

## VAMOS A PLATICAR: The Contours of Pláticas as Chicana/Latina Feminist Methodology

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*A growing number of Chican@ scholars, especially in the field of education, are employing pláticas as a research method. Yet missing from the research literature is an explicit conceptualization of pláticas<sup>1</sup> as a Chicana/Latina feminist method or methodology. This article tracks a genealogy of the use of pláticas from the late 1970s and 1980s through the present and then identifies the ways Chicana/Latina feminists have engaged pláticas from within a particular epistemological location. The authors extract underlying assumptions to offer principles of pláticas as part of a Chicana/Latina feminist methodology.*

**Key Words:** Chicana feminism, Chicana/Latina feminist methodologies, epistemology, qualitative methods, pláticas.

We both grew up *platicando*<sup>2</sup> in our familias. For me (Dolores), the pláticas with my grandmas, parents, and other adults were the way I received family cultural knowledge while growing up. Though I sometimes challenged that knowledge, I learned crucial information about who I was, where I came from, and how to be with others. I learned to respect my elders and those who had few material possessions. I learned always to look for a bargain, never to pay full price for anything, and to share what I had with others. From my grandmothers and my mother I learned women could be strong and independent. In my (Cindy) family, *platicamos* about everything. Family stories, *consejos*, *regaños*, and jests are communicated through conversations that often take place around my parents' large circular dining table. When I am home, I can count on various family members visiting my parents and conversations that last through the night. Sometimes these pláticas result in arguments, crying, laughing—but always in something learned.

Our family pláticas allow us to witness shared memories, experiences, stories, ambiguities, and interpretations that impart us with a knowledge connected to personal, familial, and cultural history.

Over the years and in various spaces, we have continued our familial tradition of platicando with hermanas, housemates, y colegas, and have continued to share, create, and learn about life, our bodies, mothering, academia, and so much more. Pláticas have also come to play a significant role to both of us as researchers seeking information. They are central to Cindy's work as she embarks on data collection for her dissertation on the spiritual practices of Chicana academics, and they have been central to Dolores's ten-year collaborative community-based research (Delgado Bernal, Aleman, and Flores Carmona 2008). In addition, platicando has been a pivotal and necessary component of traversing academic spaces that has allowed us to weave the personal and academic. For example, during my (Cindy) time in Dolores's methodology class students shared, via pláticas, testimonios about the body, educational successes and challenges, families, migration and immigration, among other topics. These pláticas, which often continued beyond the classroom, enabled us to make sense of the historical and theoretical foundations and complexities of testimonio as methodology by merging our personal experiences to them. Pláticas allowed us to engage the personal in the classroom while continuing to engage the academic in our more intimate spaces away from school. Despite the importance of pláticas to our personal and scholarly work, it was not until a series of kitchen-table pláticas *about* pláticas with graduate student advisees<sup>3</sup> that we began to realize there was a dearth of scholarship that really went into detail about pláticas as a research method or methodology. Most of the graduate students were working on dissertation proposals and had a need to articulate their use of pláticas in their methodology chapter. Collectively, we could point to a number of publications

that used *pláticas*, but there seemed to be missing an explicit conceptualization of *pláticas* as a Chicana/Latina feminist method or methodology (Gonzalez 2001; Guajardo and Guajardo 2008; de la Torre 2008). Serendipitously, while we were writing this manuscript, a doctoral student from UCLA, also working on her proposal, contacted Dolores by email to ask for consejos on where to turn to help her conceptualize *pláticas* in her methods chapter. This reinforced the need for a more thorough discussion of what it means to employ *pláticas* in one's research. The purpose of this article is to do just that—provide a thorough discussion (though certainly not the last word) and explicit conceptualization of *pláticas*. More specifically, we seek to offer the contours of *pláticas* as part of a Chicana/Latina feminist methodology.

