

Chicano Gang Members in Recovery: The Public Talk of Negotiating Chicano Masculinities

Edward Orozco Flores, *Loyola University Chicago*

Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *University of Southern California*

Using ethnographic data from Los Angeles, this article examines the ritualized forms of verbal communication used in two Chicano gang recovery programs, Homeboy Industries and Victory Outreach. These two distinctive programs facilitate recovery from gangs through contrasting models of communication anchored in religion and therapeutic rehabilitation. In recovery, ritualized verbal displays subordinate gang masculinity and elevate conventional notions of masculinity. Former gang members use sermons, group therapy, 12-step programs, and personal testimonials to articulate hegemonic ideals of masculinity, such as responsible fatherhood. A critical component of these gang rehabilitation programs rearticulates the meanings of Chicano masculinity to include abstention from drug use, providing for family members, and engaging in nurturing behavior. Through these verbal rituals, reformed gang masculinity is repositioned as dominant, desirable, and accessible to marginalized Chicano men with past gang affiliations and addictions. Keywords: Latinos; masculinities; gangs; religion; recovery.

Sociologists and criminologists have studied gangs in Chicago and New York City from the early twentieth century (i.e., Asbury 1928; Thrasher [1927] 1963; Whyte 1943) to the late twentieth century (i.e., Brotherton and Barrios 2004; Horowitz and Schwartz 1974; Padilla 1992; Venkatesh 2008). More recently this has expanded to include Chicano gangs in California and Los Angeles (i.e., Klein 1995; Moore 1978; Rios 2011; Vigil 1988). Scholars emphasize that gangs are rooted in institutionalized racism, poverty, and urban marginality, and furthermore, that gang life is fundamentally an expression of marginalized masculinity (Majors and Billson 1992; Horowitz 1983; Rios 2011; Vigil 2007; Yablonsky 1997). Yet, there has not been much social science research on gang recovery programs—programs that facilitate desistance from gang violence and substance abuse. Rather, the Chicago School-inspired perspective on urban development and social ecology has dominated most sociological research (i.e., Bogardus 1926; Bogardus 1943; Thrasher [1927] 1963; Vigil 2007; Whyte 1943). Programs that promote desistance from gang life—herein referred to as *gang recovery*—do exist, but not much is known about how they work. Even less is known about how gang recovery engages gang masculinity, which is deeply embedded in gang members' personas.

A burgeoning literature in the sociology of religion has begun to examine how gang members leave gang life through integration into religious groups (i.e., Brenneman 2011; Leon 1998; Sanchez-Walsh 2003; Wolseth 2010). Gangs in Latin America, as well as Chicano gangs, have been the focus of such research, which have also foregrounded the role of Pentecostalism, a rapidly expanding sect of Christianity. In addition, interest in secular recovery programs has grown. Investigations of therapeutic rehabilitation have critically analyzed the state and the rise of different

The primary author wishes to acknowledge the John Randolph and Dora Haynes Foundation for a doctoral dissertation fellowship (2008–2009) that allowed the data collection for this article. Direct correspondence to: Edward Orozco Flores, Department of Sociology, Loyola University Chicago, Chicago, IL 60660. E-mail: eflores2@luc.edu; or Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, Department of Sociology, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90089. E-mail: sotelo@usc.edu.

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forms of recovery programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, 12-step programs, and recovery homes (i.e., Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Carr 2010; Fairbanks 2009; Haney 2010), but these studies have not examined gangs, religion, and masculinity.

This article relies on urban ethnography and interviews conducted at two different faith-based organizations to examine how gang recovery programs engage Chicano gang masculinity. Ritualized forms of verbal communication are critical to these programs, and in this article we ask, how does ritualized talk enable men in recovery to distance themselves from street gangs? Competing definitions of masculinity are central to this process. We find that both 12-step programs and charismatic forms of Pentecostal worship use ritualized verbal displays, albeit different communication styles and speech, to cast gang masculinity in a negative light and rearticulate the desirability and the dominance of masculinities centered on being a “family man” or “man of God.” Besides repetitively denouncing gang behavior, these programs also rely on verbal rituals of shame and reintegration, allowing recovering gang members to renounce past behaviors and strive for a new place in the gender order. We argue that adopting these new discursive practices and masculine expressions help Chicano men distance themselves from street gangs.

Literature Review

Chicano Gang Masculinity

Not all men experience masculine privilege equally. There are hierarchies of masculinities and femininities, and “hegemonic masculinity”—which is implicitly normative—offers the greatest “patriarchal dividend” in the gender order (Connell [1995] 2005:79–80). However, men who have experienced structural barriers to mainstream society, such as massive unemployment, urban poverty, and institutionalized racism, have typically innovated competing forms of “marginalized masculinities” (Connell [1995] 2005:81). In turn, the formation of such gendered hierarchies has enabled the circulation of “a legitimating justification for gender inequality” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Messerschmidt 2012:64).

Chicano gang masculinity is one type of marginalized masculinity. Chicano men, as marginalized men, have been structurally blocked from resources (i.e., good education and jobs) necessary for the performance of dominant male breadwinner masculinity, and instead they have often relied on aggressive behaviors, such as the use of physical force or the exercise of control over women, in order to assert their dominance and masculinity (Baca Zinn 1982). Chicano gang behavior has been characterized as self-destructive and as part of an addictive “machismo syndrome” (Yablonsky 1997:18). Chicano gang members in Los Angeles are associated with a hypermasculine culture of *locura*, which involves “a type of craziness or wildness” and “the appearance of a lack of impulse control” (Vigil 2007:63). Heavy drug and alcohol use as well as street violence, crime, and neighborhood territoriality are part of Chicano gang life (Moore 1991; Moore, Vigil, and Garcia 1983; Vigil 2007).

