are proud of who we are. Just beCUS." As they recite "object, face or image" the Sisters use their right hands to wipe their faces as if to remove makeup or a mask which they then throw to the ground and stomp on. In the U.S. objectification and femininity are so closely tied that the Sisters' refusal to be commodified or celebrated for their looks may be read as unfeminine.

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[50] Institutional regulations discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

However, their performance does not indicate a rejection of makeup or femininity, which are celebrated by the Sisters in other public spaces, like MTGs. But rather it suggests a rejection of whiteness as the standard of beauty or what Norma Mendoza-Denton calls the "Oprah effect"[51] (2008) as they use their militant public performance to differentiate themselves from more docile forms of femininity. The Cussies embrace fashion "what one wears" and style "how one wears 'the what'" as physical markers of their erotic power and "move from mere object to self-determing subject"(Macías 2016:xx). The predominant CUS style at MTGs features big curls or slick straight locks, black eyeliner, red lips, long meticulously manicured acrylics and figure hugging leggings or jeans. Young Latinas' hairstyles, makeup and clothing, are both classed and raced, and used to express cultural difference (Bettie 2003; Ramirez 2009). For Cussies, their fashion and style choices signal power and are markers of *Latinidad*, reminiscent of distinctly Latina styles iconized by pachucas and cholas, that stand in contrast to their Panhellenic (White) counterparts whose looks feature pastels, light colored shimmery eyeshadow, barrel curls, shorter manicures and sky high heels. Unable or unwilling to pass as their White counterparts, who represent "acceptable" forms of femininity (Bettie 2003; Mendoza-Denton 2008; Ramirez 2009), the Cussies' individual presentation (makeup and dress) and collective performance assert their differences, thereby denaturalizing and destabilizing white washed constructions of "college student" and "sorority girl."

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[51] Mendoza-Denton defines the "Oprah Effect" as follows: ""...the "Oprah Effect" -when members of minority groups judge themselves by the aesthetic norms of the dominant group" (2008:159).

The Cussies rejection of White beauty standards is mirrored by some Women of Color sororities, like Lambda Tau Omega Sorority Inc. with their militant salutes and sexy strolls, and also diverges from other Women of Color sororities. The "Pretty Girls" of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., the first Black Sorority, provide a striking example of this difference. Their aesthetic is dainty, featuring the colors "salmon pink and apple green" (AKA 2019), modest dresses/skirts, stockings, and accessories like neck scarves and pearls. At many AKA new member presentations, new members sport pink, black or green tea length fit and flare dresses and sunglasses reminiscent of Audrey Heburn's iconic Breakfast at Tiffany's looks, some Sisters even wearing wrist length gloves and stylish headscarves to complete the tribute. At MTGs at Dandara University the AKAs' performance mirrors their style. They step gently and gracefully, exuding poise[52]; their feet keeping a steady beat as their hands move in unison to tell their story. At a recent new member presentation, the freshly minted AKAs recited:

> I know you heard those stories 'bout them AKAaaas
>
> With those perfect smiles, and their silky waaaaves [flipping long silk pressed hair]
>
> We are here to say, on this on this fine day
>
> We don't have to act. We don't have to perpetrate.
>
> We're pretty and conceited, that's what people say
>
> But when you're number one, you can act that way

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[52] Here "step" is used to refer to stepping.

In other performances, like MTGs, AKAs' use their hands to form "Ivy Mirrors" for themselves and their sisters to use to approvingly appraise themselves and jauntily primp their hair. Their performance and the way they carry themselves indicates a strictly enforced politics of respectability[53], which Deborah Whaley has described as a "recurring trope of [Black Sorority] step performance" (Whaley 2010:75).

The AKAs are also unable to pass as "White" but their public presentation holds no trace of the Cussies' erotic militarism. This difference between Cussies and AKAs' presentations of femininity may be attributed to historic differences in the experiences of Black women in the early 1900s and Latinas in the late 1970s which shaped their respective organizational identities, and continue to mediate their members political and personal expression. This is not to say that current undergraduates do not inform and shape the culture of their organizations and/or political expression,[54] but rather that existing traditions and culture attract certain types of members who in turn reinforce these cultural practices.

AKA was founded in 1908 at Howard University, a historically Black university. Early AKA(like many Pan-Hellenic (Black) organizations) has been critiqued as an elitist space that reinforced colorist paradigms by accepting and

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[53] A politics of respectability is the practice of "linking worthiness for respect" to a set of valued characteristics and behavioral practices, such as neatness and politeness, which in turn establishes "a behavioral 'entrance fee' to the right to respect and the right to full citizenship" (Higginbotham 1993; Harris 2003:213).

[54] See chapter 4 for a detailed explanation of the reciprocal relationship between current undergraduate political practices and organizational identity.

celebrating a particular model of Black womanhood: "fair skinned, wealthy, and educated" (Whaley 2010:23)[55]. In this context, it stands to reason that poise and grace, markers of education and wealth, and attributes frequently associated with whiteness, were valued in the AKA space. AKA, like all POC Greek letter organizations, has a deep reverence for their founders and organizational history. Emphasizing grace and femininity in their organizational identity may be part of their work to honor these legacies. It also bears mention that Black Women are consistently undervalued and hypersexualized (West 1995; Rahier 2011; Ashley 2013; Saint-Fleur 2017) and AKA's politics of respectability may have served/continues to serve as a tool of resistance to claim space and power for Black Women. Either way, today AKA is a more inclusive space (Whaley 2010) that maintains an organizational identity which values the ultra feminine.

On the other hand, CUS was founded at Rutgers University in 1980 by working class, first generation college students looking for a space to navigate the ostracization they experienced at home and at school. The founding members of CUS met in activist spaces and the national socio-political context of the 1970s and the legacies of the Young Lords and Black Panthers informed their worldview. During this time, their campus was a hotbed of political activity that featured protests against tuition hikes, de facto segregation, and the militarization of campus police (Rutgers University Yearbook Collection). In this context, the Founding Mothers learned that

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[55] Description used to describe Norma Boyd, a founder of AKA, but speaks to larger patterns Whaley identifies.

resistance via militarism commands respect. In order to claim that respect for themselves, the Founding Mothers embodied this particular form of maleness as an intentional translation of their *Latinidad*, and it is this practice that has become a key component of the Cussies' organizational identity and one of the mechanisms through which its members claim power. The undergraduates' experiences both inside and outside of the university have taught them that maleness is valued; this coupled with the historic influence of gendered militaristic practices in the CUS space creates a context where young Latinas leverage aspects of hegemonic masculinity, in concert with the erotic, to claim power.

*Hegemonic Masculinity*

Dissident femininity can be read as "going nowhere", and this reading comes with academic consequences for young Latinas (Bettie 2003:162). Araceli from Mother Teresa University outlines the implications of this reading in her experiences when she states "...we find a lot of the times the diverse groups or marginalized groups or minorities are taking the bad end of the stick. Basically, because we don't get the same opportunities as others or we may be seen as incompetent." At this moment our conversation was about racial/ethnic issues at her university, but her insights cannot be separated into racial and gendered experiences. Therefore her analysis that includes "we may be seen as incompetent" provides both racial/ethnic *and* gendered insights, and highlights a larger pattern of the exclusion of women, particularly Women of Color, in imaginaries of intelligent individuals. As Lugo-Lugo puts it "women are still, to this day, not seen as prone to reason or even possessing

intelligence" (2012:43). In university spaces, historically formed for the benefit of wealthy White males, power is connected to a form of hegemonic masculinity that is commonly expressed via intelligence and strength (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Hinojosa 2010; Garcia 2012). Cussies are neither White nor male, but they are intelligent and strong. They leverage these attributes to combat their exclusion from constructions of intelligence and power by embodying a form of hegemonic masculinity; in other words, in order to be understood as powerful the Cussies highlight these "masculine" traits (intelligence and strength) in MTGs, interest meetings, and public university spaces.

At MTGs the Cussies emphasize their intelligence by declaring their motto "Wisdom through Education" and calling themselves the "Women of Wisdom" during their performance. Similarly, the Cussies use symbolism to highlight their capable minds by connecting themselves and their organization to the almighty owl by referencing it in their salute ("an owl lead the way") and decorating their table with owl figurines and stickers. The owl is commonly used to represent intelligence and wisdom (Morris 2009), and the Sisters' association with the creature intimates that they too share these qualities. Outside of MTGs, Cussies assert themselves as intelligent by wearing para[56] at the library and logging study hours. For example, at Dandara University, a regional public school, the Sisters tracked their study hours in a

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[56] Organizational paraphernalia

CUS decorated binder that was kept in a publicly visible space[57]. Existing research finds men are "favored as prototypes of an intelligent person and the possession of typically masculine traits is emphasized in descriptions of intelligent women" (Szymanowicz and Furnham 2011:44) and that even in "highly masculine context[s], where competence and agency are very desirable and, indeed, are required for success, qualities like intelligence, competence, rationality, and ambition are still systematically less desirable for women" (Prentice and Carranza 2002:278-279). By leaning into intelligent descriptors, the Cussies are claiming a powerful masculine norm for themselves. This is not to say that intelligence should be read as male or that asserting intelligence is a denial of femininity, but rather that in the process of navigating existing power structures the Cussies have sought power from within their own capacities (intelligence) and, within the matrix of domination these women navigate, the display of that specific form of power is read as masculine by the individuals that represent and reinforce gender subordinating systems.

The Cussies also claim power via masculinity by framing themselves as aggressive and strong, albeit different. These traits are used to characterize an "ideal masculinity" or "hegemonic masculinity" that is understood in Western contexts as powerful, valuable and dominant in the gender hierarchy (Connell 1987; Garcia 2012). In the Cussies' corporal interpretation of hegemonic masculinity, aggression and strength occupy the same spaces. For example, at MTGs and new member

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[57] School gave the option of keeping a binder for Greeks, but many organizations did not participate. The Cussies had the only decorated binder.

presentations the Sisters march out as a unit sporting combat boots, furrowed brows and no-nonsense expressions. At new member presentations this militaristic aesthetic is amplified by the addition of slick tight buns and men's cut black jeans and hoodies.

Chanel explained to me that "when you have a bun on you're ready to take on any obstacle that's in front of you." Similarly, Migulina (Tubman) offers "[when we have buns on] we're showing our faces out, nothing can cover us." Their words portray the determination that the Cussies embody and supplement with the gravel in their voices as they begin to salute. The coordinated movements of their salute, strolls, and chants, also evoke masculine imagery as their feet stomp to force the ground to make space for them and their words. The Sisters' statements reinforce the narrative they create of their strength as they proclaim "the hard work and sweat" and "passion and courage" it takes to be a Cussie. Finally, in case their performance left the viewer with any doubt, they close their salutes and acknowledgements of other Sisters and Greeks with a signature "where only the STRONG SUR-VIVE, weak hearts need not apply"[58], where the syllables of survive are demarcated with two quick punches to the cement or stage.

The Cussies coordinated display of strength is bold, intense and intentionally militaristic, highlighting that not everyone can be a Cussie, and the fact that they are Sisters is worthy of celebration and acknowledgement. Going so far as to proclaim

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[58] I use a smaller font size for "weak hearts need not apply" to indicate a difference in the Sisters' intonation.

"And to all the haaaaaaaters in the crowd, don't be made because it's something you Could. Not. Do." In drawing attention to their grit and special status as Sisters, the Cussies pull power for themselves from the root of hegemonic masculinity's value by embodying militarism, the most "openly and aggressively celebrated" form of masculinity (Hockey 2003; McGregor 2003; Higate and Hopton 2005:433). In this way, they work to make Latinas and brown bodies read as powerful and worthy of celebration.

COLLECTIVE POLITICS OF ABERRANT FEMININITY

The Cussies bridge two seemingly disparate forms of power, the erotic and hegemonic masculinity, in order to actively construct an organizational identity that is intended to be read as powerful at home, with peers, in university spaces, and in larger socio-political spaces. Their practices shift in the moment and represent a multifaceted understanding and practice of Latina womanhood. Aida, a sophomore at Dandara University, describes how quickly these shifts take place and how they are read by independents (those without an organizational affiliation). I've met Aida a few times before our interview, and she comes off as cold and uninterested. She has always kissed me hello (a standard greeting) and welcomed me, but her general vibe is not necessarily mean, but not sweet either. Today she opens the door to her basement apartment and greets me with a big smile "Hey Alina!" We sit on her tiny couch separated from the washing machine by a small partition, and she describes her first impressions of CUS.

> CUS was there [at a casual Greek presentation for EOF[59] students the summer before their first year]; they scared me because of the faces that you have to make. I thought OMG no this is not for me. I was like OMG this is so intense! The other orgs didn't have their faces on... What interested me more is the fact that I was scared of it. I was like things that usually scare me I go for and end up loving it, like for coding, I thought that's not for me, but I love coding. What interested me when I went to the probate[60] was like OMG they're scary, but then after the probate I saw the love of everybody and all the Sisters came from different chapters. The probate itself [the "scary" part] you see a lot of hard work and dedication towards what they were doing that's what interested me, I wanted to do that for myself.

As Aida describes, the discipline and unity on display in new member presentations (and other CUS performances) can be intimidating for unaffiliated Latinas and others who are unfamiliar with POC Greek culture. However, during the show the energy the new members and POC Greek community creates is palpable. Audiences feed off of this energy, leaning in close to hear what the Sisters have to say about their shared mission (educating, elevating and empowering women) and their relationships to one another.

New member presentations, like MTGs, are fairly standardized and offer the Cussies the opportunity to showcase their organization and sisterhood. At new member presentations the Cussies showcase their unity, strength, perseverance and intelligence; similarly at MTGs they celebrate the same attributes as well as the

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[59]"The New Jersey Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) provides financial assistance and support services (e.g. counseling, tutoring, and developmental course work) to students from educationally and economically disadvantaged backgrounds who attend participating institutions of higher education in the State of New Jersey" (Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, State of New Jersey website accessed August 2019).

[60] New member presentation

erotic, "the lifeforce of women" represented through community, dance and personal presentation. Sisters identify Sisters by their confidence, which is consistently reinforced through the practice of being a Cussie (publicly declaring you are intelligent, desirable and strong, loudly claiming space and attention), in addition to these repetitive practices, by virtue of their membership in CUS, Cussies are consistently surrounded by a community that values them as smart and capable. While Cussies claim power from both feminine and masculine performance, their unity, their *sisterhood* is what they choose to display. Returning to Chanel's opening words about the message of MTGs performance "The message I'm trying to give off is this is me and my Sisters. It's a simple message. But the unity that we have it's synchronized, and we're synchronized. It relates to the bond we have." Nearly all of the undergraduates I interviewed and interacted with highlighted how the sister connection and "family" feel was a factor in their decision to join CUS. Laura, a Haitian and Dominican senior from Dandara University, states "I felt a genuine connection with them. [So I joined because I thought] It'll help me feel at home. Everyone says it is a home away from home, but it really is. These women were like my family members before they were my sorority Sisters."

Cussies also consistently highlighted how CUS made them feel welcomed and accepted as they are regardless of whether or not they became Sisters. When asked about the impact of CUS on her community Araceli, a sophomore at Mother Theresa responded "CUS has brought to light that basically it is okay to be a minority, and that you have a family no matter where you go, no matter what school you are at and

even after your graduate. It's not just an undergraduate thing. It can show people,

especially young women going into college, you can go to college and you're not

going to be alone." Similarly, their narratives about strolling forward unity and

relationship building across differences. Araceli and her chapter line sister, Yani,

describe stepping and strolling as relationship building blocks.

Araceli:

> It [strolling] just really binds you with the Sisters that you're doing it with
> because no matter where you are from...I could be with a Sister from any
> other chapter, but if we know the same stroll or the same step we can
> immediately jump in. And that's just an amazing way to create a connection
> with someone without even having to say something. That's one of the main
> reasons why I do it; it strengthens that bond.

Yanni:

> [The role of strolling] is unity because a lot of times those strolls are passed
> on through different chapters and stuff like that. So everyone is learning the
> same thing and it shows cohesiveness, but it also shows an outlet of creativity.
> Because everyone is able to make their own stroll, or for example, step and
> then when it spreads across the organization you see that unity aspect.

These relationships are significant for several reasons, including the Sisters'

sense of belonging on their campuses, which research has consistently shown plays a

critical role in students' mental well-being and retention and completion rates

(Hurtado and Carter 1997; Strayhorn 2008; Stebleton, Soria, and Huesman Jr. 2014;

Strayhorn 2012/2018). The Cussies' connection to each other and commitment to

consistently and repeatedly showcasing and centering those relationships, through

their synchronized performances and coordinated style, illustrates sisterhood as key

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mechanism in how these women claim power. Similar to the girls in Mendoza-Denton's study of gang-affiliated young Latinas, the Sisters use their personal presentation as a means to connect with one another via getting ready (selecting outfits and applying makeup as a group/with each others' help). Moreover, the Cussies, pachucas, and cholas also use(d) their style to signal in-group belonging and power (Mendoza-Denton 2008; Ramirez 2009). Here we see a pattern of young Latinas getting ready to go out and be seen together, signaling connection to each other, and being read as a unit of aberrant women. These groups share a distinctly Latina aesthetic that does not fit western constructions of beauty but is simultaneously too masculine and sensual to be idealized and celebrated in Latinx cultures. Disregarding both respectability and purity, these women assert a collective power, whose marks remain long after their zoot suits are hung up, their eyeliner removed and their boots put away.

For the Cussies, displaying their sisterhood by collectively claiming power via aberrant femininity reinforces their confidence. These women speak in front of hundreds of people, lead workshops, and make themselves the center of attention in casual social spaces like cafeterias and parties. Some Sisters are the only undergraduate on their campus and do many of these activities by themselves. This confidence comes from the understanding that as a Sister she never stands alone. Her letters are the physical representation of the strength of her community, and she is a

Cussie so she too represents this strength. In this way, aberrant femininity[61] and the aesthetic, attitude, and the communities it represents are marked on the contours of Latinas' bodies.

This is Latina resistance in practice as they challenge who is and gets to be powerful, sexy, and ultimately acceptable and who deserves space, belongs and is allowed to exist as they are. These women claim power and remain powerful because of the community of women they connect to and share their lives with. Long after strolls are relegated to living room antics after a few glasses of wine, confidence, the mark of publicly asserting and celebrating your difference, remains, and it is the result of their relationships to the collective. Aberrant femininity, the symbol of this collective power, is how young Latinas challenge matricies of domination and claim power in subordinating spaces, and it is this perpetual struggle for power (via external reaction to the nexus of the erotic and hegemonic that they embody) and recognition that mediates how they behave, engage politically and are understood.

For the Cussies, their unity is understood as powerful across school, community and national socio political contexts. Their collective practice resists individualistic models of political participation that are frequently centered in western framings of the political (Putnam 2000; R. Ramirez 2013) and reinforces existing research that demonstrates that marginalized communities "do" politics in

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[61] Catherine Ramirez argues that pachucas symbolized a form of "aberrant femininity" closely related to homosexuality and masculinity. I build on this construction and use it here to signal the Sisters' divergence from "acceptable" forms of femininity, namely Whiteness and demure and pure constructions of marianismo.

collaborative process oriented ways that blend the social and the political (Hardy-

Fanta 1993; Cohen et al. 1997; Bedolla 2005; Whaley 2010; Nenga and Taft 2013;

Jenkins et al. 2016). Read together, these studies indicate that relationships, and the

mechanisms used to develop them, like Greek letter organizations, hold important

insights for how marginalized groups claim and deploy power. For the Cussies,

aberrant femininity that blends the erotic with hegemonic masculinity, is a tool used

to claim power via community that reinforces a collective identity that informs and

influences how the Sisters deploy and preserve power.