Before discussing *pláticas* as part of a Chicana/Latina feminist methodology, we first point to the interconnections between method, methodology, and epistemology and briefly introduce Chicana/Latina feminist methodologies. We then provide a literature review that examines *pláticas* as they were used in sociological research with Latin@<sup>4</sup> populations in the late 1970s and 1980s. Our goal is to track a genealogy of the use of *pláticas* in research before identifying the ways Chicana/Latina feminists have engaged *pláticas* from within a Chicana/Latina feminist epistemological location. Chicana/Latina feminist scholars have clearly taken up *pláticas* in a more nuanced manner, and so we extract underlying assumptions to offer some of the principles of *pláticas* that we believe are crucial to understanding *pláticas* as part of a Chicana/Latina feminist methodology.

### **Chicana/Latina Feminist Methodologies**

There are deep interconnections between method, methodology, and epistemology (Harding 1987; Delgado Bernal 1998). While method most often refers to techniques or strategies to collect data, methodology

encompasses that and so much more as it provides the theory and analysis of the research process, from how research questions are framed to the criteria used to evaluate research findings. Epistemology is the study of knowledge and, in general, refers to the nature, status, and production of knowledge and the way one knows and understands the world. However, the concept of epistemology is more than just a “way of knowing” and can be more accurately defined as a “system of knowing” that is linked to worldviews based on the conditions under which people live and learn (Ladson-Billings 2000). It makes sense then that researchers’ epistemological orientation, their worldviews, are closely tied to the methodologies they employ in their research, and noting the differences and the interconnections between method, methodology, and epistemology is crucial to understanding how *pláticas* can be a strategy to collect data as well as part of a Chicana/Latina feminist methodology.

Chicana feminist scholars have been talking about Chicana/Latina feminist methodologies and epistemologies that emerge from specific colonial heteropatriarchal histories and experiences for quite some time (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981; Saldivar Hull 2000; Ruiz 2008). Scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Emma Pérez (1999), and Chela Sandoval (2000) have articulated feminist research methodologies and argue that new knowledge is uncovered by looking in liminal spaces and interstitial gaps for “the unheard, the unthought, the unspoken” (Pérez 1999, 5). More specifically, within the field of education, Chicana/Latina scholars push us even further by drawing upon their cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal 2008), grounding their methodologies in decolonial/anticolonial Chicana/Latina feminist thought, and (re)envisioning Chicana/Latina feminist methodologies that are “more than tools for obtaining data; methodologies are extensions of ways of knowing and being, thus are essential to the way we embody and perform research”

(Saavedra and Salazar Pérez 2014, 78). These methodologies allow us to contemplate what it means to

... confront the research process with our total selves—our grief, our fears, our desires, and our love. It means that we anchor our body, whether we are *prietas* or *güeras*, butch or fem, or someone more ambiguous, we accept and reconcile who we are and how we have come to be. This process encourages us to embrace a transformative consciousness, a queering of how we see the world in order to embrace alternative ways of knowing (Calderón et al. 2012, 534).

Said differently, adopting a Chicana/Latina feminist perspective in educational research is more than just adopting a theoretical lens, becoming familiar with a literature, learning corresponding methods, and analyzing data. It embodies who we are and requires us to grapple with our activist-scholar role, embrace alternative ways of knowing, and confront those aspects of ourselves that render us the colonized or the perpetrator, particularly if we are working with marginalized communities (i.e., the immigrant, the queer, youth, and people of color), even if we are from these communities (Calderon et al. 2012). Chicana/Latina feminist scholarship disrupts Western colonial assumptions such as the ideas that research needs to be neutral or unbiased and that our bodymindspirit (Lara, 2005) must be separate entities. While *pláticas* can be regarded as a Chicana/Latina feminist method—a strategy to collect data, we argue that *pláticas* used in research that works from these precepts are part of a Chicana/Latina feminist methodology that is an extension of particular ways of knowing.

