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**THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF NUEVOMEXICANAS TO NEW MEXICO
LOWRIDER CULTURE, TRADITIONS AND RITUALS: THE SIGNIFICANCE
OF YOUNG CHICANA CULTURAL PACHUCA AND CHOLA AESTHETICS
AND IDENTITY EXPRESSION IN THE ALBUQUERQUE LOWRIDER
COMMUNITY**

BY

VALERIE J. CHAVEZ

**BACHELOR OF ARTS AND SCIENCES COMMUNICATION AND
JOURNALISM
CHICANA AND CHICANO STUDIES**

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS CHICANA AND CHICANO STUDIES

The University of New Mexico Albuquerque, New Mexico

MAY 2024

DEDICATION

For Whispers, Gata, and Happy, thank you for sharing your stories and allowing me to capture your spirits. Thank you for your love and dedication to our shared *querencia* of Albuquerque and the beautiful lowrider community we attach ourselves to.

For all the Nuevomexicana, pachucas, and cholas now and before me. Thank you for your ability to survive through love and resistance. Your sacrifices *por la raza* do not go unacknowledged. I am grateful for your traditions, wisdom, and the culture it has created; I live for and in your memory.

For my mother who has rooted me in my Nuevomexicana identity. Thank you for your unwavering support and encouragement while I wrote this thesis and obtained this degree.

Thank you for always nurturing my light. Thank you for surviving all the struggles of womanhood with grace for my brothers and I. And thank you mama, for being everything I mold myself into.

For my tío Joey who unexpectedly left this earth the Easter Sunday before I completed this thesis. Thank you tío for teaching me the art of giving *carilla* and supporting my passion for cultural photography. Every time I go to a cruise, I will always think of you waving me down in your old Ford pickup. Thank you tío for encouraging my quest for knowledge about the state we both love, *Nuevo México*.

Lastly, for the Albuquerque lowrider community, thank you for welcoming me to and documenting your sacred space of *resolana*.

All things I do, I do in all your honor.

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**The Contributions of Nuevomexicanas to New Mexico Lowrider Culture, Traditions
and Rituals: The Significance of Young Chicana Cultural Pachuca and Chola
Aesthetics and Identity Expression in the Albuquerque Lowrider Community**

By

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M.A., Chicana and Chicano Studies, University of New Mexico, 2024

Abstract

The lowrider community in Albuquerque creates a space for families and individuals to gather and express themselves within Chicana/o/x culture. *Nuevomexicanas* have played a significant role in the teaching and preservation of the New Mexican traditions and rituals of lowriding. This research project is a visual and *plática*-based study. It explores how young *Nuevomexicanas* express their Chicana identity through *la pachuca* and *chola* cultural aesthetics and identity while actively participating in lowrider culture. This project utilizes the research methods of *la resolana*, *querencia*, and *plática* to understand, discover, and document the roles of young *Nuevomexicanas* in the Albuquerque lowrider community. This thesis fills a gap in our knowledge about *la pachuca* and *chola* cultural aesthetics and identity within lowrider culture in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

All photos used within this study are taken by me, Valerie Chavez.

Photos have been taken between the years 2020 – 2024.

Table of Contents

List Of Figures.....	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review	9
Chapter 3: History of Lowrider Culture in New Mexico & Insight into New Mexico Car Clubs	18
Chapter 4: Young Chicana Pachuca and Chola Aesthetics and Identity Expression in the Albuquerque Lowrider Community: Identity, Place, and Community	27
<i>First Plática: Lowriding Por Vida: Stories of Growing up in New Mexico Car Club Culture con Whispers</i>	30
<i>Second Plática: Being Burqueña and Finding Querencia in the Albuquerque Lowrider Community con Gata</i>	42
<i>Third Plática: Growing up Homegirl con Happy</i>	52
Chapter 5: Conclusion	58
References	63

List of Figures

Figure 1: Gate in a 1957 Ford Fairline in Old Town, Albuquerque January 2024	1
Figure 2: Lowrider Day, Española, New Mexico July 22, 2023.....	3
Figure 3: Albuquerque Supershow Cruise in Barelmas Neighborhood (4th Street) June 4, 2023.....	5
Figure 4: South Valley Sunset, <i>La Virgen de Guadalupe</i> Shirt April 2021	7
Figure 5: Lowrider Day, Española June 22, 2023.....	17
Figure 6: Good Friday in Española June 7, 2023.....	19
Figure 7: LowLow Medina’s Hood Mural for Santo Lowride: Norteño Car Culture and the Santos Tradition Harwood Muesum of Art in Taos October 18, 2021	20
Figure 8: In Memory Lucia, 2023 Viejitos Car Club Good Friday Car Show, Española, NM April 7, 2023.....	21
Figure 9: LowLow Medina’s Lowrider Museum Sign in Chimayo January 24, 2022 ...	22
Figure 10: G <i>La Virgen de Guadalupe</i> Backseat Blanket, 2023 Viejitos Car Club Good Friday Car Show, Española, NM	24
Figure 11: Julian Gonzales’s 1979 Ford Thunderbird named “Holy Faith” Low Vision Car Club, 2022 Marinteztown Cruise, Albuquerque, NM Martineztown, Albuquerque, NM April 12, 2022.....	25
Figure 12: Low Vision Car Club Martineztown, Albuquerque, NM April 12, 2022....	26
Figure 13: Low Vision Car Club Martineztown, Albuquerque, NM April 12, 2022....	27
Figure 14: Por Vida Tattoo, Albuquerque, NM December 30, 2023.....	30
Figure 15: Women of Viejitos Car Club on Good Friday in Española April 7, 2023	31
Figure 16: Por Vida Tattoo, Albuquerque, NM December 30, 2023.....	32
Figure 17: Por Vida Tattoo, Albuquerque, NM December 30, 2023.....	33
Figure 18: Por Vida Tattoo in Albuquerque, NM December 30, 2023.....	34
Figure 19: Por Vida Tattoo in Albuquerque, NM December 30, 2023.....	35
Figure 20: Por Vida Tattoo in Albuquerque, NM December 30, 2023.....	36
Figure 21: Viejitos Annual Christmas Toy Drive in Albuquerque, NM December 5, 2022.....	38
Figure 22: Viejitos Car Club Chimayo Chapter Plaque Española, 2022	38

Figure 23: Viejitos Annual Christmas Toy Drive in Albuquerque, NM “Induction Baptism” December 5, 2022	39
Figure 24: Whispers’ “Chula” Tattoo, Por Vida Tattoo Shop, December 2023, Albuquerque, NM	40
Figure 25: Valerie’s “Con Safo” or “C/S” Tattoo, Por Vida Tattoo Shop, December 30, 2023, Albuquerque, NM	41
Figure 26: Old Town, Albuquerque, NM January 29, 2024	42
Figure 27: Gata in her Aunt’s former Family Apartment in Old Town Albuquerque, NM	43
Figure 28: Gata’s Self Painted Custom Lowrider Pinstripe Nails January 29, 2024	44
Figure 29: Gata in Old Town Plaza, January 2024, Old Town Albuquerque, NM January 2024.....	45
Figure 30: Gata in the Driver Seat of 1957 Ford Fairline, Old Town Albuquerque, NM	45
Figure 31: Old Town, Albuquerque, NM January 29, 2024	46
Figure 32: Old Town, Albuquerque, NM January 29, 2024	47
Figure 33: Gata’s Tattoo in Memory of Her Father “Crazo,” Old Town Albuquerque, NM	48
Figure 34: Resolana in Old Town Albuquerque, NM.....	50
Figure 35: Gata in front of New Mexico State Flag, Old Town Albuquerque, NM.....	51
Figure 36: El Modelo Restuarant, Albuquerque, NM January 30, 2024	52
Figure 37: Happy in front of El Modelo Restaurant with 1940 Chevrolet Master Deluxe and 1981 Cutlass January 30, 2024.....	53
Figure 38: El Modelo Restuarant, Albuquerque, NM January 30, 2024	54
Figure 39: Happy in front of <i>La Virgen de Guadalupe</i> mural in Barelmas Neighborhood, Albuquerque, NM January 30, 2024	55
Figure 40: Barelmas, 4th Street, Albuquerque, NM January 30, 2024	56
Figure 41: Happy in front of Clarence Valdez’s “La Reina” Bomba, Barelmas January 30, 2024.....	57
Figure 42: “In Memory of Sparky” Cruise, May 2021, Downtown Albuquerque, NM Albuquerque, NM May 2021	58

Figure 43: Albuquerque Lowrider Supershow | June 04, 2023 59

Figure 44: Barelas, 4th Street, Albuquerque, NM | September 11, 2023 60

Figure 45: Jerry Griego’s 1964 Chevrolet Impala parked at Holy Family Church,
Albuquerque, NM | October 2022..... 61

Figure 46: Downtown, Albuquerque, NM | May 2021 62



Figure 1: Gate in a 1957 Ford Fairlane in Old Town, Albuquerque | January 2024

Chapter 1: Introduction

In New Mexican culture, customizing classic cars is a form of cultural and personal expression. The lowrider community in Albuquerque creates a sacred space of *resolana* for families and individuals to gather and express themselves within Chicana/o culture. *Nuevomexicanas* play a meaningful role in all aspects of this lowrider subculture including maintaining and nurturing *la resolana*, artistic inspiration for design/murals painted on lowriders, clothes or cultural aesthetics, identity expression, teaching and the tradition and rituals of lowriding to future generations and owning their own lowriders.

This oral history documentation and research is a visual and *platica*-based study. It explores how young *Nuevomexicanas* express *La Pachuca* and *La Chola* cultural aesthetics and identity expression as members of the Albuquerque lowrider community. I utilize the theoretical concepts of *la resolana* and *la plática* as part of the documentation process and methodology.

This study aims to understand, discover, and document the roles of young *Nuevomexicanas* in the Albuquerque lowrider community by answering the following questions: How do young Chicanas express *La Pachuca* and *La Chola* cultural aesthetics and identity in the Albuquerque lowrider community? How does young Chicana's

dedication maintain, enable, and sustain the Albuquerque lowrider culture and community?

The answers to these research questions fill a gap in our knowledge about young Chicana aesthetics, identity expression, and maintenance of traditions and rituals of the lowrider culture in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The study aims to answer my research questions by engaging in *la resolana* and *pláticas* with three young Chicanas in the Albuquerque lowrider community. As part of the inquiry, I will create a text and visual documentation that analyzes *La pachuca* and *La chola* Chicana cultural aesthetics and identity expression. This thesis fills a gap in our knowledge about Chicana aesthetics and identity within lowrider culture in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

The theoretical concepts and methods I chose for this study are culturally responsive and considered non-traditional research strategies. The theoretical concepts of *la resolana* and *plática* are foundational ways of acquiring and disseminating knowledge in Chicana culture and are especially prevalent in the Albuquerque lowrider community. Using *la resolana* and *plática* was essential to the success of this research study because *la resolana* and *plática* are part of the social structure in the community in which the research participants actively participate. *La resolana* is the sacred space in which the Albuquerque lowrider community is situated and is where *la plática* naturally transpires.

Plática operates as a theory and methodology in this study. *Plática* is the most effective, but often overlooked method for gathering stories and experiences and sharing cultural knowledge with research participants in this study. Chicana cultural aesthetics and identity expression will be analyzed through *la resolana*, *plática*, and visual documentation. Chicana cultural aesthetics and identity expression are inspired by the aesthetics created by *Las pachucas* and *Las cholitas*; both identities are rooted in a history of resistance and survival. My study aims to use *la resolana*, *plática*, and visual documentation to understand how young Chicanas in the Albuquerque lowrider community reclaim and use cultural aesthetics and identity expression and demonstrate the continued resistance to American ideals, assimilation, traditional beauty standards, and traditional female roles.