Chapter Four: Deploying Power
"Working Towards the Betterment of All Women"

In 2018, a tenured professor at Mother Teresa University wrote on a since

deleted blog post that anti-racist activists of color were more dangerous to the U.S.

nation than violent far right organizations, like the KKK. In response, the Cussies at

Mother Teresa took part in a week-long protest in order to challenge their university

culture where statements like these were made without consequence and becoming

commonplace. These incidents include hateful emails, graffiti, and remarks, whose

perpetrators were never held accountable for their actions and an administration

whose idea of inclusion included giving undergraduates points (towards both a high

value prize and the housing lottery) for including marginalized students on campus.

These activists (Cussies, plus other students) fought for an increase in Black and

Brown faculty, permanent funding for Africana and Latinx studies programs and

consequences for conservative instructors who frequently silenced marginalized

students' interventions during class discussions. Yanni explains

> Last week there was a protest formulated by a group called the Voices of
> Inclusion, which is a group highlighting all the diverse groups on campus
> which Mother Teresa claims to have, that's where the name Voices of
> Inclusion comes from. A lot of times the [diversity of the student body broken
> down by percentage] is used as propaganda for other people looking at the
> school. But when we sit in our classrooms, many times we see that we may be
> the only person that's actually diverse. It's just not around; the representation
> isn't there that's being claimed. And we find a lot of the times the diverse
> groups or marginalized groups or minorities are taking the bad end of the
> stick. Basically, because we don't get the same opportunities as others or we
> may be seen as incompetent. So the protest had a list of demands-just off the
> top of my head I could remember-they wanted to increase the budgets for
> Africana and Latino Studies programs, and they are working towards making

the Africana and Latino Studies programs [in]to departments as well as increasing budgeting for the awareness months such as Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month and stuff like that for a greater budget to help educate more people on the matter. And I'm sure there is a few more; something about Title IX that I'm not exactly sure about; I'd have to go back and see[62].

Although these protests were campus-wide, not all students of color organizations participated. Most notably, the Cussies participation in sit-ins and other protest activities during this week of action stands in stark contrast to Pa'lante's (Latino Student Union) intentional decision to "remain neutral." Sisters who are also part of this club shared that Pa'lante's leadership reasoned that the donor-named Latino Institute on their campus contributed financially to their programming and provided scholarships for many Latinx students, and they did not want to upset the Institute's living benefactress.[63] The Sisters' protest participation vis-à-vis Pa'lante's intentional inaction contrasts existing research which finds that Latinx student organizations at liberal arts colleges, like Mother Teresa, deploy deliberative political models (Reyes 2018). The Mother Teresa Cussies' also behaved differently than their Sisters at other chapters in the study who consistently chose institution-making political practices when interacting with their universities. In this chapter, I shift from an examination of how the Sisters *claim* power to an analysis of how they *deploy* power. I do this by

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[62] Yanni remembered correctly. The students "demanded" overhauls of the Latinx and Black Studies department that included event funding, core courses, and diverse faculty. The students also called for an examination and restructuring of the Title IX office on campus.

[63] To my knowledge, the undergraduates in this organization did not ask the institute's director or the benefactress their opinions on the protest activities.

analyzing Mother Teresa Sisters' responses to their university climate and arguing that their divergent political participation (from other Latinx students at Mother Teresa and from the Cussies at other universities) can be attributed to the interplay between their organizational identity and the Mother Teresa University context.

Before I explain how CUS organizational identity has come to matter to the Cussies' political practices, let me first clarify that the Cussies' specific politic is derived from a collective CUS identity that informs the ways Cussies engage in politics. In the CUS context "doing politics" reinforces a collective identity, which compels its members to "speak out" and to work to improve marginalized communities' experiences. The politics of CUS and their expression are in a dynamic relationship with the undergraduate Sisters who express them, meaning that when a young Latina challenges or maintains a power dynamic that act informs the organization's understanding of itself as a political actor. In practice, by celebrating via social media and in-person communications specific political practices, like participation in the Women's Marches, the membership signals to itself that the Sisters' actions and platform are representative of their sisterhood. In this way the undergraduates impact the sisterhood's political expression and the sisterhood in turn impacts their political practices. Through this process a Cussie's identity enters a reciprocal relationship with her political expression, and they become inherently tied. CUS identity is consistently performed and internalized (for example during MTGs, Ch. 3) and because of this the Sisters are always defining and redefining themselves and their organization as political actors.

CUSSIES SPEAK UP

     When I asked the Sisters at Mother Teresa to explain their participation in the sit ins, protests, and organizing meetings, they consistently related their activism to larger socio-political contexts and their CUS identity. For example, Araceli, a sophomore at Mother Teresa stated "We're fighting for something so much greater on this campus, and all that [racist incidents] kind of goes back to current political climate that we have. Because people find it's ok because of our own president who is so clear cut to cut people off [and] to show them you can so vividly discriminate against people; so now people on campus think its ok to do that." Araceli describes the chapter's protest activities as a fight for something larger than funding for courses and later indicates that respect for the mental and physical wellbeing of communities of color is at stake. Araceli's assessment is correct; many of the on-campus incidents that sparked the protest, like pro-Trump graffiti on the university crest and the professor's comments that opened this chapter, have Trumpism[64] at the center.

     In some ways the Mother Teresa Cussies' activism is an example of "reactive mobilization" or political mobilization in response to some stimulus, like anti-immigrant rhetoric (Verba et al. 1995; R.Ramirez 2013: 26-27). Trumpism has caused reactive mobilization among many Latinx young people (Logan, Lightfoot, and

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[64] Trumpism is "a provocative, anti-politically-correct style and strategy of communication intricately linked to Trump's narcissistic, egocentric and macho personality…" (Dimitrova 2019:139).

Contreras 2017; Wray-Lake et al. 2018) because this ideology makes it acceptable to be overtly racist and xenophobic. However, activation of Latinx identities does not explain why the Cussies protested and their peers in Pa'lante, another politically salient organization (McFarland and Thomas 2006),[65] did not. In her study on Latino youth political participation in university contexts, Daisy Verduzco Reyes encountered a comparable situation[66]. *Latinos Unidos,* a group similar to Pa'lante at another small liberal arts college, also chose not to demonstrate contentiously for fear "the school might get mad at Latinos Unidos"(Reyes 2018: 113)[67] Instead these students, like the members of Pa'lante, chose strategic silence as a response to a potentially mobilizing catalyst. Reyes argues that university contexts, primarily dictated by institution type, mediate and shape young Latino political practices. In the case of the liberal arts college (LAC), she finds that Latino students primarily participate in "institution-making politics," such as "political conversation, deliberation, and event planning for the LAC community" and attributes this focus to their relationship to the liberal arts "bubble" (Reyes 2018: 116). The Mother Teresa Cussies demonstrated against university practices in a public, disruptive, visible and "contentious" ways, and their practices are not explained by Reyes' argument.

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[65] Organizations that foster political participation by providing their members with a network of similarly engaged peers and the space to develop a set of skills that may be readily transferred from the civic to the political realm, such as marshalling resources, working collaboratively, and running a meeting.

[66] In my research I use the term Latinx. Differently, Reyes uses the term Latino, which her research participants used to describe their identities. When engaging with her work, I use the term "Latino" to recognize her intentionality and honor her intellectual decisions.

[67] Reyes does not define contentious politics, but she does indicate that her framing of contentious includes actions like protesting and disruptive demonstrations.

However, Reyes also emphasizes "that local contexts and actors really help shape political styles and approaches" (2018:136). I build on these insights and reaffirm university and organizational contexts as key factors in Latinx youth political development. However, I deemphasize the role of institution type in explaining the Cussies' engagement practices and argue that CUS identity and organization specific university contexts play primary roles in mediating and shaping these young Latinas' political expression.

The variation between Pa'lante's and the Sisters' responses to Mother Teresa's university climate can be attributed, in part, to the CUS national organizational identity. As an organization, CUS emphasizes the importance of speaking out, political and social awareness, and community engagement. This emphasis, in combination with a historical context that values protest and space claiming as change making tools, created an organizational culture that was readily able to adapt its practices in response to the Cussies' and their communities' shifted relationships to power. In other words, internalized CUS identity facilitated mobilization in the context of threat (Trumpism).[68] Dulce, emphasizes this shift in her response to "How has CUS changed in the current political climate"?

> I think our voices have gotten louder. We see what is happening. We see what is happening with immigration. How could anyone..and I'm not picking Democrat or Republican….how could anyone as a human being be ok with another human being being caged...like as a *Human*.[69] That's just, you don't

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[68] CUS organizational culture and CUS identity are mutually constitutive and inextricable.

[69] Reference to Immigration and Customs Enforcement's zero tolerance policy under the Trump administration.

do that to your dog. You know, as a human being regardless of what party you are. So I think CUS is aware of what's going on, and we are fighting back, in numbers.

Dulce has been a Sister for nearly a decade and has recently returned to Belpre to finish her degree in order to set an example for her teenage daughter. Her efforts to remain non-partisan are indicative of an earlier iteration of young Latina politics in the CUS space. At the time she became a Sister CUS provided diverse, "objective" perspectives on political issues to their university communities. The topics of these events alluded to a shared pro woman platform, but the aim of their programming was to empower others with the tools and skills to make their own, informed, political decisions. The Cussies host programming that is of value and interest to its membership and the communities they serve. Therefore, as those priorities shift, so too does the undergraduates' programming. Today, the hateful rhetoric and actions of Trump and his supporters have become so pervasive in the lives of young Latinas that they are unavoidable. These women are bombarded on campus, at work, and at home with messages that they are less important and less valued than their dominant group counterparts. In response to this political climate, the Cussies' political practices have shifted. Instead of presenting "both sides" of an issue or isolating their opinions by using boundary setting language like "I think" and "in my opinion," the Sisters now present their opinions and frequently share them as fact: "This is wrong" and "It's unfair." They continue to inform others, but because of the repetition that Trumpism necessitates, they have sharpened their political CUS identity and now work to spread knowledge on how to express a specific, pro immigrant, pro woman, pro POC

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politic[70]. Dulce highlights this shift by framing the Trump administration's immigration practices, policies, and rhetoric as a catalyst for direct, targeted political action (as opposed to a topic for analysis or discussion).

In the current national socio-political context (discussed at length in Chapter 5), CUS has repeatedly mobilized against Trump, his policies, and the actions of his supporters, at both the national and chapter levels. So much so that in a meeting of the National Board of Directors the Director of Public Relations stated "with this administration, there's something to renounce everyday." Through consistent organizing against Trumpism, the Cussies as a whole have become well versed in using their voices in service of their shared mission.[71] This repeated practice has reified that central to Cussies' shared identity is their ability to "do what they have to do in order to have their voice be heard" (Candelaria, Mother Teresa). The Sisters see their political practices, which include protesting, issuing statements, event planning, community service, and community building, as amplifying the voices of marginalized communities, particularly those of Women of Color. When they step, they exclaim "making the voices of ethnic women louder," and when I asked them to reflect on CUS's impact on campus it is this practice to which they refer. Delia from Mitchell tells me "It [CUS] provides women with a voice. If you are uncomfortable

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[70] Their platform is continually developing and also includes support for a variety of social justice issues such as gun control, the Black Lives Matter Movement, and LGBT+ visibility and equality.

[71] I understand the Sisters' shared mission as outlined in their mission statement, which every Sister can recite by heart.

with something or you feel like it deserves attention then we are more than happy to be your platform. Be your support. Be your foundation. Give you that voice."

In some moments the Cussies use this clearly defined platform to practice contentious politics. For example, the Sisters across the country (undergraduates and alumni) participated in the 2017 and 2018 Women's Marches. During these demonstrations the Cussies wore organizational paraphernalia and carried homemade signs with slogans like "Make America Think Again," " I DEMAND A SEPARATION BETWEEN VAGINA AND STATE," and "RESPETA MI EXISTENCIA O ESPERA RESISTENCIA."[72] These demonstrations express a clear platform that values access to sexual health care, demands respect for women and the Latinx community, and is critical of Trump and his supporters.

Similarly, after the September 5, 2017 announcement to end DACA, CUS mobilized because of their multiple identities as immigrants, daughters, friends, neighbors, and Sisters that experienced shifts in their different and related relationships to power. This change in existing power dynamics triggered reactive mobilization of CUS on national, regional, and chapter levels. The National Board of Directors responded by sharing a social media post titled "CHI UPSILON SIGMA DENOUNCES THE DECISION TO DISMANTLE DACA." This post outlined the benefits of DACA and "strongly reject[ed] the narrative of Dreamers being a drain on our economy"; it also highlighted the multiple economic contributions of Dreamers

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[72] Respect my existence or expect resistance.

and the projected economic losses that would be caused by their deportation. This post was also shared by all five Regional Board's social media accounts, by many chapters' official instagram accounts and by many many individual Sisters.[73] The Cussies participation in the Women's Marches and the social media campaign after the repeal of daca are examples of contentious political practices that target the state (and society more broadly) by offering counternarratives that value marginalized communities (women and immigrants).

On campus, the Sister's consistently choose deliberative models of political engagement, which more often than not takes the form of discussion based events that center the voices and lived experiences of marginalized communities. Flor (Mitchell) explains "We do programs on topics that aren't usually talked about. We did a program about crossing the border, and I feel that not a lot of people discuss that." In the aftermath of the decision to repeal DACA, the Sisters conversations turned to next steps and the distribution of counternarratives. In addition to their participation in the organization wide social media campaign, the Cussies at Belpre, Tubman and Mitchell Universities all hosted programming that covered the origins of DACA, what the announcement meant for current recipients, and best practices for those impacted as suggested by the National Immigration Law Center. Dandara and several other chapters also hosted events on or around February 16, 2017, "A Day Without Immigrants" in order to show what life in the U.S. would be like without immigrants.

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[73] As a Sister and researcher, I follow 784 Sisters on social media. For the forty-eight hours after the announcement my timeline was nearly always this image posted by yet another Sister.

At Dandara, the Sisters reported on the national boycott/strike that took place on that date and highlighted key contributions of immigrants and immigrant communities on local and national levels. In these events participants and sorority members shared immigration stories and collective fears and concerns highlighting the personal impact immigration policy has on their daily lives. At an event hosted by Tubman, one Sister told event participants about coming home the day of the announcement to end DACA to find her mother crying as she watched the news, highlighting the impact of policy at home. Similarly, during my interview with Valeria, a junior from Dandara University, she shared

> I'm comfortable saying this now, but my mom actually came into this country as an [undocumented] immigrant. And I was born here; so that's what gave me my citizenship. But now my mom has been here for twenty something years, and since then she has become a citizen. She's been [a citizen] for several years and has lived here more than half of her life now and same thing with my father and almost every other one of my family members that are in this country. [They] did come in illegally and also have made themselves citizens since then. But something like Trump's ideals now, the reason that they affect me and [why] I feel so strongly against them is because they easily could have affected me and my family. I'm very thankful that my mother went through the whole citizenship process when she did because had she gone through it now she very easily could have been deported. I very easily could have been a dreamer. I'm relying on the government to get my education; that easily could have been taken away.

Humanizing marginalized populations is a signature CUS political practice. In their public discussions and interviews, the Sisters continually framed immigrants as humans echoing Dulce's language as she expressed her disbelief about the conditions in ICE detention centers. During our interview Adriana (Mother Teresa), implored "Have a little bit more consideration - these are human beings that are

looking for a better life, coming from very troubled areas. They wouldn't make such drastic changes to their lives if they really didn't have to." Dulce and Adriana, from Belpre and Mother Teresa Universities respectively, both use the term "human being" to describe immigrants. Differently, at Mitchell University, Elena uses "they are people too" to describe the necessity of continuously supporting Puerto Ricans after the devastation of Hurricane Maria. Her chapter hosted a candlelight vigil, called the "Solidarity Memorial Walk" to commemorate the one year anniversary of Hurricane Maria's landfall on Puerto Rico. For Elena,

> It [the Solidarity Memorial Walk] was important to remind everyone that Puerto Rico is still here. Puerto Rico is still struggling. There are still people with no resources, who have difficulty getting food, water, [and] electricity. They need all the help that they can get. Not just because they're a territory of the U.S. but because they are people too. They need all the help they can get.

This practice of humanizing their communities indicates that in the hostile contexts they navigate their humanity is threatened (Chapter 5), but also that they share a common modality of "political consciousness" across university contexts.

As the Cussies highlight how events, patterns, and structures of inequality impact their membership and communities, they come to political consciousness by making "connections between their own lives and those of others, between issues that affect them and their families in the neighborhood or community" (Hardy-Fanta 1997: 233). In Hardy-Fanta's framing, political consciousness, which she also understands as "connecting personal problems to public policy" and "a sense of 'being political'" is "inextricably linked" to personal and political self-development,

which arises from political participation (1993:127, 135). For Latinas these two phenomena (political consciousness and self-development) are also closely related to community empowerment (Hardy-Fanta 1993). We see this with the Cussies as they come to political consciousness while developing their political skills through community empowerment. For example, the Sisters readily connected the announcement to end DACA to themselves and their community (political consciousness) and then leveraged their insights to host programming on this issue (exercising political skills and deepening their political consciousness) in order to educate the community on the announcement's implications for their daily lives (community empowerment) who in turn share their insights and experiences (deepening the Sisters political consciousness). For the Cussies, because of university and CUS programming requirements, as well as their own programming desires, this process is repeated over and over again. As the Sisters become more politically conscious they begin to understand their organization and themselves as political actors/potential political actors.

Research shows that girls and young women, including activist girls, see themselves as outside of the political realm (Taft 2006; Harris, Wyn, and Younes 2010 Cite.), and this holds true for some Cussies. When I asked Eli if she saw herself as a political person she succinctly replied "No" and let out a mix of a whimper and a sigh that sounded like the apologetic face you make when you walk past someone in the narrow aisle of the theater. When I asked for an explanation she responded "I feel like politics is so controversial, so back and forth; I kinda just like rather not get

involved." Eli's remarks highlight the fatigue and discomfort that many, including

girl activists, associate with conversation and involvement with state-centric politics

(Eliasoph 1998; Taft 2006). Throughout the rest of her interview she offered that

CUS can be a political organization with political goals and spoke passionately about

women's empowerment and minority access to education. Eli's desire to remove

herself from politics while actively participating in an organization she understands as

political and engaging in various activist behaviors is an example of an "oppositional

political stance" (Taft 2006), which Eli uses to distinguish her work from state-centric

politics that visibly harm her communities.

On the other hand, Eli's Sisters' responses to "Do you see yourself as a

political person?" are less resolute than her definitive no and demonstrate more fluid

understandings of their relationship to politics.

