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Gloria Anzaldúa’s Seven Stages of “Conocimiento” in Redefining Latino Masculinity: José’s Story

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Abstract

Using a case study method, this article applies the Chicana feminist framework of Conocimiento as proposed by Gloria Anzaldúa to analyze the transformation of one individual as he readjusts to family life after imprisonment. José’s story is presented in detail and begins with his arrest, conviction and time in prison for selling drugs. After his release from prison to live with his family in Northern California, the narrative then shifts to illustrate the principles of Conocimiento used by Jose’s feminist sisters as a viable tool for transforming masculinities. According to the writings by Gloria Anzaldúa, the process of Conocimiento consists of seven stages that help individuals to reconsider and readjust their ideas, motivations, and beliefs, all in the service of moving forward in their lives. Conocimiento, in conjunction with an environment of caring broadly defined as community, family, and educators, can indeed offer valuable lessons in transforming Latino masculinities.

Keywords: Latino masculinity, case study, feminism

Siete estados de “Conocimiento” de Gloria Anzaldúa en la Redefinición de la Masculinidad Latina: La Historia de la Vida de José’

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Resumen

Analizando un caso en detalle, este artículo aplica lo que llaman las feministas chicanas el método de Conocimiento. El método, primeramente propuesto por Gloria Anzaldúa, es aplicado en el análisis de la transformación de un individuo cuando se reintegra a su familia después de estar previamente encarcelada. El caso de José empieza con su arresto, convicción y su tiempo en prisión por traficar en drogas. La narrativa cambia después de que José termina su condena y va a vivir con sus hermanas y el resto de su familia en el norte de California. El enfoque es en el proceso de Conocimiento usado por las hermanas de José para ayudarlo a reajustarse a su vida familiar y transformar sus ideas de la masculinidad. De acuerdo con los escritos de Gloria Anzaldúa, el proceso de Conocimiento tiene siete etapas que ayudan al individuo a recapacitar y reajustar sus ideas, sus motivaciones, sus creencias, todo en el servicio para moverse adelante en sus vidas. Conocimiento, en este caso, es usado conjunto con un ambiente familiar, en comunidad, y con la ayuda de educadores, para ofrecer lecciones importantes para transformar las masculinidades latinas.

Palabras clave: masculinidad latina, estudio de caso study, feminismo



“**P**epe anda muy mal. Tienen que hablarle. Tenemos miedo de que las cosas no acaben bien (Pepe is on the wrong path. You have to call him. We are afraid that things will not end well).” This was the content of the long-distance phone I received from my cousin living in Minnesota. My cousin was worried about my brother who was being tagged by the police for rumored drug sales. My brother was not a big-time dealer, just one who was trying to survive as well as maintain his habit. I tried but never reached my brother by phone. Then it happened. An undercover DEA agent¹ set up what seemed like a drug deal of a lifetime for someone not used to the “big time.” José (a.k.a. Pepe² within the family) took the bait, hoping to score enough resources to help support his girlfriend and her two children. The drug deal was intentionally planned to require crossing over state lines, making it a federal offense subject to a long and mandatory prison sentence. Under federal law, a sentencing judge has almost no discretion to depart from strict sentencing guidelines after someone is convicted of a federal drug offense. Under the Federal sentencing guidelines, José was facing a minimum sentence of five years and a maximum of 25 years. Our sister Arcelia, who at the time of his sentencing was a public defender in California and was well versed in sentencing proceedings, immediately flew to Iowa where José’s trial was being held. In an imposing federal courthouse, she tearfully testified on José’s behalf, relating his family background, his character, and the family’s love for him. Based on her testimony, proof of his honorable discharge from the U.S. Navy, a lack of criminal history, and a character statement from José’s high school basketball coach, the judge did something miraculous: he sentenced José to the absolute minimum possible under the law—five years and three months in federal prison. Most individuals convicted of the same offense would receive somewhere between the minimum and maximum sentences, approximately 15 years, especially if no one advocates for them. Many judges are not socialized to see the possible good beyond a brown person in shackles and perceive convicted men of Color as nothing more than their penal transgressions. José’s fate was signed, sealed, delivered—five years and three months in prison and four years of probation. His life belonged to the criminal justice system for the next nine years.