Resolana is the foundational theory in this project because it centers on interpersonal dynamics, cultural knowledge production, and sacred space created in the

Albuquerque lowrider community. By employing the concept of *la resolana*, this research centers the understanding of cultural knowledge of the young women who participated in pláticas. Tomás Atencio gives *resolana*'s traditional definition in his co-written book *Resolana: Emerging Chicano Dialogues on Community and Globalization*,

La resolana is the space defined by the south wall of a building that is shielded from the east and west winds, where the sun reflecting off the wall creates a place of warmth, light, and tranquility. In that place, men have gathered across the years to pass the time of day, exchange good and bad news, gossip, share jokes, and talk about everyday life, birth, and death; they have told stories and shared memories of the past and have pondered the future.

Raul Yzaguirre defines *resolana* in his foreword to the same book as, “both a place and a process, a noun, and a verb. It refers to a gathering place where knowledge flourishes.

But it also connotes a process of understanding the world at a higher level of awareness.”

Resolana is a community-based foundation experienced at weekend cruises, community events, and one-on-one interactions. Where there are lowriders, there is *resolana*.



Figure 2: Lowrider Day, Española, New Mexico / July 22, 2023

La resolana found in the Albuquerque lowrider community is unique because of the sense of belonging formed through people's respect for one another and shared interests. In Chicana/o culture, the customization of classic cars is a form of cultural and personal expression. As a product of Chicax culture these cars are considered art and some are even considered historical relics. A 1969 Ford LTD named “Dave’s Dream” by Dave Jaramillo from Española can be found in the National Museum of American History. In New Mexico, the customization of lowriders is an artform. This tradition has been passed down from generation to generation, and as an outcome, most cars are prized

possessions and family heirlooms. Lowriders have historically been informally displayed on cruises (driving them up on down popular streets.)

Cruising has become a community activity and a sacred place for car owners and their families, creating a sacred place for those who contribute. Yzaguirre describes *resolana* as both a place and a process where Chicanas/os can be themselves to express their identity, speak their language, and feel at home. The Albuquerque lowrider community is a space of abundant knowledge by sharing stories, wisdom, beliefs, values, reflections, joys, sorrows, ceremonies, and rituals. I have learned about the process of *la resolana* by submerging myself into the Albuquerque lowrider community through photography and oral history documentation.

For the past four years, I have dedicated my craft of photography to documenting the subcultures of New Mexico's lowrider communities with an emphasis on the Albuquerque community. This is because I am born and raised in Albuquerque, New Mexico. *Mi familia* has deep roots in New Mexico, with my lineage dating back generations. I identify as *Burqueña* which is a native-born woman of Albuquerque who identifies with New Mexican heritage and culture. Because of my upbringing and attachment to *mi querencia*, or devotion to home, place, and identity, and my fascination with lowrider culture, I have focused my study on the Albuquerque lowrider community. When conducting research on literature written on New Mexico lowrider communities, it became evident that there is a gap of knowledge on Albuquerque and the evolution story of the lowrider community in the city. This research aims to fill that gap with written work and visual documentation of the present moment.

I decided to document the lowrider communities in Albuquerque and other areas of New Mexico because of my desire to capture *la cultura* of my community, *familia*, and *querencia*. It was also important to document other aspects of New Mexican lowrider culture, traditions, and rituals. I felt drawn to the lowrider community because of its form of cultural expression. It was beautiful, unique, and distinct. Documenting my first cruise, I was unsure if I would be welcomed as a person not born into this tradition. I learned quickly that spending time with people at cruises, taking photos of their most prized possessions, and starting conversations demonstrated respect. I noticed other photographers would shake hands with the photographers or display a form of comradery

towards one another. The relationships between everyone were formed through time and participating in *la resolana* specific to the Albuquerque lowrider community.

Over time, the photographers have been seen as community members and are respected because of their contributions to preserving the lowrider traditions through visual documentation. After attending that first cruise, I was welcomed into the lowrider community with open arms. I wanted to contribute to this beautiful subculture by documenting the traditions, rituals, people, and celebrating them. I showed respect by actively participating in *la resolana* and engaging in *las pláticas*. At every cruise, I engaged in conversation, asked questions, and honored every car and person. Because of my continued engagement, I have become a familiar face within their community. *La plática*, the act of conversing or engaging in dialogue, is a way of sharing and acquiring knowledge and information.



Figure 3: Albuquerque Supershow Cruise in Barelitas Neighborhood (4th Street) | June 4, 2023

La plática may occur in a familiar, safe, and sacred space between two or more people where all participants are engaged and contributing to the conversation. Cindy Fierros and Dolores Delgado Bernal explore the concept of *pláticas* as a Chicana feminist methodology in their chapter in *Chicana/Latina Studies*, vol. 15, *VAMOS A PLATICAR: The Contours of Pláticas as Chicana/Latina Feminist Methodology*. Fierros and Delgado Bernal also explore *pláticas* as a form of cultural knowledge. Fierros explains the significance of *pláticas* in her life and family,

In my (Cindy) family, *platicamos* about everything. Family stories, *consejos*, *regaños*, and jests are communicated through conversations around my parents' large circular dining table... 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. Both writers and educators agreed that plenty of scholarship and research utilized *pláticas* as a methodology. Fierros and Delgado Bernal conceptualize *plática* as a Chicana feminist methodology and argue that *pláticas* “...allowed us to weave the personal and academic.” (99). *Pláticas* and *resolana* work together as methodology and theoretical frameworks in this project. The use of *pláticas* in this project demonstrates Fierros and Delgado Bernal's argument that *pláticas* are a legitimate and culturally responsive Chicana feminist research method. *Pláticas* are a central analysis point in this project, along with the visual documentation of Chicana cultural aesthetics and identity expression. My study utilizes visual documentation to analyze the present-day significance of this study's young Chicana research participants and their use of cultural aesthetics and identity expression in the Albuquerque lowrider community.

The visual documentation used for this research expands on the work done for other lowrider communities in New Mexico, primarily captured in northern New Mexican villages. I decided to implement photography as a research tool because I used my photography to become a member of the Albuquerque lowrider community. My interest in my research topic was formed by my efforts to visually document the Albuquerque lowrider community. For years, I have attended and photographed local cruises, lowrider supershows, and other community events that included lowriders. My photography captures the Albuquerque lowrider community in its present form to be used and studied not only for my research but potentially for future research on this community.

I use the term “visual documentation” to describe the photos taken of young Chicanas and the lowrider community to understand Chicana cultural aesthetics and identity expression in Albuquerque. The word “visual” refers to the photographs used. The word “documentation” refers to the photographs used in the research study to cement them into the University of New Mexico's digital repository, validating their significance to knowledge creation at the academic level and recognizing the research participant's contributions to Albuquerque and New Mexico lowrider culture. The visual documentation used in this research further enhances the analysis of cultural aesthetics and identity expression. The photographs I used in this study add to the historical record

of lowrider communities in New Mexico. It was important as a researcher to include my research participants in the process of the visual documentation used for this study.

The young Chicana research participants were essential in making the visual documentation. I asked each participant to choose the location of where the photos and *plática* would take place. I encouraged the participants to choose a place in Albuquerque that had special significance for them. They could choose anywhere they wanted, but ultimately, they each chose a location they had a personal connection to, or a place correlated with the Albuquerque lowrider community. I also encouraged them to dress or bring items to our *plática* to represent their identity. They each put care into their outfits, ensuring they expressed their identity with something they wore to lowrider events. I wanted my participants to be as comfortable as possible by allowing them to pick the location; they were in a familiar space, allowing each of them to be open in our *plática*. Another component that made the participants open and comfortable was that they knew me as a photographer in the Albuquerque lowrider community. I have seen each of my participants at cruises, car club events, or Lowrider Supershow. They are all familiar with my photography and supported me in continuing my efforts to document Albuquerque's lowrider culture. One of the other factors that made my participants comfortable with me is that each of them, myself included, identifies as a *Burqueña*.



Figure 4: South Valley Sunset, La Virgen de Guadalupe Shirt

Burqueña is a term of identity used by native-born women of Albuquerque who preserve the New Mexican heritage and culture found in Albuquerque. The fact that we all recognize it as Chicana, *Nuevomexicana*, and *Burqueña* creates a sense of

camaraderie. We are homegirls that see each other at cruises, talk the same language, eat the same *comida*, and know the same places. We all share the same home, Albuquerque. We feel safe with each other because of this; where a person is from is especially important to New Mexican culture; it signifies a lot about a person. For this research, the participants and I collaborated to create and document an important part of life in Albuquerque. Although each participant is a member of the lowrider community, one does not have to know that lowriding is a special tradition in Albuquerque. It is being celebrated increasingly with events like Lowrider Day in Civic Plaza or the Mariachi Lowrider Night at the local baseball Isotope game. This research and the visual documentation included are significant because they focus on the Albuquerque lowrider community and the young women who proudly represent it and have chosen to make it part of their lifestyle and legacy. They each express a deep love for lowrider culture and plan to be part of the Albuquerque community for their whole lives. The women who participated in this study are part of the next generation of women in the lowrider communities in New Mexico.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study focuses on *Nuevomexicana* cultural aesthetics and identity expression in the Albuquerque lowrider community while building on approaches grounded in Chicana Studies and *Nuevomexicana/o* lived experiences, *resolana* and *plática*. I approach the research through an ethnographic lens, using visual documentation to understand how young women participating in lowrider culture express cultural aesthetics and identity. This literature review focuses on analyzing the historical role women have played in Chicano lowrider communities, examining the Chicana archetypes of *La Pachuca* and *La Chola*, and their cultural aesthetic as an influence on the Chicana participants of this study, and the historical context of *Nuevomexicanas* and their survival strategies during U.S. colonial dominance starting in 1846.

There is a gap in *Nuevomexicana*'s roles in New Mexico's lowrider culture and their roles in history. I also found that most of the literature on lowrider culture is situated in Los Angeles, an important space for analysis in Chicano Studies. My research and this study aim to build on the literature written about Chicanas' role in the greater lowrider culture and on *Nuevomexicana* stories and roles in Chicana history. Most of my knowledge of *Nuevomexicana* identity is from oral histories told by my mother and grandmother. Our stories, traditions, identity, and way of life have rarely been documented in academic research, and we rely solely on storytelling to preserve our cultural experiences. I plan to use and make connections with the literature and written works centered on my research topic available to answer my research question. I will begin this literature review by discussing the historical context of Chicanas in lowrider communities, and the cultural aesthetics that the research participants draw inspiration from are essential.

In Charles Tatum's *Lowriders in Chicano Culture: From Low to Slow to Show*, he provides insight into various topics within lowrider culture. He includes a chapter titled "Women in Lowrider Culture," in which he discusses the historical role women have played in lowrider communities, describing these roles as "... secondary and even subservient roles in different aspects of lowrider culture, including car clubs, media, art, and music" (135). Tatum explains these roles mirror the traditional roles that Chicanas

were subjected to outside the lowrider culture. He connects these dichotomous gender norms to the machismo attitude that has existed in Chicano communities and has resulted in "...strict norms of behavior and manifest a specific set of attitudes to meet the expectations of men: humility, subservience, sexual purity before marriage and disinterest in sex after marriage, self-negation, sacrifice, long-suffering, unambitiousness, submissiveness to the desires of the man, and complete devotion to the family and the wider culture" (136). It is important to understand women's representation and participation in the lowrider culture because as the culture has evolved, so have the women.

Women's increasing involvement in lowrider culture reflects the periods when Chicanas resisted the traditional historical gender roles to which they were restrained. The literature reviewed for this study focuses on the cultural aesthetic influence of *La pachuca* and *La Chola* archetypes on young Chicanas in the Albuquerque Lowrider community. I will first review the literature of *pachucas* in the World War II era and their influence on the Chicana feminist movement that led to the creation of the *La Chola* archetype and aesthetic. I will connect these Chicana feminist archetypes and aesthetics to the history of the Chicana feminist movement and *Nuevomexicanas* and their historical resistance to U.S. colonial dominance. I will then apply the foundational Chicana feminist and *Nuevomexicana* historical context to the resistance used today within the cultural aesthetics and identity expression of the young Chicanas involved in this study.