> *high pitched hmmm sucking in air* I don't. I think so, but I don't. Because I think I only get political when major issues happen, and I think a lot of people are like that. Like when there were major shootings recently[74], I feel like I got political then because I was saying oh we should have some sort of gun reform. But on a regular basis I'm going to have to say no because I feel like I'm not usually out there saying we need gun reform and I'm this party affiliation, and I believe these are my values. I'm not always
> going out of my way to say that. - Mari, Mother Teresa

> Yes, but a very low level of that just because I can't say that I've been heavily involved. But I always say that the way that I get politically involved is by learning and teaching people about the knowledge that I am gaining so like in my classroom or in a presentation [for a CUS event]. I always try to share the knowledge that I have and that I know other people might not be exposed to

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[74] Reference to the shootings that claimed the lives of 17 students and injured 17 others at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida in February 2018.

as a way of my political activism just because I like to learn and I like to talk, especially about things that I'm very passionate about-Tatiana, Dandara

You know it's interesting because I never really did see myself as political, but like whenever I do see something interesting I'll try to share that on social media. And I had this family dinner a week or two ago and a family member was saying to me: So I see you're being more political. You've been sharing a lot of these political articles online. And it was just so interesting to me because I didn't really think of myself as being political. I never really identified myself as being political, but to me its just being aware of what's happening in the world and trying to spread that awareness so other people are informed as well. But after she said that I just reflected on it, and I guess I am political."-Elena, Mitchell

Their responses suggests that Cussies as a group do not dismiss politics, even narrowly defined, as outside of their grasp or not something for them, but rather that for these young women politics is something they dabble in or learn about but that does not define them. They do not always understand themselves as political actors, but they do analyze their understandings of politics and their relationships to power.

Much like its members, CUS is negotiating its relationship to politics. On a national level, its leadership is adamant that CUS is not a political organization, but rather an organization that supports its members' exploration of political issues. It is possible that the member of the Board of Directors who provided me with this information was trying to avoid language that would threaten the organization's 501c status, but given my insider status as a Sister, and the rapport I have established with her, it is unlikely that her statement was filtered by anything other than her understanding of the organization she helps lead. However, despite the distance its leadership and some alumni work to maintain between CUS and politics,

undergraduate Cussies, including those who define politics narrowly (like Eli), nearly

always identify CUS as a political organization.

"Do you think CUS is a political organization?"

> I do think so. I think we are an organization that is not outwardly political, but
> we do take stances on things that are important to our organization and our
> members. Case and point the Puerto Rico issue that is going on[75]. I feel like
> we take social justice stances...we take a stance and that sends a message.
> Now how that message is perceived varies, but I feel like that message is
> there. -Gabriela, Mitchell

> I think we are a political organization because I know many Sisters that have
> gone out and protested on their behalf or just on behalf of CUS about many
> things. And they're not ashamed to be political when they do protest, and I do
> see that CUS endorses a lot of things. Like they reposted on the official social
> media about Sisters protesting so I do think CUS is political[76].-Karina,
> Tubman

For its undergraduate members, CUS is clearly a political organization

committed to addressing and shifting subordinating power dynamics. Given the

reciprocal relationship between CUS identity and the practices of its membership,

their status as Sisters can be mobilized in conjunction with their other identities and

relationships to power. So a Cussies who understands herself as exploring politics or

developing her political lens (political consciousness), uses CUS (via event

programming) to practice and explore politics and political interventions (community

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[75] Reference to inadequate government response in the wake of Hurricane Maria.

[76] Karina is referencing a social media post that features a Sister protesting Brett Kavanaugh's
appointment to the Supreme Court. She is wearing a black veil, and her mouth is covered with duct
tape. Her hands are held up and written across her palms are the words "We Dissent."

empowerment), which then become part of her understanding of herself (self-development). This process is reinforced via repeated public declarations that she is a Cussie whose voice matters (aberrant femininity) and in turn becomes an internalized, politicized, and therefore potentially mobilizing, identity.

This is the case for Yanni, Araceli's chapter line sister, who sees her participation as compulsory because of her CUS identity. She explains,

> CUS played a role in [the demonstrations].There were sit ins at the [president's office] and CUS participated in the protest [referencing organized protests in the center of campus]. We decided to participate as undergrads because our sorority, our sisterhood, is based on minority women. We were founded by seven Latina women who founded [CUS] because they too were suffering marginalizing actions. They were not getting the same opportunities. And if we refuse to stand with people who are fighting for the same matters it's almost as if we let our Founders down, and we're not looking at the reason why we are here. And it also shows that it's an ongoing battle that we have to keep fighting to hopefully see a solution.

By decentering herself and her university experiences Yanni expands the scope and aim of her political engagement practices and emphasizes the relationship between her political practice and organizational identity. For the Sisters at Mother Teresa this CUS identity was mobilized alongside their other identities, many of which they share with members of *Pa'lante*, and it is this organizational identity (which they do not share) which accounts (in part) for their divergent political responses. Pa'lante asked themselves "Should we respond?" Whereas the Cussies, who in Araceli's words, "weren't afraid to say where [they] stood on the situation" asked themselves "How do we respond?" Ultimately, the Sisters' at Mother Teresa answered this question with contentious political practices. This differs from their Sisters at other

universities in the study who did not deploy contentious political practices but instead worked within their university structures to enact change. In the next section, I examine three moments of institutional-organizational tension and argue that, regardless of university type and culture, the Cussies' primarily deploy deliberative, institution-making, political practices.

INSTITUTIONAL-ORGANIZATIONAL TENSION

*Belpre University*

At the opening of Chapter 3 I described the spectacle of Meet the Greeks at Belpre University. It is a large cross council event attended by Belpre Greeks, unaffiliated students, and staff, as well as by Greeks and students interested in Greek life from other universities. Culturally based Greek letter organizations are the big draw, and their performances (stepping, strolling and/or saluting) are the night's only entertainment; they also account for the largest portion of revenue generating guests. In order to compete with significantly larger mainstream organizations they solicit support from their local (and not so local) chapters. Each one of their brothers, sisters, and their respective interests from other chapters pays the $5 entry fee. Additionally, POC Greeks who are not chartered at Belpre also attend the event to participate in the open stroll, see their friends and raise their profile on the campus.[77] At Belpre, Meet the Greeks is attended by 600-800 people including many individuals who are not

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[77] Organizations who are not currently chartered at a specific university frequently work to establish positive relationships with administrators and Greeks on campus in order to garner enough support to be approved as a candidate for expansion.

affiliated with the university. Each one of these outside guests is charged $5. Belpre also sells prepackaged snacks and drinks in a box office window turned concession stand. In total, Belpre collects approximately $5000 from their semesterly Meet the Greeks. When the event costs are deducted (DJ, security, stage rental etc.) Belpre still earns a sizeable profit.

In 2017, as we were walking out of Meet the Greeks, Lilian and I started chatting as Sisters do. Lilian became a Sister in Spring 2010, and as an undergraduate I spent a fair bit of time with her. We were never best friends, but she was very close with her line sisters at my chapter. We have enough shared memories to fall into an easy conversation. At the time she was serving as Belpre's Alumna Advisor and somehow we started to talk about the possibility of a Cultural Greek showcase at Belpre to raise money for the Cultural Greek Council. Meet the Greeks is a big event at any university, but at Belpre it is a BIG event. I asked why the POC Greeks (as a council) needed an additional revenue source and learned that since at least 2010 when Lilian became a Sister, Belpre had been profiting from the event and not sharing any of that income with the students who organized, advertised, worked the door and concession stand, and performed for the event. Our conversation shifted to the feasibility of a Greek showcase in an over crowded market and drifted off until we reached our cars. Later that academic year, I interviewed Lillian's chapter sister, Dulce, and learned that the issue had been brought to the university by the Greek

Senate.[78] The students worked with campus administrators to come to a resolution, and it was decided that the money would be given from the Greek community to a charity. There was a vote between several causes, and in the end the profits from Meet the Greeks at Belpre went to "the kids."

In Reyes' framework, this is an example of deliberative institution-making politics, which she finds is the dominant political practice of the Latinx student organizations at the liberal arts college (LAC) in her study. Reyes argues that the students' feelings of connectedness to campus (faculty, staff, and leadership) and peers mediates their political practices and encourages a deliberative model of political engagement. However, Belpre is not a small liberal arts college, it is a regional public university. In Reyes' study the Latinx student organizations at the regional public university were more likely to engage in contentious politics, like protesting, than their LAC peers. I find value in Reyes' assertion that students' relationships to their universities mediates their political expression. I build on this framework and argue that the type of organization that they participate in also impacts their relationship to the university and therefore their political practices. In Reyes' study, we see this at the Research University, where the two Latinx student organizations have different relationships to the university and therefore divergent political practices. The organization that enjoyed a closer relationship to the

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[78] The undergraduate Sisters at Belpre learned about the university's use of funds when Lilian became their Alumna Advisor.

institution practiced deliberative, institution making politics.[79] Similarly, Greek letter organizations have unique relationships to their universities. They are more regulated than their unaffiliated peers and can only add new members to their organizations during university approved windows. In addition to meeting their programming and intake requirements they are also required to attend several mandatory trainings, designated university events (when the university needs a large turnout), provide specific services to the university (help with large on-campus events) and local community (university led Greek life wide events) and maintain a specific gpa.[80] Greeks are also required to submit reports at the end of the year that highlight the value they bring to campus. The university uses these reports and the Greek Advisor's assessments to rate the chapters, usually using a star system (5 star chapter). They also have day to day responsibilities such as securing locations and campus resources (projectors, security, parking permits etc.) for their events. While other on campus organizations may have some of these requirements only the members of Greek letter organizations are subject to all of these regulations. Some of these regulations have negative effects on members of Greek letter organizations, especially for the Cussies

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[79] Reyes and I deploy different conceptualizations of politics. She privileges her study participants' framings of their practices and tends to emphasize political practices aimed at institutional transformation. I apply a fluid definition of the political and read challenges to existing power dynamics as political practice. Reyes' provides a detailed description of the practices and relationship to campus of the organization at the Research University that enjoyed a closer relationship to the institution. I analyzed these descriptions and, like Reyes, found them to be examples of discursive (deliberative) political practices. However, given our (Reyes and myself) different foci, with the information provided, I am unable to comment on the political practices of the group at the Research University that did not maintain a close relationship to the university.

[80] For the universities the requirement is usually a 2.0, but to be an active Sister of CUS the requirement is 2.5. At the time of this study, CUS was debating a GPA hike which would require Sisters to maintain a 3.0.

and other members of POC Greek letter organizations, which I describe in the next chapter.

However, handing out these regulations and their enforcement, as well as the multitude of required events, grade checks, and programming review meetings means that members of Greek letter organizations, especially their executive boards, share a great deal of face to face time with their university. For the Cussies and other POC Greek letter organizations, where chapter sizes are usually less than 10, most active members of the organization are executive board members, with many holding several positions. Every single Sister interviewed and every undergraduate Sister encountered throughout this study held at least one position. Working so closely with their Greek Life and Faculty Advisors, the Office of Student Affairs and/ or other campus administrators gives the university a face for these students. By virtue of their participation in Greek Life the Cussies know at least one person to go to with their concerns. Their advisors (or sometimes a team of administrators) know their names, many of their closest friends (chapter and other Greeks), their academic performance and the demands of Greek life. These administrators frequently maintain open door policies and serve as de-facto academic and professional mentors, helping their students navigate other aspects of the university bureaucracy. In this space of repeated, informed, contact between administrators and the same group of students, genuine relationships between undergraduates and staff are formed that can last beyond graduation day. For example, in 2018, I attended the Cultural Greek Leadership Conference where I ran into my former Greek Life advisor. She hugged

me tightly and immediately began asking me about my chapter Sisters and friends (fellow Greeks) from my time as an undergraduate. She remembered our names and the things that mattered to us. These relationships can make students feel seen and valued and can contribute to students' feelings of connectedness to the university (Coates 2010).

In addition to repetitive contact with a university "face," POC Greeks also repeatedly connect with each other. Mandatory university events and trainings bring them together, but they also co-sponsor each others' programs, hang out socially on and off campus, and during Greek Week usually come together as a hybrid teams of 2-3 same-gender organizations in order to compete in events, like flag football, against their mainstream peers. The combination of close relationships with their Sisters, fellow POC Greeks, and their university administrator(s) makes campus feel smaller and transforms the undergraduates' university experiences into those represented by the "bubble"phenomenon that Reyes observed within the LAC space and describes as the result of student connectedness to their campus communities. High levels of engagement with campus mediate Latinx undergraduate political expression and encourages discursive institution making political practices (Reyes 2018). I observed this pattern at Belpre University, where the Sisters' status as members of a POC Greek letter organization resulted in close campus ties. Given this relationship to the university, when Belpre's policy of profiting from Meet the Greeks became an issue for the undergraduates they, along with their peers, brought their

concerns to the university and trusted institutional mechanisms to lead to a satisfactory outcome.

*Dandara University*

Similarly, the Sisters at Dandara University and their peers in other POC Greek letter organizations put their faith in their university to handle the punishment of a racist Greek leader. A member of the Greek Senate executive board[81] was video taped saying the n word repeatedly. This video went viral and made its way into the hands of the Cultural Greek Council who responded by issuing a public statement condemning the woman's behavior and placing their trust in their university to respond to the issue appropriately and in a timely manner. Similar incidents at other universities including the University of Alabama and the University of Connecticut sparked campus protests and criticism of the universities' responses (Barton 2018; Wright 2018; Fink 2019; Murdock 2019). However, instead of contentious political expression, for the POC Greeks at Dandara University, this racist incident sparked a deliberative collective response; they discussed the issue with their chapters, came together as a Culturally based Greek community to further deliberate the issue, decided on a collective response, and then worked together to draft and share an open letter to their university community.

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[81] The Greek Senate usually refers to a student lead umbrella board for all of Greek life, including IFC (white men) NPC (white women) and POC organizations.

Like Belpre, Dandara is also a regional public university, whose POC Greek community does not have the same permeable relationship to the university that Reyes observed in their Latinx organization counterparts in her study. Instead of loose ties to their campus communities, the Sisters at Dandara report feeling connected to their university. When I asked Valeria, the vice president of CUS at Dandara, what CUS's relationship to the university was like she responded:"We're very actually close to our Greek advisors.We're very close to them. We don't really have issues with them; they really like us." I later asked if Dandara was accepting of Greek life, and Valeria states "They can be accepting. They like the fact that we're very involved on campus not only between each Greek org but with outside clubs and organizations." Similarly, Guillermina, Valeria's chapter sister, states "They[university administrators] try to make relationships with us and accept us because they know that we do bring a positive attitude to the community. We don't just think about ourselves, and we're constantly asking if they need help. So they definitely see that effort we put [in] so they definitely try to accept us more and in anyway possible." This feeling of connectedness includes commuter Sisters, like Valeria, who states "A lot of people know me on campus like, Valeria, she's the Cussie who is so involved on campus, and she's at everything. People think I live here, and I don't." This is significant as research has consistently shown that commuters report lower levels of engagement than their resident peers (Jacoby and Garland 2004; Newbold, Mehta and Forbus 2011; Thomas and Jones 2017), and it

reinforces POC Greek life as a pathway to campus engagement and an increased sense of belonging (Yearwood and Jones 2012).

Valeria and Guillermina's responses highlight an important trend in the Cussies' perception of their university experiences. When Cussies think of the university and their experience of it, they always (every interview, every university) answer with a description of their relationship to the office or individual responsible for Greek life on their respective campuses. In their experiences, these individuals represent and speak for the university. This dynamic provides universities with repeated opportunities to establish and develop relationships with these students. These relationships are not always positive, as these administrators are responsible for handing out consequences for policy violations etc., but the interactions are consistent. The students learn what they can expect the university to deliver for them and where their perspectives/ practices might diverge from preferred policies. The coupling of a face for concerns and consistency builds connections between students and their campuses, and it is this relationship that fosters discursive, institution making, political practices.

*Mother Teresa University*

If the Cussies across the board, regardless of institution type, prefer deliberative political practices in relation to their universities, then why did the Sisters at Mother Teresa choose a contentious form of political expression? The Sisters

protested only after the university damaged their relationship with the Greek community and then repeatedly failed to address their concerns. This university context coupled with the CUS organizational context that values speaking out and deploys contentious political practices in other spaces created a layered context that facilitated the Mother Teresa Cussies' divergent politics.

In 2017, I attended the Fall Meet the Greeks at Mother Teresa. When I was an undergraduate this event rivaled Belpre's for the largest in the region, and it was always sold out. It drew an especially large crowd because it was exclusively a Cultural Greek showcase and the national performance team for one of the D9 fraternities always closed the show.[82] I was shocked when I entered a half empty space with a handful of tables for the Greek organizations on campus. I walked over to the Cussies said hello and turned to an alumna I knew as an undergraduate and said "What happened?!?" She and the Mother Teresa undergraduates proceeded to tell me how Mother Teresa had revoked the charter for all metro-chapters saying the responsibility for students' actions on other campuses and for non-Mother Teresa students' activities was a liability risk they wanted to minimize[83]. I later spoke to a campus administrator about this and heard nearly the same sentence verbatim. Although when I asked her about it she added we told them it was coming, and that

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[82] D9 is an abbreviation for Divine Nine, which is a reference to members of the NPHC, the nine original Black fraternities and sororities.

[83] A metro-chapter (metropolitan) is a chapter of a POC Greek letter organization composed of undergraduates at multiple universities where the organization is chartered. These students work together to meet programming and intake requirements at each university in the chapter.

they had to get enough Mother Teresa members to charter if they wanted to be

recognized at this campus. While this policy may not have been racially motivated, it

was read by the Cussies as targeted action against the United Greek Council; it only

impacted Black Greeks and resulted in the loss of 3 chapters, or 27% of POC Greek

life at Mother Teresa. In their words the policy was a racist way to cut their numbers.

This policy's impact was amplified by the loss of two chapters that had died out in the

spring and would be using the next calendar year to recruit new members (failure to

do so would result in the loss of their charter). The loss of metro chapters at Mother

Teresa significantly damaged the Sisters' and their community's relationship with the

university.

The relationship between CUS and Mother Teresa had also been damaged by

the university's failure to retain staff in the Greek advisor position[84]. The current

undergraduates had two advisors, and the generation of Cusssies just before them also

had two advisors during their time as undergraduates. This change damages the POC

Greek community's relationship with university because the students cannot expect

the university to respond to their needs consistently and trust between the

organizations and the university is developed only to be lost again the next year. This

is particularly detrimental to working relationships with POC Greek letter

organizations because they have extended institutional memories. For example, the

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[84] There are no studies of Greek advisor retention rates of which I am aware. However, I received this information from a conversation with a Greek Advisor involved with the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Affairs who speaks with a network of advisors across the country every month. "There are a lot of people who leave the field after their first few years."

Cussies at Mother Teresa would not have known how exciting their Meet the Greeks used to be if their alumnae had not given them a point of reference. This elongated memory keeps score with the university and can amplify the impact of policies that negatively impact the Cussies' daily operations. In the span of seven years the Cussies at Mother Teresa and their POC Greek peers had lost several key pieces of real estate in the University Center: the Greek hang out room, their organizations' lockers, and the Greek Bulletin Board. These losses and stories of their utility are passed down to new members and become part of their university experiences through which they learn they cannot depend on the university to support them or to behave consistently. By failing to retain staff the university fractures its institutional memory, resetting their relationships with the Cussies and their peers from a deficit standpoint. The new advisors are therefore unable to fully understand how current policy changes may be read within the context of the university's existing relationship to its students.