In March of 2005 José was released to a halfway house in Salinas, California, where he was to reside for six months until he would be released to live with our family, 36 miles north in the city of Santa Cruz. For the next five years, José would dedicate his life to seeking redemption for all that had happened during and before his incarceration— experiences that had led him to his current status as a parolee, living in the care of his family in a new community, in a strange region of the country, with few prospects for his future. The dominant narrative is that the former inmate would be out of prison for a year at most before returning to drugs and eventually to prison. Given the challenges José was facing, what were the chances that José could escape such a dire prediction? And for our purposes here, what could the writings by Chicana feminists offer to help change the expected course already assigned to him? Below I provide some answers.

Intersectional Identities at Work: José’s Story

To examine how the feminist principles embodied in intersectionality are factors in life situations, I use José’s experiences as a testimonio (testimony). At the end of his prison term, José was released to live close to three of his sisters, all of whom identify and live as feminists³. He also joined an extended family of lawyers who have worked as public defenders, as well as my husband, Professor Craig Haney, who is a renowned expert on prison conditions and readjustment after incarceration. However, even with these significant resources, formerly incarcerated individuals rarely succeed in “making it” after release from prison. Even notable families such as the Kennedy’s contain sad trajectories of many family members who were never able to overcome their addictions.

This case study is a feminist example that takes context, community, relationships, and a redefinition of masculinity to help one individual overcome the deleterious effects of incarceration and find redemption. I relate from my personal standpoint how I, together with my family, and our community applied, without conscious intent, the theoretical underpinnings of Chicana feminisms and intersectionality to help José reintegrate into his family and his newfound community in Northern California.

Contextual Factors: La Red (The Network) of Caring

Fortunately for my brother, his family happened to live in a community widely known for its liberal politics, feminist leanings, and ethics of caring. Santa Cruz is a progressive college town that supports non-traditional behaviors of all sorts. In particular, there is a general commitment to de-stigmatize previous incarceration as exhibited in the city government, which, for the most part, assumes that individuals are capable of change and understands that contextual factors can contribute to negative behaviors. Drug addiction, in particular, is de-stigmatized. Drug use is perceived as not necessarily deviant but as socially constructed. Criminalizing drug use is seen as the means by which the state punishes particular populations. In this community, José did not automatically stand out, either by appearance or by previous history. Although a predominantly white community⁴, the population of Santa Cruz is largely dedicated to extending a degree of tolerance toward all citizens with a lively street life with many non-traditional residents. This street life my brother found ideologically congruent with his views as he considered himself an “aging hippie” with a deep love for the music, particularly the genres of blues and rock-and-roll. He felt an openness and fellowship with Santa Cruz residents, especially those who embraced alternative lifestyles. In such a community, he began to heal from past stigmas and found camaraderie with “street people” by engaging in “pick up” games of chess, befriending several “homeless” (or non-housed, as called in Santa Cruz) individuals, and occasionally treating them to coffee or giving them a few dollars for food. He would often sit with them on one of the many benches lining the main street in downtown Santa Cruz and catching up on what was happening in their lives.

Integral to this ethos of caring is the large network of nonprofit organizations in the city of Santa Cruz that, working in tandem with county agencies, are committed to a philosophy of rehabilitation and recovery. Among the many nonprofits in Santa Cruz County dedicated to rehabilitation are Barrios Unidos, Defensa de Mujeres, Hermanas, Fenix, Friends Outside, GEMMA, Pajaro Valley Prevention and Student Service, R.I.S.E., SI SE PUEDE (Yes You Can), Santa Cruz Youth Services, and Santa Cruz Probation Services. Crucial to José’s reintegration, however, was the nonprofit organization Barrios Unidos, expertly managed under the

49 *Hurtado – Redefining Latino Masculinity*

directorship of Nane Alejandre. Of the many factors that led José to redirect his path, Barrios and the guidance provided by its staff were indeed central to Jose not returning to prison.