I begin with examining Deena González's *Women's Survival Strategies: Gifts and Giving as Methods of Resistance, 1846-1880* to situate the *Nuevomexicana* identity and demonstrate their historical resistance to the United States' colonial dominance in New Mexico. González discusses the years of 1846-1880, an important timeframe because it is when the U.S. won the Mexican-American War and claimed New Mexico as a territory. This change in power created a period of Nueva Mexicana resistance to political and economic control of Santa Fe or the southwest frontier. González describes the focus of this chapter of her book as "...assesses the poverty and survival strategies of the bulk of the poorer women and of a few wealthy ones, suggesting how much the business style of women like Barceló and Manuela Baca yielded in the face of ever-changing political and economic structures." (77) Deena González makes the Chicana colonial struggles specific

to the historical context of Santa Fe of 1846 - 1880. She explains the conditions Spanish-Mexican women faced with the new arrival of white settlers, who took economic and political power, changing their traditional way of life and earning a living.

González writes, “Powerful religious leaders, lawmakers, military officers, and merchants determined the course of women’s lives in new ways because they were directly responsible for employing them, and because they were building structures and passing laws that indirectly affected women” (88). As the economic power shifted in Santa Fe post-war, the Spanish-Mexican women could not compete with the new Euro-American leaders. Making more and more women rely on wage labor. González argues that Spanish-Mexican women resisted and survived the Euro-American ways of conquest by establishing their wills despite their economic status. They knew the corrupted ways of thinking the Euro-Americans used in spheres of society (courts, religion, politics, economy, etc.) González states,

Whether they were insiders or outsiders, at the bottom or at the top, the Spanish Mexican women of Santa Fe defy easy categorizations, resist linear graphings...Their survival was based on no coordinated program of resistance based on their gender, but still they obliged their colonizers (and now, historians) in at least one respect: They left us a legacy, an inclination toward many responses.

This sentiment is similar to how *Nuevomexicanas* felt during the transition from Mexican to U.S. rule. In response to U.S. imperialism, *Nuevomexicanas* went to court to fight against the injustices happening to them. They ran businesses and ensured their wills were set in stone so future generations would not lose family land. Chicanas have a historical pattern of resistance to colonial domination and have used strategic survival methods to ensure future generations did not face the same oppression they did.

Deena González’s work goes back in time to reveal the historical struggles of *Nuevomexicanas* and uncovers the root of our struggle. It is vital to investigate history to learn these cultural survival methods passed down from *Nuevomexicanas*. Although the literature and historical documentation of the lives and transformation of *Nuevomexicanas* is limited, the historical uncovering of their stories by Deena González exposes the resilience of *Nuevomexicanas*. My study expands on this resilience by focusing on the new generation of *Nuevomexicanas* in the Albuquerque lowrider community and how they express that generational resilience through cultural aesthetics and identity

expression. Like *pachucas* during World War II, Chicana feminists in El Movimiento, *Nuevomexicanas* during this period fought for their voices to be heard, and they relied extensively on their community connections to do so. *La Pachuca* is a Chicana archetype from the Chicanas in East L.A barrios during and after WWII. Her rebellious attitude and style are a foundational influence of Chicana cultural aesthetics and identity expression in lowrider communities. I will examine the work of Catherine Ramírez to situate her role in this study.

Las Pachucas are symbols of defiance of American patriotism, white female beauty standards, police violence, racism, and discrimination in school as a direct response to the U.S. trying to project the image of a unified nation-state during and post-World War II. *Pachucas* were active members of their barrios voicing and displaying their intolerance to the systematic violence that their communities were facing. One of the most notable instances of social injustice *pachucas* participated in were the Zoot Suit riots. The riots took place in East LA in June 1943 as an outcome of the civilian and military tension caused by the constant discriminatory violence constantly faced by *pachucas/os*. Catherine Ramírez writes about how *pachuca's* defiant attitudes in her *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory* and *Crimes of Fashion: The Pachuca and Chicana Style Politics* describes how their political and historical roles in Chicana/o culture are reflected in their dress. She defines *La Pachuca* and their essential wardrobe as,

The pachuca was the female counterpart to (and often the companion of) the pachuco. Like pachucos, pachucas had a distinctive look. Many teased their hair into high bouffants (called "rats") and wore what was considered excessive makeup. They usually donned short skirts and long coats, and some wore the masculine version of the zoot suit (complete with "punjab" pants and "fingertip" coats.

Ramírez argues that *Las Pachucas* historical acts of rebellion of conventional white working class American feminine roles and beauty standards through their dress and cosmetic choices, speaking and acting against social injustices demonstrated intolerance towards U.S dominance. She argues that *Las Pachucas* embodiment and acts of resistance were also aimed towards the tradition's cultural expectations of Chicanas in machista (strong masculine pride) Chicano culture. Ramírez explains, "Although many *Las Pachucas* may have labored on behalf of their families inside and/or outside the

home, they also nurtured "a separate culture" distinctive from that of their parents. In doing so, they appeared to privilege individual desires over the family's survival (as well as the nation's survival)" (12).

La pachuca's explicit defiance of domestic responsibilities by spending time outside the home and instead "by venturing into the public sphere (namely, the street, courtroom, and police station)" was seen as selfish behavior. These opinions towards the actions of *Las Pachucas* were deemed as "malinches" or traitors of their people.

Malinche is the indigenous woman that was forced into marriage with the conquistador that colonized Mexico, Hernán Cortés. Malinche is a feminine archetype that has been historically used to shame Chicanas for confronting the patriarchal foundation of Chicano culture. *Las Pachucas* were deemed insubordinate by both the United States and their own communities by talking back and dressing excessively in short skirts, high-teased hair, and exaggerated makeup. They refused to only be constricted to the confines of the home and found new spaces to demonstrate their rebellious Chicana femineity.

I argue that *Las Pachucas* have become their own Chicana archetype, the daughter of Malinche, symbolic of resistance to hegemonic and cultural expectations, excessive and rebellious cultural aesthetics, and identity expression. *Las Pachucas* are *la madre de la lowrider cultura*. This study recognizes *Las Pachucas'* role and influence in shaping Chicana identity expression and cultural aesthetics for *Nuevomexicanas* and other Chicanas in lowrider communities. *La Chola*, the daughter of *La Pachuca*, was born after the El Movimiento and Chicana feminist movement. I will analyze the work of Adaljiza Sosa Riddell to situate the historical context of Chicana feminism and how the work done by Chicana feminists resulted in *La Chola* identity.

The Chicana feminist movement in the 1970s resulted from Chicanas feeling frustrated that their voices were not represented in the El Movimiento and white feminist movement. Chicanas felt dismissed by Chicano leaders and did not see themselves being represented in the feminist movement that was focusing on white women's struggle to move up in the male-dominated workplace. In both movements, Chicanas began to write and advocate for their needs, as Adaljiza Sosa Riddell clearly outlines in her "Chicanas

and El Movimiento.” *Aztlan* 5, no.1-2 (1974):155-165 what Chicanas wanted to be addressed at the time,

The end which is desired by Chicanas is the restoration of control over a way of life, a culture, an existence. For a Chicana to break with this goal is to break with her past, her present, and her people. For this reason, the concerns expressed by Chicanas for their own needs within the Movimiento cannot be considered a threat to the unity of the Movimiento itself.

Riddell argues that the Chicana experience should have been prioritized by the Chicanos in El Movimiento. She explains the Chicana condition is an outcome of sexual exploitation by colonial powers both during Spanish and U.S. domination. Riddell also points out the stereotypes of Chicanas because of colonial subordination, “Social scientists describe la Chicana as, ideally submissive, unworldly, and chaste,” or “at the command of the husband, who (keeps) her as he would a coveted thing, free from the contacts of the world, subject to his passions, ignorant of life.” (156) Riddell is challenging the patriarchal hierarchy of Chicano leaders in El Movimiento created and why Chicanas confronted them about their neglect of Chicana experiences at a time where change is possible.

Riddell highlights that machismo is how Chicanos project their subordination to dominant masculinity and project onto their Chicana counterparts. The work and persistence of the Chicana feminist movement have continued to evolve Chicana studies and the attitudes and inclusion of women in parts of Chicano communities, including the lowrider community. *La Pachuca* and *La Chola* are archetypes of Chicana pride in the Albuquerque lowrider community. *La Chola* is the other archetype and influence I analyze in this study. Her role is also an important influence of Chicana lowrider identity.

La hija de la pachuca is *La Chola* the female counterpart of el cholo. *La Chola* as an aesthetic developed in the 1980s and 90s. *La Chola* style comes from the working-class barrios of Southern California and has often been associated with gang culture. In her 2015 VICE article, “*The Folk Feminist Struggle behind the Chola Fashion Trend*,” Barbara Calderón-Douglass focuses on the popularization of *La Chola* style in American popular culture. She begins by discussing *La Pachuca*’s role in forming *La Chola* aesthetic. Calderón-Douglas expands on *La Chola* aesthetic, style, and attitude,

It embodies the remarkable strength and creative independence it takes to survive in a society where your social mobility has been thwarted by racism. The Chola identity was conceived by a culture that dealt with gang warfare, violence, and

poverty on top of assertive gender roles. The clothes these women wore were more than a fashion statement—signifying their struggle and hard-won identity. *La Pachuca* and *La Chola* cultural aesthetics and identity expression have been prevalent in southwest lowrider communities. Understanding *La Pachuca* and *La Chola* aesthetic and identity expression is essential to the goal of this project because they continue to inspire young Chicanas in the Albuquerque lowrider community and how they express their cultural identity. The essay by Rosa Linda Fregoso, *Re-imagining Chicana Urban Identities in the Public Sphere, Cool Chuca Style*, acknowledges *La Pachuca*, *La Chola*, and homegirl as historical subjects. It puts them in conversation by analyzing how their identity expressions symbolize opposition and resistance to assimilation, traditional beauty standards, domestic life, and American ideals.

Fregoso explains that *La Pachuca*, *La Chola*, and homegirl identity representations form Chicana feminist discursive expressions. She describes how pachucas opposed the Chicana/o traditional structure of *la familia* with how they dressed, spoke, embraced their sexuality, and navigated *la vida loca y la vida dura*. *La Pachuca* lifestyle set a tone of resistance for future generations of young Chicanas. Fregoso further describes, “Their bodies refused to be contained by domesticity or limited by prevailing orthodoxy of appropriate female behavior” (75). *La Chola* aesthetics and identity are an extension of *La Pachuca*’s rebellious nature. *Las Cholas* embody a more masculine aesthetic than *La Pachuca*.

Although *La Pachuca* had her version of the zoot suit and other aesthetic elements used by pachucos, *La Pachuca* still used hyper-feminine forms of dress. *Las Pachucas* were scandalous with their dress forms, wearing shorter skirts, higher hair, and more makeup than considered acceptable. Comparing *La Pachuca* to *La Chola*, *La Pachuca* is considered very feminine. *Las Cholas* dressed masculinely by wearing men's clothing, but like *La Pachuca*, they combined this with their makeup. *Las Cholas* used much inspiration from *La Pachuca* with their high hair, thin eyebrows, and adding their own signature touch of black cat-eye liner. Young Chicanas in the Albuquerque lowrider community are using elements of *La Pachuca* and *La Chola* aesthetic and reclaiming their cultural identity. In Lorena Galván’s dissertation titled *The Chola Loca in Landscapes of Struggle: Breaking Silence in the Works of Helena María Viramontes and*

Yxta Maya Murray, she reconnects *Las Cholas* being described as “*malinches*,” “Referring to *Cholas* as modern day *Malinches* provides a glimpse into the deeply rooted idea that women who define themselves on their own terms and their own codes are considered traitors, and therefore, *locas* because they subvert gender roles and expectations” (92).

The visual documentation produced through this project allows further analysis of the reclaiming of *La Pachuca* and *La Chola* aesthetics and what this expression communicates in a modern context. In her book, *Aesthetics of Excess: The Art and Politics of Black and Latina Embodiment*, Jillian Hernandez explains how aesthetics operate for women and girls of color as a form of resistance against being racialized, sexualized, and marked as “other.”