### ***Pláticas* in “Hispanic”-Focused Research**

The use of *pláticas* in “Hispanic”<sup>5</sup> focused research emerged as a result of researchers believing that traditional<sup>6</sup> models of research, particularly

ethnographies and surveys, did not work well with “Hispanic” participants (Beccerra and Shaw 1984). In response to cultural and general limitations of interview research methodologies, Ramón Valle and Lydia Mendoza identified *la plática* as a more culturally appropriate form of engaging with the Latin@ population (Valle and Mendoza 1978). Valle and Mendoza identify *la plática* as a “friendly, intimate and mutualistic manner” of engaging in dialogue (Valle and Mendoza 1978, 33). According to the authors, *pláticas* are a more appropriate methodology with Latin@ populations because of their focus on the cultural formalities of the interview process. This process begins with *la entrada*, which includes some sort of discussion of how the interviewer has been linked to the interviewee. Usually this includes discussion of a mutual contact. The process continues with an *amistad* interview, made up of the “proper” interview and informal “conversation byplay” that takes place before “getting down to business” (Valle and Mendoza 1978, 25). The informal portion may include verbal and non-verbal culturally sanctioned modes of communication and sharing of information not especially relevant to the interview protocol. Finally, *la despedida* incorporates a display of appreciation by both parties and may also include additional conversation of a more personal characteristic, sharing of family and home relics by the interviewee, and sharing of gifts. According to Valle and Mendoza these three phases constitute what they called a *plática* methodology to be employed when working with Latin@ populations.

Expanding on this initial work, Valle identified *la plática* as a social mapping technique that enabled researchers to locate and link support networks used by “Hispanics” (Valle 1982). In this work Valle underscored the importance of *la plática* as a “relationship building component” that “reinforces mutuality and reciprocity” (Valle 1982, 116). Later, Valle and Gloria Bensussen identified a social network paradigm that includes the *plática* process as a

“rapport building dynamic that may be particularly crucial to developing Hispanic social network intimacy and cohesion” (Valle and Bensussen 1985, 154). As part of the “casual friendly conversation” trust and warmth are developed between individuals. While there are certainly limitations to these initial articulations of a *plática* methodology, which we discuss shortly, this early work highlights the importance of relationships and reciprocity, both of which are important components of a Chicana/Latina feminist *plática* methodology. Unfortunately, it appears that the scholarship following Valle and Mendoza’s original *plática* use did not incorporate these in their work (Valle and Mendoza 1978).

Scholars in social work and mental health employed the work of Valle and Mendoza as more appropriate “culturally syntonetic” or emotionally responsive research methods to meet the needs of the Latin@ participants (Magaña 2010; Manoleas and Carrillo 1991). For example, in their work with Latin@ immigrants Caplan, Escobar, Paris, Alvidrez, Dizon, Desai, Scahill, and Whittemore identified la *plática* as an approach to counter the high rate of participant decline (Caplan 2013). Believing that la *plática* serves as a more appropriate culturally syntonetic model because of its employment of staff members familiar to the participants and their cultural background, the authors argued, “The culturally syntonetic approach provided an understanding of the context of the participants’ beliefs” (Caplan 2013, 74). Unfortunately, the authors did not articulate the specific ways the staff members become familiar with participants’ contexts or beliefs, nor did they provide a context to how Valle and Mendoza’s (1978) three-phase interview process was used. Like other researchers who claim to employ la *plática* methodology, the authors briefly stated that an interview process took place with an interviewer who came to be trusted by the participant (Valle and Mendoza 1978; Daly, Applewhite and Jorquez 1989). There was no discussion of how this came to be, nor was there a

description of what it means to gain participant trust or how gaining the trust of a Latin@ participant changes an interview into a plática.

While the use of plática in these studies does take into consideration the particularities of culture, there are a couple of limitations that can be identified. First, culture is understood as a very essentialized and static entity. It is certainly true that one needs to be mindful of the tensions that may arise when researchers enter and conduct inquiries among populations of which they are not a member; however, the importance of *confianza y respeto* are not discussed for this purpose. They are discussed more as an understanding of cultural difference, not as a power differential. The aforementioned researchers who employ a plática methodology do not discuss the tensions inherent in research conducted on marginalized populations and why it is important to build trust. In addition, not all self-identified Latin@s may subscribe or identify strongly with “the Latin@ culture”—as if there is just one Latin@ culture. Will a plática methodology be necessary here?