The Role Of Barrios Unidos In José's Journey To Reintegration

The organization of Barrios Unidos (BU) started in 1977 as a community-based movement dedicated to ending urban violence in California. In 1993, Santa Cruz Barrios Unidos became a nonprofit organization dedicated to the prevention and curtailment of “violence amongst youth within Santa Cruz County by providing them with life enhancing alternatives”⁵. BU, as it is commonly known, adheres to five primary strategies to accomplish its mission: 1) leadership and human capital development, 2) civic participation and community mobilization, 3) cultural arts and recreational activities, and 4) coalition building. Over the course of many years, BU has developed a model that seeks to reclaim and restore the lives of struggling Latino youth and men while promoting unity among families and neighbors through community building. BU aligns itself with the philosophy developed during the Chicano Movement and identified in the writing of Chicano activist Corky Gonzalez who drew a “straight line of cause and effect between the loss of cultural identity and the frustrations, anger, and breakdown of communal fabric that led to gang and family violence,” according to Acosta (2007, p.xli). The leaders of BU committed themselves to:

[S]piritual expression and indigenous ceremony centerpieces of their theory of social change. To them it had become evident that standard conventional interventions alone, emphasizing either constructive alternatives to violence and crime or official criminal sanctions, could not be relied upon to solve the problems of Latino or other youth involved in gang and related antisocial activities. Instead, as they saw it, cultural awakening, awareness, and respect were the essential keys to progress. As a result, *Cultura es Cura* (Culture is the Cure) came to be known as BU's guiding philosophical tenet, and a wide array of alternative healing and consciousness-raising practices came to anchor the organization's efforts. This was considered groundbreaking, faith-based work aimed at ending the violence in communities across

America. Much of BU's development in this direction was inspired by indigenous Native American traditions and influences, including those extending back to the origins of tribal civilizations throughout the Americas (p. xliv).

From its inception, Barrios Unidos was in coalition with other organizations, progressive women and other allies that were dedicated to helping men of Color reintegrate after incarceration and to preventing the violence rampant in many Latino/a communities. BU has a network of political allies that are highly visible in the public arena. Among the strong supporters of BU and its founder Nane Alejandrez are the singer and activist Harry Belafonte, the actor and activist Danny Glover, and the co-founder of the United Farm Workers' Union Dolores Huerta. Another important contributor to the mission of BU is Ms. Connie (Constance) Rice⁶ (Acosta, 2007). Ms. Rice is head of the Los Angeles-based Advancement Project dedicated to engineering "large-scale systems change to remedy inequality, expand opportunity and open paths to upward mobility. Our goal is that members of all communities have the safety, opportunity and health they need to thrive".⁷ The Advancement Project focuses on four areas: educational equity, equity in public funds, healthy city, and urban peace. Ms. Rice's allegiance to BU is particularly aligned with the latter area of focus—urban peace—which entails a commitment to "reduce and prevent community violence, making poor neighborhoods safer so that children can learn, families can thrive and communities can prosper".⁸

Ms. Rice is one of the most widely recognized and effective civil rights attorneys in the country. Her dedication to BU's mission stems from an overall concern with the well-being of communities of Color. The fate of the men who come from these communities is not independent of the long-term health of the families living in these communities. As Ms. Rice states: "Families are losing an entire generation and community of men to incarceration related to drugs, gang association, and street violence. Even a ferocious feminist like me knows that if you take the men out of the community, the community dies" (Acosta, 2007, p.177). This is a crucial point in understanding the demands of masculinity and the effects of drugs on poor communities. Masculinity demands silence about areas of vulnerabilities that may bring shame and loss of pride to the self. The exaltation of the "silent man" or the "indifferent man" may have merit, but

equally viable and less acknowledged is the possibility that many men feel as much as women but they are not provided with the language or opportunity to articulate their fears. For many poor men, the social and familial expectation of becoming providers is immensely stressful, particularly when there are few jobs available. Turning to drug dealing becomes a viable, if not the only viable, alternative to fulfilling the role of providers (Payne, 2006). That certainly was the case for José—at the time of his arrest, he was dealing in drugs as a way to provide for his girlfriend and her two children. They had become a family and the small town in Minnesota where they lived offered few employment opportunities for him to effectively provide for his new family. José took the fall for drug dealing and his relationship with his girlfriend and children fell apart after his incarceration.