However, the Cussies did not shift their political practices because of this damaged relationship alone. For at least two years before the Sister participated in the protests, they repeatedly turned to the university administration to address their concerns with the racial climate on campus. Before and after the removal of metro-chapters, the Sisters went to their Greek advisor and asked questions, provided feedback and expressed concerns about the changes; they told the university administrators "It [the policy] doesn't seem fair." Similarly, they asked to reclaim former spaces or to have new spaces provided for them that would address their need

to store organizational materials in a central and easily accessible space. The Sisters also spoke to their Greek advisor about their anger over Mother Teresa's inadequate response to a racist email that was sent to the entire university community and a racist social media post that came out only three weeks later and targeted an individual student. In these situations the university failed to meaningfully engage with the students' concerns, and the relationship between the Cussies and the university weakened.

Over time the Sisters stopped turning to their Greek advisor to address their concerns. When a White fraternity came to campus sporting "MAGA spin off hats" the Sisters discussed their concerns with the rest of the United Greek Council, but they were unsure if their sentiments had been shared with their Greek advisor.[85] In a follow up phone call I was told "someone probably said something to her." Even if the Sisters did not reach out to their Greek advisor it is that individual's responsibility to know about the fraternity's behavior and to address it[86]. Moreover, it is their job, as a representative of the university, to make campus an inclusive community where all students feel safe and valued. The Sisters did not feel that way in January 2018 when they along with the rest of the United Greek Council (UGC) passed a unanimous resolution pledging their support to Voices of Inclusion (VoI) and their demands, which Yanni outlined at the start of this chapter. Mother Teresa did not respond to

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[85] More details on this incident provided in Chapter 5.

[86] Job descriptions for this position frequently require the provision of "leadership, guidance and support" to all Greek letter organizations and "oversight and management" of the university's standards and regulations, which includes "conduct matters."

UGC's resolution. However, several administrators did meet with representatives of VoI during the 2018 spring semester. Those students left the meetings without a sense of collaboration and partnership with the University. One leader of VoI reported to Mother Teresa's newspaper that the University provided "watered down" responses and that "we [members of VoI] definitely didn't feel like our voices were being heard." Ten months after UGC issued their statement, in October 2018, VoI delivered a list of refined demands to a university provost.

In addition to the list of demands, VoI also delivered a petition to repeal Mother Teresa's Diversity Project which rewarded students with prizes and priority on campus housing registration for including peers from marginalized communities. When I reviewed the petition it had been signed by the Cussies and over 1300 others. In addition to signing the petition, UGC issued another statement this time explicitly denouncing the university's Diversity Project as a "racial injustice" that goes "against the principles[they] stand for." The Cussies also issued their own statement against the project on behalf of the Mother Teresa Chapter of Chi Upsilon Sigma National Latin Sorority Inc. The Sisters' statement declared that the Project stood against their organization's values and concluded with the sentence "This initiative masks the continuous struggles that minorities face and unnecessarily rewards behavior that should already be in place as respectful members of the same community".

In total the Sisters issued three statements about their concerns, and they signed a petition. The first statement issued by UGC in January of 2018 and the October delivery of the refined demands were both featured in the school's primary

newspaper, indicating that the University was well aware of the students' discontent. These practices are an escalation of their usual form of deliberative politics (talking to their Greek advisor), but they are still examples of institution-making political practices and show a desire to work with the university to better the experiences of marginalized communities on campus. The revised demands included deadlines for response, and the promise to protest if no steps were taken to address their concerns. A few weeks after the delivery of the revised demands VoI, the Cussies, and the POC Greek community began a protest and sit in that lasted eleven days and ended when the University met three of their five demands. I interviewed Araceli after the protests concluded, and she said this of the resolution: "The university responded. I'm not going to say it was an easy battle, because it wasn't. It felt like pulling teeth a little bit but after various negotiations the university is working with the students, but it is still ongoing." The Sisters only participated in contentious politics when the University repeatedly failed to engage with them in meaningful ways thereby dissolving an already compromised connection between the Sisters and Mother Teresa; in other words, the failure of deliberative models of conflict resolution led them to try different political practices.

CONCLUSION

Civic participation facilitates political engagement (Milbrath 1965; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Glanville 1999; Putnam 2000) with recent research demonstrating that participation in *certain types* of civic organizations facilitates

political practice[87] (McFarland and Thomas 2006; McIntosh and Youniss 2010; Terriquez 2015a; 2017). Research has also shown that students' university experiences and relationship to their institutions informs their political practices. I build on these insights and offer that participation in certain types of student organizations, like POC Greek letter organizations, shifts students' relationships to their university thereby mediating and shaping their political practices differently than their peers whose organizational experiences offer them different university-student relationship dynamics. This has important implications for policies intended to improve students' sense of belonging and retention as well as places renewed importance on retaining dedicated staff.

Similarly, research has found that controversial issues, like anti-immigrant rhetoric, can lead to reactive mobilization of an individual's identity or identities that are impacted by this catalyst (R. Ramírez 2013). I understand this insight in relation to the intersectional knowledge project (Collins 2015) and offer that changes in an individual or communities' relationships to power can spark reactive mobilization at the nexus of their interlocking identities. These shifts in power dynamics may lead to "political consciousness" (Hardy-Fanta 1993) or "intersectional consciousness"

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[87] These types of organizations are sometimes identified as "politically salient;" they provide their participants with (1) a set of skills that are readily transferred from organizational to extra-organizational political contexts, such as running a meeting, marshalling resources, and resolving disputes, (2) safe intra-organizational environments to practice these skill sets, and (3) support while developing these skill sets (McFarland and Thomas 2006). I understand CUS as a politically salient organization that provides its members training and opportunities for the development and practice of critical skills such as negotiation, advocacy and navigating bureaucracy all of which can be used to challenge or reinforce systems of oppression.

(Terriquez 2015), which both emphasize the process of connecting lived experiences to larger phenomena, namely "public policy" and others' experiences (Hardy-Fanta 1993) and systematic oppression and discrimination (Terriquez 2015). For the Cussies, organizational identity is internalized and can be mobilized in relation to the Sisters' other identities. Through their example, we see that participation in certain types of organizations can not only facilitate, mediate and foster political practice (the use of power) but also influence how individuals navigate external relationships to power.

Chapter Five: Preserving Power
"They Kind of Like Kill Us Off"

Regional retreat is a CUS event that happens once a year. Many Sisters within a region gather at a campground and spend the day doing fun activities that include things like arts and crafts, team building exercises, and learning new strolls. They spend the night in bunk beds in communal cabins and eat breakfast together before departure the next day. Undergraduate attendance is compulsory, but many alumni attend as well. During my fieldwork, I attended two retreats. Every retreat has a large campfire at night. In upstate NY in 2017, I sat with a group of about 70 Sisters around a fire pit while chocolate, graham crackers, and marshmallows were passed out. As the Regional Officers worked on getting the fire started, the Sisters talked as one collective group in the darkness. The air was crisp and a Sister from NYC said "time to bust out the timbs" (timberland boots), which led to a conversation on neighborhoods in the city changing and the chopped meat spot closing down. Out of the darkness to my left, a Sister said with a smh[88] tone "They takin everything." The group was silent as her words solemnly ended the conversation until someone told a joke and everyone was laughing again.

The reality is there is no joke that will lift the impacts of gentrification, sexism, racism and other intersecting oppressions from these women's lives. The Cussies, like many Black and Brown women, operate in a persistent context of threat.

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[88] Abbreviation for "shaking my head" that has its own independent meaning, tone and appropriate use.

On a state level, the current political climate filled with racist, xenophobic, and sexist rhetoric, actions and demonstrations permeates many aspects of their daily lives. On campus, the Cussies contend with university policies that simultaneously erase and over police their organizations, and as individuals they must navigate their distinct relationships to power. In this chapter, I analyze how these contexts impact the Cussies' experiences of their campuses and communities, detailing the multiple threats to Cussies' well-being. I then argue that the Cussies deploy survival politics via distancing narratives, rule following and physical self-care practices to sustain their individual and collective power in the context of these pervasive threats.

THE CONTEXT OF THREAT

*Trumpism*

Mitchell University is enormous and Elena, a short Ecuadorian woman with soft features, seems smaller by default. She is a senior Spanish major who became a Sister her Junior year and intends to enroll in an accelerated nursing program after graduation. After a few phone calls to direct me to her dorm, Elena meets me in the hallway and leads me into her room. She lives in a small, bright, single. As I take off my coat, she offers me water, introduces me to her plant and then looks at me eagerly; we begin to chat. Elena is thoughtful, carefully considering the weight of each word and listening intently to my questions. She is sitting on her lofted bed looking down at me on her desk chair, and we are carrying on like old friends. When our conversation

shifts to Trump's impact on her campus climate, she clears her face of warmth and

emotion, looks around the room, gives me a weary and resigned look, and says

> I think Trump has given these people a platform to basically spew out their
> hate to the world and make them feel safe for doing so---sort of defended----
> obviously everyone has the right to first amendment, freedom of speech -- but
> it is just a lot more hateful rhetoric that people feel entitled to express.

Elena uses "these people" to distance herself from Trump supporters and other hateful

people, including members of her university community. In categorizing those that

reinforce existing power dynamics that subordinate marginalized communities as

"other", Elena is avoiding association with these groups. However, the "the hateful

rhetoric" and actions of Trump and his supporters have become so pervasive in the

lives of young Latinas that they are unavoidable; these women are bombarded on

campus, at work, and at home with messages that they, themselves, are "other" and to

be excluded from Trump's narrative of the good and right. Young Latinas political

practices are contextualized by their desires to avoid engaging with Trumpism and

their basic need to navigate their daily lives. In other words the Sisters' experiences

within the interpersonal domain of power have shifted in response to the increased

visibility of subordinating power dynamics in structural and cultural domains of

power.

While the election and subsequent presidency of Trump have had many

implications for young Latinas and their families, the Cussies' political engagement

practices were most impacted by the violent actions of those emboldened by the

banality of hatred in the U.S. today. The United States has a long history of hate and

hate crimes, which cannot and should not be attributed to Donald Trump. However, as Elena highlights, the years of this research were marked by shift in the power relations within the cultural domain resulting in an increase in the visibility of those forms of prejudice that abandon any pretense of acceptance or tolerance of difference. For example, at the "Unite the Right Rally" that took place in Charlottesville, Virginia (August 2017) groups of White men, some wearing "Make America Great Again" hats, publicly chanted "Heil Trump," "F*** you [homophobic slur]," and "blood and soil" without fear of the social and/or professional consequences (Dvorak 2017; Mathias 2017; Thompson 2017). One man even proclaimed "revvin' up them ovens boys wooo!" (Anderson 2017). Former Louisiana House Representative and Grandmaster of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, David Duke, described the rally as a "turning point" in the movement to "fulfill the promises of Donald Trump" (NBC News 2017). Sadly, this weekend in Charlottesville took Heather Heyer's life and left 19 others injured.

Universities are not immune to these violent outbreaks; they are spaces of political contention that have been strategically targeted by the far-right for both recruitment and violent demonstrations (SPLC 2017; Ira Glass, Zoe Chace, Steve Kolowich, and Dana Chivvis 2018). For example, just the day before the white nationalist rally discussed above, white nationalists led a torch-lit march through the University of Virginia, during which participants chanted similar slogans including "You will not replace us." These white nationalists, empowered by shifts in their relationships to power within the cultural domain, leveraged their collective cultural

and interpersonal power to create a threatening display of disciplinary power intended to "reclaim" power across domains that they perceived as lost and/or threatened. The Cussies live their daily lives on these literal political battlefields.[89] As a result, they are barraged with the knowledge that members of their campus community actively dislike or even hate them, their families, and the people they love. For example, at Mother Teresa University, the morning after Trump's election the students woke up to "TRUMP" spray-painted on the campus seal at the center of campus and "MAGA" tagged on campus sidewalks. The students of color also report that a pro-Trump professor actively silences them in the classroom in order to make space for the thoughts and opinions of their White male peers.

At Mitchell University, hate has also become part of students' daily experiences. Incidents included "Black Live Don't Matter" graffiti on a school bus, "Imagine a Muslim Free America" posters across campus, and swastikas painted or posted on such a frequent basis that when I asked a campus police dispatcher about a specific swastika painted in black on a building with a red circle around it, they replied "that's like every day." On this campus, Identity Evropa, who believe that "ethnic diversity...is an impediment to societal harmony," (Identity Evropa Website 2018[90]) attempted to recruit students. This is particularly alarming as Eli Mosley, a leader of this group wrote "This [pro-Trump demonstration in Philadelphia] is a sign

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[89] College campuses are frequently sites of political contention (Klatch 1999; Muñoz and Guardia 2009)

[90] Identity Evropa has since rebranded itself to the American Identity Movement.

that we have moved into a new era in the Nazification of America. Normie Trump supporters are becoming racially aware and Jew Wise." (Mosley as quoted by Kelley 2017). In yet another example of hate on this same campus, Grace, a Sister of CUS, texted me "On campus today there was a hate group spewing [hate with] very racist and sexist signs on campus/Police protected them, one way the Trump administration has affected our campus" (April 30, 2018). This was in reference to a religious group yelling slogans condemning women, the LGBTQ+ community, and other groups.

These are not isolated or regional incidents; many universities across the country, including the University of Florida, California State University at Stanislaus, University of Maryland, and Bowie State University are facing an increase in racist hateful vandalism and white supremacist and hate group recruiting (Heim 2017). In fact the Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism reported a 77 percent increase in white supremacist propaganda on college campuses during the 2017-2018 academic year and has documented 478 incidents of propaganda on 287 campuses in 47 states and the District of Columbia since 2016 (2018).[91] This frequency means that young Latinas are constantly confronted by the preponderance of hate crimes and hate speech on via social media and television.

These experiences are compounded by the proximity and normalization of Trump supporters. Elena remembers the first time she saw a Trump supporter on

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[91] Written in the Spring of 2019.

campus: "I was on the bus and I saw someone wearing a MAGA hat. I was just in disbelief and shock." During our interview at Tubman, Miguelina shared a similar experience.

> My freshman year I had this White guy in my English comp 101, and he seemed like a really cool guy. You know he wasn't mean. He was a pretty nice dude, and then all of a sudden he switched up on me the moment we started talking about (in English) more heavier topics like Women's Rights and stuff like that. He kept taking jabs at a lot of the thinking that I had in the ways of like, you know, women should get paid equally, prominent women figures, or like when we were reading about women's literature at one point in the semester. Samething with like LGBTQ rights and minority rights, and *then* like all of sudden...my freshman year was the year of Trump's election... the day after the election he came in with a Make America Great Again Hat. And I felt kind of disgusted. He always had those thoughts and that kind of was like "Ugh! He's a beautiful guy. I don't know what I should think." And then he pulled out that hat and it made me think you were jabbing on everything that I believe in, all semester long, and then this happens. Now ever since that point he's blatant. He's been blatantly saying what he really really thought, and it was really really horrible because I considered him my friend.

Miguelina's experiences with her classmate demonstrates how Trump's leadership emboldens his followers to spread hate and toxicity, even when they are in the minority. At the sight of a single MAGA hat Elena felt "shock" and Miguelina felt "disgust"; their reactions were reflected and amplified at Mother Teresa where MAGA spinoff hats caused community wide unease.

In our conversation Sofia, a Colombian junior at Mother Teresa University, revealed that an Interfraternity Council (IFC) organization, which she described as "the male orgs from a more social fraternity" came in during Greek week [92] wearing

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[92] Greek Week is a week of competitions and programming designed by a university sometimes in collaboration with members of Greek letter organizations; this week of programming is exclusively

"hats that were a spinoff of Trump's Make America Great Again" hats, which caused

disquiet amongst the people of color Greek community. Sofia is referencing the

moment approximately 45 mostly White and wealthy men wearing MAGA hats

entered the hall where a few hundred Greeks wearing their organizational

paraphernalia had gathered for the kick off event of Greek Week. Sofia continues

> There was definitely [a response to the hats] in smaller communities. Like in UGC
>
> [United Greek Council] we said it was kind of weird because Trump doesn't
> support a lot of diversity where [we are] a very diverse part of campus.
> Obviously, we weren't too happy about it...It wasn't attacking diversity, but
> you know it is definitely a part of our council. We had to address in it a
> way...I'm not too happy, but I'm not going to do anything about [it] because
> they have the right to say that. They [United Greek Council] weren't too
> happy because they didn't like Trump and what he stood for. It was a poor
> reflection of their organization. If they stand for diversity and whatever
> else...maybe that shouldn't have been what their hat said. But ultimately it
> said that.

Sofia's comments emphasize the complexity of young Latinas reactions to Trumpism.

On one hand, she fundamentally believes in others' right to different opinions and

freedom of speech, and on the other, she knows that Trump symbolism frequently

moves beyond freedom of expression into a grey area of thinly veiled hate speech. In

her conversation, Sofia lays bare her internal struggle between strategic silence

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for Greeks, though it may include attendance at a larger university event, such as a high profile guest
speaker.

(which she ultimately chooses) and representing her sentiments, and those of her community, to power structures like white male patriarchy, embodied by the IFC fraternity.

Together, Sofia, Miguelina, and Elena's experiences highlight the visceral reactions that Trump paraphernalia elicits in young Latinas and other communities of color. These incidents also suggest that mundane on-campus activities, like commuting to class, are intensely politically charged for the Cussies[93]. In the Sisters' examples, the racist undertones of MAGA and the IFC fraternity's MAGA spin off hats are amplified by these women and the broader POC Greek community's deep respect for paraphernalia. In their view, when you wear something, especially when you wear it alongside your letters, you are proclaiming "This is me. This is what I'm about. What I stand for. Who I ride with."[94] Sofia confirms that this is how she read the men's statement: "If I didn't like Trump, I wouldn't wear something embellished from his campaign. I feel like that was a very political thing of them to do." The Sisters' readings of MAGA hats is supported by William Kelly who argues that "the baseball cap... has become preeminent in asserting self-identity and negotiating social placement" (2017: 261). By wearing these hats, the members of the fraternity were asserting themselves as part of a larger group of individuals who understand

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[93] Miguelina also reported an incident when a White male student told her repeatedly that "women especially are sluts; Latinas are sluts." She was on her way to class and was so upset by his remarks that she returned to her car and went home. In her view this experience was linked to the context of Trumpism as she remarked "it was just after Trump had been elected."

[94] Interview with alumna who became a Sister in 1983 (three years after the organization's founding).

themselves as superior to a significant portion of the United States populace. In this way, the fraternity's hats became a space claiming practice used to reinforce existing power dynamics between White Cis-men and people of color. They signify the wearer's ability to express hate, and to intimidate and anger others without consequence. This practice further marginalized communities of color by indicating that campus is yet another space where they are dehumanized instead of welcomed, accepted, and celebrated. In the lives of young Latinas, Trumpism is the constant reminder that their right to belong in their neighborhoods, on their campuses and in this country is under attack.