Like other socially disadvantaged and marginalized men who lack access to mainstream institutions, rewards, and resources (i.e., Messerschmidt 2004), Chicano men have sought masculine dominance in alternative spheres, namely the streets (Rios 2011). For poor urban men, and especially men of color, hypermasculine gang behavior, dress, and language serve as a compensatory response to the absence of stable employment and education (Majors and Billson 1992; Rios 2011). As Richard Majors and Janet Billson (1992:85) suggest, “The streets become the community living room, the sports arena, the recreation hall,” the key setting for drug deals, swagger, boasts, dares, fights, and sexual conquests.

In Los Angeles, Chicano gang members include the adolescent sons of immigrant workers from rural areas of Mexico. Many of these men hail from backgrounds influenced by what David Gilmore (1990) has characterized as Andalusian masculine imperatives: to father children, as well as provide for and protect one’s family. When these men discover that their fathers’ old world

masculine expressions do not suffice as a source of dignity or protection on the streets, they may turn to gangs and drug dealing as masculine badges of honor, income, status, and protection (i.e., Bourgois 1995; Ramirez and Flores 2010; Smith 2006). Gang membership provides a social world of protection and resources on the streets, offering group loyalty and a feeling of family belonging, alongside violent, self-destructive behavior (Hunt and Laidler 2001; Moore 1991; Vigil 2007). Masculinity and self-esteem become embedded in a community code of honor, and dishonor is experienced as a loss of manhood (Horowitz 1987; Horowitz and Schwartz 1974). To cope with the tenuous nature of honor on the streets, Chicano gang members develop aggressive, hyper-masculine stances and, in turn, interpersonal violence provokes police harassment and funnels these men into the criminal justice pipeline (Rios 2011). Although return trips to Mexico may shelter Chicano men from engaging with street gang masculinity, many migrants do not return home regularly and this leaves Chicano men vulnerable to socialization into street gangs (Smith 2006).

Most scholars agree that gang behavior and delinquency can be remedied through integration into family, religion, employment, and the military (i.e., Edin, Nelson, and Paranal 2004; Gans 1962; Hunt, Laidler, and MacKenzie 2005; Laub and Sampson 2003; Moloney et. al 2009; Roy and Dyson 2010; Whyte 1943). Simply maturing out was once a common path of gang exit, with gang members shifting their orientations from the streets towards conventional life as they grew older and joined the military, got married, and acquired jobs in the formal economy (Horowitz 1983; Moore 1978; Vigil 1988). Today, structural and historical factors have made that path of gang exit more elusive. The maturing out option, as sociologist Ruth Horowitz observed in her book *Honor and the American Dream* (1983), was still possible in the mid-twentieth century, when a vibrant manufacturing economy provided relatively stable and good paying jobs to men with low levels of education. However, today's bifurcated job structure and hourglass economy offer few accessible job ladders to Chicano gang members (Gans 1992; Hagedorn 1991; Kalleberg 2011, Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Smith 2006). Alcoholism and drug addiction also complicate the process of Chicano gang members easily distancing themselves from gang life (Moore 1991).

The contemporary post-industrial American economy provides few job ladders to gang members, but therapeutic rehabilitation and religion now inform innovative programs dedicated to gang exit and social integration. In part, this has been supported by private and public sources of funding. For example, in 2001, public policy changes revitalized the American religious marketplace, allowing church ministries to compete for federal funds to provide social services.¹ This research investigates neither the source of funding nor the measurement of efficacy, but the role of ritualized verbal exchanges in these programs. Chicano gang members who seek to leave gang life do so against the backdrop of deindustrialization, but also within the context of the ascendancy of religion and therapeutic rehabilitation in America.

Contrasting Recovery Programs

An emerging body of scholarship has looked at the rise of "recovery," "restoration," and "rehabilitation" programs rooted in religious missions (i.e., Brennehan 2011; Leon 1998; Sanchez-Walsh 2003; Smilde 2007). Since Chicano gang members are frequently addicted to drugs and/or alcohol as well as violence and expressions of rage, many religious-based, anti-gang programs have adopted addiction recovery models. These programs have aimed to reform such behavior through religious practice and the internal work of self-monitoring, and patterns of verbal communication are central to both. While scholars have emphasized the long arm of the state in analyses of the clinical model of therapeutic rehabilitation, literature on the Pentecostal model has tended to emphasize being "set free"—religion as an empowering process. Below, we contrast two models rooted in therapy and religion: the 12-step model and Pentecostalism.

1. A 2001 presidential executive order established the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI), and gave federal funds for faith-based and community organizations to provide social services.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), founded in the 1930s, is the grandfather of 12-step programs that are today international and have broadened to include Over-Eaters Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and Criminal and Gang Members Anonymous. These are mutual aid therapeutic societies that promote abstinence and spiritual support, and talk is an essential part of these processes. Heath Hoffman (2006:671), in his study on AA, found a wide range of normative rules guiding verbal communication: telling one's story, not allowing "cross-talk" during one's story, and practicing humility and kindness.