Providing Safe Spaces: Barrios Unidos Philosophy of Acceptance, Personal Responsibility, And Cultural Restitution

When José was released from the halfway house, he needed an organization like BU, where not only the staff but also the founders and supporters, like Ms. Rice, understand the connection between drug dealing, economic survival, and the restrictions imposed by masculinity. Ms. Rice as well as other supporters knew José's story all too well and their efforts in aligning with BU is to prevent José and other formerly incarcerated men from returning to prison.

Formerly incarcerated individuals often need “a safe space,” a haven from the outside world where the norms and rules of interaction can be confusing and contradictory. The space provided by BU became the saving grace for my brother. At BU, Nane Alejandre and his team established a norm of non-judgmental and spiritual acceptance. Upon entering Barrios, the men usually receive a hug and a greeting that makes reference to “the creator” as the source of guidance and solace. It is a place that does not tolerate drug or alcohol use. In every meeting the philosophy of the organization is re-inscribed verbally and through ritual. Staff meetings begin with everyone standing in a circle, thanking the creator for another day and for the opportunity to do good deeds in the world. Sage is burned and the ancestors are summoned to oversee the organization's activities and

goals. The safe space created in Barrios Unidos is extended to the small parcel of land the organization owns in the hills of the Santa Cruz Mountains. BU built a sweat lodge as a gathering place for different groups of men to come together to sweat and “detox” their bodies as well as their minds. The philosophy developed by Barrios Unidos and the various founders of the organization was to aid men of all ages (and to a lesser extent, girls and young women) who have been institutionalized and need to re-enter society by inhabiting the transitional sacred space provided by the organization.

When José left the halfway house, the conditions of his parole required that he obtain a job within a couple of weeks. He was given a list of potential employers—businesses that had volunteered to hire individuals who had been incarcerated. Most of the jobs were entry level, paying low wages, and highly competitive given the scarcity of opportunities for individuals exiting a halfway house. José suffered several rejections and there were no clear employment prospects in sight. Every rejection was painful for my brother, only reminding him of the stigma attached to someone just released from prison. I stopped sleeping and began to worry that José would be returned to prison if he were unable to find a job. The very thought of his potential incarceration drove me into a frenzy of despair. The week before the employment deadline set by José’s parole officer, I met with Nane and other BU staff over another matter⁹ for breakfast at a local diner. As we were leaving, Nane asked me how my brother was doing. I told him that José was having trouble finding a job and I could not face the prospect of his return to prison. I burst into tears and Nane leaned over, put his hand on my shoulder, and said, “We are not going to let that happen.” I could hardly believe that his dedication to keeping my brother home was as strong as my own. We made arrangements for my brother to be hired by Barrios Unidos for a temporary part-time job, with enough hours and responsibilities to keep José home. Nane wisely told me as my brother began work, “We’ll see how it goes after three months. Sometimes it works out, and sometimes it doesn’t.” His warning felt like an honest assessment of the situation. He did not know my brother or his skills, and most importantly, he did not know whether José would fit with the philosophy of kindness, gentleness, and acceptance fostered at Barrios Unidos. Nane’s warning also made me aware of the great risk he was taking

in giving my brother this opportunity. I felt more grateful than ever because unlike me, he did not know my brother and yet he was willing to put himself and his organization on the line for a stranger. I felt the power of acceptance and faith promoted by Barrios Unidos and embodied by Nane Alejandrez. Barrios was indeed an organization of last resort for the many men of all ages who cannot find recourse if they want to change their lives away from the streets and back into their communities. I was humbled by Nane's help.