Another problem we see is that although plática is referred to as a methodology, there seems to be a simultaneous invalidation of plática as a legitimate form of method or methodology. Instead, plática is viewed as an initial nicety, important to set up the interview process, but not actually valid enough to use as a data collection strategy and not understood as “central to the way we embody and perform research.” In Valle and Mendoza’s work, plática methodology is used to refer to a whole series of steps, including informal discussion not pertaining to the research inquiry that must take place before the “actual” interview (Valle and Mendoza 1978). Other researchers identify plática methodology as less of an actual methodology or method of data collection and more as small talk or “friendly, informal conversation” before the “real” interview (McKean Scaff et al. 2002; Applewhite 1995).



For example, in their book focusing on research methodology with “the Hispanic” population, Gerardo Marín and Barbara Marín identified key cultural characteristics with which they felt it was important for researchers to familiarize themselves when formulating a research study (Marin and Marin 1991). In this list, they included *simpatía*, which emphasizes the need for behaviors that promote smooth and pleasant social relationships” (Marin and Marin 1991, 12). According to Marín and Marín *la plática*, or “small talk” (Marín and Marín 1991, 13) before and after an interview facilitates participation and the building of a concerned relationship between researcher and participant. In this case, *plática* is a way to ease into the collection of data, though the conversations that take place during this time are not meant to be significant to research inquiry. This view of *plática* sees the talk of everyday, the talk of how one is doing, how family is, etc. as unimportant and separate from that which the research is about. In this way, the “small talk” is seen as secondary to the research project. We do recognize the possibility that some researchers move fluidly between a *plática* and the more formal interview portion. However, here we are outlining how this research does not regard that which is shared during the *plática* as actual data nor relevant to the research inquiry.

Finally, though the aforementioned researchers name their use of *pláticas* a methodology, it appears that *pláticas* are used more as a method, a way of collecting data than a methodology grounded in a theoretical or epistemological perspective. Even in their initial 1978 writings, Valle and Mendoza refer to *pláticas* as a methodology, yet they do not highlight *pláticas* as anything more than strategies to collect data (Valle and Mendoza 1978). *Pláticas* as an extension of knowing and being is not discussed in early sociological work or later mental health work, and thus we believe it should be referred to as method, not methodology, in this body of scholarship.

While this early emergence of plática as an applicable research method for Latin@ communities did attempt to work through the limitations of traditional research methods, it did so with an assumption that the everyday lives of Latin@s were something not necessarily worth including in research, but a cultural characteristic to address to fulfill research agendas. As we will show next, Chican@/Latin@ scholarship, and particularly Chicana/Latina feminist scholarship, expanded on this by drawing attention to the importance of alternative sources of knowledge and the intellectual theorizing that takes place during pláticas. In addition, the use of pláticas in Chican@/Latin@ scholarship provides a clearer example of pláticas as methodology, not just method, which takes into consideration the epistemological framing of the researcher and their relationship to the research inquiry and research participants.

### **Pláticas in Chican@/Latin@ Scholarship**

Working with a similar goal of filling a gap in Chican@/Latin@ research and expanding on traditional research strategies, Chican@/Latin@ scholars have further developed the plática methodology. A main difference between this work and early sociological work is an understanding of plática as a practice that develops from a goal to honor researchers' and research participants' epistemological position. For example, Miguel Guajardo and Francisco Guajardo discussed the use of pláticas in their home as a way to pass on familial, cultural, and historical stories (Guajardo and Guajardo 2008). They argued that plática as a method is useful for them as educators and researchers for its emphasis on sharing ideas, experiences, and stories, and relationship building. In addition, they value its reciprocal process necessary in a plática, in which the facilitator of the plática must be open and vulnerable.

Perhaps most insightful is Guajardo and Guajardo's insistence on plática as a method that is "most theoretically and epistemologically congruent"

(Guajardo and Guajardo 2008, 65) with their educational development. In other words, pláticas inform the method through which these scholars learn, teach, and experience reality and vice versa. Those citing the work of Guajardo and Guajardo place strong emphasis on pláticas as a method that recognizes knowledge as a socially constructed concept and prioritizes research participants' everyday experiences while also taking account of researcher epistemology (Zanoni 2008; Guajardo et al. 2014).