The 12-step model is underpinned by latent religiosity and explicit negotiations of masculinity. Hoffman (2006:675) found that verbal communication in AA invoked faith, such as prescriptions to "practice serenity," "accept things beyond your control," and "believe in God or a higher power." In fact, AA is rooted in nondenominational Protestant Christianity (Rudy and Greil 1989). However, in an illuminating study of Mexico City men in AA, urban anthropologist Stanley Brandes (2002) observed that verbal communication in AA was rooted in Mexican Catholicism's cultural focus on rituals, and trajectories of transgression, guilt, confession, and salvation. Furthermore, Brandes noted that masculine identity was a key component of what was reshaped in AA, as recovering alcoholics in Mexico City reconstituted traditional notions of manhood. Public talk allowed for emotional displays that reformulated masculinity as strong, but also nurturing: men spoke at the podium, shared their private struggles and challenges, and publicly renounced their alcohol use.

Critiques of the 12-step model of recovery have noted that this process forces subjects to accept fault, blame, and accountability, thereby imposing neoliberal governance (i.e., Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Fairbanks 2009; Haney 2010). In *Scripting Addiction* (2010), E. Summerson Carr observed that drug counselors and therapists evaluated verbal performances in 12-step programs in order to modify participants' access to goods and resources. Participants were forced to learn and perform rituals of speaking in recovery in order to obtain food, shelter, and child custody. In this regard, AA and other 12-step programs can be seen, Carr (2010) argued, as a process of "rehabilitating the drug user's relationship with language" (p. 12). Participants must learn to follow the recovery narrative, which features a linear plot line that spans from a dirty past, to hitting bottom, and points to a clean future. In this view, the widespread institutionalization of talk therapy is a disempowering extension of the state.

Pentecostal conversion and programs to facilitate urban gang exit have emerged in the United States and in Latin America (Leon 1998; Sanchez-Walsh 2003; Vásquez, Marquardt, and Gómez 2003; Vigil 1982; Wolseth 2010). These emphasize redemption through the ecstatic, collective worship of being "set free." Pentecostal worship is generally loud and effervescent, accompanied by upbeat live music. The tradition has roots in late nineteenth-century America among Christians who sought to replace what they saw as an overreliance on the Bible scriptures with a more experiential expression of faith—baptism in the Holy Spirit. Pastors and their congregation often adopt the "call and response" mode with pastors calling out to their flocks in the pews, who answer with enthusiastic verbal responses and shouts. Pentecostal worship services use public testimonials relating past sins and the experience of redemption to Biblical parables. By 2000 there were 250 million Pentecostal adherents worldwide, with rapidly growing numbers in the global South, many of them attracted to both charismatic forms of worship and to an array of Pentecostal social ministries (Miller and Yamamori 2007).

Pentecostalism is not a cohesive, uniform religion, but rather a diverse religious tradition underpinned by patriarchal gender ideals that often only allow men in leadership positions. In the United States, Pentecostal churches have generally relied on a patriarchal church structure that promises the American dream to marginalized Latino immigrants and actively promotes a new male code of honor (Leon 1998; Sanchez-Walsh 2003). Pentecostal religious movements seek to reform practices associated with machismo: substance abuse, absence from the household, and intimate partner violence (Brusco 1995; Flores 2009). Scholars of masculinity have noted that some men who experience the costs of self-destructive expressions of masculinity (i.e., substance abuse and violence) are eager to trade these in for the privileges associated with household-oriented

masculine expressions (i.e., Heath 2005; Messner 1997). Religious conversion may facilitate this shift by providing a faith-based model of nurturing, household patriarchy, a “soft patriarchy” (Wilcox 2004:14). Though some scholars have noted the inherent contradiction of evangelical Christianity’s or Pentecostalism’s emphasis on being “set free,” and the rigidity of its ascetic codes and rules (O’Neill 2011; Pine 2008), Elizabeth Brusco (1995) suggested that such ascetic codes facilitate upward socioeconomic mobility by redirecting resources from the street towards the household and family.

Shame and Reintegration

Recent research offers a glimpse into how processes of shame facilitate marginalized persons’ reintegration (i.e., Braithwaite 1989; Brenneman 2011; Hagan and McCarthy 1997; Rios 2011). John Braithwaite (1989) theorized that contexts that allow “rituals of reacceptance and reabsorption” produce “reintegrative shaming”; in reintegrative shaming, public shame and disapproval produce social reintegration and reduce deviant behavior (Hagan and McCarthy 1997:181). On the other hand, the absence of rituals for reacceptance produces “disintegrative shaming.” In disintegrative shaming, stigmatization targets individuals rather than behaviors, reintegration does not occur, and deviant behavior continues (Braithwaite 1989; Hagan and McCarthy 1997:181). This perspective underscores how actors from mainstream institutions may perpetuate permanent stigmatization and alienation of gang members, while community-level groups that reach out to gang members may allow them to learn, make amends, and become socially reintegrated (Brenneman 2011; Rios 2011).

Robert Brenneman (2011), in a study of Pentecostal and Jesuit-based programs in Central America, found that gang recovery hinged on reintegrative shaming. Pentecostal groups denounced gang behavior, but at the same time built bonds between shamed recovering gang members and sympathetic church members. By allowing men to publicly cry, Pentecostal programs institutionalized processes of shaming that challenged the dominant status of hypermasculinity, while allowing them to build trust outside the gang. In addition, Victor Rios (2011) also suggested that gang members’ hyper-masculine, delinquent behavior could be reformed through reintegrative shaming. Rios (2011) found that mainstream institutions (i.e., education, corrections, jail) relied on disintegrative shaming, through hostile interactions that emasculated gang members, but he hypothesized that community-level organizations maintained the potential to facilitate reintegrative shaming through activism and empowerment.²

This article extends the hegemonic masculinity canon by examining what James Messerschmidt (2012) identified as a blind spot: how subordinated groups cultivate hegemonic masculinity. This article shows how current and former Chicano gang members draw from ritualized verbal displays to negotiate masculinity and facilitate processes in gang recovery and in doing so, circulate hegemonic ideas of masculinity. Ritualized verbal displays articulate hegemonic ideas of masculinity and rearticulate Chicano masculinity, distancing men from expressions of marginalized gang masculinity and facilitating their new place in the gender order as reformed gang members. Twelve-step programs and charismatic forms of Pentecostal worship employ radically different forms of verbal communication, but both rely on ritualized verbal displays to facilitate the process of recovery. We argue that these two models of public talk are as much about reshaping Chicano manhood as they are about reforming gang behavior. Recovery situates hegemonic masculine ideals, such as the “family man” or “man of God,” as dominant to Chicano gang masculinity, while verbal rituals allow participants to rearticulate and perform Chicano masculine expressions.