Fortunately, José's part-time employment at BU was extended after three months. In fact, he became a fulltime employee and stayed on as a valued member of Nane Alejandrez's team for two years. For José, BU became a source for community and belonging. BU's emphasis on the restitution of Chicano/a culture and the use of indigenous rituals were an essential aspect of José's recovery. Whereas Jose was heavily opposed to twelve-step programs because of their Western, Judeo-Christian religious emphasis, BU's philosophy of *la Cultura es Cura* (the Cure is Culture) resonated with Jose's worldview. Furthermore, BU's dedication to youth reignited José's passion for making a difference in young people's lives. José had been an extraordinary athlete playing varsity basketball in high school. He had even played briefly for the local college in South Texas after he finished his seven-and-half-year volunteer stint in the navy. His dream job had always been to become a high school English teacher and basketball coach combining his love of sports with his love of books and interacting with young people. Through his work at BU, José was inspired by the young people at the organization and began to find a new path in his life.

The next question that arose was how could we help José implement his newfound inspiration to work with young people in an educational setting.

Public Education Committed to Rehabilitation

Community College

After José's temporary employment at BU was settled, the subject of college was raised during one of the regular family meetings my two sisters and I had with him. All three sisters held advanced degrees and we believed

education had been our salvation from the grueling work both of our parents had been locked into in South Texas. Our parents were immigrants and had not had the educational opportunities we had being raised in the United States. Our father was a farmworker and died prematurely from a heart attack at the age of 59. As an uninsured farmworker, he never had access to regular medical health care to adequately attend to his diabetes. Together our parents never earned more than \$15,000 a year while raising four children in the border town of McAllen, Texas. In light of our family's history, we knew that José's long-term success was highly dependent on obtaining an education. José had the advantage of always excelling academically in school, which included his graduating with honors from high school and obtaining advanced technological training when he joined the navy shortly after graduation. When he was honorably discharged seven and half years later, he attempted college several times unsuccessfully until he finally obtained an associate's degree from Worthington Community College¹⁰ a few years before he was arrested in Worthington, Minnesota.

As a professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC), I knew many of the professors and administrators on campus. I contacted a fellow Chicano, Francisco Hernández, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs to help me find the appropriate channels to guide my brother's academic plan. Vice Chancellor Hernandez referred me to Ronaldo Ramirez, who at the time was working in the Office of Development. His wife Olga Nájera-Ramirez was a professor in the department of anthropology. Both Ronaldo and Olga had helped members of their extended families transfer from community college to four-year universities by engaging the help of Ms. Barbara Love, UCSC's Articulation Officer, who had been an effective liaison for these transfers. My brother and I made an appointment with Ms. Love after obtaining all of my brother's transcripts from his various excursions into higher education. Ms. Love was true to her name—a caring, knowledgeable, and non-judgmental staff person who never made my brother feel shame because at his late age (he was in his late 40s) attempting to begin a college degree as a reentry student. Furthermore, she did not blink when he laid out his educational trajectory during his incarceration where he had taken all of the limited number of training programs available to him. In fact she thoughtfully proposed ways in which the prison program certifications might earn him additional college credits.

55 *Hurtado – Redefining Latino Masculinity*

When we left Ms. Love's office, my brother and I hugged each other feeling hope for his future. Ms. Love had given him a series of courses to take at the local community college that would allow Jose to transfer to UCSC—a top-ranked research university. Ms. Love had demonstrated the open-mindedness prevalent at the university and in the city of Santa Cruz; she had not judged *a priori* someone's educational potential because of a previous history of incarceration.

The University

The University of California, Santa Cruz campus is a liberal institution dedicated to extending and dovetailing with the values of the surrounding community of Santa Cruz. The university is nationally recognized as having an extremely liberal faculty that consistently reinforces a view of incarceration as a social issue, and not as a result of individual failings. Faculty and administrative units on campus adhere to a philosophy of redemption and of extending resources and kindness to those who have been incarcerated. The staff, for the most part, is also dedicated to progressive ideas of collectivity and of providing assistance to those most in need, including those previously incarcerated. The university includes diverse staff in key positions of influence, many of whom have experienced the pain of having relatives incarcerated and the terrible impact that incarceration has on all family members.

When José successfully finished the community college courses necessary to transfer to UCSC, he found yet another network of caring and assistance that was also helpful in furthering his goal of obtaining a bachelor's degree. Below I outline several of the crucial units and staff members that were critical in Jose's educational success.