I use Hernandez’s analysis and comparison of *chonga* and *chola* aesthetics to understand better young Chicana cultural aesthetics in the Albuquerque lowrider community. She defines “*chonga*” identity as “a colloquial term that appears to have originated in the Cuban American community in Miami in the mid-1980s or early 1990s. The *chonga* could be understood as a younger version of the feminized, gossipy Latinx figure of the *chusma*, or the *chusma-as-teenager*” (Hernandez 64). Hernandez compares *chola* and *chonga* aesthetics, explaining how they represent resistance towards dominant cultural expectations of women,

...cholas, chongas undermine the sexual policing of Latina girls through their sexualized body presentations. Chongas express indifference toward portraying an assimilated white middle-class identity by embracing intricate and dramatic modes of hair, nail, and makeup styling that signal ethnic difference. As their aesthetics stem from and are reflective of poor and working-class urban spaces, *chonga* bodies signal class disparity in a neoliberal society that masks its structural workings—they make class burn.

Hernandez’s understanding of the significance of *chonga* aesthetics applies to *La Pachuca* and *La Chola* aesthetics in the context of my project. What *chonga*, *pachuca*, and *chola* aesthetics have in common is that they are historically resistant to American identity and traditional expectations of women, represent working-class experiences and female comradery, and are central to survival. In the next chapter, I will explain more about the Albuquerque lowrider community.

Chapter 3: History of Lowrider Culture in New Mexico & Insight into New Mexico Car Clubs



Figure 5: Lowrider Day, Española | June 22, 2023

The birthplace of lowriding is still debated amongst lowrider communities across the United States, especially in the Southwest, where the lowriding culture has been practiced the longest. The winner of this ongoing debate is usually given to Los Angeles. While conducting research for this study, it was clear that most of the literature and research on lowrider culture is centralized in Los Angeles. After my long quest to find written works on lowriding in New Mexico, I agree that Los Angeles is the birthplace of lowriding. In Brenda Bright's 1994 Ph.D. thesis, she writes about three different lowrider communities in the U.S. and their contributions to popular culture. The communities she focuses on are Los Angeles, Houston, and Chimayó. Bright writes, "Low riding originated largely in the 1960s in Los Angeles, a center of industry, mass media communication, and Mexican American culture in the United States." This comes from the rapid economic growth of California after World War II. Many prominent American automobile companies started creating assembly plants in Los Angeles, becoming Detroit's biggest competitor. Post-war, most citizens relied on car transportation for daily life, making automobile sales increase at the time. Los Angeles also had the largest Chicano population in the nation. As Los Angeles became a metropolis with an ever-growing industrial infrastructure, more native people of California were pushed out of

urban areas or forced to assimilate within the broader population. All of this led to the popularization of lowriders and Los Angeles being named the birthplace of lowriding.

As Chicano veterans returned from war and were forced into low-paying factory jobs, they could only afford used vehicles and scrap parts. In his book, *Lowriders in Chicano Culture: From Low to Slow to Show*, Charles Tatum describes the beginning stages of lowrider culture forming in Los Angeles. He explains that the used vehicles Chicanos could purchase were perfect for customizing and explains the first methods used to lower their cars, “The lowering of a vehicle was also achieved at this time by cutting the suspension coils and by placing heavy objects such as cement bags or bricks in the trunk” (9). He also points out that smaller tires were used on early lowriders because they allowed for further lowering and were inexpensive. This beginning of customizing cars continued into the 50s and 60s, which correlated with the Chicano Movement or El Movimiento. Lowriders in Los Angeles participated in political protests and became part of social unrest because of their constant battles with the LAPD. Tatum describes the causes of the tension between lowriders and the LAPD,

Media coverage suggested that the cruisers were gangs of roving criminals threatening white residents. Although it is probably true that there were some gang members among the lowriders, the media coverage grossly exaggerated these claims to the point of causing a public outcry. Pressure on politicians resulted in the California legislature passing a law in 1959 prohibiting using any vehicle with any part of it below the rim base.

The frustration lowriders felt by constantly being the target of LAPD led to the invention of hydraulics, initially used in B-52 bomber planes. This allowed lowriders to rise and lower, increasing when police officers were present and lowering when they were not. This solution was created to bypass the discriminatory law passed in 1958, Section 24008, which banned modifying cars so that the frame could not be lower than the bottom of its wheel rims. This invention changed lowrider culture, becoming a popular customization practiced today.

Since World War II and the late twentieth century, Los Angeles experienced global racialized capitalism at a large scale, but so did the rest of the Southwest. The lack of employment and good wages caused many New Mexicans living in rural villages to move to California for work. Many of them eventually returned home, bringing lowriders

with them. The most prominent village in New Mexico known for lowriding is found in the northern New Mexican city of Española, along with the surrounding villages that use Española as a centralized meeting place. This migration of lowriding is claimed true by New Mexico's inaugural state poet and assistant professor in Chicana/o Studies at the University of New Mexico, Levi Romero, who was born and raised in the small village of Dixon, NM located in Embudo Valley, thirty minutes from Española. In his essay *Lowcura: An Introspective Virtual Cruise through an American Subculture Tradition*, he writes,

It was in the early 1970's and the beginning stages of lowriding in Española. The factions between the Hotrodders and the Lowriders were visibly played under the streetlight's glow of shopping center parking lots and long main street. My cousin, lil' Joe, recently moved back from California, had brought his passion for lowriding with him and transplanted it into the quickly forming popular pastime. Lil' Joe would pass on down to me my first low rider, a copper brown 1959 Chevrolet station wagon with velvet curtains, shag carpeting, and a donut steering wheel.

Romero's personal story describes the beginning of lowrider culture in New Mexico.

Lowriding quickly became a tradition that involved the whole *familila*. Working on cars became a popular activity of *familia* and *comunidad* participation. The lowriders of northern New Mexico established their style that emphasized *familia*, faith, and culture



Figure 6: Good Friday in Española | June 7, 2023

Over time, Española would be deemed “The Lowrider Capital of the World.” According to Brenda Bright, it would also get the nickname “Lil LA.” The villages of northern New Mexico used the skills they acquired working in the automobile industry in Los Angeles to customize their cars to represent their cultural identity and traditions

specific to their villages. Bright writes about the differences of lowrider culture in northern New Mexico and other parts of the U.S. southwest, stating,

In New Mexico, customizing aesthetics are influenced by a sense of culture difference that is rooted in highly localized identities—related to family, land, and local cohorts—but inflected by responses to economic and cultural appropriations in the area that necessitate appeals to a larger-scale, extra-local identity.



Figure 7: LowLow Medina's Hood Mural for Santo Lowride: Norteño Car Culture and the Santos Tradition | Harwood Museum of Art in Taos | October 18, 2021

I have attended and photographed many lowrider events in northern New Mexico. One event I attended was the 2021 Santo Lowride: Norteño Car Culture and the Santos Tradition exhibit at the Harwood Museum of Art in Taos, NM. This exhibit was exciting, showcasing the area's many unique works of lowrider artists. One artist is LowLow Medina; I was able to interview LowLow and his *familia* for the paper I wrote in an individual study, titled, *New Mexico Lowrider Communities: Nuevomexicana Contributions to Lowrider Culture*. LowLow was raised by his grandmother near El Santuario, who worked at Ortega Weaving Shop weaving blankets. LowLow's grandmother would ask him to draw a picture so she could weave designs onto blankets. This is where his artistic expression began. LowLow took his love for drawing and transferred it to painting on canvas. His creative skill eventually found its way onto his cars, becoming his favorite canvas to express himself.

When LowLow first began lowrider painting, he needed the materials that most car painters have today, such as paint spray guns. He started painting cars with spray paint, paper cups, and plates for designs. He also used tape he found at his job at an ice

factory to make pinstripes. LowLow told me, “I would go to the car wash because I wanted to hang out with everybody, and everybody would go wash their cars. And every time that I would go wash my car at the car wash the paint would peel off cause the pressure of the water from the car wash was too strong for the type of paint on the car. So, I painted my car practically every month. By painting the car every month with spray cans is where I learned how to airbrush.” This was the start of a lifelong love and passion for LowLow.



Figure 8: In Memory Lucia, 2023 Viejitos Car Club Good Friday Car Show, Española, NM | April 7, 2023

LowLow’s story reveals the traditional way of lowriding before painting and hydraulics were available in the rural villages of northern New Mexico. He used whatever materials were available to him, and he constantly practiced his craft. LowLow’s first car, which he practiced painting and pin stripping on many times, was photographed by National Geographic, as shown above. LowLow now has thirteen lowriders. Fixing, painting, and customizing them is his passion, and he has passed his lowriding skills to his daughters. They continue their father’s legacy as a northern New Mexican lowrider artist by customizing and painting their lowriders. LowLow has

dedicated his life to representing northern New Mexico's lifestyle and traditions through lowriders. He did so while raising his *familia* with the same lifestyle and giving back to his community.

Joan, LowLow's wife, also spoke with me about her role in his life's work. Joan told me "I met my husband in 1982 in the summer and right away we started working on cars left and right." At the very beginning of their relationship, LowLow and Joan made lowriding a core part of their life together. Joan has dedicated her life in support of LowLow's passion for lowriders which has become a major part of her *familia*'s lifestyle and legacy. Joan describes her husband's work as "A canvas on wheels" and believes LowLow's passion is not just a hobby but an art form that is an extension of their New Mexican culture. Joan and LowLow's *familia* showcase how the lowrider communities in Northern New Mexico operate, with emphasis on culture, *familia*, and tradition. While talking with Joan she emphasized how important her faith is in what she and her *familia* do in the lowrider community. A mantra she uses daily is "Cultura y Fe," so she always remembers that she does everything with the guidance of God.



Figure 9: LowLow Medina's Lowrider Museum Sign in Chimayo | January 24, 2022

Joan and LowLow have worked hard to maintain the lowrider culture in Northern New Mexico by being involved in their community and raising their daughters to appreciate and participate in the culture. As a *familia* they have worked on countless

lowriders, learning how to rebuild, paint, and drive. Joan has been an active lowrider community member and has planned multiple local community events called “Show’n Shines” where lowriders park their lowriders at a business or location to support local community causes such as school supply drives. These events bring the community together while keeping the lowrider tradition alive in the process. Joan was fundamental in planning the first-ever Lowrider Day in Española in 2019. This event had over five hundred lowriders on display in celebration of the lowriding tradition in New Mexico. Joan and her *familia* have immense pride in where they come from and the community, they are a part of. Joan and LowLow have taught their two daughters the traditions and rituals of lowriding. Joan and LowLow’s *familia* have dedicated their lives to ensuring that lowriding in Española and Chimayó is celebrated and maintained through their community involvement and passing their skills to their daughters. The Medina’s lowrider lifestyle demonstrates what Brenda Bright describes in her dissertation about Northern New Mexico lowrider culture,

Each car is not just an individual project, but also a family project and a local reference. Each requires structuring a 'vehicle' for family participation and personal and group narratives. Each low rider is a 'vehicle' for claiming an identity that is extra-local as well tied to its village roots. In this sense, the car is a 'cultural vehicle' enabling one to adapt to the necessity of re-inventing culture as one goes along.

My conversation with the Medina *familia* gave me valuable insight into the lowrider culture in northern New Mexico. Española, the “Lowrider Capital of the World,” has been the center of written work on New Mexico’s lowrider communities. While lowriding was introduced to northern New Mexicans in the 1940s, after WWII, because of family members returning from California, the same could be found in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The lowriding trends in southern California made their way to Albuquerque when lowriders started to be seen downtown, cruising on Central Avenue on the historical Route 66 making their way to San Gabriel Park, a popular hangout spot for locals in the 1970s and 80s. The lowrider community in Albuquerque is unique and has many similarities to the lowrider communities in northern New Mexico.