This study suggests that recovering gang members are indeed “set free” by being offered opportunities, through verbal rituals in recovery, for expressing a more ascendant form of masculinity—the former gang member. Ritualized verbal forms, however, are not deployed in a vacuum of talk,

2. Rios’s (2011) work is an important analytic contribution, as he was once a gang member, and his fieldwork was carried out in the community where he was once active as a gang member.

they are accompanied by significant job programs. Homeboy Industries maintains a well-designed program that includes education, skills development, and job placement, offering many minimum wage job opportunities to members, while Victory Outreach provides work to men in the recovery home through temporary, subcontracted jobs in construction, tree cutting, or concession stands at carnivals. Work and employment are fundamental components of how gang recovery works, as masculine hierarchies in gang recovery are legitimated through occupational structures within these programs or through access to opportunities outside the programs. However, it is beyond the scope of this article to examine these structural processes. This article remains focused on the different forms of ritualized verbal displays, and how they reformulate masculine expressions, at two contrasting gang recovery programs in Los Angeles: Homeboy Industries and Victory Outreach.

Data and Methods

I (Edward Flores) spent 18 months, from June 2008 to December 2009, conducting 245 hours of participant observation at Homeboy Industries, a Jesuit Catholic founded nonprofit organization, and 195 hours of participant observation at Victory Outreach, a Pentecostal-evangelical church. I observed the men's interactions in therapeutic and faith-based spaces, and participant observation occurred in many informal settings both inside and outside Homeboy Industries and Victory Outreach. I typed field notes after events, with analytical reflections concerning the themes of gang recovery and masculinity. In addition, the research also included 34 semi-structured interviews with adult Latino men in gang recovery, ranging in length from 60 to 90 minutes. These were audio-recorded and formally transcribed. Following the "extended case method" (Burawoy 1998:5), during the data collection period I periodically analyzed sets of field notes, reflections, and interview transcripts to search for patterns in the themes of recovery and masculinity. The major pattern that appeared over and over again, even when comparing and contrasting both sites, pertained to embodiment and verbal performances. The sermons, group therapy, and personal testimonies highlighted drug addiction, violence, and absence from the household. Some of the key themes that emerged through coding were the tropes of "addiction" and "recovery," and the pathological gang member (i.e., drug addiction, violence, and absence from the household). I also coded for hegemonic masculine constructions. At Victory Outreach this was articulated through verbal pledges and exhortations to become the "man of God," while at Homeboy Industries this was the "family man." The analytic themes drawn from these codes bring verbal practices and masculine performance, rather than emotion, to the fore, offering a different perspective of gang recovery than Brenneman's (2011) account, which highlighted emotion, shame, and effervescent worship.

Both Homeboy Industries and Victory Outreach are large institutional programs that grew out of the historic concentration of gang activity around the Pico Aliso housing projects in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles. Sonny Arguinzoni founded Victory Outreach in 1967 as an outreach program to Chicano gang members. Arguinzoni was a Puerto Rican/Italian man who became involved with gangs and drug abuse during his youth in New York City. He converted to Christianity under David Wilkerson, author of *The Cross and the Switchblade* (1962). Wilkerson was one of the first evangelists to gain recognition for reaching out to delinquent youth. Arguinzoni later moved to Boyle Heights and ministered to heroin-addicted Chicano gang members out of his own personal apartment. Today, Victory Outreach claims over 700 urban churches worldwide, and draws freely from Christian rock and rap music, film, and publications. Their official website presents a husband-and-wife picture of Sonny and Julie Arguinzoni, smiling and dressed formally, describing Victory Outreach as "a place where outcast and marginalized people can feel welcome" (Victory Outreach 2010). Victory Outreach appeared to be heavily funded by members' tithes, and day labor work. The top hierarchy of pastors drove expensive cars

and lived in suburban homes, and the organization purchased a fourteen-acre compound in La Puente, east of East Los Angeles, for 1.7 million dollars. This site held the “mother” church, which seats 2,000 people, a bookstore, and a school of ministry (Leon 2004:218).

In the 1980s, Father Greg Boyle, a Jesuit priest, arrived in Boyle Heights to serve as pastor at Dolores Mission church, reportedly the poorest Catholic parish in Los Angeles. Weary of burying so many neighborhood youth killed in gang violence, Father Boyle started “Jobs For a Future” in 1988, and Homeboy Bakery in 1992, to create jobs and alternative futures for gang youth. This evolved into Homeboy Industries in 2001, an independent nonprofit organization dedicated to gang recovery. Homeboy Industries was guided by the motto “nothing stops a bullet like a job,” and claimed to be the largest gang intervention program in the nation; by 2010 it operated with a budget of \$9.8 million dollars, the majority coming from donations and grants, and \$2.5 million of the total coming from the organization’s businesses (Becerra 2010). Homeboy Industries offered employment in the bakery, the café, silk-screening, tattoo removal, landscape, and maintenance. During fieldwork, 500 gang members were employed through Homeboy Industries, though after the period of fieldwork ended, county funding was cut and most employees were laid-off.³ Additional activities included an assortment of alternative therapeutic and spiritual programs, including classes, yoga, Native American sweat lodges, individual counseling, free tattoo removal, and a panoply of 12-step therapy programs.

