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Latina Diasporic Identity Politics Through
The Lambda Pi Chi Sorority

Latina diaspora within predominantly white, elite universities/institutions (PWIs) in the United States has been a topic of contention for many decades, particularly in discussion with identity politics. A “Latina” woman is someone who was born in or has ancestry in Latin America, but is now living in the United States. The debate then lies within the validity of the Latina identity as both an ethnic and racial identity with its own culture outside of the dominant white American cultural identity. The tension is amplified within historically white Greek elite sororities where Latinas navigate spaces that are rooted in whiteness and exclusivity. Latina culture is a minority culture that conflicts with the dominant white culture, therefore cultural tension is heightened as Latinas battle issues with cultural representation, inclusion, and assimilation in white sororities. At universities like Davidson College, Latinas participating in predominantly white sororities demonstrate identity negotiation as they evolve and change aspects of their cultural identity to participate in shaping their social networks and cultural epistemology.

In this paper, I will put the Chicana Feminist Scholar Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of 'Borderlands' in her work, *Borderlands* and British Cultural Theorist Stuart Hall's definition of diaspora in conversation with one another to interpret Latina diaspora and resistance within predominantly white sororities at PWI's, via the 2017 Lambda Pi Chi stroll for uplift and the 2026 Lambda Pi Chi stroll at Davidson College. Anzaldúa's concept of 'Borderlands' is described as physical borders where two or more cultural identities meet, and the battle between identities creates a hybrid, third diasporic identity (Preface, 80). The 'Borderlands' create ambiguity, pain, and tension for the Latina minority to "juggle [both] cultures," especially in white spaces, leading to the evolution of a third identity that encompasses aspects of both cultures (Anzaldúa, 79). In the context of minority identity development, different marginalized groups can also begin to interact/exchange cultures in the face of an exclusionary dominant culture. Hall's definition of diaspora as something fluid, fragmented, and changing as the women themselves evolve is vital to understand this phenomenon (Hall, 4). Together, these two frameworks highlight how marginalized groups function within exclusionary spaces and come to crave belonging and freedom of expression.

Latinas sororities, then, are the prioritization of familiar, unique spaces where they can connect with other Latinas who share their experiences and find community (Olivas, 5). As a result, Latina sororities function as counter spaces within predominantly white universities that build community support, institutional belonging, and group identification (Olivas, 6). Counter spaces are physical and social settings where marginalized communities challenge dominant norms, power structures, or unsustainable practices prevalent in mainstream society (Margherio; Swan; Horner-Divine; Mizumori; Yen, 2). Through the lens of Gloria Anzaldúa's conception of 'Borderlands,' and Stuart Hall's definition of diaspora, I argue that Latinas within PWIs resist

assimilation by creating Latina sororities that function as counter-spaces in predominantly white institutions, as seen through the 2017 Lambda Pi Chi “Stroll for Uplift” and the 2026 Lambda Pi Chi stroll at Davidson College. The performances visually demonstrate embodied resistance auditorily and physically and the manifestation of the third, hybrid identity being utilized as a form of cultural resistance.

When American universities initially came into fruition, they were all white and male. As a result, sororities and fraternities are historically very white as well. Students of color and women who began to join universities naturally were excluded from joining fraternities and if they did join, they were subjected to marginalization. This led to the very first Latina sorority, “Lambda Theta Alpha” to be created in 1975, at Kean University (Lambda Theta Alpha, “About Us”). Previously, Latinas were subordinate to machismo ideology, a hispanic cultural construct that promotes hypermasculinity, and this sorority reflected a new gendered resistance through the construction of a hybrid identity. Upon their creation, Lambda Theta Alpha claimed to be a third thing, a counter-space for Latina women to express cultural identity and reflect the independent, education-driven Latina population in the United States. The sororities are diasporic, as their identity no longer became rooted in cultural traditions they knew, but grew into a new tradition when Latina families began migrating to the United States.

Echoing in its footsteps, the Lambda Pi Chi (LPC) Sorority emerged as the first Latina-focused sorority founded at an Ivy-league Institution. Lambda Pi Chi, standing for Latinas Promoviendo Comunidad, was officially established on April 16, 1988 at Cornell University (National Executive Board, “History”). The first 5 founders included Patricia Rivera, Maria Caban, Eva Marie Sosa, Migdalia Franklin, and Irma Almirall-Padamsee, all Latinas and 3 out of the 5 being Afro-Latina. Their goals in creating their sorority were to welcome all women, but

especially Latinas of all races in search of community and encouragement to embrace their hybrid identities. The sorority itself focuses on the preservation of cultural legacies that speak on their diasporic experiences in the United States, commitment to public service, and uplifting of both community and sisterhood.