Figure 10: *La Virgen de Guadalupe Backseat Blanket*, 2023 Viejitos Car Club Good Friday Car Show, Española, NM

Culture, *familia*, and tradition has always played an important role in New Mexico lowrider communities and can be found documented in photography books focused on the topic. In Kevin Bubriski's, *Look into My Eyes: Nuevomexicanos Por Vida, '81- '83* depicts a *Nuevomexicana* in the backseat of a bomba (1950 Chevy). Bubriski's collection of photos depicts lowriding culture in 1980s Albuquerque. Most of his photos are taken at San Gabriel Park, a place that I have only heard stories about from my mother, aunts, and uncles. San Gabriel was originally located in what is now the Albuquerque Botanic Gardens. This was one of the main locations of lowriding culture in Albuquerque. Bubriski's photographs give examples of what *resolana* looked like at that time, such as friends parked, leaning against their rides, arms crossed, having conversations with one another and anyone who passed by. There are also images of women with their hair fluffed, chola bands on, gazing with a tough stare, holding hands, and united with her homegirl. San Gabriel Park was where *Burqueñas/os* went to have a good time and the photos taken by Kevin Bubriski captured the spirit of the Albuquerque

lowrider community in its fullness. Today, the same spirit can be found on a Sunday afternoon on Central Avenue, Barelas neighborhood, or Old Town.



Figure 11: Julian Gonzales's 1979 Ford Thunderbird named "Holy Faith" | Low Vision Car Club, 2022 Marinteztown Cruise, Albuquerque, NM

Through my experiences documenting lowrider communities in New Mexico, I have seen the similarities and differences, especially the influences on the designs of lowriders. Brenda Bright's documentation of northern New Mexico lowriders, she found, "Chimayo cars are distinguished to the extent that religious images are prevalent. For several low riders, the Santuario de Chimayo is important in influencing which symbols they choose and circulate" (127). The Albuquerque lowrider community also uses Catholic iconographies painted on their cars. One car owned by a member of Low Vision Car club is named "Holy Faith." It depicts the Virgin Mary painted on the hood and a mural of Jesus on the trunk. The theme of *la familia* is another image often artistically designed on lowriders in Albuquerque; it is common to see lowriders dedicated to a loved one. Over time, Albuquerque has become a centralized location for lowriders. Some lowriders live in Albuquerque and have moved from other cities and villages across the state to share a space where all New Mexican lowriders showcase their regional differences and similarities.



Figure 12: Low Vision Car Club | Martineztown, Albuquerque, NM | April 12, 2022

Looking at the photos that I have taken of the Albuquerque lowrider community, I can see the foundation of culture, *familia*, and tradition. Since the introduction of lowriding to New Mexico, the lowrider culture has grown and stayed true to the communities that it has built. Families in the lowrider community continue to pass down the traditions and rituals of lowriding to the next generation. They find spaces to practice the tradition of lowriding despite facing challenges with cruising restrictions enforced by the city. The Albuquerque lowrider community remains a core part of the cultural expression and celebration of New Mexican identity. It creates a space for many to gather with their *familia* and friends, engaging in the *resolana* that has existed since lowriding became popularized in Albuquerque. The location of the cruises may change over time, but the connection and devotion to this tradition is unbroken and deserves to be celebrated.

My study aims to capture and document the Albuquerque lowrider community and expand on the knowledge about it. I aim to focus on the roles of young Chicanas in the community and how they have become members of this community. I also aim to analyze and understand the cultural aesthetics and identity expression of the women who participated in this study and how that expression is rooted in the resistance of the Chicanas that first made these cultural aesthetics popularized. The women who

participated in this study demonstrate that *Nuevomexicanas* have played a foundational role in sustaining the Albuquerque lowrider community and continuing the tradition and rituals of lowriding in Albuquerque.



Figure 13: Low Vision Car Club | Martineztown, Albuquerque, NM | April 12, 2022

Chapter 4: Young Chicana Aesthetician the Albuquerque Lowrider Community: Identity, Place, and Community

For this study, I conducted three *pláticas* with three young women active in the Albuquerque lowrider community. I have used fictitious names as it does not serve the purpose of this study to use the subject's actual given names. I will refer to the women who participated in this study as Whispers, Gata, and Happy. I met all three women over the past four years while photographing local cruises and other lowrider community events. I noticed their engagement with the community and how they proudly represented their cultural identity. I respected their displayed dedication to the lowrider community at their age (19-22). When I saw these young *Nuevomexicanas* finding their place in the Albuquerque lowrider community while using historically resistant Chicana cultural aesthetics, I wondered why and how they attached themselves to this community. I am honored Whispers, Gata, and Happy agreed to participate in the *pláticas* and to visually document our *pláticas* with photography.

It was important for Whispers, Gata, and Happy in this study to employ their agency by selecting the locations of our *pláticas*. I wanted them to feel comfortable in our environment, and I encouraged them to select a space they felt connected to. Being connected and safe in space is important for *resolana* to occur. Conducting this study, I learned how Nuevomexicanas find and create resonance. *Resolana*'s traditional definition is described as an action done by men. Tomás Atencio states:

La resolana is the space defined by the south wall of a building that is shielded from the east and west winds, where the sun reflecting off the wall creates a place of warmth, light, and tranquility. In that place, men have gathered across the years to pass the time of day, exchange good and bad news, gossip, share jokes, and talk about everyday life, about birth, and about death; they have told stories and shared memories of the past and have pondered the future.

This study also expands the traditional understanding of *resolana* by understanding *Nuevomexicanas* and our creation of *resolana*. By allowing Whispers, Gata, and Happy to select the location of our *pláticas*, I discovered how *Nuevomexicanas* have our own way of telling our stories and knowing who to share them with. I reflected on how I have learned how to engage and create *resolana* and realized it is a skill I have learned from the *Nuevomexicanas* who have shaped me. I refer to *resolana* is a concept and methodology for the purpose of this study but is so much more than a culturally informed method; it is something that I and Whispers, Gata, and Happy are familiar with because of their *Nuevomexicana* and *Burqueña* identity. *Resolana* is found in the Albuquerque lowrider community through rituals and traditions in lowrider culture, but it is also part of our upbringings and everyday lives as *Nuevomexicanas*.

Resolana, for *Nuevomexicanas* is found in the kitchen talking to friends or *familia* preparing or sharing a meal at the table or washing the dishes at the sink while I wash and my prima dries. *Resolana* is in the bathroom getting ready with your homegirls. *Resolana* is the phone calls I get from my aunt asking how I have been. *Resolana* is Sunday cruises on 4th street in Barelás. *Resolana* creates bonds through knowledge shared in stories, cries, jokes, and recipes. *Resolana* heals, nurtures, and creates lasting connections. This study acknowledges the feminine *resolana* and how as Chicanas, we have our own *resolanas*, sacred places, sharing knowledge, and ways of being. This is why *resolana* is essential to this research in the Albuquerque lowrider community and why I made sure the women in this study selected the *resolana* we had our *plática*. *Resolana* is a concept

and method for this study, but most importantly, it is part of the *Nuevomexicana* lived experience. I am proud to know how to nurture and respect the process of *resolana* in many cultural spaces, and I was grateful to have these skills when having *plática* with Whispers, Gata, and Happy. *Plática* serves as research method for this study but like *resolana*, it is also part of the lived experience as a *Nuevomexicana*.

Plática is a form of dialogue that the women of this study and I naturally know how to engage in because it is a way that we communicate with friends, family, and community. As Cindy Fierros and Dolores Delgado Bernal argue, “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” (116). My study validates the arguments made by Fierros and Delgado Bernal, as researcher, community member, and *Nuevomexicana*, utilizing *plática* in this study was essential to ensuring the women in this study felt comfortable to share their stories with me and for them to also feel comfortable asking me about my experiences. Fierros and Delgado Bernal explain that for *pláticas* to be effective, it must be collaborative experience where the researcher also must share and be vulnerable and be an active part of the dialogue. My shared *Nuevomexicana* and burqueña identity with Whispers, Gata, and Happy allowed me to understand and connect with them on a cultural and personal level. *Pláticas* are valuable to forming connections and allow for reciprocity between research and research participant.

My approach to the *pláticas* I conducted for this study did not have a planned structure. I wanted to ask a couple of questions, starting with how did you become part of the lowrider community? I allowed the *pláticas* to take their natural course and eventually asked other questions such as, why did you decide to dress this specific way today? How does this style of dress make you feel? I conducted the three *plática* to understand Whispers, Gata, and Happy’s experiences as *Nuevomexicanas* in the Albuquerque lowrider community. The experience of having *plática* and taking photos of our time together was not just collecting data, it was also creating a memory that we made together to be used to and document the community we are all a part of.

In the next section of this study, I will discuss each of the three *pláticas* and the accompanying photographs. Using our *pláticas* and the photos taken from them, I analyze Whispers, Gata, and Happy's cultural aesthetics and identity. I focus on the significance of this form of expression and what it means for the future of the Albuquerque lowrider community. Through *resolana*, *plática*, and photographs, we not only created valuable documentation that expands on the knowledge that is written lowrider communities in New Mexico, but we also created a connection and together we created this research.



Figure 14: Por Vida Tattoo, Albuquerque, NM | December 30, 2023

First Plática: Lowriding Por Vida: Stories of Growing up in New Mexico Car Club Culture con Whispers

I conducted the first *plática* with the woman I refer to as Whispers. Whispers grew up in Albuquerque and had been part of the lowrider community since she was six when her father joined the Viejitos Car Club. Since then, she has attended countless car shows, cruises, and events. Whispers chose our *plática* to be at a local tattoo shop called Por Vida Tattoo. When I asked her why she chose this location, she told me it was because of the Chicano art inside the shop, and she thought it would provide a unique setting for the photos. We learned that most of the art displayed was from local artists and mostly part of the shop owner's collection. Por Vida Tattoo welcomed us and encouraged

us to utilize their space while I learned more about Whisper's experience being part of a car club at an early age.

Whispers and I began our *plática* by exploring the Por Vida Tattoo shop and trying to find the best places to take photos. We admired all the art on the walls while I looked for places where I could get various angles to capture as much art as possible in the frames we took. Although I have seen Whispers at her car club's events, this was the first time we spent one-on-one time with each other. We began to take photos on one of the staircases displaying Whisper's Viejitos Car Club plaque. Being a photographer, I have learned that most people get uncomfortable when they are in front of a camera, and the best way to deal with that discomfort is to make the person laugh. I started to tell jokes so she could become more comfortable. It did not take long for Whispers and I to connect through *Nuevomexicana* type banter called *carilla*.



Figure 15: Women of Viejitos Car Club on Good Friday in Española | April 7, 2023

Carilla is a playful, teasing dialogue. The way that Whispers engaged in *carilla*, I could tell that she has grown up in a community rooted in her culture. Growing up, I learned how to give *carilla* by observing my *familia* conversations. My uncles would joke and tease me when I was young. It used to hurt my feelings as a little girl, but as I got older, I realized that the only way to escape *carilla* is to give it back. *Nuevomexicanas/os* use *carilla* to bond and to get to know what kind of person they are talking with. *Carilla* is also a form of love and care. Although it is usually light-hearted teasing, it is understood by our communities that the more *carilla* you receive, the more you are loved. *Carilla* is especially prevalent in lowrider communities and is part of the *resolana*. The Viejitos Car

Club, having many chapters throughout New Mexico and the United States Whispers, has been exposed to variations of *carilla*.