During the time of this ethnographic research, both sites had a significant proportion of women (about 20 percent at Homeboy Industries and 40 percent at Victory Outreach), but the missions of the organizations were primarily focused on the rehabilitation of male gang members. A highly gendered division of labor characterized both organizations. The Homegirl Cafe employed only women, while the Homeboy Bakery employed men, with the exception of a couple women who worked the register. In addition, Tattoo Removal was staffed by women, while Homeboy Landscaping employed men. Similarly, Victory Outreach vigorously maintained sex segregation through separate men and women’s recovery homes, and through seating male and female home members on opposite sides of the church. Leaders made it very clear that it was a social norm to not talk with the opposite sex, nor to even make eye contact for too long. At Victory Outreach leaders wore suits and dress clothes, whereas at Homeboy Industries’ leaders dressed more casually. As an ethnographer, and as a Chicano male then in my late twenties and with no former gang affiliation, I concentrated on the male spaces to examine the recovery interventions for Chicano male gang members. At times, I observed public interactions involving women and children. The patriarchal structure of Victory Outreach ensured that men were much more visible at church services, bible studies, fundraisers, and “street evangelism.” Women were more likely to spend time making phone calls, cooking, standing outside selling food, and watching children in the child care room. To capture the use of language among men in recovery, I concentrated my participant observation at formal church events, and only occasionally at members’ homes or away from the church. Likewise, at Homeboy Industries, the group therapy classes under closest observation were male-dominated, such as Criminals and Gang Members Anonymous or Substance Abuse. I occasionally observed offsite gatherings, such as Native American sweatlodge retreats, or non-Homeboy Industries sponsored events, such as informal social gatherings at members’ homes involving alcohol.

I encountered little resistance, suspicion, or discomfort from subjects, perhaps because I seemed to personify some version of Chicano masculinity, but also because most members of Homeboy Industries and Victory Outreach had already dedicated a good deal of their time to meeting new persons. Homeboy Industries survived on public fundraising efforts, and one of Victory Outreach’s main goals was to proselytize Christianity. Additionally, both organizations had already received significant exposure to the public through major news organizations, newspaper articles, and books. A journalist, Celeste Fremon published a popular book in 1995, *G-Dog and the*

3. See Becerra (2010).

Homeboys: Father Greg Boyle and the Gangs of East Los Angeles, and in 2010, Father Greg Boyle published his own book, *Tattoos on the Heart*, with a major New York trade press. The research followed IRB approval and procedures. I told the men that their real names would not be used, but that the names of the organizations, Homeboy Industries and Victory Outreach, would be made public.

Findings

Talking about Recovery

Talk was a central component of these gang recovery programs. At both Victory Outreach and Homeboy Industries, organization leaders facilitated recovery through ritualized verbal displays that included testimonies of transgression, guilt, and salvation. Both programs exercised many of the prescriptions of Alcoholics Anonymous (Hoffmann 2006:675), such as putting the recovery group ahead of self-interests, admitting powerlessness, practicing humility and kindness, frequently attending meetings, and telling one's story. While social interactions at Victory Outreach were overtly spiritual and highly effervescent, (i.e., Leon 1998; Sanchez-Walsh 2003), interactions at Homeboy Industries were more secular in nature, tied to the 12-step model. Nonetheless, Victory Outreach and Homeboy Industries both reflected the mix of spirituality and secular therapy observed in research on the Alcoholics Anonymous movement.

Recovery from gang life relied on situated verbal performances of Chicano masculinity that repeatedly elevated reformed gang members and shamed men who were resistant to leaving gang life. Leaders in these gang recovery programs used talk to distance themselves from Chicano gang masculinity, renouncing drug use, violence and incarceration. Through verbal rituals the leaders aligned themselves with conventional expressions of masculinity. For example, they spoke highly of abstaining from drug use, earning wages, and rebuilding fractured family relationships. Former gang members who had become leaders in gang recovery rearticulated Chicano masculinity as a "soft patriarchy" (Wilcox 2004), either through notions of the "family man" (at Homeboy Industries) or the "man of God" (at Victory Outreach). The institutionalization of ritualized verbal displays that affirmed hegemonic ideals of masculinity allowed men in recovery to perform masculine expressions ascendant to marginalized, Chicano gang masculinity.

"Men of God": Victory Outreach and Spiritual Restoration

Victory Outreach-*Eastside* leaders frequently asserted that attendance at Church services was key to the Christian project of recovery, which they referred to as "spiritual restoration." Church services were held twice weekly and garnered audiences that varied between 130 to 200 people. A typical Sunday service opened with 45 minutes of "praise worship," in which members clapped and danced to church music. Former gang members from the men's recovery home wore orange "security guard" vests, and warmly greeted church members who walked in well-dressed and carrying bibles. They exchanged elaborate handshakes and hugs with male church members, many of whom had gang pasts. Music oscillated between upbeat catchy "praise choruses" and slower, melodic hymns, as the congregation sang and swayed to the music. Many people in the pews lifted their arms and mumbled improvised, stream of thought prayers. Aside from singing, dancing, and clapping, some church members occasionally spoke "in tongues." After the musical introduction, Pastor Raul, or another speaker with a gang background, delivered a sermon from the podium, or requested congregation members to give personal testimony.