Chicana/Latina feminist scholars have also taken up plática as research process stemming from unique epistemological dimensions of Chicana/Latina scholars. Francisca González's dissertation research with young Mexicana students has been cited as the pivotal scholarship introducing pláticas y encuentros<sup>7</sup> as part of a Chicana/Latina feminist methodology (González 1990). González designed a qualitative research methodology called *trenzas y mestizaje*—a multimethodological approach of which pláticas are a part. Pláticas, according to González, are conversations that take place in one-on-one or group spaces, and which are a “way to gather family and cultural knowledge through communication of thoughts, memories, ambiguities, and new interpretations (González 2008, 647). In this particular study, individual pláticas took place during lunch while encuentros, or group pláticas, took place on two different occasions. Unlike early sociological work, González did not merely use the pláticas as a way into the lives of youth in order to then collect research data. Instead the conversations that took place during the pláticas, in which the youth shared their experiences and stories, were viewed as the actual data. In addition to using pláticas to engage Latina youth, González underscores the importance of pláticas as a space of theorization. Unlike early sociological and mental health research that focused on *collecting* data, Gonzalez understands pláticas as a space where data, the lived experiences of young Latinas, is *theorized*. Pláticas are thus “useful and necessary to unbury and advance Chican@ intellectual knowledge

on theory and methods” (Gonzalez and Portillo 2012, 20). Pláticas are not just used to extract information from youth, but to allow them to assess or theorize about their own lived experiences. Within the space of pláticas Chicana@ knowledge can be shared, constructed, and theorized.

Gonzalez’s early scholarship has been cited by other Chicana/Latina scholars and has been used in numerous dissertations. However, like Gonzalez’s initial research, these pieces lack a discussion regarding what a plática methodology is and what it signifies when it is used in place of traditional interview models. However, as we will show below, the specifics of Chicana/Latina research that use pláticas does in fact highlight its methodological implications. Our goal is to review some of this work and demonstrate the ways in which pláticas have been employed as a methodology. In addition, we highlight five principles, which we argue form the contours of plática as a Chicana/Latina feminist methodology.

### **Pláticas as a Chicana/Latina Feminist Methodology: Five Principles**

Below, we synthesize Chicana/Latina scholarship that effectively depicts a plática methodology. As mentioned previously, many scholars have incorporated González’s early work which we argue points to the necessity of an expansion and more thorough conceptualization of pláticas. To do this and theorize a plática methodology, we chose to focus on published scholarship in which authors work from within a Chicana feminist epistemological orientation and use pláticas in their research. Indeed, the first basic principle of a Chicana feminist plática methodology is that the research draws upon Chicana/Latina feminist theory. This theoretical framework is often woven together with other critical theories that center the experiences of marginalized individuals and draw attention to the multiple ways systems of oppression effect the daily navigations of some people, to the benefit of privileged others. For example, in their retelling of the Ph.D. journey as

Latina students, Michelle Espino, Susana Muñoz, and Judy Márquez Kiyama drew from Chicana feminist thought and Critical Race Theory (CRT), which allowed them to center racialization as a process that structures the graduate school experience for students of color (Espino, Muñoz, and Kiyama 2010). Simultaneously, *trenzas de identidades múltiples* (Godínez 2006) allowed them to call attention to the intersectionality of identities that influenced the oppression and resistance of the *mujeres*. Finally, they state that it was a feminist pedagogy of sisterhood (Burciaga and Tavares 2006) that provided them a space to gather the authors' testimonios. *Plática*, as "a collaborative process comprised of sharing stories, building community, and acknowledging multiple realities and vulnerabilities" (Burciaga and Tavares 2006, 805) in combination with CRT, provided a methodological approach that gathered the testimonios of study contributors and rigorously evaluated them for their theoretical contributions.

Another example comes from the work of Cinthya Saavedra, Swetha Chakravarthi, and Joanna Lower (2009), in which they discuss current practices in linguistic diversity, while reimagining new possibilities through a feminist transnational lens. In this article, the authors participate in a *plática* amongst each other, which becomes the essence of a critical reflexive process and the "data" they write about throughout the article. Using Chicana, postcolonial, and US feminist epistemologies as a theoretical framework the authors' engagement in *pláticas* became a way to produce their own transnational feminist space for theorizing and reflecting on their linguistic diversity training and research. According to the authors, their use of feminist theories allowed them to frame their concerns and issues in such a way as to resist the notion that scientifically based knowledge is the only legitimate knowledge. The authors' combination of *pláticas* with feminist theories contributed to a different way to view linguistic diversity training and research.