Historically, the creation of the Lambda Pi Chi held space in predominantly white institutions for Latinas to perform their culturally rooted rituals in forms of strolls and public theatrical demonstrations. These performances are a form of resistance towards assimilation, and reflect their diasporic identity fluctuating with their lived experiences as Latinas. Cultural Studies Scholar Diana Taylor elaborates on how visual performances, in this case strolling, hip hop, and Latin dance, serve as “bodily archives” that express cultural memory and identity through the study of movement, music, and language (Taylor 3). The “bodily archives” are not isolated within society, and are derived from the performer’s daily life and cultural expression (Taylor, 3). When performed in a predominantly white institution, these performances challenge the notion that embodied performance is not equally as legitimate as written archives. All together, embodied performance specifically challenges American/Western epistemology and dominant cultural norms (Taylor, 16). Writing, historically, has been the main source of archive that was introduced during the Conquest colonization, but, Latin American performances deplatform this structure with cultural embodied performances (Taylor, 17).

Performance as a form of resistance and symbolic deplatforming is not unique to Latin American traditional performance within American Greek life. Strolling and stepping, for example, initially took inspiration from South African “gumboot” culture, later evolving into slave chants (Museum of History and Holocaust Education, “Stepping and Strolling”). African American Greek organizations were the first to adopt stepping/strolling, and were later adopted

by Latinx organizations due to close proximity and overlap between cultures in predominantly white institutions. Within LPC, Afro-Latina founders incorporated strolling/stepping into their sorority's cultural affirmation rituals as an expression of their hybrid, third identity (National Executive Board). However, there is tension that comes from the interaction of both cultures. Black Greek sororities at Davidson College have their reservations with non-black Latinx sororities incorporating stepping into their own rituals, as it is a black cultural expression of resistance. Hence, the LPC performances currently only incorporate strolling as a result of the diasporic identity negotiation, demonstrating the diasporic complexity of the ritual itself. The hybridization of movement or lack thereof are an acknowledgement within minority groups of diasporic roots and the need to affirm each other's cultural identities, further pushing the conception of 'Borderlands' as a space where identity changes as multiple cultures overlap. Diasporic identity struggle is complicated when there's tension between marginalized groups overlapping as different marginalized groups need their own culturally affirming spaces, even with one another.

Building on this historical and theoretical framework, I turn to the 2017 *Lambda Pi Chi Stroll for Uplift* and the 2026 *Lambda Pi Chi stroll at Davidson College* to analyze their movement and language/verbal shouts, through Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of 'Borderlands' and Stuart Hall's theory of diaspora as a third, fluid diasporic identity.

To begin, the 2017 and 2026 Lambda Pi Chi's performances contain a mixture of American hip hop, strolling, and Latin American dance in multiple sequences. The most notable movements in both performances are formations that demand space and the hybridization of hip hop, strolling, and Latin-American dances. At the beginning of the 2017 performance, the three women take a "guard" formation emphasizing their unified front, with their arms forming a line

in front of them. This move physically takes up space, a symbolic message visually asserting their need for visibility within predominantly white spaces. As Gloria Anzaldúa argues in *Borderland*, a third hybrid identity initially stems from cultural ambiguity against a dominant culture where two or more cultures overlap (16, 22). Latina women want and need the freedom to choose which cultural values to embody and it can only be achieved by being provided a physical and social space to explore their identity. Their guard formation is a spatial strategy in an institution that doesn't acknowledge their need for recognition that physically creates space and visibility towards their cultural need for a counter space where identity can transform. Though they implement this strategy, their need to create space reveals how limited their visibility is within predominantly white institutions and their need to challenge it.