*POC Greek-University Relationships*

Chanel is fire. She's a proud Afro-Latina with opinions to spare. She's a dedicated student and Sister who loves to dance and moonlights as a model. In her words, she's "independent, beautiful, and goddamn brilliant". When I met her, she was a senior at Mitchell University about to graduate with her B.A. in Human Resources Management. Today she holds an MBA (also from Mitchell) and a "fancy big girl" job in New York City's financial district. I interviewed her in the living room of her on campus apartment. We sat on her couch, exchanged quick pleasantries and got straight to business. Chanel held my eye-contact the entire time and gave it to me straight. When I asked her about CUS's relationship to her university she responded:

It's a PWI. They're kind of like trying to weed out the Cultural Greek Council. They're trying to pull us out one by one...They're supportive of their perspective on Greek life, which is more the Panhellenic Greek [Conference (White sororities)]. They're not supportive of the Cultural Greek Council. They kind of see it as something strange and like very secretive. I feel like sometimes when people don't understand something completely or they are not in the knowing of something then already it is automatically a threat. Ambiguity is something they don't like, and I feel like some things are very sacred to multicultural Greeks because of our roots and our values and like the things that we stand for and go through. And since they didn't necessarily go through any struggle or any like...low standards or something...they kind of like kill us off in that sense. Just the not knowing something or not being aware or not being included; it's kind of something they get rid of.

Here Chanel describes the tension between university administrators and POC Greeks and identifies unfamiliarity as the root cause of this tension. In her view, the university is threatened by a form of Greek life they are unfamiliar with and therefore treats POC Greeks as a threat to their established practices. This view is in line with my findings which suggest that universities disproportionately police POC Greeks and that university's treatment of POC Greeks suggests a lack of familiarity with these students' realities.

*Disproportionate policing.*

Chanel's experiences at Mitchell highlight a larger pattern of regulating POC and POC Greek spaces. For example, at Mother Theresa University the involvement fair takes place on the center of the campus and features a DJ, dancing, food, and games. Members of POC Greek letter organizations were told by university officials beforehand that they would not be permitted to stroll or wear letters, despite the fact that dancing was a key component of the event, and the university was not in the

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habit of regulating students' dress. Meet the Greeks (MTGs) practices also highlight the increased scrutiny these communities are under. Recall my entrance to Belpre MTGs that featured a walk through a metal detector, a potential pat down and a photograph of my driver's license. There were also police officers with side arms at this university where MTGs is desegregated and features both White and Culturally Based Greek Letter Organizations.

Differently, at Dandara University, where MTGs is a POC event, the police were armed with large crossbody guns and bullet proof vests. As she was leaving Dandara's MTGs an alumna commented to one of these officers that "this [gesturing to his getup] is a lot" to which he smiled and responded, "it isn't too heavy you get used to it." The Sister had implied the officer's prepared-for-battle attire was not fitting for the occasion, similar to wearing an evening gown to the hardware store. The officer's patronizing smile and light hearted response signaled that he did not understand or share her concern. This exchange suggests how out of touch the police present on campus were to the communities they were there to "protect and serve."

These patterns of policing and regulation are unsurprising. Campus is a microcosm of larger socio-political contexts (Sweet 2001) in which Black and Latinx communities are literally being killed by police and ICE officers (Khan-Cullors and Bandele 2018; Macaraeg 2018; Mapping Police Violence 2020). Research has consistently shown that students of color are more likely to be regulated and disciplined (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights 2014;2018 Losen and Whitaker 2017; Skiba et al. 2019) and members of POC Greek letter

organizations are subject to specific regulations that do not impact other students of

color or members of IFC or NPC Greek letter organizations. Chanel highlights this in

her description of Mitchell's disproportionate disciplinary practices.

> They're D9, but right now they [Black fraternity] had a party outside of
> Mitchell's community. Something did happen that was out of their [the
> Brothers] control. They had a Halloween party and an outsider basically came
> and shot up the place. Well not shot up the place, but he had a gun and
> something happened. And they [the Black fraternity] got kicked out from
> Mitchell. It was something out of their control, and they still got kicked out
> for two years; cease and desist. But when it's an IFC org, for example,
> [White Fraternity], they got kicked out. I think suspended for a year. They
> were having mixers with random girls, and they had [drinks] filled with
> ecstasy. A brother from another chapter said they said it was for their
> personals. So every brother had a [pitcher of punch[95]]with ecstasy [mixed] in
> it, but it kind of doesn't really make sense. [Chanel giggles nervously and
> continues.] Their punishment wasn't as severe. That's why I feel like they are
> kind of killing us off. Orgs that Mitchell, as a primarily White institution,
> know, [for example White fraternity], they know that fraternity, probably have
> some members from that fraternity, and it is seen as something that is ok.

Chanel continues by asserting that her university president and campus administrators

are members of White fraternities and are more familiar with IFC organizations. She

suggests that because of these relationships, White organizations are more likely to

"receive a slap on the wrist" than their POC counterparts who administrators may be

less familiar with. Chanel states "If they don't know you, you're pushed away or

dismissed." Here Chanel describes how different relationships to power yield

different campus experiences for Greek letter organizations and intimates that these

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[95] Punch is an alcoholic drink that includes one or more types of hard liquor and a fruit punch type
juice. "Drinks" and "pitcher of punch" were added to this quote after consulting with Belcalis.

connections determine who stays and who is killed off. Chanel's language is significant. She could have said suspended, banned, or that the organizations lose their charters, but instead she chooses a violent collective framing (killing us) that highlights the feeling of direct targeted attack and a linked fate (Dawson 1994; Simien 2005) mentality whereby the Cussies' future on campus is inherently tied to that of their POC Greek peers.

In addition to obvious regulations like those present at MTGs, there are also more subtle ways universities and administrators indicate that POC Greek life is less desirable than IFC and NPC (White) forms of Greekdom. For example, when I asked Vanessa if her university was accepting of Greek life she said "It can be iffy. It's like a 50/50 type of thing...I do think it is harder for minority organizations to pass [host] events. And I do think it's hard for our organizations to do things on campus, but we kind of accept it for what it is, cause that's the society that we live in." In sharing that it is more difficult for minority organizations to host events at Dandara, Vanessa implies that her White peers have an easier time than she does meeting their programming requirements. Moreover, Vanessa connects her university context to external power structures that order society and frequently subordinate marginalized communities. To explain university administrators' treatment of POC Greeks, Delia from Mitchell offers: "To the people who run OFSA [Office of Fraternity and Sorority Affairs], I feel more than anything we're not looked at as equal to the other councils, and that's because of the numbers that we pull in in comparison to them or the resources that we have at our disposal in comparison to them, which isn't always

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*fair* [nervous laughter] but I'm going to leave it at that." At the time of our interview Delia was interning for OFSA and her analysis indicates that she has a clear understanding of university administrators' justification for the treatment of POC Greeks. Delia suggests that in the university's eyes POC Greeks comprise a smaller population of the Greek community than their IFC and NPC peers and are therefore deserving of less time, attention and resources. She also indicates that because POC Greeks (which for the Cussies includes a large population of working class and first generation students) contribute less financially to the university they are also lower priority. Physically, Mitchell University supports her assessment as it visibly caters to its White male fraternities. These men live in " Fraternity Row," a beautiful block of Victorian homes with manicured lawns at the very center of its most popular downtown campus. To say they enjoy prime real estate on campus would be an understatement. Their homes are within walking distance to the city's downtown strip, a historic park, the largest library at the university, the University Center, which features meeting spaces, entertainment, and several popular eateries, and a brand new state of the art gym, where Mitchell's extraordinarily popular football team works out. Similarly, the large brick houses of the White Sorority are on the surrounding side streets. In Contrast the POC Greeks do not have houses or any space on campus to call their own.

*Colorblind policy.*

The Sisters' insights do not indicate that all university administrator's undervalue or seemingly dislike POC Greek life. As described in Chapter 4, many

Greek advisors work closely with their students and foster positive relationships with the POC Greek Community. University-Greek relationships are layered and complex. Delia highlights this complexity as she seamlessly moves from her critical comments above to this description of her Greek advisors: "I think specifically our MGC [Multicultural Greek Council] representatives are more accepting [of Latina Greek life] than the people who run OFSA. That's only because they work closer with us and so they're taking more time to understand who we are." Similarly, Aida from Dandara explains "The relationship that CUS has with the Director [of Greek life], we have a close relationship...to that person directly we have a good relationship, but as a minority sorority I feel like they kind of don't respect us in a way, but that's towards all of the orgs that are in the multicultural council."

In the Sisters experience, there is a disconnect between their relationship with their Greek advisor and the university's treatment of their organization, which their Greek advisor is charged with administering. In essence, in their view Greek life policies are not made by the people who understand their day to day realities. When policy, even well intentioned policy, fails to account for variations in students' lived experiences and relationships to power, students suffer the consequences.

Delia explains:

> There are times when I feel like the authority figures who are in charge of Greek life aren't looking at Greek life with a real lens. They don't understand or take the time to understand what student realities are and the resources they may or may not have. There are certain pressures that you cannot put on organizations because it just **not** feasible. It's completely overlooked because

they're looking at four different councils as exactly the same whereas four different councils don't operate in the same kind of ways.

Similarly, her chapter Sister, Flor shares:

> I feel that there's a very big misconception about Mainstream and Cultural and Black [Greeks] and because we are thrown into the mix of Greek life where it's mixed in with Mainstream we get a lot of the backlash, and we get a lot of the [exaggerated exhale] policies that are made to deter certain things from occurring...like intoxication.[96] Or even the number rule I feel that even though it doesn't jeopardize Panhellenic orgs, it separates us in giving us a rule of eight members minimum. I think that in a sense that isn't accepting of the multicultural Sororities and Fraternities because they don't understand that our process is different from their process.

Here Delia and Flor highlight that Mitchell treats them exactly like their peers; this "equal treatment" collapses differences and can negatively impact POC Greeks by subjecting them to regulations that are "not feasible" and holds them accountable for the behaviors of other types of organizations. University-wide moratoriums on Greek life and in some cases the ban of Greek life altogether are frequently caused and/or justified by the negative behaviors and practices of white male fraternities (DeSantis 2016; Winsor 2019; Snyder 2020; Sokol 2020). These policies apply to marginalized students, who benefit from POC Greek spaces, (Kimbrough 1995; Taylor and

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[96] At Mitchell and across the nation many White male fraternities have been disciplined for issues, including deaths and rape, surrounding excessive alcohol consumption (Winsor 2019; Snyder 2020; Sokol 2020). However, despite the Sisters and many of their peers' clean records for alcohol related incidents, they too lost the privilege of hosting parties when Mitchell enacted a ban on Greek life parties following several prominent incidents on Fraternity Row.

Howard-Hamilton 1995; Kimbrough and Hutcheson 1998; Whaley 2010; Moreno and Banuelos 2013) regardless of their organizations' relationships to campus.[97]

By enacting colorblind policies, Mitchell University creates an institutional context that disproportionately burdens members of the POC Greek community. Despite cultural, organizational and individual differences these students are required to meet the same requirements as their Mainstream peers; this has negative consequences for the Sisters. For example, in her interview, Aida from Dandara described a situation where campus administrators told the Sisters they had to attend a meeting "last minute". She explains that

> As a multicultural Greek sorority, I feel they don't respect us *anxious laugh*. For example, there's meetings that you are told to go to last minute and then people can't make it because they have jobs or they have lives, and then if you don't go you get fined. I get that if people can't go you get fined, but if you're sending a replacement you still get fined so it's like how is that any fair.
> We're still going to these programs.

While finding 2-3 representatives to attend a meeting with short notice *might* be feasible for an organization with over sixty members for the Cussies with 2-10 Sisters on campus this requirement and the financial consequences of failing to attend the meeting are significant stressors.

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[97] The 2018 Greek life suspension at the California Polytechnic State University is one of the two examples I have come across where POC Greeks were not punished alongside their IFC peers for IFC offenses (Leslie 2018; Anderson 2019). However, at Cal Poly the language of the policy, as delivered by university president Jefferey Armstrong, stated that Greeks were banned thereby framing POC Greeks as outside of the Greek community.

At Belpre University colorblind policies take the form of identical service requirements. In our interview Dulce states "Belpre is constantly emailing us like 'hey we have a community service at the food bank, three dates. Do you guys want to get involved? Do you guys want to sponsor? Co-host?" She continues "They definitely require us to do community service every semester, a fundraiser every semester, mandatory Greek meetings, so mandatory, we must come to these meetings. We must hear this is what's been going on; this is what we need fixed; this is what we need to do better." Belpre does an excellent job of connecting its Greek organizations to service learning opportunities. However, this constant contact can also contribute to student burn-out. At Belpre University Greek letter organizations are rated annually using a star system that ranges from 1-4 stars. The Cussies are a three star chapter, and in order to maintain a good relationship with the university they say yes to nearly every university request. These commitments are compounded by their CUS programming requirements and their personal programming desires.[98] By requiring smaller organizations to meet the same requirements (in the same way) as larger organizations, Belpre contributes to student burnout.

The Sisters are spread thin and this can have a negative impact on student success. For example, the Cussies at Belpre fell from a four star (the highest rating) chapter to a three star chapter despite completing all programming and service

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[98] CUS programming requirements are almost always met by meeting university programming requirements. However, CUS requires undergraduates to attend regional retreats and conferences and one national event annually. Travel to these events requires a significant time commitment and resources which the Sisters must fundraise or work to cover.

requirements because the Sisters' aggregate GPA dropped below the 2.5 university standard.[99] This happened despite an organizational culture that values academic achievement and CUS-wide initiatives like academic probation (which limits the ways Sisters can participate in CUS with a GPA below a 2.5) and CUS tutors (official and unofficial) that are intended to support members in attaining their degrees. At Belpre and every other university in the study, the Sisters reported feeling exhausted, burned out, or having so much going on they barely had time to breathe or stress about everything to do. Unlike popular portrayals of undergraduate life, these women did not have all the free time in the world. They had full calendars and our interviews would need to be scheduled around work, CUS, class, family, club meetings, and other commitments.

In addition to keeping the Sisters busy, university requirements also mold their political practices by exposing them to different audiences, organizations and civic/political practices. For example, Belpre bussed students to the shore to work with environmental groups at a beach clean up. The Sisters speak positively about these types of experiences. However, given their competing priorities and the finite amount of time the Sisters have as undergraduates, these experiences frequently come at the expense of other civic and political socialization and skill development opportunities and desires. Dulce explains this as she states "sometimes I think it's because we just have so much to do that we're just involved in CUS and we're not

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[99] There are only two Sisters in the chapter at Belpre.

involved with other things that represent our organization that also try to help or impact or change policy or the communities [like participating in the club to support undocumented students]." Many other Cussies are involved in additional organizations and clubs. However, CUS is time consuming and many Sisters use language that suggests they would like to dedicate more time to clubs and organizations outside of CUS. For example Miguelina's description of her participation in Tubman's PRIDE organization: "I'm just a general member. I wanted to be, like, you know, part of the executive board, but I didn't have the time". While university Greek life policies are not entirely responsible for the Sisters' busy schedules, they do add unnecessary pressures to them by setting the same expectations for a group of 2-10 women as a group of 35-100+.

By collapsing POC Greeks into mainstream greek culture, the university signals that one type of greek life, White greek life, is the standard to which POC Greeks should aspire. We see this in number requirements intended to shift the quality vs quantity mindset pervasive in POC Greek spaces. By asking the Sisters to recruit and teach more members than they normally would the university indicates that their organizational and community cultures are less desirable than those of their peers in dominant groups. An extreme example of this took place at Mother Teresa in 2013 when the university proposed that POC Greek sororities participate in the Panhellenic recruitment process, which is shared by all NPC organizations. In contrast, POC Greeks intake processes are specific to their organization. In another context this request would spark public outrage. Imagine the headlines if a university

asked students of color to "act white," but the Cussies and their peers are subjected to these types of requests and demands on a regular basis. When the Sisters are not being asked to conform to dominant constructions of Greek life they are frequently asked (or mandated) to share Latinx Greek culture with their IFC and NPC peers. In the next section, I discuss how universities profit from POC Greek culture and labor and argue that some university policies can be interpreted as school sanctioned cultural appropriation.

*Profiting from CUS.*

Universities profit from POC Greek life in three primary ways: labor, programming, and cultural appropriation. Regarding the first, the Sisters and other Greeks, both POC and White, are routinely asked to volunteer their time to support university events. Students are sometimes given points towards their star rating for supporting these events, but during their annual evaluations, it is not always evident how their participation has been weighed. For example, at Mother Teresa the Greeks were asked to attend a guest speaker's chat in order to help fill an auditorium. They were also asked to set up tables and chairs alongside paid student staff for another event and to help first year students move in. On their annual evaluation checklist only the guest speaker and move in were listed. Given the power dynamics between students and the Greek office and the precarious conditions that POC Greek chapters operate under, university requests are frequently read by the Sisters has mandatory: "We have to go." Giving the university this implicitly required support can come at financial and academic costs to the Sisters who will rearrange work and study

schedules to accommodate the university. This impacts POC Greeks differently than their White counterparts, primarily because of their chapter sizes and ability to divide the labor fairly and/or have someone fulfill a university request with little notice.

In addition to providing event support, POC Greeks, specifically, are asked by university administrators to serve as unpaid "energy producers"[100] (Haddish 2017); for the Cussies this often takes the form of strolling to draw a crowd or keep energy up during an event's intermission. Additionally, at Belpre up until recently the university profited from their large MTGs that was popularized by their POC Greek community (Chapter 4).

In addition to relying on student labor, the university also uses POC Greek letter organizations' money for student programming. Karina (Tubman) describes "everything comes out of our pockets because the Greek Council doesn't get funding from the school. So everything literally comes out of our pockets, and it's like really hard. Let's say we want to bring a speaker or we want to have [a large scale event] on a Saturday when so many people could come, we can't do that because we can't afford to pay $600 for a program when it is just two undergraduates." Karina explains to me that the university does not fund their programming or allow Greeks to apply for funds from the student programming board because of their exclusive membership practices. This funding practice means that the university receives a wide variety of

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[100] Tiffany Haddish writes "energy producer is what white suburban people call a "hype man"; she also offers that in this role she "used to get that part cracking" (2017:15-16).

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programming for its general student body free of charge. This impacts POC Greeks differently than their peers not only because of the costs of programming per member but because of inherent organizational differences. As explained to me by Mother Teresa's Assistant Dean of Students, "Panhellenic [and IFC] organizations can meet their programming requirements internally" meaning that the funds those students put into programming are predominantly used to sponsor member only events whereas the funds the Cussies put up for programming are used to sponsor public events. Even if the Sisters' hosted programming exclusively for Cussies the university might still consider funding them as they do other exclusive clubs like the university choir, orchestra or marching band. However, they do not and instead profit from their students' labors.

Universities rely on Greeks for event support and student programming, but they also rely on POC Greeks for readily exploitable culture. During Greek Week, Tubman required White Greeks to come up with and perform their own strolls. These resulted in dance, fair attempts, and blatant parodies that failed to honor the legacies and contributions of POC Greek life. One sorority chose not to participate and instead they performed a cheer that borrowed no aspect of POC Greek culture for their performance. These events are distinct from voluntary student run Greek Swap events where two organizations (from the same or different councils) learn about their partners' Greek culture and perform a stroll informed by their interactions. When a university understands POC Greek culture as its property to distribute and assign as its leadership deems fit, it claims students of color's contributions as its own. In

essence it creates a context of school sanctioned/required cultural appropriation.[101]

These practices exploit students of Color and provide little if any benefit to White

students. While some White Greeks might create cross community dialogue by taking

the assignment as an opportunity to learn from their POC Greek counterparts, the

majority create their performances with little if any interaction with the POC Greek

community. This reifies racial hierarchies[102] that value Whiteness and reinforces

White students' experiences (and often expectations) of privilege relative to their

POC peers.