Second, a *plática* methodology has a relational principle that honors participants as co-constructors of knowledge. In other words, the participants are viewed as contributors and co-constructors of the meaning making process. Whether the researcher has a long significant relationship with the contributors or the relationship is new, it is grounded in respeto for the contributor as a holder and creator of knowledge (Delgado Bernal 2002). For example, in their participation in an organization of Latinas who work or study at a Utah university, Judith Flores and Silvia Garcia discuss the impact of a “Latina space” (Flores and Garcia 2009). The authors argue that in their sharing of personal and academic experiences during *pláticas*, Latina students and faculty enacted the knowledge making process about Latina educational experiences. Additionally, they contributed to the sense-making and theory-building of Latina educational experiences.

Similarly, Godínez, in her work with young Mexicanas (2006), finds that the young contributors shaped the research process, and in turn the knowledge that is produced, by engaging in conversations in which their own interests and concerns emerged. Respectfully calling them *las pensadoras*, Godínez highlights the young Mexicanas not merely as informants, but thoughtful makers of meaning and knowledge. Similarly, but through a more intimate relationship, Bianca Guzmán identifies the *pláticas* that took place between her daughters and herself as moments in which her daughters contributed to the understanding of Latina mothering (Guzmán 2012). For example, though Guzmán lives and works from a feminist standpoint, she finds herself asking her daughter to change into more modest clothing so men will not get the “wrong” idea. Immediately, she apologizes to her daughter, who responds, “Mom, I know you can’t shake the old school.” What Guzmán realizes, and what is particularly important for *pláticas*, is that her daughter is not only highlighting the complexity of motherhood, which involves layers of cultural

and political socialization, but she is also contributing to a definition of motherhood that is always evolving. While traditional interview and focus group methods view research participants as merely informants of stories and experiences, the aforementioned examples of Chicana/Latina pláticas scholarship highlight their role as contributors to the meaning making and knowledge producing aspect of research.

Third, a plática methodology makes connections between everyday lived experiences and the research inquiry. Instead of ignoring or minimizing lived experiences as if they do not relate to the research inquiry, a plática methodology draws them in as part and parcel of research inquiry. For example, Flores and Garcia's Latina convivio group was created because of the lack of support for women of color at their predominantly white institution (Flores and Garcia 2005). While pláticas began as discussions about educational experiences, they quickly included topics such as family, language, sex, and gender. Understanding that none of these social and institutional categorizations exist in isolation from each other, Flores, Garcia, and the other participants welcomed these conversations as factors that influence one's educational experiences.

In another example, Espino, Muñoz, and Marquez Kiyama (2010) engage in a plática to discuss their transition from doctoral students to faculty. While the focus of the article is on the challenges of this transition, it becomes apparent quickly that the authors' lives as scholars are not separated from their lives as mothers, sisters, partners, and community members. Instead, the plática provides the space to engage how these various roles influence their roles as scholars. For example, one of the authors is in the midst of deciding on a job offer. When asked what she had decided, the author centers family as a major focus of the decision process.

As both of these examples show, when *plática* is used as a research methodology its informal conversational format allows for more fluid discussions. Unlike an interview, where one person is asking all the questions, a *plática* involves a two-way conversation. Researchers' interests and themes may guide the *plática*, but there is room for the contributor to discuss those topics that matter for them. Moreover, when used from within a Chicana/Latina feminist perspective the holistic life forces of contributors matter for the research inquiry and are not only welcomed, but understood as necessary.

Fourth, a *plática* methodology provides a potential space for healing. Used as a method of therapeutic practice by curandera Elena Avila who defines a *plática* as “a deep heart-to-heart talk that continues for as long as it needs” (Avila 1999), a *plática* is believed to be a cathartic treatment. As discussed by Avila, in Aztec tradition *pláticas* served as a space that allows the curandera to learn about her client while also educating or providing healing remedies. During a *plática*, a curandera listens to the stories of her clients attempting to understand the cause of one's illness. By nature, the *plática* is a spiritual act, for the very power to listen fully with all five senses and healing comes from the curandera's own spiritual connections, and as such discussions of client's spirituality or religiosity are also a part of the *plática*.