Ritualized verbal displays rendered gang masculinity subordinate by mocking gang life. Leaders used oratory forms of verbal communication, such as sermons, testimonies and bible study classes rather than conversational forms. As a result, most Victory Outreach members spent a lot of time sitting in the pews as the pastor spoke. Victory Outreach's ritualistic communicative form was much like the "call and response" verbal displays found at many Black churches. After a statement

from the pastor, church members in the pews regularly shouted out affirmative and enthusiastic exclamations such as “Amen,” “Woo,” “C’mon now, bring it!” or “That’s right, tell it Pastor!” and “Hallelujah” or “Praise the Lord.” They clapped, cheered, stood up immediately, raised one hand for several seconds, or “raised the roof” motioning with two palms pulsing upwards as if to push the ceiling. In addition, the pastor or speaker often made remarks to explicitly assert the hierarchical and oratory nature of sermons and testimonies, and compelled members of the congregation to respond with a heightened level of enthusiasm. If Pastor Raul thought that the congregation was not being sufficiently participatory or loud, he shouted, “Can I hear an Amen?” Tapping the microphone, he would rhetorically ask, “Is this thing on?”

Victory Outreach leaders larded sermons and testimonies with religious parables and symbolism, framing the tragedies of gang life—addiction, violence, and incarceration—through the Christian frame of “being in bondage.” Speakers portrayed male and female gang members in gendered ways, as hypersexualized or violent gang members, against conventional notions of femininity and masculinity, such as nurturing mothers or fathers. They scorned the images and behaviors associated with gang masculinity, describing them as being “in the stronghold of the devil.” They satirically and dramatically performed Chicano gang masculinity, drawing examples from Chicano culture and slang, such as calling guns, drugs, and barrio characters, “chuco,” “feo,” “lenio,” and “quite.” While these parodies of Chicano gang life were jabs at older members’ past histories, they were also criticisms of newer members’ behaviors. As older members casually laughed, younger members sat intensely quiet, reluctant to voice dissent in the public space of recovery.

Pastor Raul, as well as the half dozen bible study leaders, positioned reformed masculinity as a dominant masculinity. Male speakers were always well dressed in suits and ties, and presented themselves as family-oriented “men of God.” They were former gang members, with testimonies of several prison stints or lengthy rap sheets, who shamed their previous gang behavior and resistance to reform. They spoke of the problems of drug addiction, violence, and family separation, and urged members to “submit to the Lord,” rather than to be “prideful.” They used a repertoire of phrases to tell the men that God wants to “see you broken” (i.e., crying), “touch your heart,” “heal you,” and ultimately “build you up” as a leader in the church’s patriarchal hierarchy. These testimonies characterized gang masculinity as riddled by addiction, violence, and incarceration, and emphasized how the speaker had been “set free” from these evils through faith in God.

Ritualized verbal displays articulated conventional notions of manhood, and rearticulated Chicano masculinity. Victory Outreach leaders used sermons to teach lessons related to family, work, and interpersonal behavior, and no topic received as much attention as the ideal of responsible fatherhood. To reformulate Chicano masculinity through notions of faith and responsible fatherhood, Pastor Raul often drew from bible scripture and barrio imagery. In one sermon, Pastor Raul told of an experience with a pit bull (a popular breed in Chicano barrios), and a Christian book on fathering (Kenneth and Jeffrey Gangel’s *Fathering Like the Father* [2003]). Pastor Raul cited Matthew 7:24 and proclaimed, “Those who believe in God are like the wise man who built his house on a rock. Those who don’t believe are like the foolish man who built his house on sand.” The congregation nodded and murmured in affirmation. Pastor Raul then bellowed that there had just been a three-day storm, with accidents followed by blaring sirens and howling from his pit bull. Pastor Raul metaphorically offered that there were also other storms that would be weathered in life: affliction, problems, pain, loss, and abandonment. He urged the congregation to “Stand, survive, and thrive in the storm with God,” because, “in the scripture, the house is symbolic for life. There are things like layoffs, death, and sickness in the family.” Pastor Raul urged congregants to go to church services and bible study, and to attend Victory outreach education Training classes. He spoke directly to the men, exhorting them to “invest in a Christian book . . . learn how to be a good Christian husband or parent.” Other examples included excerpts from the diaries of John Adams Jr.’s son and grandson, a clip of Derek Redmond crying and being held by his father at the 1992 Olympics, or Pastor Raul’s testimony of his and his wife’s struggles with

raising a family. In these sermons, as in others, Pastor Raul advocated for hegemonic notions of manhood: fatherhood as a strong, yet nurturing presence.

Not only did Victory Outreach leaders cast gang members as inferior and subordinate to church-going, family-oriented male breadwinners, but these ritualized displays also allowed opportunities for gang members' integration into the church. After Pastor Raul's sermons or any testimonies, the band played music again and the pastor invited church members to an "altar call," where the members could accept Jesus and be forgiven for their sins. More than 100 people crowded the altar; speaking in stream of thought prayers, church leaders rested their hands upon them and prayed for them. Despite the overt shaming of gang behavior, and the presence of active gang members in the Church, the pastor's sermon and altar call offered redemption, inclusiveness, and a sense of belonging to current and former gang members.