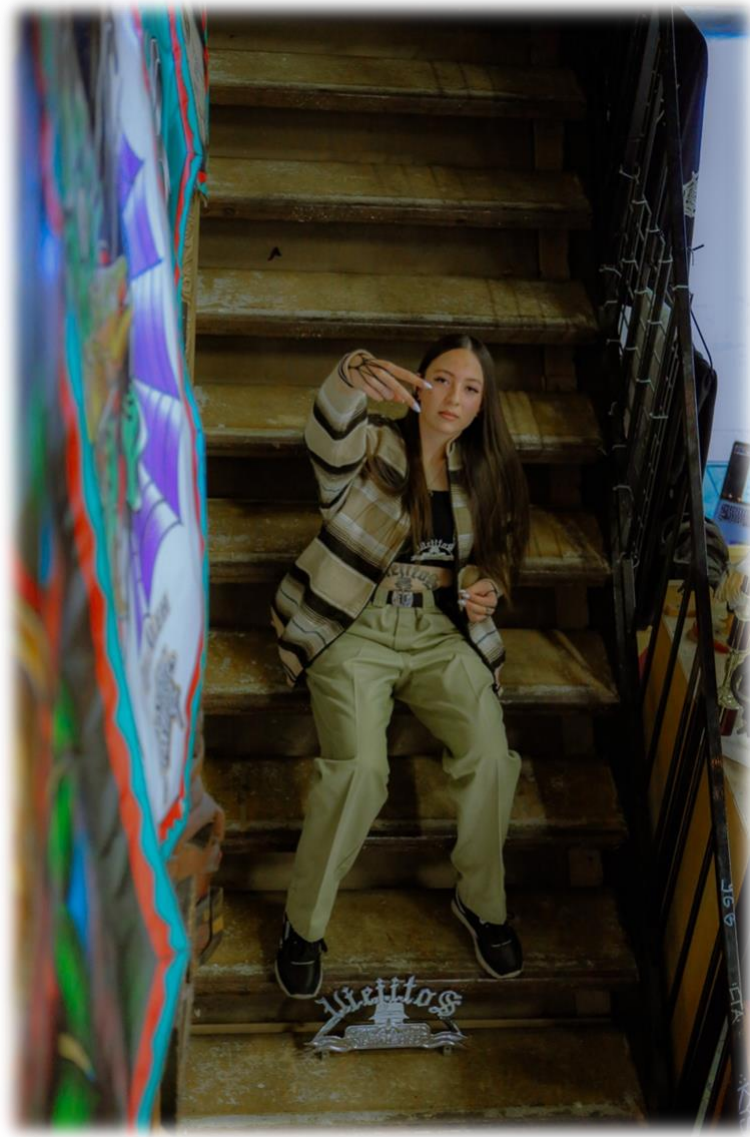


Figure 16: Por Vida Tattoo, Albuquerque, NM | December 30, 2023

Although we were laughing and enjoying the moment, Whispers portrayed a tough exterior in the photos I was taking. What is very noticeable in the photos and my interactions with Whispers is expressing her dedication to her car club. The accessories she ensured in her photos were her Viejitos Car Club plaque and a necklace. If Whispers did not show up with her plaques, Viejitos Car Club would still be part of her identity expression, with her dedication to club being permanently part of her identity by getting a tattoo of the club's name on her stomach. Whispers also kept posing her hands with *chola* bands as a peace sign but also symbolizes "V" for Viejitos. *Chola* bands have been used since the 1970's as a way of personal *chola* expression. *La Chola* aesthetics come from working-class Chicanas in southern California, leading to most of their clothing and accessories being affordable brands. *Chola* bands are cheap plastic bands that were used to express individuality by the decided design. Their bands become symbolic of unity

through the braided designs. Whispers continues to use this expression and aesthetic choice that many lowrider women before her have also done. Her dedication to the Viejitos Car Club is a major part of her cultural aesthetics and identity expression in the Albuquerque lowrider community.



Figure 17: Por Vida Tattoo, Albuquerque, NM | December 30, 2023

After taking photos on a stairwell, we decided to take photos of an old Volkswagen beetle that was the shop's centerpiece. It was ironic that a car was waiting for us to have our *plática*. Whispers decided to change into a poncho that she got in Los Angeles. Adorned on Whisper's poncho is the image of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, a significant symbol of Chicana identity. In Clara Román-Odio's book *Sacred Iconographies in Chicana Cultural Productions*, the author analyzes the Chicana feminist writings of Gloria Anzaldúa, Pat Mora, Cherríe Moraga, Ronnie Burk, Clarissa Pinkola Estés on the *La Virgen de Guadalupe* to understand her deep spiritual meaning that is rooted in social activism, decolonization, and resistance to U.S colonial influence. Román-Odio explains,

In the hands of Chicanas, the Virgin of Guadalupe is molded into a source of social activism and healing; on the one hand, a story uniting the split feminine self

and, on the other, reversing the demoralizing effects of colonization. Chicana spirituality is explicitly contextual, reflecting on what it means to live in a relationship with the Virgin of Guadalupe in times of momentous historical transformations.



Figure 18: *Por Vida Tattoo* in Albuquerque, NM | December 30, 2023

Chicana feminists argue the *La Virgen de Guadalupe* is not restricted to the patriarchal Catholic representation of her being a divinely pure mother used to historically confine Chicana femineity. She has deep spiritual meaning and has the power to unite and transform the definition of Chicana womanhood throughout time. *La Virgen de Guadalupe* is symbolic of the Chicana struggle, her image is not only tied to Catholic religious practices, but she is also a spiritual navigator. Whispers told me during our *plática* that she always wanted to get her image tattooed, but she was told that she is not Catholic and cannot do so. Román-Odio's analysis of Chicana feminist writings on the *La Virgen de Guadalupe* proves that notion untrue. Although Whispers does not align herself with Catholicism, she still finds her connected, through her Chicana identity, to *La Virgen de Guadalupe's* image. Román-Odio expands on why Chicanas have a connection to the image of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, "Our Lady of Guadalupe becomes a prime icon of

Chicana feminist projects because, in searching for their cultural identity, the Chicanas found the *La Virgen of Guadalupe*, who tackled the devastating consequence of conquest and colonization, racism, and greed, with boldness and an unwavering devotion” (96). Whispers' selection of clothing with the *La Virgen de Guadalupe* for this study reveals her connection with herself and her culture. Her Chicana identity is expression is rooted in all the themes Román-Odio argues; the resistance to the systems *Las Pachucas*, *Cholas*, and Chicana feminists fought against with their writings, clothing, speech, and spirituality. Whispers changed her clothing one more time, implementing more modern *chola* pieces.



Figure 19: *Por Vida Tattoo* in Albuquerque, NM | December 30, 2023

Whisper's last outfit was a cropped shirt that is known as a “Charlie Brown” or the “cholo polo.” These shirts are now made by a brand called F.B County, a brand that is popular in lowrider communities, and that also makes trendy clothing and accessories associated with *chola/o* aesthetics, such as flannels, khaki pants, t-shirts, bandanas, and other workwear. F.B. County also includes more present-day *chola/o* clothing like

hoodies and tracksuits. The brand has expanded to include a wide variety of women's versions of all their popular items. When I looked on F.B County's women's section of their website, I noticed that they also have a cosmetic line that features *chola* staples such as dark brown lip-liner, light nude lipstick and gloss, and, of course, black eyeliner. When I asked Whispers why she chose to wear that shirt for the photo shoot, she said it was because the brand finally made Charlie Browns for women. Her last outfit was completed with a pair of black work pants, a military belt with a belt buckle adorning a V for Viejitos, Chuck Taylor sneakers, and her Viejitos club plaque necklace. We took our last set of photos in front of paintings we could not believe we did not see right away. The first depicts a *cholo* and *chola* skeleton couple and the other was a painting in what looks like a 1964 Chevrolet Impala.

Por Vida Tattoo provided so many beautiful backdrops and a unique sense of *resolana*. *Cholas/os* were also known for the popularization of getting tattoos in Chicana/o culture. Before, tattoos were extremely taboo, and it was believed that only gang members had them after their time in *la pinta*. Having tattoos became a part of *chola/o* aesthetics and identity expression and Whispers and I were in a space where that expression is now celebrated. After taking our last photos, Whispers changed into something more comfortable, and we continued our *plática*.



Figure 20: Por Vida Tattoo in Albuquerque, NM | December 30, 2023

I asked Whispers why she decided to wear what she does as a member of the Albuquerque lowrider community. She said wearing clothes that she brought with her

that day makes her feel powerful and that when she gets ready to go to an event with her club, the clothing she selects helps her settle into her identity in the Viejitos Car Club and the greater Albuquerque lowrider community. The way Whispers dresses directly influences her attitude in lowrider spaces. She said that it communicates a “Don’t mess with me” attitude, like *Las Pachucas* and *Las Cholas* that created the aesthetics she is inspired by. She told me a story of a time she decided to dress as she does at lowrider events at school, showing that part of her identity to her peers. Whispers did not get a positive reaction from everyone at her school for her and said she felt judged by some students and that even her teacher commented about how that form of dress is inappropriate for school. This experience only made Whispers want to continue expressing herself and embrace the cultural aesthetics she has known her whole life being raised in a lowrider community. Whispers explained how the car club is a significant part of her lifestyle, identity, and attachment to her community. She shared with me the culture, dedication, and respect that goes into upholding the club's values.

Whispers described the car club as her second *familia*. She referred to the car club members as her uncles and explained that everyone in the club looks out and is always there for one another. She said that the car club is very *familia*-oriented and deeply connected to her childhood memories of her father. Growing up, her father included her and her siblings in the maintenance of his cars. Whispers said she would complain about working on the cars when she was younger but now is grateful for the skills she learned and getting to spend time with her *familia*. Whispers added that detailing cars is her specialty and that she is the only person her father trusts to detail his cars before car shows and competitions. She explained that going to car shows in other states is particularly important because it shows representation for the New Mexico chapters of Viejitos Car Club.



Figure 21: Viejitos Annual Christmas Toy Drive in Albuquerque, NM | December 5, 2022



Figure 22: Viejitos Car Club Chimayo Chapter Plaque | Española, 2022

Representing the state is a significant source of pride for her *familia* and club. Participating in out-of-state car shows demonstrates that New Mexico is part of the greater national lowrider community, and cars from the state can win or place at big car shows. Viejitos Car Club New Mexico chapters are very active in the local communities. I explained to Whispers that they are so hospitable to me every time I see the club at events or cruises. She said that it is a part of their club culture to be courteous to everyone. I told her how much I appreciated those small gestures of kindness as a photographer. Viejitos Car Club has always treated me respectfully, offered me water on hot days, and ensured I was okay because I usually attend local events alone. Whispers talked about the club she is in with so much adoration and expressed so much pride in being part of the community it has created. I asked Whispers if she plans to continue to be part of the club she is in. She answered, “I am in this till I die.” One way to demonstrate

loyalty to any club is to represent it while at club events or not constantly. Whispers displays her dedication to her club in many ways, including the tattoo she got in its honor.



Figure 23: Viejitos Annual Christmas Toy Drive in Albuquerque, NM | "Induction Baptism" December 5, 2022

I was very curious about Whisper's tattoo because it clearly connects to her identity expression. When asked more about why she got her Viejitos tattoo, she explained that the placement and size of her tattoo were intentional because she wanted to make a statement of her intention of being lifetime loyal to the Viejitos Car Club. Whispers said that she was proud to show the club members and that she shocked all her uncles and instantly gained their respect. Having courage and dedication are essential qualities in the lowrider community, and displaying those qualities as a woman in her club signifies that she deserves respect. She is currently in school and is proud that she is also getting an education, proving that Chicanas can be part of the lowrider community and be educated. Whispers is unapologetic when representing the club and the next generation of the Albuquerque community. Whispers plans to have a lowrider one day

and continue the traditions and car club morals that her father instilled in her. Whispers and I talked for a long time after we took photos, and once the *plática* was over, she paused and looked at me to ask if we should get tattoos. I was unsure, but then I thought, Whispers got her Viejitos tattoo to demonstrate her loyalty to her car club, a community and *familia* that has shaped her life. I decided to get a tattoo with her to demonstrate my dedication to this study and use my knowledge and access to higher education to document the *Nuevomexicana* experience and the Albuquerque lowrider community.



Figure 24: Whispers' "Chula" Tattoo, Por Vida Tattoo Shop, December 2023, Albuquerque, NM

It did not take us too long to decide what tattoos we wanted. We both decided to get tattoos that represented our Chicana culture. Whispers decided on a cursive script with the word "Chula" above her knee. I decided to get c/s, which means "con safo." In José Antonio Burciaga's book *Drink Cultura: Chicanismo*, he defines C/S as "The c/s sign-off means *con safos* and translates to "with safety." It was meant as a safety precaution, a barrio copyright, patent pending. No one else could use or dishonor the graffiti. It was an honorable code of conduct, a literary imprimatur. Like saying "amen" (6). My tattoo symbolizes that I must never dishonor myself, that I am sacred and deserve

to be treated with care. I could not help to think what other *cholas/os* might have gotten the same tattoo. Whispers and I bonded over our tattoos and cemented the memory of the day with one another. Whispers gave me so much insight into what it is like growing up in a car club like Chicana and *Nuevomexicana*. She taught me that values of car club members and that in New Mexico, car clubs value *familia* more than anything else. Showing respect and being hospitable is valuable. Whispers displayed unshakable pride and loyalty. Her identity expression demonstrates that she is unafraid of what others think of her and that she is strong in her character because of the morals she learned from her Viejitos *familia*. Her plans to continue to be as she said, “an educated Chicana,” devoted lowrider community member, and made me hopeful that the next generation is community-centered and will nurture the traditions of lowriding for a long time.