Appropriating students' culture, using their funds, and demanding their labor

are exploitative processes. These processes are compounded by colorblind policies

that fail to account for differences in students' academic and organizational

experiences. These cultural, social, and interpersonal power dynamics work to

subordinate members of POC Greek letter organizations, which when coupled with

existing structural matrices of domination leads to the disproportionate policing and

regulation of the Cussies and their POC Greek peers.

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[101] I do not understand Mother Teresa's request that Women of Color sororities participate in
Panhellenic rush practices as cultural appropriation. That was a request to apply a codified operating
procedure (which the WOC refused) as opposed to an organization specific set of traditions and
practices.

[102] Natalie Masuoka and Jane Junn define racial hierarchy as "an ordering of political power among
groups classified by race" (2013:2)

*Individual Relationships To Power*

Collectively the Cussies experience the context of threat in similar and related

ways. However, the Sisters must also navigate their unique positionality within

matrices of domination. These individual differences in their relationships to power

and lived experiences also inform their political practices. In this section the Sisters

share some of their individual experiences that contribute to the context of threat and

demonstrate how multiple domains of power coalesce as interlocking systems of

oppression in the lived experiences of marginalized communities. Aside from

curating these excerpts, my voice is intentionally absent in this section. These women

are the experts on their own lives.

*Representation.*

> I am a political science and economics double major so my class is all males. I
> think in all of my classes there is only one or two females. So it's definitely
> hard trying to get my point across or trying to constantly prove to everyone in
> every class, including my professors, that I deserve to be here. You should
> respect me just as much as the male student here who probably knows just as
> much as me. So it's constantly having to prove myself everywhere.-Karina,
> Tubman University

> As a Latina we're not seen in technology or in the STEM program. So when I
> go to class I'm the only Latina there and as a woman I'm one out of five. So I
> guess just some Latinas feel like they're not able to do things Caucasians are
> able to do so that's why I wanted to [host] this coding program [for CUS].
> Also I feel like funding [is a challenge]. When I get my grants and I talk to my
> Caucasian friends they get all these grants and all these loans. And I'm like "I
> have to pay out of pocket and you're getting all these loans and you're getting
> all these refund checks;" why am I not getting that same type of things? We
> get the same grades. We get the same gpa, and we're in the same program.
> But why are you getting more money and I'm not?-Aida, Dandara University

Karina and Aida's experiences demonstrate that they feel less valued than

some of their peers. In Karina's example she explains that her professor and her peers

respect her less than her male peers and therefore value her insights less than her male counterparts. This lack of respect multiplies her work load as she must take on the burden of "proving herself" as a worthy student and peer in addition to learning the material and responding appropriately in class. Similarly, Aida finds herself equally matched with her peers in all areas except funding. In this way Dandara and her program signal to her that her scholarship is less valuable than her White classmates. These messages (less valuable than white and/or male peers) can make degree attainment more difficult for these women (Hurtado and Alvarado 2015).

*Family Pressures.*

> Having to deal with my parents' expectations[is a challenge] as well. I'm a first generation Latina student. I'm the first in my family to graduate college, hopefully, and it's umm really hard meeting their expectations. You know they don't really understand what I'm going through, and they don't really understand the type of support that I need yet. And I don't blame them at all because they never really had to experience something like this, and I hope that with my brother they're better. But with me they kind of just expect me to do everything at once. Take care of them. Do my school work right, but also I have to chip in with the house and stuff. I work, like a lot.- Miguelina, Tubman University

Miguelina is also a first generation American, and she has served as her family's translator since the age of seven. She is extraordinarily proud of her parents' sacrifices and their reliance on her. Additionally, she uses a growth mindset to describe her parents' abilities to support an undergraduate child and hopes that her sacrifices will have a positive impact on her younger brother's schooling experiences. However, managing her parents' expectations and her university requirements (both academic and financial) can be exhausting and stressful.

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*Language Concerns.*

Personally, I grew up in a Haitian Dominican household, but because of my mom's personal preference we were never taught to speak Spanish. And sometimes I feel left out of conversations that I can't personally contribute to because I don't speak Spanish. Or like in the community, I won't understand all of the references because how I grew up. And the community, the Latino community, is not exclusive to Latinx people, but there are references that you just feel left out of. It is a little difficult sometimes, but also being ok with I'm not going to get that reference because I'm not Colombian.I'm not going to get that reference because I'm not Puerto Rican or like not understanding all of the Dominican references because of my mom's personal preference. An example would be in our group chat with a fraternity everyone was talking machis, and I never grew up with them. So everyone was really excited talking about the differences between those, and I was kinda just like ......it's nothing huge, but like it's still the sense that I'm missing a social cue. And I'm not really sure what to do.-Laura, Dandara University

Spanish is a primary or secondary language in many Latinx communities, and it is often valorized as a marker of *Latinidad.* Laura, who does not speak Spanish, feels excluded from popular imaginaries of *Latinidad,* and this feeling of exclusion can be compounded when she does not understand a particular pop culture reference. Dominant constructions of *Latinidad* can also be homogenizing and fail to represent the wide array of cultural and linguistic traditions within the Latinx community (Dávila 2000; Molina Guzmán and Valdivia 2010). Laura resists her marginalization by reminding herself of the heterogeneity within Latinx spaces.

*Race.*

I'm in the middle. I'm in this weird limbo. It's like--- ok, for the Latino community it's like oh "morenita, tu 'ta negra or something," and it's like curly hair or like "tiene pajon." You have unruly hair or something; "you just brush it." I had one of my friends try to justify [when] he said something like super stupid like "you're like the light skinned Black; you're the lightest shade

of Black. You're not black; you're a light shade." In the Latino community there's like the anti-black[ness], especially in the Domincan Republic. So yeah like in that sense I don't connect easily to some women. Some Latinas are still on that mindset. Maybe due to like personal family backgrounds and obviously because maybe they have a different status of privilege. Some Latinas who kind of identify as me, they feel the same way like they're in this weird limbo.

But then in the Black community, even though I am Black they don't see me as Black . They kinda see my like "you that Spanish jawn." It's like in the Dominican Republic there's braids but it's not the same braids. It's weird. It's like they do cornrows and that's as far as you go with braids. It's not like box locs; it's not like box braids. It's not Sengalese braids. And the fact that I didn't really know the terminology or the certain types of braids the Black community kinda looked at me like "whaaaaaat? You not Black. You Spanish." So I'm in this weird limbo; like I don't really fit in a category.- Chanel, Mitchell University

Representation in a sense, especially in the Latinx community. Like if a lot of people see CUS, they'll see a bunch of women that look like standard Latinas. And then they see me, and [they're] like "where are you from?" "Oh I'm from Haiti and the D.R." Really?! *excited voice* It's just the "really" that kind of throws me off. It's like "yeah, I am. My mom's from here, and my dad's from there." Or like, just, there's always like a sense of the really, the surprise, the "oh that makes more sense." What if I was just Haitian? Would it not make sense for me to be in this organization or be a part of this community? It's like me being Dominican is like the "oh that makes sense" aspect of it. It happens frequently, but I know it's not out of malice. But it is a slight annoyance. -Laura, Dandara

In Chanel's example she uses her hair to show how racial boundaries are frequently set and reinforced across the bodies of Women of Color. These types of in-group policing make little room for those with multiple racial and/or ethnic identities. In Chanel's story she is too Black for some of the Latinx community and too "Spanish" for some of the Black community. Similarly, Laura's Haitian identity is

often excluded from conceptualizations of Latinx communities. Interestingly, when Laura uses the term "standard Latinas" she too buys into and perpetuates the homogenization of Latinidad that she is resisting through both her understanding of her Haitian identity as Latinx and her positive self-talk that reminds her that Spanish language skills are not a requirement of *Latinidad*(example above). The inability to "fit in a category" that Chanel and Laura describe contributes to their individual experiences of threat as it calls into question their understandings of themselves and their communities. Moreover, this threat is amplified as it is frequently members of their own communities who question their belonging and sometimes even themselves (Laura).

*Queerness.*

Several Sisters from the LGBTQ+ community were interviewed, but in the majority of our interactions their sexualities' relationships to power did not come up as contributing to their experience of a context of threat. However, in one interview a Sister shared a narrative of threat that I was asked not to disclose. I have included this section to acknowledge that for her, and other Sisters, navigating gender and sexuality can be threatening.

*Beyond Threat*

At this moment the pervasive context of threat the Cussies navigate is marked by Trumpism, university policies and practices that simultaneously police, erase and profit from the POC Greek community, and the Sisters' individual relationships to

power. These threats (and others) work to subordinate the Cussies and other members of their communities across domains of power. However, Collins' heuristic also makes space for resistance (1990; 2017; Collins and Bilge 2016). In Chapter 3 I discussed space claiming, performance and presentation as forms of resistance. Similarly, in Chapter 4 I examine how shifting relationships to power mediate the Sisters' political practices. In the next section, I provide an analysis of the Sisters' less visible acts of resistance.

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SELF-PRESERVATION AND THE PRESERVATION OF POWER

Survival is a political act (Collins 2017). Indigenous communities, displaced peoples, immigrants, refugees, and/or survivors of religious persecution teach us that survival disrupts dominant, frequently disparaging, narratives and highlights the resilience of marginalized communities (Dion 2004; Choi 2008; Weld 2014). The Cussies also use their personal testimonies as a political tactic to render visible their experiences and improve the lives of their communities (Chapter 4). However, this process includes consistent emotional, mental and physical labor, which is always paired with the demands of their student, Greek, and family lives. Nearly every Sister I spoke with mentioned feeling over-extended in some aspect of her life. In order to continue their work, which they understand as critically important, they enact self-preservation as a political tactic via distancing narratives, rule following, and physical

self-care. The Cussies use these practices in concert to protect and preserve their communities and their space on campus.

*Distancing Narratives*

While I am sitting in Elena's room, we begin to chat about racist, homophobic, and sexist acts that have taken place on college campuses. She pauses for a second, considers the pattern thoughtfully, and shares that aside from a big incident a few years ago, Mitchell University has thankfully been immune from those types of issues. She makes this statement despite the fact that in the last two years Mitchell University has had a slew of hate crimes and issues, including anti-Black and anti-Muslim posters, nazi graffiti, white supremacist recruiters, and demonstrators yelling racist, homophobic, and sexist slurs. Granted, Mitchell University is quite large, but based on the sheer volume of incidents alone,[103] it is unlikely that all these incidents, including several reported by her Chapter Sisters who she sees multiple times a week, escaped her radar. However, Elena is not an outlier. Other Sisters in this study, including those not interviewed, repeat this pattern of distancing their university experiences from their toxic realities. For example, Mari, a senior at Mother Teresa University, interviewed before the protests were organized, remarked that her university was accepting of POC, and that maybe one incident had occurred during her time on campus. However, her chapter sister, Araceli, having just

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[103] Recall earlier in the chapter the 911 dispatcher on this campus who remarked that these types of incidents occurred on a daily basis.

participated in the movement for inclusion and support of marginalized students at Mother Teresa, listed a wide array of incidents the university had barely responded to or failed to respond to over the last five years. This discrepancy between their accounts of the same institution might have been attributed to their individual campus experiences. However, other Sisters also used distancing language to describe their campus cultures at their events; I heard "We are lucky things are not so bad at [insert university name]" time and again, from campus to campus, whenever conversation shifted to Trumpism.

This dissonance between the Cussies' descriptions of their universities and their daily campus realities is used as a self-preservation tactic to limit their direct engagement with oppressive power structures. Cussies are well aware of hate's presence in their lives, but they cannot control the violent socio-political climate around them. However, young Latinas do have the autonomy to shape their narrative of hate's role(s) in their lives, and they choose to describe and emphasize realities that distance themselves and their communities from the hate, harm and stress frequently associated with Trumpism. In this way, they create alternative realities that push threat from their purview and protect their loved ones; they create narratives in which marginalized communities can survive. By distancing themselves from the realities of interlocking oppressions, the Sisters limit how they engage with subordinating power structures. These acts of boundary setting give the Cussies some control over when and how they engage with threat. This modicum of control allows the Sisters to preserve their power and strategically deploy it the circumstances they choose.

*Rule Following*

Similarly, when asked about CUS' relationships to their universities the

Sisters also distanced themselves from the university's treatment of Culturally based

Greek letter organizations. For example, Chanel, who used the collective term "us"

when describing Mitchell University's hostile relationship to POC Greeks, distances

CUS from this shared experience by interrupting herself with this aside in the middle

of her story about the disproportionate policing of POC Greeks: "We[CUS] make an

impact because we follow the rules. In Mitchell's eyes we are doing well because we

follow the rules. We're following the systems they have here." In highlighting the

Cussies adherence to the rules, Chanel outlines another preservation strategy the

Sisters use to protect their power in the context of threat: rule following. Delia,

Chanel' chapter sister, elaborates

> I'm an intern [for the] MGC [multicultural Greek Council] also. So sitting in
> those meetings and going over lists of who has what and what we have to do.
> I'm like "Oh great, we got this" or "oh we don't need to worry about that. It's
> not an issue that really pertains to us because we're not in bad standing." We
> keep our grades up. We make sure our intake is done right. We pull off the
> programs that we need to. We don't piss off [our Greek advisor]--sorry . We
> don't aggravate our representative or we don't aggravate the person who is
> supposed to be our sub-representative to the MGC representative. We keep
> our ducks in order, and I feel like that helps us not always like oh we're
> submissive but we do what needs to be done.

Rule following and strategic diplomacy strengthens the connections between the

Sisters and their Greek offices which protects their charter (and by extension the CUS

space) and provides them with the occasional latitude. For example, at Dandara

University the Sisters had not submitted their paperwork to table and perform at the

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involvement fair. Their Greek advisor made an exception for the Sisters and allowed them to turn in their paperwork the day of the fair. The Cussies attributed this allowance to their established relationship to the university. Aida describes "We were told we weren't able to perform because we were missing this paper. But then the relationship that CUS has with the director, we have a close relationship because we always do things on time and we get things done, and then they gave us that leeway like we were able to hand in that paper the day of." This allowance was a big deal for the Sisters as several of Aida's chapter sisters mentioned it in their interviews as well. I interviewed the girls at different moments in the academic year, including well after the exception had been made and yet they still thought it relevant to discuss. The Sisters are taken by this gesture because it is uncharacteristic of the institution that frequently subjects them to additional rules and regulations and disproportionately polices them.

Academic institutions usually do not make allowances for the Cussies, but their rule following grants them continued existence and charter on the campus and the occasional bone, when something slips through the cracks. Given the constraints on their time it could be argued the Sisters have all the more reason to miss a deadline or skip an event, but they almost never do. Instead they do the work of dozens of students for their chapters and are meticulous with their deadlines and organizational responsibilities.[104] While some amount of rule following is built into the university-

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[104] A sister might miss a deadline etc., but it is rare for a chapter to shirk or overlook their responsibilities.

Greek organization dynamic, not all organizations or organization types are as concerned as the Sisters with "keeping their ducks in order." White male fraternities have been part of and/or the cause of some of the ugliest incidents on college campuses including racism, sexual violence, hazing deaths and drug and alcohol abuse (Albuquerque Evening Citizen 1905; Nuwer 1999; DeSantis 2016; Turkewitz 2019; Sokol 2020). Given the continued prevalence of these incidents it does not appear that White male fraternity members are nearly as concerned with rule following as their CUS counterparts. This can be attributed to differences in their relationships to power both on and off campus.

In the United States universities were created for the benefit of wealthy White men (Wilder 2013). Women and Women of Color were not included in these initial constructions of the ideal college student and even today they must continually work to make spaces for themselves in these institutions (Yosso et al. 2009; Ferguson 2017)

The Cussies, who claim and deploy power in public, visible, and sometimes contentious ways, leverage a politics of respectability to minimize their perceived threat to the vestiges of power left by centuries of institutional practices that intentionally idealized wealth and maleness as university students' characteristics. A politics of respectability is the connection of "worthiness for respect to sexual propriety, behavioral decorum, and neatness" (Higginbotham 1993; Harris 2003:213). Historically, respectability was used by White women to claim "greater political and public power" (Harris 2003:xxx) and by African Americans, particularly Black

Women, as part of an "uplift politics" intended to both model and spread "respectable" behavior in the African American community and to demonstrate Black respectability to White communities (Higginbotham 1993; Harris 2003). In both these examples, those subordinated by distributions of power that value maleness and whiteness leveraged a politics of respectability to distinguish themselves from less respected groups.

The Cussies use rule following as a respectability politic in two primary ways. Similar to White women and African Americans, the Sisters leverage a politics of respectability to differentiate themselves from harmful stereotypes of Greek life. Additionally, the Cussies also rely on rule following as a form of respectability to strengthen their relationships with university administrators thereby facilitating their continued presence on campus. For the Sisters the idea that they are "always wearing their letters" is not only a point of pride, but also a reminder to act in "respectable ways" that are valorized by academic institutions and have permeated CUS culture as a means of organizational survival. Communities, like CUS, are spaces that both resist and "provide respite from oppression" (Collins 2017:29). Rule following supports Sisters' efforts to maintain a CUS chapter on campus; in other words, following the rules facilitates the preservation of a place of refuge and restoration. CUS is a space created to support Latinas and other Women of Color by protecting it the Sisters preserve a source of power, their sisterhood (community).

Self-care has emerged as an important coping strategy that the Cussies are actively practicing and encouraging their university and broader communities to take up. Their conversations on healthy eating, traditional medicines, yoga, and meditation indicate a focus on physical and spiritual well being. Lip scrubs and natural hair product raffles have joined bake sales as chapter fundraisers. Events are hosted on individual sisters' diseases and conditions in order to create space for healing testimonies, spread awareness, and connect audiences to screening and treatment resources. Healthcare professionals are invited to speak on women's health issues and where to seek preventative care. The Cussies also host events on skin care, mental health and free/low cost mental health services, the impacts of stress on the body, and stress relief strategies.

At these events, the current political context and/or school related stressors are consistently given as a reason these issues are of renewed importance. In a classroom at Dandara University one evening, a group of 15 undergraduates, mostly students of color, gathered to discuss skincare routines and make face masks. The event began with a discussion of the relationship between stress and acne. The hosts, two Sisters and a member of a male Latinx fraternity, talked about the stress of school, family and Greek life obligations. They invited the group to talk about their individual stressors that resulted in breakouts or dark circles under their eyes. After a non-affiliated young woman who was interested in becoming a Sister of CUS stated that the news was stressing her out, the discussion briefly shifted to the stresses they face

because of the current political climate, particularly a very well publicized racist incident involving a member of a White sorority on their campus. Attempting to lighten the mood and move into the event the organizations had prepared for on exfoliation, natural remedies and the importance of hydration, one of the hosts, Yiliana, a Dominican senior, proclaimed, "let's not even talk about the cheeto." The event proceeded with shared testimonies about horrible breakouts and budget friendly treatments and concluded with participants making their own face masks out of their preferred combination of lemon, honey, sugar, and coconut oil. Throughout the mask making process participants chatted in groups of 2 or 3 about classes, Greek events, weekend plans, and romantic relationships. The event closed with the hosts thanking everyone for their participation.