Although church leaders asserted that for recovery from gang life to occur, one had to accept Jesus and "surrender," they did not expect all vestiges of Chicano gang life to be erased. Former gang members verbally declared abstinence from substance abuse, violence, and extra-marital affairs, but they still spoke with the accent and language of Chicano gang members. Pastor Raul urged members to redirect their gang behavior to become soldiers for Jesus and to "fight for Christ," building on the aggressiveness of gang masculinity by evoking the image of a masculine Christian warrior. To carry out their mission, as soldiers for Christ, Victory Outreach members held bible studies in areas with high gang activity and tried to guide newer members who were "lost." By taking their faith to the streets and verbally proselytizing to others, recovering gang members affirmed their engagement with the process of recovery. They had distanced themselves from gang activity, and now repositioned themselves in the gender order, through a dominant display of masculinity: the "man of God."

"Family Men": Homeboy Industries and 12-step Talk

Homeboy Industries' model of recovery was influenced by Alcoholics Anonymous, and sought to reintegrate violent and drug-addicted gang members into broader society through a variety of 12-step support groups and job training. An array of substance abuse and support groups were available with names such as: Criminals and Gang Members Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, Substance Abuse (including levels I, II, or III), Anger Management, Building Relationships, Speech Class, Parenting, Baby and Me, Circle of Youth, and Spreading Seeds. Homeboys and Homegirls would trickle in a few minutes late to class, and join about a dozen others sitting behind tables arranged in a large circle formation. Classes lasted about 60 to 90 minutes, and took place in modern style rooms, housed in Homeboy Industries' sparkling new 23,000 square foot building. Some members attended classes voluntarily, but many class members participated only as a condition of probation or court conviction. A typical Homeboy Industries' group therapy class opened with the moderator stating the ground rules of communication ("respect" and "confidentiality"), before doing "check-ins" to probe into class participants' personal lives. After check-ins, the class moderator gave a short lecture, and called on class participants to answer discussion questions or to talk about their own addiction. Participants used the therapeutic vocabulary of AA, referring to "cravings," "relapse," "the cycle of violence," "secondary emotions," "co-dependency," "denial," and "accountability."

Gang recovery leaders taught newer members that manhood was associated with the acceptance of criticism, not aggression. Ritualized verbal displays, such as group therapy talk and testimonies, rendered gang masculinity subordinate. The moderator was almost always a former gang member, who would admonish the aggressive behavior of some class participants, as well as his old behavior. One day, Alfredo, moderator of the Anger Management class, prefaced the class by telling participants, "Me . . . I've been called names, I wanted to walk out . . . [But] sometimes it takes a better man to walk away . . . This is a starting point, Homeboy Industries." By portraying gang behavior as defensive and immature, and characterizing acceptance of criticism as a marker of manhood, Alfredo reformulated notions of Chicano masculinity. Likewise,

Jeremy, moderator of the Criminals and Gang Members Anonymous (CGA) class, often ridiculed the aggressive nature of gang masculinity; disparaging the behavior of previous participants, Jeremy told his class participants not to bring gang rivalry problems into group therapy because, "a real man won't go doing something like that." In these settings, as with Victory Outreach, newer members usually sat intensely quiet, reluctant to break the discursive rules of the public space of recovery.

Homeboy Industries' moderators regularly shamed and ridiculed gang masculinity, framing substance abuse, selling drugs and violence through the tropes of "addiction" and the "cycle of violence." Both Victory Outreach and Homeboy Industries' leaders criticized members as part of their heated, passionate orations. Jeremy once forcefully pointed his finger at a few young gang members sitting near me as he said, "You think it's fun, and you think it's fun, and you think it's fun. But it ain't fun. It is not fun! As a juvenile I got life in YA (Youth Authority), but today I would've gotten life in the pen." Jeremy talked about the harsh realities of prison life and new harsher sentencing standards, asking men in class if they preferred to be lined up "dick to ass" with prison inmates (relying on not so subtle homophobia) or if they would rather live outside jail and have romantic relationships with women. Moderators often sarcastically ridiculed the major tenets of gang life, such as extreme gang loyalty or preoccupation with violence.

Homeboy Industries' leaders positioned reformed masculinity as dominant and desirable. Homeboy Industries' leaders proudly referred to themselves as "family men" who were oriented towards family and work rather than street life. Moderators spent a great deal of time shaming gang behavior, contrasting domestic responsibilities and nurturing fatherhood against the scorned image of violent gang masculinity. In addition, when Jeremy enthusiastically urged CGA participants to shift their presence from the street to the home, he described the joys of being outdoors with his son. Jeremy warned, "You can't do that stuff if you're locked up." Moderators encouraged participants to reform their behavior in order to become financial providers for their household, as well as to build relationships with women and children.

Homeboy Industries' moderators used testimonies to articulate conventional expressions of manhood and to rearticulate Chicano masculinity. Reformulating Chicano masculinity through the "family man" image, Antonio, moderator of the Substance Abuse class, chastised participants by telling them that the money they spent on drugs could instead be used to provide for their family's needs. Antonio then shared his personal testimony, of working at Homeboy Industries to support his family while also going to school at night to take classes for his drug counseling certification. Antonio said that it was the thought of his wife and children waiting for him to arrive home that prevented him from relapsing. Moderators encouraged class participants to reform for the well-being of their family members. Several times, moderators even pointed to the field researcher and said that he was a "real man"—not like men in the class or on the street—because he was in college and was able to take care of his mother.