The Chicano Latino Ethnic Resource Center

The Chicano Latino Resource Center, or El Centro (The Center) as it is commonly known, was headed by Ms. Rosie Cabrera, who had graduated from San Jose State, a university 45 minutes from the city of Santa Cruz. Rosie, as most undergraduates know her, is responsible for providing culturally relevant programming and support to undergraduates; a side

benefit of her activities is the extensive involvement of Chicano Latino/a graduate students in El Centro's endeavors. Rosie received José with open arms. The Center was an important haven for José during his undergraduate years, as he was at least thirty years older than the typical undergraduate on campus. Rosie's inclusion of José in various student activities provided a transitional space for José as he ventured from the now familiar culture of BU to the student culture prevalent in undergraduate research universities. Rosie and El Centro became a second sacred space for José.

The Faculty

José attended UCSC for two years, completing a bachelor's degree in Community Studies at the end of this time. During his entire UCSC term, there was not a single faculty member who did not offer to extend themselves to help José with his educational endeavors. One particular professor who was critical to José's success at the university was Mike Rotkin, a lecturer in the Community Studies Department. Professor Rotkin took José under his wing and supported all of his efforts, including supervising his undergraduate thesis, which was based on the work he was performing at BU where he was counseling youth who had been pushed out of the K-12 school system. In addition to helping him with his thesis, Professor Rotkin became José's greatest advocate, writing him letters of recommendation when, upon graduation from UCSC, José decided to apply to the graduate school in social work at San Jose State University. Professor Rotkin wrote the following recommendation for Jose:

I am very pleased to give you my most positive reference for José Hurtado...I consider him the single, best-prepared student for this professional certification among the scores of thousands of students I have taught over the past forty-two years at the University of California, Santa Cruz. José has received nothing but straight As in our program, and as you will see in his overall transcript, the few grades he has received of less than an A are balanced by several A+ grades, something we do not issue very often here at UCSC Having been the Mayor of Santa Cruz, California, five times and elected to the City Council six times, I have a very good idea of what any community will expect of a person holding this professional

license and I have absolutely no doubt that José is ready to move beyond his past and I know that he is well prepared for work as a LCSW. I also have taught in both men's and women's prisons in California.... José has completed his required federal probation without incident, and he is ready and willing to use what he learned....I was the academic supervisor of a full-time, six-month internship/field study that José conducted with Barrios Unidos and Youth Services here in Santa Cruz. José received glowing letters of evaluation from all of his supervisors in the field. His work for me is simply among the best I have ever received from a student working in the area of youth counseling. José is already working at a professional level and was assigned a counseling caseload (under supervision) at Youth Services while he was still an undergraduate student.... José has been in a unique position to reach some of the most intractable youth at various levels of gang affiliation and legal trouble. Many of the clients with whom he has been working, are at serious risk for a lifetime in the criminal justice system and José, ... is bilingual and quickly able to develop a rapport with the youth and their families....I have probably recommended a couple of hundred students to social work programs over the past three decades. I have never had a student who was better prepared to be an outstanding practitioner in the field of social work. José has a warm and engaging personality and quickly wins the affection and support of everyone with whom he works. His experience both in life and as a student has prepared him exceptionally well to be an outstanding professional in the field of social work.

I have quoted Prof. Rotkin's recommendation letter at length because of its detailed articulation of his views on the reintegration of previously incarcerated men. Furthermore, Prof. Rotkin's consistent message of hope for someone who has overcome a difficult past is not necessarily the norm, even in the most prestigious universities where faculty are highly educated about criminal justice issues. Prof. Rotkin's position is also illustrative of the relationships among the city of Santa Cruz, the elected officials of the city (he was both mayor and city council person multiple times), and the University. The significance of positive interactions and consistent views toward reintegration after incarceration should not be taken for granted in fortifying the chances for José's educational success. It is noteworthy that I did not personally know Prof. Rotkin. His interest in José's success was

purely as a teacher and a person interested in the well being of a male, reentry student, with a difficult past who was invested in maximizing his educational opportunities. No doubt that my brother's performance definitely influenced Prof. Rotkin's positive evaluations. My brother had always been an excellent student, even when in prison, but previously no one had taken the time and effort to reinforce his positive behaviors in the academy. Most importantly, although Prof. Rotkin's support was central to José's success, all of the faculty and staff José encountered at UCSC instilled in him a similar message of hope and inspiration that he was capable of forging a new life through education.