Figure 25: Valerie's "Con Safo" or "C/S" Tattoo, Por Vida Tattoo Shop, December 30, 2023, Albuquerque, NM



Figure 26: Old Town, Albuquerque, NM | January 29, 2024

Second Plática: Being Burqueña and Finding Querencia in the Albuquerque Lowrider Community con Gata

The next *plática* I conducted was with Gata, I have known her the longest out of the three women in this study and met at the first Albuquerque Lowrider Supershow I attended. Like Whispers, Gata and I have seen each other at many events, but our *plática* was our first time getting to know each other on a deeper level. Gata was born and raised in Albuquerque and is currently studying to be a beautician specializing in hair coloring, haircuts, facials, and nails. Gata chose Old Town, Albuquerque as the location of our *plática* because part of her *familia* is from there. She told me that she researched her ancestry and found that she is a multigenerational *Nuevomexicana*. Talking with Gata she told me many childhood memories of being in Old Town, and how being in those spaces reminds her of her family history.



Figure 27: Gata in her Aunt's former Family Apartment in Old Town Albuquerque, NM

We started our *plática* where her aunt lived in Old Town. We walked up the stairs of the adobe building to the apartment her aunt once called home. We looked inside to see its charm and imagined what life must have been like for her. What was her aunt's home is now an office and business space. Gata sat on the staircase leading to what was once her aunt's apartment with *papel picado* in the background. Gata selecting a location with family ties to it speaks to her connection to her *Nuevomexicana* identity. This strong connection to her identity is proudly displayed on the shirt she decided to wear, with Old English font spelling "Dukecity." The Duke City is a nickname for Albuquerque deriving from the Duke of Albuquerque whom the city was named after. The nickname was popularized after the local baseball team the Albuquerque Dukes. Gata, chosen to represent the Duke City speaks to her identity expression being rooted in her *Burqueña* identity. Gata displayed other cultural aesthetics through her makeup.



Figure 28: Gata's Self Painted Custom Lowrider Pinstripe Nails / January 29, 2024

Gata embraces *chola* makeup trends with exaggerated black winged eyeliner and dark lined lips. What makes her look signature is her rhinestone piercing under her eye, accentuating her eyeliner. Other details of Gata's look were how she designed her nails to depict pinstriping found on lowriders that she paired with her *chola* bands and black Chuck Taylor sneakers. All these settle details showcase Gata's Chicana identity that embraces a *chola* influence. What is unique about Gata's aesthetics is that she intentionally intertwined the *chola* inspiration with her *Burqueña* identity.



Figure 29: Gata's Self Painted Custom Lowrider Pinstripe Nails | January 2024

Gata and I discussed how we feel about expressing our *Nuevomexicana* identity. She explained that as *Nuevomexicanas*, we are not encouraged to be proud of where we are from, and how many of us grow up wanting to move away and separating ourselves from our cultural identity. I told Gata that I felt the same way growing up. I thought moving away from Albuquerque was praised as an accomplishment, but as I have gotten older, I realized I am proud of staying and celebrating Albuquerque. I told her if we don't celebrate where we come from, no one will.



Figure 30: Gata in the Driver Seat of 1957 Ford Fairline, Old Town Albuquerque, NM



Figure 31: Old Town, Albuquerque, NM | January 29, 2024

Gata explained that when she thought about leaving home, it never felt right for her and that she could be her true self in Albuquerque. The way that Gata explained her affection towards Albuquerque reflected a concept of *querencia* which is defined by Juan Arellano as, “It is that which gives us a sense of place, that which anchors us to the land, that which makes us a unique people, for it implies a deeply rooted knowledge of place, and for that reason we respect our place, for it is our home and we don’t want to violate our home in any way” (50). *Querencia* is the love, respect, and connection to a place where we find our home and identity connected. As Gata and I continued in our dialogue I realized that the Albuquerque lowrider community is an extension of *querencia*. Gata and I were in a space of her *querencia*, Old Town, a space where lowriders are often found. The lowrider itself, the street it is cruising down, the sidewalks along that street where I have seen Gata, and her homegirls are walking down can be a space of *querencia*. Gata is true to herself and is proud that she has her own individual style that mixes her *querencia* and her cultural aesthetic inspirations to express it.

When I asked Gata about her style inspirations she brought up the classic *La Pachuca* aesthetic. She told me when she dresses more like a *pachuca*, she feels connected to the Chicana that started lowrider culture. By Gata gaining inspiration from and embodying *pachuca* aesthetics, she is reasserting their work, Catherine Ramírez describes *La Pachuca* aesthetic as, “...rejected middle-class definitions of feminine beauty and decency; and redefined U.S. citizenship by claiming a right to collective goods, including not only coats, trousers, and lipstick, but public space” (25). Gata’s style choices are not simply how she likes to dress but represent a history of radical Chicana feminist identity.



Figure 32: Old Town, Albuquerque, NM | January 29, 2024

La Pachuca’s explicit aesthetic choices expression and involvement in social injustices including police brutality, assimilation, racism, and poverty, not only shaped Chicana attitudes in spaces like lowrider communities, but they also actively disrupted cultural domesticity and Americanized feminine beauty ideals. Gata demonstrates that the values and beliefs of *La Pachuca* and *La Chola* historical resistant identity are prevalent in the Albuquerque lowrider community.



Figure 33: Gata's Tattoo in Memory of Her Father "Crazo," Old Town Albuquerque, NM

I asked Gata how she became involved in the lowrider community; she told me it was because of her love for the culture and sense of community that came with it. It is also a way for her to connect with her father, who passed away when she was very young. She said her father was associated with the Albuquerque car club, Rollerz Only. Gata has a tattoo on her arm in dedication to her father that we made sure to highlight in many of the photos that we took. I opened up to Gata and told her that I also lost my father when I was a child. By being vulnerable with one another and sharing shared experiences, it strengthens the arguments Fierros and Delgado Bernal make about the importance of *plática* in community-based research stating it is "...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" (116). Gata and I also have the shared experience of being *Nuevomexicanas* trying to connect with the Albuquerque lowrider community without familial connection to it.

I used my desire to capture New Mexican culture with photography as my entry point into the Albuquerque lowrider community. Gata found her way by simply inserting

herself and participating in the lowrider culture. She entered the Albuquerque lowrider community embracing her *Burqueña* and Chicana identity with inspired *La Pachuca* and *La Chola* aesthetics, because of this, I believe she gained *respeto* in the community. The way that a person engages with the *resolana* Albuquerque lowrider community is important to the connections one creates within it. Gata's identity expression demonstrates that she understands the meaning of dressing and paying homage to the Chicanas who contributed to the lowrider culture.

I asked Gata how she sees herself continuing to participate in the Albuquerque community. She explained that she wants to eventually own a 1959 Chevrolet Impala. When I asked her why she wants her own lowrider, she replied, "You always see women in the passenger seat, never the driver. I want to be in my own car, pulling up and hitting switches." Gata is attached to her *querencia* in Albuquerque and the lowrider community within it. Levi Romero writes about how one must care for one's *querencia*, "It is not enough to speak of one's love for *querencia* without participating in the maintenance that ensures its health and well-being" (11). She sees herself being an active member of this community throughout her life. This dedication and intention demonstrate that women will continue to be a foundational part of the Albuquerque lowrider community.



Figure 34: Resolana in Old Town Albuquerque, NM | January 29, 2024

Gata and I ended our *plática* in the main plaza where we know a group of car owners are always seen gathering on the weekends. It was a beautiful day with the sun out, we saw the usual group sitting in their lawn chairs engaged in their *resolana* enjoying the weather and each other's company. Gata and I approached the group and asked if we could take photos with the 1957 Ford Fairline. The owner quickly agreed and allowed us to get inside his vehicle and take as many pictures as we wanted. Just like the Volkswagen Beetle that was waiting for Whispers and I, this car was waiting for Gata and I. This was not planned, and we were so grateful that we had the opportunity to take photos with a lowrider. It was truly meant to be.



Figure 35: Gata in front of New Mexico State Flag, Old Town Albuquerque, NM

When Gata and I were done taking our time at the Fairline, we went and talked with all the car owners and thanked them for allowing us to take photos. Just as we were walking to leave, Gata and I noticed a New Mexican flag waving in the wind. We looked at each other and knew it was another ironic moment, symbolic of our *plática*, it was the perfect way to end our Sunday. Spending the afternoon with Gata was a special moment and made me imagine what the future of the Albuquerque lowrider community would look like, and it made me smile to know it will be filled with *Nuevomexicanas* in the driver's seat.



Figure 36: El Modelo Restuarant, Albuquerque, NM | January 30, 2024

Third Plática: Growing up Homegirl con Happy

My last *plática* occurred with Happy at El Modelo Restaurant and the Barelas neighborhood. Happy was also born and raised in Albuquerque, her *familia* is from San Jose and Barelas neighborhoods. I have always known Happy's attachment to the Barelas neighborhood because she has always admired the photos I have taken there and because this was not my first-time taking photos of her there. I have taken photos of Barelas before our *plática* together. I was not surprised when she wanted to take our photos and have our *plática* there because she has always expressed her pride to be from, this historic Albuquerque neighborhood. She expressed that for this occasion she wanted to center her photos of the *La Virgen de Guadalupe* mural that is distinctive to Barelas. When she told me she also wanted to take photos at El Modelo, I was surprised and excited because it is an extremely popular and symbolic restaurant of Albuquerque. Many aspects of Happy's *plática* were different from the other two I had, and I found some similarities. The key difference of Happy's *plática* that made her distinct is that she had many people with her to offer their support. She was surrounded by her homegirls and familia that care about her and what to see her thrive, especially in the Albuquerque lowrider community.



Figure 37: Happy in front of El Modelo Restaurant with 1940 Chevrolet Master Deluxe and 1981 Cutlass / January 30, 2024

When I arrived at Happy's *plática*, she and two of her homegirls were parked outside, waiting for the cars they invited to show up, holding a place for them to park in the front of El Modelo. It was a Sunday afternoon, and everyone was at El Modelo getting their favorite foods. One bomba (1940 Chevrolet Master Deluxe), that is owned by her uncle parked and a 1981 Cutlass Supreme owned by one of Happy's friends, who is a woman active in the Albuquerque lowrider community. The Cutlass Supreme had a dedication on the back trunk, written in cursive "RIP Dad" and "Always with Me" with the script was an image of the owner's father. This is a common customization seen on Albuquerque lowriders since the family dynamic is so prevalent in this lowrider community.



Figure 38: Happy in front of El Modelo Restaurant on a Sunday Afternoon, Albuquerque, NM

It was special to see how many people helped Happy make her vision come to life for her photoshoot. While I was taking photos of her, so was everyone else. We were all having conversations with one another, talking about the lowriders or how many people were at El Modelo that day. While at El Modelo, Happy wore a serape jacket similar to the one Whispers wore. This has become a popular modern accessory in the lowrider communities, I have especially noticed it, especially on women. She paired her jacket with a classic fedora, Chuck Taylors, and her *chola* bands. Happy wanted this look to be more casual and more what I observed *chola* inspired. *Chola* style aesthetics are casual in comparison to *La Pachuca*, showing the evolution of Chicana identity expression rooted in working-class lifestyle. As I was taking photos of Happy, many other lowriders passed us by as Sunday is not just the holy day, but also the sacred day of lowriding. The whole crew drove down the road to the historic 4th Street in the heart of the Barelás neighborhood.