The hybridization of American hip-hop, strolling, and Latin American dance in both the 2017 and 2026 performances are a physical manifestation of diasporic identity, in which the intersectionality of cultural identities pushes for negotiations of cultural expression. The hip hop choreography is sharp and grounded in footwork, transitioning into synchronized strolling in a vertical line and clapping, before finally ending with fluid hip movements typically performed in Latin-American choreographies. Similar to the strolling and Latin-American traditions overlapping due to Afro-Latina cultural genealogy, the hybridization of all 3 dances comes from a shared marginalized space within predominantly white communities. The lived experiences within predominantly white communities are shaped by pressures of to fit in and diasporic conditions outside of past university contexts. As Stuart Hall elaborates, identification is constructed from shared identities across different cultural groups, and they come to form an allegiance (Hall, 2). Within these spaces that overlap, strategies of resistance and visibility are shared and adopted, blurring cultural boundaries. These strategies suggest aspects of American

culture and Latina culture are introduced as one single embodied performance. In the performance itself, the transition between all 3 dance styles is seamless, fluid, and physically observable. As an expression of hybridity, the performance serves as a “bodily archive” of historical genealogy, and the ongoing identity overlap between cultures achieves a “transmission of [historical] knowledge” that can be physically analyzed (Taylor, 17).

Secondly, through verbal shouts and a national chant, language within both performances functions as a vocal strategy to create collective identity and resistance, as opposed to movement, which functions as a physical and visual manifestation of diasporic identity. In *Borderlands*, Gloria Anzaldúa contextualizes “wailing” as a form of gendered protest through vocal expression within societies that oppress women physically and emotionally (Anzaldúa, 33). In both performances, the Lambda Pi Chi “wail” in between choreographies and at the end of their national chant (Montoya, 2026; Utin 2017). Their collective wail is vocalized in the same manner Gloria Anzaldúa’s theorization of wailing communicates is an act of protest. To add, the national chant in the new, updated 2026 performance, is a unifying marker not only within the chapter at Davidson College, but across all Lambda Pi Chi chapters in the nation. LPC has always had a national chant, but it started to be included more frequently over time as seen by the 2026 performance due to an increase of “hermanas” (sisters) joining the sorority nationally (Montoya; 2026). The collective vocal expression demands visibility by disrupting a metaphorical silence within predominantly white institutions as the Latina cultural voice is limited against a dominant cultural force. The collective expression also solidifies their connection to one another and resistance to be isolated, especially since they are a minority. Together, the wail and the national chant are grounded in the disruption of a different sensory than movement, but still express resistance.

Latina sororities within predominantly white institutional (PWI) spaces utilize embodied performance and the intentional creation of institutional presence in order to create a community that safely explores their diasporic identity together. Latina women do not all have a collective, monolithic identity, but within PWIs, they share cultural and gendered barriers that restrict access to education, kinship, and visibility. Latina pursuit of education directly counters the “machismo” narrative, and their existence itself in predominantly white universities is a diasporic battleground of choosing between existing cultural values and educational opportunity. Hence, the presence of Latina women in elite PWIs is already an evolved resistance that is an intentionally racialized and gendered act of refusal against assimilation.

Latina sororities are founded as counter spaces as a direct consequence of forced assimilation and prioritizes the acceptance of hybrid identities that can be accepted and expressed through collective chants, movements, and performance. As Stuart Hall argues, identity formation is a “process that is never completed.. and always in process,” within changing cultural and social contexts (Hall, 2). Latina organizations like Lambda Pi Chi are social sites where collective identity is an intentional act of healing, creating kinship, and cultural practice. They produce and maintain their collective third, hybrid identity through ideology and performance.

Resistance within PWIs is not restricted to just fighting exclusion, but putting in the work to restructure what belonging for marginalized groups looks like within PWIs. It begins with visibility, but visibility does not dismantle the institutional and structural limits that have been historically set into place due to the white, American exclusionary culture. The work being done within PWIs reflects not only spaces where Greek life exists, but real-world refusal to be silenced. In a time where Latina women are being targeted by ICE in the United States, their bold

expression of cultural identity is much more than a performance, but a means of survival and everyday expression. It is inspirational and courageous, even a radical call-to-action that demands social and political change that is institutionally implemented as opposed to a temporary fix that grounds itself in visibility. Visibility is not an end goal, but simply the beginning of this change.

At institutions like Davidson, American predominantly white culture can be deeply rooted and exclusionary towards other cultures that overlap with it. Having a space where Latina cultures are able to find themselves as opposed to being forced to assimilate, encourages an acceptance of different cultures co-existing together as opposed to territorially protecting their ground. There is already change happening from the 2017 LPC performance to the 2026 LPC performance as the national chant is being increasingly incorporated into these performances to continue promoting collective acceptance of identity and kinship. Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of 'Borderlands' is transformed from a piece of literature into a lived, existing, truthful narrative about Latina diaspora and their battle to enhance visibility, memorialization, and resistance in predominantly white institutions. These performances are inspiring during a current moment in time where more acceptance and documentation towards new hybrid cultural identities is needed.

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