The Family (Extended by Friends)

Of course, the primary responsibility in helping José reintegrate once he left prison, was up to our immediate family, including my sisters, my husband, our children, our niece, our sister-in-law, and my elderly mother (beyond this, our larger extended family of uncles and cousins live in Mexico and we have had little or no contact with them over the years.) Not only were the ideas of reintegration and redemption of previously incarcerated individuals central to our beliefs as a family, but every single family member worked within, or had connection with, the criminal justice system—as lawyers (public defenders and public interest law), professors (writing about the criminal (in)justice system in the United States and abroad), and practitioners (social workers). However, it bears mentioning that our dedication as a family to fight for those mistreated in prison is not a safeguard that once a family member leaves prison, he will in fact survive the brutal realities of reintegration.

In addition to the immediate family, we are fortunate to have a network of friends that we consider part of our extended family, including fellow UCSC professors, graduate students, and staff members, who also undergirded our familial efforts. This extended familial network gave José a broader community who, at different times, played crucial roles in easing him over the difficult hurdles as José learned to be a free man again.

One of the many difficult obstacles for previously incarcerated individuals is to reintegrate into the families left behind and to find a community that consists of a circle of friends. In José's case, our entire

59 *Hurtado – Redefining Latino Masculinity*

family was beyond elated to have him back with us. During his five years or so of incarceration, my sisters, mother, and I (several times accompanied by me) made yearly pilgrimages to visit José in whichever prison he was assigned to¹¹. The task of familial reintegration takes time and resources. The fact that everyone in our family was a professional at the time that José was incarcerated facilitated the financial cost of visiting him and sending him money on a regular basis. In addition, my mother has always been a prodigious letter writer, and, as she was retired by the time José was in prison, she religiously sent José weekly letters and a small amount of money to help him with expenses not covered by the very stringent federal funding for prisoners. Certainly when José was released to the halfway house he was not given any clothing, toiletries, or full meals. Our family pooled their resources to provide these essentials for him. In addition we drove every weekend to see him, at least 90 miles for several of us. Once he was permitted day visits away from the halfway house and eventually weekend visits, we all took turns picking Jose up and driving him to Santa Cruz to spend time with the family.

Our extended family of friends readily adopted my brother as part of their circle of friends as well. Friends like Ronaldo Ramirez, who had helped us locate Barbara Love, the Articulation Officer, Mrinal Sinha, a graduate student in the UCSC Psychology Department, Ciel Benedetto, UCSC's Affirmative Action Officer, and Sophia Garcia, a Financial Aid Officer at UCSC, all found commonalities with my brother and befriended him and supported his efforts. No one held him suspect because he had been previously incarcerated. His entry into our extended network of friends and family also adhered to the same set of values we observed, such as being non-judgmental about José's past and enormously committed to helping him succeed, both in school and in life.

Critical Encounters: The Generosity of the Web of Caring

In helping José's transition from the halfway house to living with our family, two critical incidents are worth noting. While incarcerated, inmates are in close quarters surrounded by others literally twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, making it very difficult upon release for them to be alone. Depression is not uncommon, and social isolation is dreaded until

inmates readjust to life on the “outside.” Furthermore, total institutions like prisons do not allow individual choice—in what inmates wear, when and what they eat, when and how much they sleep, and even when to shower. Recreation or hobbies are rare, and reading (with limited access to number and variety of books) is one of the very few outlets for inmates who are literate. Television watching, although accessible, is also regulated, as are other sorts of media such as films. Consequently, a monumental adjustment once a person is released from prison is being alone and forging new friendships. My brother had several advantages—he was an avid reader (science fiction, among other genres)¹², a passionate music listener, and an excellent chess player. Upon his release from the halfway house, José lived with my sister Maria (a graduate from UCSC and a social worker by training), at the time serving as the Deputy Director of Parks and Recreation for the city of San Jose, and our grown daughter Erin, an investigator at the Santa Cruz Public Defender’s Office (also a UCSC graduate). Between the three of us, we ensured that José spent very little time alone during the first year after his release. On occasions when family members were not available, my then graduate student and now professor Mrinal Sinha (Ranu to his friends and family) would play chess with José in downtown Santa Cruz. Ranu spent hours with José, talking, joking, and generally kibitzing about their chess skills. They would also pick up chess games with others at the local coffee shops. Ronaldo Ramirez also stepped in and asked José to hangout with him; they would reminisce about growing up in Texas and share the many regional stories South Texans have in common. The importance of this transitional bridge of friendships cannot be underestimated as former inmates adjust to the hustle and bustle of regular life with no guards and wardens monitoring their every move.