This event highlights how young Latinas use boundary setting as self-care and as a method of preserving power. At the start of the skin care workshop, a participant brought up Trumpism's impact on her mental and physical wellbeing. The students in the room responded with their own stories of how prejudice, hate, and white supremacy were impacting their daily lives and schooling experiences. This conversation, in a space for relaxation and restoration, shows how deeply entwined Trumpism has become in the lives of young Latinas. Yiliana's use of "cheeto" to describe Trump is particularly telling of her opinion of him as it indicates a multitude of disparaging comparisons between Trump and the artificial, cheap, chemically laden, snack. By asking the group to move on, Yiliana makes a conscious choice to preserve the space for restoration, thereby distancing her community from Trumpism.

In moving the conversation from Trump and his supporters, Yiliana reclaims the group's time together to create a space that actualizes the narratives of young Latinas that emphasize their distance from the power dynamics that work to subordinate marginalized communities.

While in some spaces the Cussies intentionally distance themselves from proximity to Trumpism, they also leverage the impact of the current political climate to encourage their peers to care for themselves and others. In September 2017, the Tubman University chapter hosted an event on polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS); it was intended to introduce the audience to the autoimmune disease and teach them how those living with it cope with their multitude of symptoms. The Sister leading the event laced the presentation with her personal experience of the disease and shared a video of another Sister's testimony. The primarily young Latina audience responded by connecting the information to their own lived experiences, some disclosing that they too suffered from the condition, and sharing resources, tools, and skills. A health educator alumna participated by listing on campus and off campus resources for free and low cost gender specific healthcare. Their exchanges about healthcare, personal health, and diseases impacting their communities were peppered with references to the necessity of prompt action as healthcare access was at risk, some directly referencing threats to Planned Parenthood.

The Cussies references to external stressors caused by Trumpism are indicative of their use of strategic narratives as political practices. In some circumstances, the Sisters intentionally distance themselves and their communities

from the impact of Trump. However, when survival via access to healthcare or DACA protections is called into question these women directly call out Trumpism to draw attention to their proximity to threat and offer their communities tools to navigate and/ or challenge existing distributions of power. For example, at the event on PCOS, one woman from another Latina sorority shared her mother's battle with untreated women's health issues and asked how to get her treatment. In planning the event, the young Latinas made sure an alumna with public health expertise was on hand to field such questions. After the young woman's question about her mother was answered, another Sister said one of the best things the woman could do for her mom was to take care of herself, directly referencing the health care services available at Tubman. A third Sister in the room picked up that mantle and reinforced the reality of Trumpism, toxic social media (hate/Trump supporters), and university pressures by stating, "with this added stress, your family needs you to take care of yourself." Here, Cussies strategically frame their proximity to hate to encourage themselves and other women to use self-care as a tool to resist external stressors and care for loved ones. When erasure is at stake, self-care, whether it be mental or corporal, becomes an act of survival as it works to ensure the endurance of communities that are continually stripped of power. Self-care is one way the Sisters resist their marginalization, center their experiences, and reaffirm their commitment to each other.

CONCLUSION

The Cussies political practices are informed by an interrelated context of threat. On campus, Trumpism has manifested itself via a slew of hateful propaganda, racist, sexist and homophobic incidents. In the Sisters' experiences, some university practices over-police POC Greeks while colorblind policies contribute to student burnout. University policies, including those that profit from the Sisters' labor and culture, and the on-campus manifestations of the national socio-political context are shared experiences that inform each Sister's individual relationship to power. These collective and individual relationships to power create a context that *threatens* the Sisters' safety, political voice, access to education, and other aspects of their individual and shared well being.

In response to this context of threat the Sisters' preserve their power via distancing narratives, rule following and self-care. Through these practices (and others) the act of preserving collective power, or ensuring community survival, becomes an act of self- preservation. Self-preservation is also a means of preserving power. In other words, self-preservation and the preservation of power are mutually constituting in the Sisters' experiences. When a Sister cares for herself, her Sisters, or the members of her community she reinforces their abilities to create, shape and share their own narratives. For the Cussies, and many scholars of political engagement, voice is a critical component of political practice (Verba et al. 1995; Bedolla 2005; Schlozman et al. 2012; Loader, Vromen and Xenos 2014). The Sisters consistently use their voices to make space for themselves and advance their pro-woman, pro-

immigrant, pro-POC platform (Chapters 3 and 4). Therefore, when the Cussies take a moment to distance themselves from threat and make a face mask, they are not avoiding politics, but rather they are replenishing their arsenal in their fight to challenge subordinating power dynamics. In this way, survival becomes the bedrock of the Sisters' political practices. It's pretty bad ass if you think about it -- an army of girls toppling the patriarchy one manicure at a time.

Chapter Six: Conclusion
"I Been Thinking About This for a Long Time"

In this dissertation, I have argued that CUS, a Latina sorority, is an important political space where young Latinas claim, deploy and preserve power. In the first two chapters, I introduced the narratives surrounding youth and Latinx political engagement, sororities, CUS specifically, and this study. In Chapters 3-5, I analyzed the Sisters' behaviors that both challenge and reinforce existing power dynamics, paying particular attention to how the Cussies both wield and subvert power.

Cussies use their public performances to claim power from two disparate sources, namely the erotic (as Lorde conceptualizes it) and hegemonic masculinity. I understand this practice as aberrant femininity or a distinct form of Latina womanhood that differs from feminine practices frequently associated with whiteness and the idealized virginal femininity of *marianismo*. In practice, aberrant femininity foregrounds community, as young Latinas like Cussies, pachucas and cholas, use their aesthetic to signify both belonging and power. In addition to serving as an expression of community, the Cussies also leverage aberrant femininity as a space claiming practice on frequently hostile college campuses.

Sisters don't just claim power: they also use that power. Cussies, across university contexts, share a pro-immigrant, pro-woman, pro-POC politic. This platform takes different forms in different moments and its expression is generally dependent on the Sisters' relationships to power. By developing, adjusting and enforcing university policies, university administrators, particularly Greek-life

advisors, have power over many CUS practices and the ability to shift the organization's relationship to and experience of power thereby mediating the Sisters' political expression. Different from previous research, I found organizational relationships to power play a greater role in Latinx youth political expression than institution type.

Across institutions and chapter contexts, at the time of this study, threat was a pervasive marker of the Cussies and CUS' relationships to power. This context of threat mediates the Sisters' experience of and relationship to power at national, institutional, and individual levels of analysis and ultimately their political expression. At the national level, Trump's election and leadership have bolstered the expression of hate on college campuses. At the institutional level, universities simultaneously police, erase, and profit from CUS and other POC Greek letter organizations. At an individual level, Sisters experience threat differently; their experiences include underrepresentation in their classrooms, managing familial expectations, and navigating racial and ethnic biases. The Sisters actively resist these threats by working to preserve their power via distancing narratives, rule-following, and physical self-care. These strategies of self- preservation are tools used to ensure the Cussies' continued ability to challenge subordinating power dynamics.

Throughout this dissertation, I have emphasized the co-constructing relationship between power and political action. In the Cussies' experiences, claiming, deploying, and preserving power are different tactics that include a myriad of political practices aimed at fundamentally changing the experience of power for

marginalized communities. In other words, by adapting their political practices to their current experiences of interlocking systems of oppression the Sisters work to maneuver themselves, their families, and their broader communities from subordinated relationships to power. Based on their experience of power they choose the right moment, audience, and context to advance their mission using one of the many political practices available to them. In this way, the Cussies actively challenge subordinating power structures, make gains for their communities across domains of power and construct and express imaginaries of power that value POC, women and immigrants. In sum, Latina sorority girls, in contrast to stereotypes and assumptions about their apathy or political disinterest, are political actors who both navigate and challenge interlocking systems of oppression and whose political behaviors and practices are mediated and shaped by their individual and collective relationships to power.

LESSONS LEARNED, QUESTIONS RAISED, & FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

This study of the Cussies' multi-directional experience and use of power makes important contributions to our understandings of Latinx youth politics, intersectionality, Latinx Greek letter organizations, POC Greek-University relationships and CUS Culture. To conclude, I delineate several of these key insights, raise related questions, and offer ideas for future studies. I also make recommendations for university administrators and CUS leadership and close with a discussion Latinas' political resilience.

*Latinx Youth Politics*

Our understandings of Latinx youth politics are inherently tied to how we conceptualize and understand the political (ch 1). Many scholars have shown that adopting, applying and interrogating broader conceptualizations of politics works to illuminate and recognize marginalized communities' political contributions that are frequently invisibilized (Hardy-Fanta 1993; Cohen et al. 1997; Bedolla 2000; Taft 2006; 2019; Cohen 2010; Crossley 2017). I have leveraged these insights and applied a broad conceptualization of politics that includes the behaviors and practices that both challenge and maintain existing power dynamics. From this expansive starting point, I have traced, mapped, disentangled and analyzed the Cussies' relationships to matrices of domination in order to identify how the Sisters' claim, deploy, and preserve power.

This work identifies new empirical patterns that contribute to our understandings of *how* young Latinas are political. It also answers the call to move from critiquing exclusionary constructions of politics by engaging with the modalities and implications of marginalized communities' political practices (Cohen et al. 1997; Taft 2014). By critically engaging with power I make space for the consideration of marginalized communities' political strengths, such as the creation and maintenance of homeplaces (Hooks 1990), and counterpublics, like CUS. These spaces support the development and reproduction of counternarratives that challenge deficit framings like those that leverage individualistic state-centric constructions of politics to portray

Latinx and Black youth as underengaged and politically lacking (Torney-Purta et al. 2006; Levinson 2007; Rogers et al. 2012; Krogstad et al. 2016).

One of the counternarratives that the Cussies' and many scholars of marginalized community politics offer is that political practice is community oriented and inherently social (Hardy-Fanta 1993; Whaley 2010; Nenga and Taft 2013; Crossley 2017). Building from these insights my framing of a Latina sorority (civic organization) as a site of political practice invigorates our discussion on the relationship between civic and political engagement by re-emphasizing the sociality of the social in this discourse. Studies of the relationship between civic and political engagement often focus on social interactions within civic spaces only as they lead to state-centric political practice (Milbrath 1965; Glanville 1999; Putnam 2000). More recently, scholars have demonstrated that organization type plays a significant role in this dynamic and have classified certain organizations as politically salient. Differently, Nina Eliasoph offers that participation in civic organizations can discourage large-scale (as opposed to "close to home") state-centric political participation (1998). However, in all of these framings civic associations are studied because of their connection to state-centric political practice. I intervene in this discussion and offer that social and fun spaces are sites of political practice (not only sites that lead to or prepare members for state-centric political engagement) that offer rich insights into individuals and communities' relationships to state held and extra-state power. I find that both state-centric and extra-state politics take place in the social realm.

This is not a new contribution. Scholars have been arguing for the need to open up definitions and conceptualizations of the political for decades, especially when addressing the engagement practices of youth and marginalized communities (Hardy-Fanta 1993; Cohen et al. 1997; Beaumont et al. 2006; Cohen 2010; Taft 2014). However, my research reframes these insights by forwarding social spaces' potential to illuminate the relationships between state-centric and extra-state political practice by focusing on the experience and use of power within social spaces. We see this in the Cussies' experiences within the sorority space where they practice politics that target the state, other institutions, and subordinating power dynamics. Experiences within the social realm raise many compelling questions about the relationship between forms of political practice: How does space-claiming via performance and dress influence state-centric political participation? Similarly, how do state-centric political contexts impact everyday expressions of power?

For the Cussies, their public performances at Meet the Greeks, new member presentations and other venues are used to claim power and draw attention to CUS and the Sisters' relationships to one an-other. Similarly, when Cussies wear their letters they are signaling their membership in the exclusive CUS community. In this way, their performance and dress are markers of their internalized CUS identity which is inherently tied to their pro-women, pro-POC, pro-immigrant platform. In other words, the sorority space highlights that symbols and communities can serve multiple roles that indicate different relationships to power in different contexts. Given the co-constructing relationship between power and the political, the Cussies

demonstrate how performance and dress can work as indicators of state-centric political participation.

The inverse is also true for the Sisters; when shifts in power take place within the state apparatus, like during the election and presidency of Trump, the Cussies' daily practices also adjusted in response to this shift. For example, Dulce (older undergraduate Sister) described CUS' response to "human being[s] being caged" as "we are fighting back, in numbers." When I asked her how the Cussies were "fighting back" she proceeded to tell me how she had leaned into her Latinx identity on social media by taking part in a 30 day challenge to highlight her culture. This shift in Dulce's social media use did not stop there. She felt so compelled to change the negative narrative surrounding Latinx peoples that she physically called her mom, her friends, and her Sisters and told them they "had to do this" photo challenge with her. Dulce's experiences highlight how changes in national socio-political landscape can change both individual and communities' use and experience of the interpersonal domain of power.

A critical analysis of power is key to answering these questions and others that explore political practice and the dynamic relationships between forms of political engagement. I believe that many more (if not all) studies of politics and political practice need to *engage* with power in its multiple constructions. It is not enough to name power in reference to the state. Research needs to trace the contours of power and analyze its experience and use. This work will often complicate our understandings of political practice; we should embrace this complexity, grapple with

it and learn from its insights. My analysis of power has illuminated how individual

and collective experiences of power are mediated by participation in a federated civic

organization, which in turn shapes participants' political practices. This work has also

examined how these relationships to power can be shifted or maintained by individual

and collective action(s) within the experiential domain thereby illuminating a myriad

of political activities within a social space. There is much still to be learned and many

generative approaches to the study of power that have been and can be used to

analyze political practice (Brown 1995; Foucault 1978). In my work, I have relied on

the intersectional knowledge project to facilitate my analysis of the co-constructing

relationship between power and politics.

*Intersectionality*

I selected the tools that intersectionality offers because of its ability to handle

complexity and its focus on centering the voices of women and other marginalized

groups. For me intersectionality is a set of dynamic concepts (see Chapter 1) that are

constantly in flux; this inherent movement makes it adept at rendering power, both in

terms of its experience and its use, visible. Similarly, power in its multiple forms is

always in movement. Intersectional research cannot be conducted without engaging

with power, and the consistent movement of both power and the completion of

intersectional analysis (McCall 2005; Yuval-Davis 2006; Nash 2008; Keating 2009).

My work contributes to the field by offering a targeted approach to the study of

power. I use the term "targeted" to signal that I did not attempt to capture all of the

Cussies' relationships to power or even the breadth of their experiences across

domains of power. Instead I focused on the experiential domain of power and approached structural, disciplinary, and cultural power only as they presented themselves in the Sisters' experiences. I also chose to examine race, class, gender and other systems of oppression.

For example, when I discussed the relationship between POC Greeks and the university my analysis focused primarily on race and class. While the Cussies' experiences as POC Greeks are inextricable from other relationships to power, their descriptions of CUS' relationships to their universities de-emphasized gender, sexuality, age and/or other matrices of domination and foregrounded race and class. Similarly, instead of considering additional matrices of domination's implications on the Cussies' political practices, I choose to work within the parameters set by the Sisters' descriptions of their experiences.

I maintained these boundaries for two primary reasons. First, following Collins, I understand the Sisters' as situated knowers. For me, this means that I understand and respect them as the authorities on their lives, including their experiences of power, and I use their insights to frame my arguments. My use of the Cussies' frameworks is similar to the way many scholars (including myself) engage with the work of other researchers; I place them in relation to existing knowledge and consider their implications on/for the arguments I offer throughout this dissertation. Second, like many involved in the intersectional knowledge project, I am committed to learning from the diversity, complexity, and nuance of women's experiences, but given the breadth of these experiences, I am unable to provide detailed analyses of

each power dynamic operating in a given experience. Rather than provide minimal analysis or pay lip service to the other systems of oppression present in the Sisters' experiences, I take a "quality over quantity" approach and instead disentangle the implications of specific matrices of domination on a particular context.

This targeted approach to intersectional analysis may raise concerns about splintering individual and community experiences. However, I believe the *artificial* dissection of marginalized communities' experiences more accurately describes the disquietude caused by the many studies that misinterpret or overly simplify marginalized communities' experiences. These types of arguments use insights gained from studies of dominant groups' experiences to explain marginalized groups realities and are often constructed by cutting away the complexities of marginalized communities' experiences.

A focused approach works to avoid this violence by honoring the insights of research participants. Instead of imposing explanatory frameworks, I worked with the Cussies to highlight their experiences of power that they identified as more salient in a given context. Several studies have taken a similar approach to intersectional analysis by zeroing in on the relationships to power that are most prevalent in participants' experiences (Yuval-Davis 2006; Sherwood 2009; Falcón 2016). I offer language to talk about this process and a sample methodology to help clarify this approach to intersectional analysis and the conversations surrounding it.

*Latinx Greek Life*

This field is still evolving, and its development offers many opportunities. It is important that we forge a field of Latinx Greek life that is informed by not only the literature of higher education but also by scholarship on Latinx youth, power, race and ethnicity. I believe it is vital that we, as a field, resist the urge to produce the same knowledges as those constructed in Greek life studies and Black Greek research and instead approach Latinx Greek life with the questions its distinct culture and communities raise. My research contributes to this growing body of work by providing the first analysis of both women's experiences and power in these spaces. It also challenges stereotypes of Greek life and paints a more complex picture of the Greek landscape than currently exists in the dominant imaginary. Throughout this work, I have often asked more questions about Latinx Greek life than found answers. I have included some of these questions to encourage other researchers to explore this field's potential and possibilities.

On the historical front, more needs to be understood about what Fajardo (2015) has termed "Latin American fraternities," Puerto Rico's Greek movement, particularly the construction and preservation of histories of Fraternidad Fi Sigma Alfa and Sororidad Eta Gamma Delta Inc. Fi Sigma Alfa has a convoluted history that includes the merging of four different organizations throughout the U.S., multiple names for the same organization in different regions, and chapters all over the world including Geneva, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Cuba and Belgium (Phi Sigma Alpha 2020).

Additionally, very little is known about the early Latina sororities. I have been immersed in this community and research for years and have just become aware of potentially defunct Eta Gamma Delta Sorority established in 1928 that shares a motto "semper fidelis" with the U.S. Marine Corps and established chapters throughout Puerto Rico and Florida as recently as 2009.

Moreover, the emergence and spread of contemporary Latinx Greek letter organizations also needs to be documented. This includes expanding knowledge about the epicenter of Latinx Greek movement in New Jersey and tracing the movement throughout the midwest and west coast. Interesting comparisons can also be generated from these histories. I am particularly interested in the various political organizing trajectories of Latinx youth on the east and west coasts. During the 1970s and 1980s on the east coast, Latinx youth organized and formed social organizations that did political work. Inversely, a political organization that fosters social connections, el Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) was founded during this same time period on the west coast. These historical contexts should also be considered in relation to the variations in POC Greek culture from coast to coast. What accounts for these differences? Socio-political moments, university contexts, geographic contexts, some combination of these factors or something else entirely?