The lowriders parked in front of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* mural. Happy changed into a knit tank cropped top with a long white puff sleeve shirt underneath, paired with black work pants, her signature “Chicana” fedora, and a pair of black heels. Almost every

time I have seen Happy at cruises, she has been wearing her “Chicana” fedora. This caught my attention when I first documented the Albuquerque lowrider community because she was forward with representing her identity. The flower on her fedora pays homage to *las pachucas*, who often wore red roses behind their ears or in their bouffant, hair styles. I loved Happy’s vision for her photos and the settings she chose, because they reflect spaces *las pachucas* and *cholas* chose to take their photos. They chose culturally significant spaces that represented their *barrios*.



Figure 39: Happy in front of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* mural in Barelitas Neighborhood, Albuquerque, NM

Situating her *plática* and photographs in front of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* reasserts that her image plays a significant role in Chicana identity expression and cultural aesthetics. She is deeply loved and honored in the Albuquerque lowrider community and represents motherly protection and love. Happy expressed to me when choosing her locations that she loved *La Virgen de Guadalupe* and loved the idea of having her incorporated into this study. Her image has been used in Chicana/x movements, literature, stories, personal expressions, spiritual connection, thoughts, cinema, music, and other vital parts of our lived experiences. She has been transported through time, connecting us to *la gente pasada y presente*. Norma Alarcón writes with the same sentiment about our beloved *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, “she transports us

beyond or before time” and that she symbolizes “...transformative powers and sublime transcendence and is the standard carried into battle in utopically inspired movements” (112) Happy and Whispers are examples of this spiritual connection to *La Virgen de Guadalupe* transporting into a new generation of Chicanas. Their connection and love for her image and symbolic meaning is deep enough for them to transform into their identity expression through specific chosen cultural aesthetics. This connection should further be explored by having *plática* with other young Chicanas in the Albuquerque to investigate this instinctive attachment to *La Virgen de Guadalupe* and why she means so much to *Nuevomexicanas* in this subculture of lowrider communities in the southwest.



Figure 40: Barelas, 4th Street, Albuquerque, NM | January 30, 2024

Happy explained that she was introduced to the lowrider community through her grandfather, a member of Drifter Car Club. The Drifters are a prominent car club in Albuquerque, their unique quality being that they only accept cars made before 1969, highlighting older versions of classic lowriders. Drifters can be found at all major City of Albuquerque community events, representing the lowrider community and working to help the community through donation drives. Growing up in this community-based environment. Happy has learned the value of her culture and dedicated her time to ensure these efforts continue for generations to come. I asked Happy what memories she had as a child growing up in the Albuquerque lowrider community, she told me her grandfather would always take her cruising on Sundays in his 1951 Chevrolet Oldsmobile. She remembers sitting in the back seat looking out the window watching all the lowriders pass by. I asked Happy if she wants her own lowrider and she responded, “I want a 1951

Chevrolet bomba just like *mi abuelo*.” She plans to continue the traditions of lowriding and represent Barelas and San Jose *por vida*. I am excited for Happy and the idea of her cruising in her *abuelo*’s honor to cruise in with her *familia* and homegirls. I am even more excited to photograph that moment when I eventually see it.



Figure 41: Happy in front of Clarence Valdez’s “La Reina” Bomba, Barelas, Albuquerque, NM

Reflecting on Happy and I’s *plática* was revealing similarities with the other two *pláticas* I had for this study which included: *La Virgen de Guadalupe* as a symbol of cultural aesthetics, *querencia* or the devotion to homeplace and identity, sense of responsibility to community, and creating and maintaining systems of support. Happy’s *plática* and photographs revealed to me While taking photos of Happy I could not help but feel the sense of support surrounding us. Her *familia* and homegirls were watching us with pride, encouragement, and excitement. The comradery was inspiring, and that is why we all love and nurture the Albuquerque lowrider community. We all shared a common goal, to celebrate, document, and cherish what this culture creates.

Chapter 5: Conclusion



Figure 42: “In Memory of Sparky” Cruise, May 2021, Downtown Albuquerque, NM

This study celebrates *Nuevomexicana*’s identity in the Albuquerque lowrider community and acknowledges resistance by young Chicanas expressing their cultural identity through cultural aesthetics created by *La Pachuca* y *La Chola*. Utilizing the culturally informed methodology of *plática* for the visual and written documentation of Whispers, Gata, and Happy’s stories, validates the cultural knowledge produced by *Nuevomexicanas*. This documentation demonstrates Whispers, Gata, and Happy’s devotion, love, and wisdom *Nuevomexicanas* currently and historically contribute to the sustainability of the one-of-a-kind culture, traditions, and rituals found in the Albuquerque lowrider community. My *pláticas* with Whispers, Gata, and Happy will always be cherished memories of mine, their support and encouragement of my research has meant so much to me as a striving *Burqueña*, *Nuevomexicanas*, and Chicana scholar.

Their trust to document an intimate part of their lives allowed me to explore important notions of *Nuevomexicana* cultural aesthetics, identity expression, knowledge creation and dissemination, systems of support, and camaraderie through the Albuquerque lowrider community. Their participation allows for the expansion of knowledge and documentation on New Mexico lowrider communities and women’s roles in them. Whispers, Gata, and Happy’s vulnerability were essential to the creation of this study. Their cultural knowledge is impactful and allows for insight to be drawn from a

younger generation of women that have attachment to the Albuquerque lowrider community and how the future of *Nuevomexicana*'s role in New Mexico lowrider communities will look like. Their identity expression and inspiration of *pachuca* and *chola* cultural aesthetics implement modern trends found in lowrider communities and how they still pay *respeto* to the fierce, outspoken, dedicated lowriding Chicanas of the past.



Figure 43: Albuquerque Lowrider Supershow | June 04, 2023

Whispers, Gata, and Happy's *testimonios* demonstrate that *Nuevomexicanas* value dedication to community, family, and friends, tradition, cultural pride, attachment to *querencia*, spiritual connectedness, and the sacredness of *resolana*. It was a privilege to have *plática* in spaces of *resolana* while capturing the memory to be preserved and utilized for studies centered in the topics addressed in this study. All three women

displayed courage, confidence, individuality, and openness. It was a unique research experience that I was overjoyed to co-create with Whispers, Gata, and Happy.

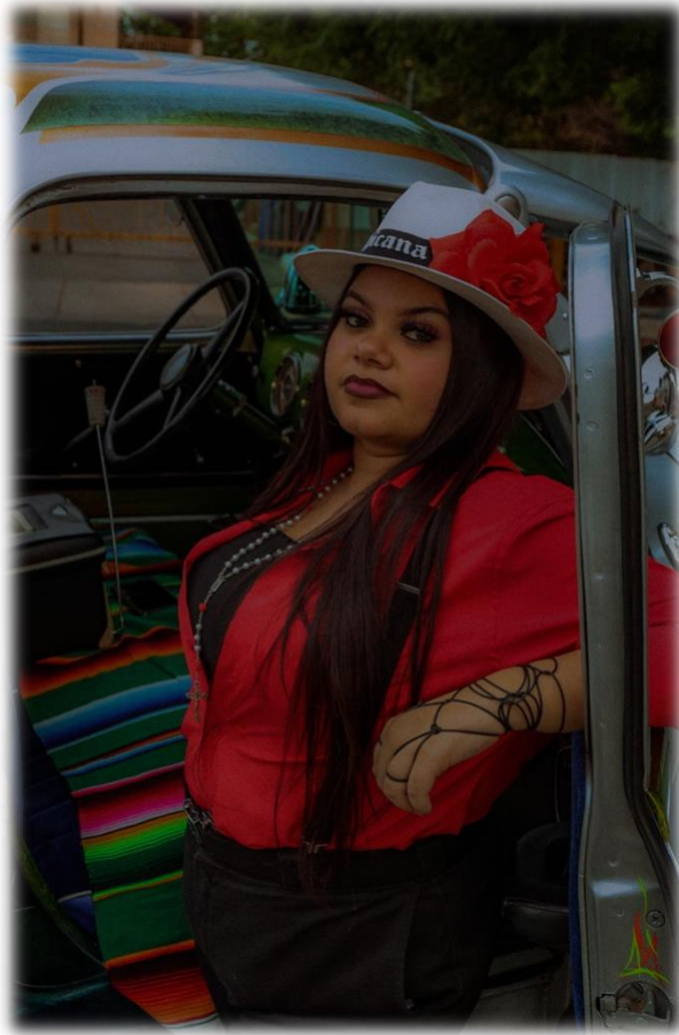


Figure 44: Barelas, 4th Street, Albuquerque, NM | September 11, 2023

This study and research aim to give validity to research being conducted by and for scholars that have a shared identity with the community subjected to research. My shared cultural identity, knowledge, and experiences were vital elements of this study fostering authenticity. The methodological approach of centering the cultural and sacred space of *resolana* while enacting *plática* was also a significant aspect of this research. *Plática* and *resolana* are important cultural elements of conducting research in Chicana/x/o communities. Delgado Bernal and Fierros explain *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” (99) and “...more than just a "way of knowing" and can be more accurately defined as a "system of knowing” (101). As researchers, we must center cultural systems of knowing to honor the knowledge, testimonios, rituals, and traditions of Chicana/x/o communities. It is even

more important to be a person that understands cultural systems of knowledge because that is their own system of knowledge as a member of that community.



Figure 45: Jerry Griego's 1964 Chevrolet Impala parked at Holy Family Church, Albuquerque, NM | October 2022

As a *Nuevomexicana*, I have known and celebrated *resolana* my whole life. It is a system of knowledge rooted in my family dynamics that extends to the Albuquerque lowrider community. I describe *resolana* as sacred because it is a space where sacred knowledge, tradition and rituals are practiced. It is a space that must be honored and never violated. My respect for *resolana* allowed me to form personal connections within the Albuquerque lowrider community. I demonstrated this respect by engaging in the *resolana* through *pláticas* with members of the community. Every time I went to a lowrider event, I made a commitment to conversing with the community, showing them that I value their stories and lifestyle. This commitment not only gave me the trust of the Albuquerque lowrider community but also made me a valued member of it. I have expanded that commitment to also use my acquired knowledge and skills learned from my attendance at the University of New Mexico for the benefit of and documentation of the Albuquerque lowrider community. The systems of knowing within the Albuquerque lowrider community are true to *Nuevomexicana/o* ways of being. *Resolana* is found in spaces outside the lowrider community and in our daily lives. We are deeply rooted in our historical traditions of sharing knowledge and creating spaces where our knowledge and stories can be nurtured. Our *resolanas* are interconnected to our *querencia*, as Rudolfo Anaya defines it, "...love of home, love of place" (15).



Figure 46: Downtown, Albuquerque, NM | May 2021

This is a core similarity between Whispers, Gata, Happy, and me – our shared *querencia* of Albuquerque. We are all proud *Burqueñas* finding community through lowrider culture. It is a space where we all can fully express our *Burqueña*, Chicana, and *Nuevomexicana* identities. I bonded with each of them through our identities because we all speak the same language, share the same culture, and love our *familia y comunidad*. I laughed, encouraged, validated, and celebrated each of them. It was beautiful to see how they glowed with pride talking about their families while sharing memories with me. They gave thought and intention with the answers to my questions because they wanted to represent themselves and their *gente*. I was happy and excited to answer their questions for me, asking about my family, how and why I take the photos I do, giving me creative direction, and reciprocating the love and respect I showed them. I am grateful that I am *Nuevomexicana* and can engage in my community on a soul level and to use the dominant colonial systems like academia to give prominence *por mi cultura y raza*. I plan to continue my culturally informed research rooted in my *Nuevomexicana* identity and explore our contributions to the field of Chicana Studies. There is a necessity in our field to incorporate more *Nuevomexicana* experiences, knowledge, traditions, rituals, expressions into our scholarship production. This study expands on the research, documentation, and knowledge on the *Nuevomexicana/o/x* experiences and explores the nuances the Albuquerque lowrider subculture while emphasizing *Nuevomexicana*'s valuable role in the culture being preserved and practiced today.

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