The work of Avila has been taken up by scholar Adela de la Torre who views a *plática* as a relational “conversation[s] that allows us to self-discover who we are in relationship to ourselves and others” (de la Torre 2008, 44). In her work, de la Torre focuses on the *plática* as a tool used by her family to discuss ailments and provide support to each other, and to address trauma and ways to heal from that trauma. de la Torre believes *pláticas* are coping strategies for illness and disease. Similarly, Espino et al. (2010), begin with an “unburdening” of *pláticas*—a discussion of the challenges and tensions that exist for them as



newly minted faculty trying to balance the demands of academia and family. The pláticas flow from past stories of pain and trauma, current negotiations, and future hopes. As is displayed in their article, a sense of raw openness and vulnerability is needed by the researcher and contributor to nurture the plática and those involved. Such researcher and contributor vulnerability provides the potential for the plática to be a space of healing through self-reflexivity.

Fifth, a plática methodology relies on relations of reciprocity and vulnerability and researcher reflexivity. As noted by Avila, “the most important ingredient in the plática is trust” (Avila 1999, 150). We believe that trust can exist only if the process is reciprocal. In other words, researchers must be willing to share that which they ask of their contributors. Unlike the interview that involves the researcher asking questions of the contributor without space for any questions to be asked of the researcher, the conversation set-up of a plática allows for a talking back and forth. In this way, the contributor can ask questions and the researcher can also share similar experiences. This differs from interviews where the point is to allow for a one-way conversation where the researcher says as little as possible in the hopes of focusing on the interviewee and gathering as much information as possible.

Reciprocity also involves researcher reflexivity. While some researchers use pláticas as a method to engage with outside contributors, others use the method as a meaning making process between two scholars. In their reexamination of Cara Lynn Preuss’s earlier work, Preuss and Saavedra engage in pláticas y encuentros as a tool to retheorize the lives of women in earlier studies (Preuss and Saavedra 2013). Through pláticas y encuentros the authors were able to question each other while attempting to make meaning of the lives of other women. In another example of pláticas used as researcher reflexivity, Espino et al. (2010) share the pláticas they had regarding academic, personal,

and family life. Through these pláticas, which they defined as “a collaborative process comprised of sharing stories, building community, and acknowledging multiple realities and vulnerabilities in an effort to enforce strong bonds” (Espino et al. 2010, 805), the authors combined narrative and explanation to unpack multiple identities.

Pláticas move from method to methodology when they are embedded within the rich, analytical theory of Chicana feminism, engage contributors as knowledge creators essential to the meaning making process, draw on life experiences, and provide a potential space for healing. Perhaps most important, pláticas are part of a methodology that is relational and holds the researcher responsible to the contributors. In other words, the space we create with pláticas requires that we, too, be open to sharing our own stories and be vulnerable as we are asking of contributors. The Chicana/Latina feminist plática methodology allows for this, in fact, it necessitates this.

### **Conclusion**

Chicana education scholars, in particular, have taken up the call to articulate Chicana feminist perspectives that contribute to a decolonization of the research process and inform our practice as educators and activist scholars. Elenes (2011) reminds us that the process of decolonization “is not to recover the silenced voices by using hegemonic categories of analysis, but to change the methodological tools and categories to reclaim those neglected voices.” (Calderón et al. 2012, 60)

In this article, we have taken up the call to articulate the contours of pláticas as a Chicana/Latina feminist methodology—a methodology that allows us to locate ourselves within the research and then reclaim neglected voices as

well as overlooked sources of everyday knowledge. We argue that by utilizing pláticas in their research, scholars have offered another kind of methodological tool, one that is grounded in Chicana feminist perspectives and reflects their embodied knowledge. In much the same the way our (Dolores and Cindy's) family pláticas sometimes result in long stories, multiple interpretations, crying, or laughing—but always in something learned—pláticas in research offer much to be learned. Perhaps because many Chicana feminists have learned so much from marginalized experiences and silenced voices, there is an understanding that pláticas as methodology have the potential to get at what is missing, passed over, or sometimes avoided. Indeed, when the research process is grounded in decolonial/anticolonial Chicana/Latina feminist theories, pláticas are a part of a methodology that is essential to the way we embody and perform research. Pláticas align with the strong feminista tradition of theorizing from the brown body, and therefore, the modes of interaction and analysis are collaborative and attentive to the many ways of knowing and learning in our communities.