The impact of Latinx Greeks on their campuses and in their communities also needs to be examined. What are the tangible and intangible outcomes of Latinx Greeks' service and programming? What about the impact of visibly educated Latinxs young people in their communities? There are also a variety of parental and

familial relationship questions to be explored within the Latinx Greek context. Many organizations, like CUS, make a concerted effort to inform and involve families in their organization. My own mother self-identifies as a CUS mom. These close relationships may provide insight into some Latinx Greeks' higher retention rates in comparison to their non-affiliated peers (Delgado-Guerrero and Gloria 2013; Moreno and Banuelos 2013) as research has indicated that first generation undergraduates perform better when university culture emphasizes community and interdependence (as opposed to "middle-class norms of independence") (Stephens et al. 2012). Differently, other parents, especially those less familiar with the Latinx Greek community, view their children's participation negatively. How do these contexts mediate Latinx Greek experiences of power?

I am also intrigued by extra-familial relationship construction and maintenance within the Latinx Greek community. Latinx Greeks remain connected via friendships, romantic relationships, marriages and organizational involvement to members of their respective organizations and other POC Greeks long after graduation. In addition to social network analyses and community development studies, we should also consider the cultural implications of these connections. For example, Glenda Gracia and Lea del Rosario, who wrote the CUS mission statement together remain best friends to this day. They are so close that they planned the births of their children together. Their children and the children of many other Latinx

Greeks have been raised knowing they will become Greeks. What impact will increasing numbers of legacy members have on Latinx Greek culture[105]?

There is so much within and surrounding the Latinx Greek community to explore (much more than I have listed), and I am excited for the directions in which this field is growing. However, one looming impediment to the development of this field is publication. I have read several interesting papers and dissertations that have sadly remained unpublished manuscripts. I have wanted to cite this work, to read follow up studies on it, and to share it with my peers. I believe it is imperative that we, as a community of scholars engaged in the study of Latinx Greek letter organizations, commit to its development by publishing and sharing our work.

Overall, my research reframes the relationship between power and politics, emphasizes how power is claimed, used and preserved in social spaces, and highlights a less considered political actor, the Latina sorority girl. In addition to these contributions to the literatures on Latinx youth politics, intersectionality and Latinx Greek life, this study also offers insights and raises important questions for both university administrators and CUS leadership, the two groups best positioned to improve the Cussies' undergraduate experiences, challenge their subordination and facilitate their use of power.

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[105] There are several legacy members in the organization now. I expect these numbers to increase as the size of the organization grew through time, meaning there will be more and more undergraduates whose parents' have exposed them to Latinx Greek life as children as the organization, its members and their children age.

*University Administrators*

For administrators, the greatest take away is to invest in staff development and retention. I have shown how staff retention positively impacts institutional outcomes and undergraduates' schooling experiences. Long-term staff build relationships with their students and as a result are better able to provide student-centered feedback on policy and practice. Staff development also plays a significant role in students' experiences. Staff who are provided opportunities to develop will take longer to outgrow positions, and when they feel valued and fostered they are more likely to stay within the institution which can save on training costs.

Moreover, many administrators have limited if any experience with POC Greek life so it is important that those staff that interact with Greek life are adequately trained not only on the basics of POC Greek culture but also on how to demonstrate respect in those settings and work with students' specific needs. Administrators should also be mindful of the power they wield and represent as students may be less likely to request support from an advisor if there is fear that their request will be taken into account during their organization's annual review. Additionally, staff need comprehensive training on systems of oppression and the ways that relationships to power impact learning outcomes. It is not enough that they be able to identify racist or sexist comments and practices; administrators need to be equipped to address these issues in effective ways that support marginalized communities.

Along those lines there is a real need to recognize and engage difference. POC Greeks are not White Greeks, and they should not be treated or policed as if they are and vice versa. Each type of organization should be celebrated for its contributions and individual actors and organizations need to be held accountable when policy violations take place. You would not punish the swim team for the football teams actions even though they are all athletes so why is it an accepted standard to punish POC greeks for White Greeks' actions?

Lastly, every effort should be made to make funds available for Greek programming. Often budgets already exist for student-hosted programming and policy is the only obstacle to access. Again, precedent already exists. Not every student can participate in the men's football team but that does not stop the university from investing thousands and thousands of dollars in those students' experiences. I have heard the argument raised that these types of sporting events generate revenue and that former athletes donate more to their undergraduate institutions. These ideas are classist, highlight an inherent flaw in the neoliberal model of education, and do not align with universities' stated mission to educate and foster the academic and professional growth of its students. Funding can help alleviate POC Greek burnout as it offers them the opportunity to dedicate less time to fundraising in order to sustain their programming. Managing money also provides students an important learning and growth opportunity that they can leverage after graduation.

Universities should also continue to expose their Greek communities to diverse engagement opportunities. These provide students with experiences that

encourage student engagement while exposing them to people, places, histories etc. that are not readily accessible on campus. These experiences provide students an opportunity to connect with staff in more casual settings and foster the connections that encourage students to go to them with concerns and requests for support. Similarly, providing permanent physical space and hosting special events like Meet the Greeks where students can be proud of their culture and share it are vitally important for students' belonging and success.

*Chi Upsilon Sigma National Latin Sorority Inc.*

My research suggests a reimagining of the university/Greek letter organization relationships can be mutually beneficial. It also indicates that greater consideration needs to be paid to CUS's role as both a political site and space of political development. At present, universities hold a significant amount of power over Greek letter organizations, particularly POC Greek letter organizations. This places Greek letter organizations in a subordinate and precarious position. Institutions, like universities, can wield power in unexpected and destabilizing ways (Falcón 2020)[106] and at any moment CUS's operating status can be changed or upended, frequently without dialogue or prior notice. For instance, when universities temporarily suspend all Greek activities in response to a transgression committed by a single organization.

To mitigate this threat in the present moment, CUS might consider strengthening existing relationships between the organization and the universities that

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[106] Sylvanna Falcón, conversation during office hours, February 19, 2020.

host it. This can be achieved through identifying and supporting university needs that CUS can help meet. How can this relationship be expanded to include more than the operation of CUS on campus? One possible answer to this question is by supporting university efforts to retain and develop talented staff who I have shown play a critical role in shaping the Cussies' experiences of their university. How might CUS support these efforts? A more equal partnership with universities also better positions CUS to lead efforts to reduce the burdens placed on its undergraduate members without lessening the sorority experience.

In the long term, I encourage Cussies to construct and prepare to execute a vision of CUS's future that is not predicated on external decision makers (university administrators). What would that look like? How would existing members respond and navigate this shift? How would new members be identified and recruited? How would this shift impact daily operating practices? What is potentially lost or gained in this transition? At this moment, this may seem unnecessary. However, there is a growing number of universities that do not recognize Greek letter organizations (or single gender organizations) and/or penalize their students who choose to partake in Greek life, and CUS (and the rest of the Greek community) needs to prepare for the potential implications of this shift.

My research has shown that universities police, ignore and profit from CUS and other POC Greeks and value White Greek culture as the standard of Greek life. In our interview Chanel from Mitchell University indicated that university administrators are largely unfamiliar with POC Greek life and therefore treat the

community as a "threat." I have shown that Cussies navigate threat by creating distancing narratives, rule following, and taking care of their mental and physical health (self-care). Comparably, CUS (the organization) navigates threats to its continued existence by prioritizing its survival. This practice is most visible in CUS's efforts to move away from potentially intimidating branding that features black combat boots and the slogan "only the strong survive, weak hearts need not apply." However, despite these efforts undergraduates and alumni alike cling to these markers of aberrant femininity. I have argued that Cussies use this language and imagery in public to showcase a distinctly Latina form of womanhood and claim power for themselves and their communities. It might also be suggested that this organizational survival strategy amounts to a whitening of CUS and a dilution of the expression of Latina power. If CUS leadership is committed to moving away from these markers, how will CUS identity express power in ways that are equally meaningful to its members? What is potentially lost or gained in this transition?

As CUS considers the expression of its identity, it should also reflect on its relationship to politics. I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation the myriad of ways that CUS serves as a site of political practice and development. I understand that CUS is a nonprofit organization whose status as a 501(c)(3) organization limits the ways in which it can be politically active. However, even with these boundaries, there is value in embracing CUS's role in the political socialization and development of its members. In CUS spaces young women navigate power, engage with institutions, and form and practice their state-centric political values. Given this

information, how would CUS's practices shift if the organization considered itself an important space of political and civic development and practice? How would the Cussies practices shift if they all considered themselves political actors?

*Unconquerable Souls*

I began working with the data for this project just before the 2016 election of Donald Trump. As a member of the community, I watched my Sisters and our families reel as the reality of his election sunk in. At this moment of shock, they turned to self-preservation strategies, turning off their televisions, resting, researching how to move to Canada, and processing their thoughts and feelings in community spaces. During this time they also used their power to organize and protest Trump's election. In the process, they alongside thousands of other women, girls and allies took part in the largest single-day protest in U.S. history (Chenoweth and Pressman 2017; Rosenberg 2018). As the U.S. faces the threat of another Trump term, I am encouraged by the Sisters' resistance. I see them learning about public policy, registering their communities to vote, building coalitions, and sharing their thoughts and opinions on presidential candidates.

These discussions and practices make space for other Sisters and community members to consider their own relationships to the state. For example, Aida shares

> No. I been thinking about this for a long time. I think it's because of where I grew up, the community, I grew up in Newark and like that's not talked about. So then I came here to college and everybody has like their views, and I'm like I don't even know if I'm Republican. What's a... a... a whatever, What's a Republican? Or What's a Democrat? I don't know what this is. So I wasn't

taught this in school. Nobody talked about this in Newark. I'm like what is all this? So now that people talk about politics, I don't know where I stand...

Although Aida has not yet found her footing in the state-centric political arena, her consistent thought about politics (I been thinking about this for a long time.) has led her to conclude that the education that was available to her as a girl did not include this discourse. This rumination also prompted her to ask questions about the party system that she was unfamiliar with and later to identify a desire to clarify her positionality.

The implications of the Cussies' collective practices of claiming, deploying and preserving power are unique for each Sister. I was particularly struck by Karina's association of political participation with shame as she remarked that Cussies were not "ashamed to be political." Despite the structural and cultural challenges like those described by Aida and Karina, my research has shown the young Latinas are nimble political actors able to adapt their tactics and conceptualizations of politics to their current relationships to power. In the POC Greek community, we value this ability to adjust our practices to our circumstances while remaining steadfast in our missions, and it is for this capacity that we are grateful for our unconquerable souls.

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# Appendix

*Table 2.1*    **Belpre: Regional Public University**

| Institution Type | Student Pop. | Student Demographics | | Annual Tuition[1] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| HSI | 14,056 | Latinx | 28.1% | $12,600 |
| | | Black | 19.4% | |
| | | Asian | 5.7% | |
| | | Native Am. | 0.2% | |
| | | White | 33.6% | |

| Sororities Dem. | | Fraternities Dem. | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Latina | 3 | Latino | 3 |
| Black | 4 | Black | 4 |
| Multicultural | 3 | Multicultural | 3 |
| White | 4 | White | 4 |
| Total | 14 | Total | 14 |

| CUS Chapter | |
|---|---|
| Age[2] | 0–10 years |
| No. of Sisters[3] | 2 |
| Avg. Age of Sisters | 19, 34 |
| Ethnic Identities | Puerto Rican <br> Dominican |
| First generation college students | 50% |
| 1.5 or second generation Americans[4] | 0% |
| Sexualities | Heterosexual |
| Self-identified Class | Upper-Middle <br> Working |
| Parents' highest level of education | High School–Undergraduate Degree |

*The notes below are applicable to all charts in the series.*

[1] Instate tuition excluding fees, room and board.

[2] Some CUS chapters have paused legacies where the chapter was on campus (sometimes unofficially) for many years and then died out and returned under the same chapter name. Those alumni are active with the current undergraduates, and in CUS the chapter age is determined by the first Sister on campus. However, I used the dates the chapter was officially recognized on campus and therefore beholden to the full requirements of CUS and their respective universities.

[3] Greek letter organizations' sizes vary from semester to semester. These numbers indicate the size of the chapter when I entered the field in Fall 2017.

[4] Here 1.5 generation refers to childhood arrivals and second generation refers to U.S. born children of immigrant parents.

*Table 2.2*       **Dandara: Regional Public University**

| Institution Type | Student Pop. | Student Demographics | | Annual Tuition |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| HSI | 11,518 | Latinx | 31.3% | $13,200 |
| | | Black | 16.7% | |
| | | Asian | 7.3% | |
| | | Native Am. | 0.1% | |
| | | Unknown | 5.4% | |
| | | White | 38.7% | |

| Sororities Dem. | | Fraternities Dem. | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Latina | 2 | Latino | 2 |
| Black | 3 | Black | 4 |
| Multicultural | 1 | | |
| White | 4 | White | 3 |
| Total | 10 | Total | 9 |

CUS Chapter

| | |
|---|---|
| Age | 10–20  years |
| No. of Sisters | 10 |
| Avg. Age of Sisters | 21 |
| Ethnic Identities | Puerto Rican<br>Dominican<br>Ecuadorian<br>Haitian |
| First generation college students | 75% |
| 1.5 or second generation Americans | 50% |
| Sexualities | Bisexual<br>Heterosexual |
| Self-identified Class | Working |
| Parents' highest level of education | High School—Undergraduate Degree |

*Table 2.3*      **Mitchell: Public Research University**

| Institution Type | Student Pop. | Student Demographics | | Annual Tuition |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| PWI | 50,254 | Latinx | 13% | $24,500 |
| | | Black | 7.5% | |
| | | Asian | 26% | |
| | | Other | 5.2% | |
| | | White | 41.5% | |

| Sororities Dem. | | Fraternities Dem. | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Latina | 5 | Latino | 4 |
| Black | 3 | Black | 3 |
| Asian | 6 | Asian | 2 |
| Multicultural | 3 | | |
| White | 13 | White | 28 |
| Total | 30 | | |
| | | Total | 37 |

| CUS Chapter | |
|---|---|
| Age | 30–40 years |
| No. of Sisters | 11 |
| Avg. Age of Sisters | 21 |
| Ethnic Identities | Dominican<br>Ecuadorian |
| First generation college students | 30% |
| 1.5 or second generation Americans | 27% |
| Sexualities | Bisexual<br>Heterosexual |
| Self-identified Class | 4  Working<br>5 Middle |
| Parents' highest level of education | Some High School—Doctoral Degree |

*Table 2.4*     **Mother Teresa: Private Catholic University**

| Institution Type | Student Pop. | Student Demographics | | Annual Tuition |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| PWI | 10,300 | Latinx | 17% | $41,460 |
| | | Black | 8% | |
| | | Asian | 12% | |
| | | Two or More | 4% | |
| | | Unknown | 10% | |
| | | White | 48% | |

| Sororities Dem. | | Fraternities Dem. | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Latina | 3 | Latino | 1 |
| Black | 1 | Black | 2 |
| Multicultural | 1 | Multicultural | 1 |
| White | 6 | White | 6 |
| Total | 11 | Total | 10 |

CUS Chapter

| | |
|---|---|
| Age | 30–40  years |
| No. of Sisters | 6 |
| Avg. Age of Sisters | 20 |
| Ethnic Identities | Dominican |
| | Colombian |
| | Peruvian |
| | Colombian/White |
| First generation college students | 100% |
| 1.5 or second generation Americans | 20% |
| Sexualities | Lesbian |
| | Heterosexual |
| Self-identified Class | 4 Working |
| | 2   Middle |
| Parents' highest level of education | Middle School—Some College |

*Table 2.5*        **Tubman: Private Catholic University**

| Institution Type | Student Pop. | Student Demographics | | Annual Tuition |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| PWI | 4,800 | Latinx | 19% | $43,720 |
| | | Black | 18% | |
| | | Asian | 6% | |
| | | Other/Multiethnic | 6% | |
| | | White | 50% | |

| Sororities Dem. | | Fraternities Dem. | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Latina | 2 | Latino | 1 |
| Black | 3 | Black | 2 |
| White | 4 | White | 3 |
| Total | 9 | Total | 5 |

**CUS Chapter**

| | |
|---|---|
| Age | 0–10 years |
| No. of Sisters | 2 |
| Avg. Age of Sisters | 19, 20 |
| Ethnic Identities | Mexican Ecuadorian |
| First generation college students | 100% |
| 1.5 or second generation Americans | 100% |
| Sexualities | Bisexual |
| Self-identified Class | Working |
| Parents' highest level of education | Some Middle School—High School |

*Table 2.6* University Demographics

| Institutional Information | Belpre | Dandara | Mitchell | Mother Teresa | Tubman |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Type* | Regional Public University | Regional Public University | Public Research University | Private Catholic University | Private Liberal Arts College |
| | HSI | HSI | PWI | PWI | PWI |
| *In-State Semester Tuition* | $12,600 | $13,200 | $24,500 | $41,460 | $43,720 |
| *Student Population* | 14,056 | 11,518 | 50,254 | 10,300 | 4,800 |
| *Student Demographics* | | | | | |
| Latinx | 28.1% | 31.3% | 13% | 17% | 19% |
| Black | 19.4% | 16.7% | 7.5% | 8% | 18% |
| Asian | 5.7% | 7.3% | 26% | 12% | 6% |
| Native Am. | 0.2% | 0.1% | — | — | — |
| Multiethnic/Other | — | — | 5.2% | 4% | 6% |
| White | 33.6% | 38.7% | 41.5% | 48% | 50% |
| Unknown | — | 5.4% | — | 10% | — |
| *Sorority Demographics* | | | | | |
| Latinx | 3 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| Black | 4 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| Asian | — | — | 6 | — | — |
| Native Am. | — | — | — | — | — |
| Multiethnic/Other | 3 | 1 | 3 | 1 | — |
| White | 4 | 4 | 13 | 6 | 4 |
| Total | 14 | 10 | 30 | 11 | 9 |

(continued)

| Institutional Information | Belpre | Dandara | Mitchell | Mother Teresa | Tubman |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Fraternity Demographics* | | | | | |
| Latinx | 3 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| Black | 4 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Asian | — | — | 2 | — | — |
| Native Am. | — | — | — | — | — |
| Multiethnic/Other | 3 | — | — | 1 | — |
| White | 4 | 3 | 28 | 6 | 3 |
| Total | 14 | 9 | 37 | 10 | 5 |
| *CUS Information* | | | | | |
| Chapter Age (Years) | 0-10 | 10-20 | 30-40 | 30-40 | 0-10 |
| Chapter Size | 2 | 10 | 11 | 6 | 2 |
| Average Age | 19, 34 | 21 | 21 | 20 | 19, 20 |
| Ethnic Identities | Dominican Puerto Rican | Dominican Ecuadorian Haitian Puerto Rican | Dominican Ecuadorian | Colombian Dominican Peruvian White | Ecuadorian Mexican |
| First gen. college students | 50% | 75% | 30% | 100% | 100% |
| 1.5 or second gen. Americans | 0% | 50% | 27% | 20% | 100% |
| Sexualities | Hetero-sexual | Bisexual Hetero-sexual | Bisexual Hetero-sexual | Lesbian Hetero-sexual | Bisexual |
| Self-Identified Class | Working Middle-Upper | Working | 4 Working 5 Middle | 4 Working 2 Middle | Working |
| Parents' highest level of education | High School-Undergrad | High School-Undergrad | Some High School-Ph.D. | Middle School-Some College | Some Middle School-High Sch. |