Homeboy Industries' class moderators also rearticulated Chicano masculinity to encompass expressions of vulnerability, regret and forgiveness. Group therapy classes helped to create what Brandes (2003) called "a space in which the expression of regret is interpreted as strength rather than weakness" (p. 163). Homeboy Industries' moderators used ritualized verbal displays to practice reflection, compassion and nurturance. Once during an Anger Management class, as Alfredo started his check-ins with participants, a young, male class participant said, "My mom's been tripping lately." Performing a nurturing expression of masculinity, Alfredo paused for a moment, and then softly asked the participant to reflect. Alfredo asked, "Okay, why do you think that is, dog?" The participant shrugged and simply replied, "I dunno." Alfredo tapped his folders on the table as a gentle reminder of previous class discussion, urging the participant to be more reflective. Alfredo asked, "Empathy, big dog, what does it mean?" The participant finally answered, "To put myself in someone else's place." The participant then thoughtfully reflected on a recent illness in his family, and the strains it may have caused on his mother's household responsibilities. Verbal rituals, such as check-ins, offered men in recovery opportunities to engage expressions of masculinity.

As with Victory Outreach, moderators were not doing away with all facets of Chicano masculinity. They relied on Chicano slang to lead discussion and mediate social interactions, but they verbally attacked elements associated with street life. Moderators would remark that one could be more “down for their neighborhood,” a key value of Chicano masculinity, if they were doing well in life and able to provide for others. Moderators would tell participants that they were naïve for going to the streets because “real men” were “family men.”

Conclusion

The context for gang exit is structured by more than just economic factors, such as access to well-paying, stable jobs. Jobs are certainly part of the story, but so are programs that encourage Chicano men to leave gang life. By participating in therapeutic rehabilitation or religion, Chicano men were able to distance themselves from gang life and the streets. This was facilitated through two related processes: the practice of new verbal rituals and the negotiation of Chicano gang masculinity.

At both Homeboy Industries and Victory Outreach, the process of gang recovery centered upon ritualized verbal displays that allowed gang members to participate in the public space of recovery. At Victory Outreach, the pastors and leaders relied on Pentecostal, oratory-like sermons, as well as call-and-response interactions from congregation members. They used these orations to discuss how gang behavior led to transgressions, pain and regret, and ultimately redemption. They framed their experiences through religious symbolism and parables, melding bible scripture with lived gang experience and Chicano slang and references to barrio life. At Homeboy Industries, the 12-step model structured group therapy sessions. Moderators led class discussions, and drew from members’ testimonies and troubles as well as their own. These group therapy discussions centered on the linear plot line of a dirty past, hitting bottom, and always pointed towards a clean future.

Building on previous scholarship that suggested reintegration rituals can help facilitate desistance from crime or gangs (i.e., Braithwaite 1989; Brenneman 2011; Hagan and McCarthy 1997; Rios 2011), we focused on the centrality of gender reformulations through ritualized verbal displays. We found that the negotiation of Chicano gang masculinity was a central component of recovery, and that it was woven into verbal rituals in two ways.

First, recovering gang members consented to learning nurturing behavior that redefined notions of manhood. During testimonies, sermons, or group therapy, leaders acted as secular priests or spiritual leaders, encouraging members to accept a higher power, accept things beyond one’s control, and put the recovery group ahead of one’s interests. The men not only verbally renounced substance abuse and gang violence, but they publicly expressed regret and empathy for the plight and suffering of others. In doing so, they reformulated regret as a sign of strength rather than weakness, and learned how to perform nurturing expressions of masculinity that fit with hegemonic masculine ideals.

Second, gang masculinity was discussed in negative terms while the image of the male breadwinner, rooted in hegemonic masculinity, was constructed as dominant. A model of Chicano, family-oriented, breadwinner masculinity was repeatedly described and encouraged, and practices and behaviors of Chicano gang masculinity, such as the use of gang monikers, territoriality, substance abuse and addiction, and violence, were ridiculed and shamed. Because aggressive posturing allowed leaders to elevate recovered gang member’s masculine expressions above those of newer members, such performances aligned recovered gang masculinity to fit with hegemonic masculine expressions. Importantly, however, neither program sought to erase all vestiges of a gang past.

Are gang recovery programs and processes ultimately empowering or disempowering? Previous research on therapeutic and religious approaches holds contrasting views. Some scholars have emphasized the long arm of the state in studies of therapeutic rehabilitation, suggesting that these programs simply propagate state power and encourage the disciplining of docile bodies

and conformity (i.e., Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Carr 2010; Fairbanks 2009; Haney 2010). Scholars in the sociology of religion have emphasized the empowering potential of Pentecostalism (i.e., Leon 1998; Sanchez-Walsh 2003; Vásquez et al. 2003; Vigil 1982). This strikes us a false binary. Institutionalized forms of talk in recovery programs allow for the possibility of both socialization into mainstream institutions and empowerment. Through verbal communication in gang recovery, men learn to distance themselves from gang behavior and to align themselves with conventional masculine expressions such as working, providing for, and nurturing one's family.

Chicano men were able to facilitate exit from gangs by promoting new ideals of masculinity and rules of discursive interaction, but solving the gang problem is not just about talk. Pentecostal evangelism and the 12-step model are undergirded by deeper social currents in American society; by placing the individual at the center of change, through verbal self-examination and testimonials, gang recovery programs are drawing on American individualism and therapeutic mechanisms of the twenty-first century. Used alone, these approaches do nothing to address the deeper, structural issues that underlie marginality and gang involvement: neoliberalism, segregation, educational exclusion, economic instability, and the erosion of jobs. Work that allows for dignity, honor, and a living wage still plays an important role in shaping the lives of marginalized, urban residents. Given the crisis of joblessness and the prominence of drug addiction among marginalized men of color in cities today, recovery programs need to include both forums for verbally renegotiating masculine identities, as well as access to education, skills training, and well-paying, stable work.

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