A plática methodology must also be attentive to the types of relationships that are always unfolding within pláticas. In the same way that one might engage in platicando with a sister, a close neighbor, or someone they just met at the market, pláticas might take place between researchers and participants who have recently entered a new relationship with each other, or between those who have a deep ongoing relationship (within or outside of a research project). Either way, it is important to understand pláticas as a relational practice that develops from a goal to honor research participants' epistemological position. There must also be reflexivity about the relations of power present in the research process even when an insider/outsider, colonized/colonizer researcher is involved. A power differential that reflects the researcher's assumed status as knower and the participant's status as an object of study is disrupted with a

relationship of sharing, teaching, and learning from each other's experiences, stories, and consejos.

We started the article by pointing to the methodological *pláticas* we have had with others about the need for a more thorough discussion of what it means to employ *pláticas* in one's research. Based on the scholarship of others and our research, we have offered the contours of *pláticas* as part of a Chicana/Latina feminist methodology. What we have offered are not strict rules or a checklist of procedures, but rather principles that might offer some guidance to researchers. In the same way that the contours of everyday *pláticas* differ depending on the topic of discussion, the location of the conversation, emotions that are present, *confianza y respeto* in the relationships, and how and what language is used, we know that *pláticas* in research differ. We look forward to continuing to learn from future scholarship the methodological differences and nuances, as well as the rich knowledge that comes to light as a result of *platicando con otr@s* en nuestras comunidades.

### **Acknowledgments**

We acknowledge and thank all those scholars before us who have brought the discourse and process of *pláticas* into the realm of qualitative research. We also thank the many family members, mentors, colleagues, and acquaintances who have shared their wisdom, consejos, and knowledge with us through *pláticas*.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> *Pláticas* are informal conversations that take place in one-on-one or group spaces, and which are a "way to gather family and cultural knowledge through communication of thoughts, memories, ambiguities, and new interpretations" (Gonzalez 1998, 647).

<sup>2</sup> Like Sonia Saldivar-Hull (2000), we engage in a consciously political *movida* to accommodate and legitimize our own tongue versus that of the monolingual English speaker (Anzaldúa 1987) and choose not to translate throughout this text.

<sup>3</sup> These pláticas about pláticas included (former) doctoral students at the University of Utah Cindy Fierros, Sylvia Mendoza, Socorro Morales, Alicia De León, Andrea Garavito, Kathleen Christie, and Juan Freire.

<sup>4</sup> Our use of @ at the end of labels such as “Latin@” is a way to challenge the gender hierarchy present in the Spanish language (the use of the masculine “o” at the end of words to refer to both males and females) and to recognize gender fluidity. We use “Latinos” when referring to males only and “Latinas” when referring to females only.

<sup>5</sup> We use the term Hispanic here to reflect its usage in much, but not all, of the research we review in this section and as a way to juxtapose the literature with the critical tradition of Chican@/Latin@ and Chicana/Latina feminist scholarship discussed in the next sections.

<sup>6</sup> We use the term “traditional” to refer to research methods and approaches that are positivist or colonial in nature and contrary to critical methodologies, or that which is a “reflexive discourse constantly in search of an open-ended, subversive, multivoiced, participatory epistemology” (Denzin & Lincoln 2008, x). Traditional research instead “serves as a metaphor for colonial knowledge, for power, and for truth” (Denzin & Lincoln, 4).

<sup>7</sup> Though Gonzalez identifies her methodology as pláticas y encuentros, we will continue to focus on pláticas with an understanding that encuentros, which are actually group pláticas, also fall within our discussion of a plática methodology.

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Vamos a platicar|Para tomar una conversaci3n lo mas correcto es Vamos a Platicar.Â Spanish (Mexico) Near fluent. Vamos a platicar. Vamos a platicar. See a translation. Report copyright infringement.