As part of the reintegration process, the family decided, with José’s agreement, that we would be open about his incarceration history. We were not ashamed of what had happened, and, like so many others, if José had received the appropriate treatment for his drug addiction he would have never been incarcerated. He was one of the 60% of non-violent offenders languishing in prisons and jails because of drug offenses when treatment is what they desperately need (Schmitt, Warner & Gupta, 2010). As a consequence, everyone who knew us knew José’s history. Our agreed-upon openness allowed our extended networks to be on the lookout for

61 *Hurtado – Redefining Latino Masculinity*

opportunities to help José. Sophia Garcia, one of my longest friendships in Santa Cruz, offered one such opportunity. As Financial Aid Officer at UCSC she knew of an academic scholarship for re-entry students to obtain tuition and a modest stipend for school expenses. José applied and wrote the requisite essay explaining his circumstances, and Sophia was a formidable advocate on his behalf. José obtained the scholarship and it ameliorated his financial burden as he obtained one of the best undergraduate educations in the country, if not the world.

The Boat

As mentioned earlier, prisons hamper individuals from developing healthy engagements and interests. Therefore, once released from prison, it is not uncommon for many former inmates to return to their old habits of drinking and drug use. In the case of my brother, he had a deep love of the ocean. He had been a “navy man” and had traveled the world on board a guided missile cruiser. One of his favorite activities in Santa Cruz was to take long ocean walks along beautiful West Cliff Drive. Fortuitously, our friends and colleagues Dr. Heather Bullock and Dr. Julian Fernald had a sailboat that they no longer wanted to keep. When they found out in one of our family gatherings that José had a deep connection to the ocean, they offered him the sailboat as a gift. My brother was dumbfounded by their generosity. Heather and Julian reassured him that they wanted him to have it. For the next three years, sailing in the Monterey Bay became my brother’s salvation. Whenever he felt anxious, depressed, or overwhelmed by the number of changes he was undergoing, he would go sailing. He invited friends and acquaintances, including young people from BU, to experience sailing in the bay, his form of renewal. The boat became the gift that allowed him to heal spiritually by commuting with nature and feeling the generosity of spirit of two of our closest friends who gave to Jose simply because they were invested in his well being and success.



Figure 1. José in Santa Cruz with the boat gifted to him.

Media to the Rescue

José re-joined a family of extremely busy professionals. By the time he was released from prison, all of our careers were in full swing. My husband and I are professors; our three children were grown and two were about to attend law school and another one was already a professor at a prestigious university on the East Coast; my youngest sister and her partner were lawyers in the San Francisco Public Defender's Office; and my next youngest sister was a high level city administrator in San Jose, and her daughter was attending community college in San Francisco. Under these circumstances, José could have quickly become alienated within a family that, no matter how well intentioned, had very little time to spend with him on a daily basis. Our family, fortunately, lived within a relatively close geographical area in Northern California—Santa Cruz County and the cities of San Jose and San Francisco. As such, we made a commitment to spend all holidays together at our home in Santa Cruz. As the oldest sibling, I was the closest in age to José and in many ways the most familiar with his upbringing, given our childhood experiences together. My sisters are 16 years and 9 years younger than José. I also lived in the same city as José and had the most flexibility because of my senior academic appointment.

63 *Hurtado – Redefining Latino Masculinity*

During the first year after José left the halfway house, I became the closest I have ever been to him. However, despite these all the resources I just listed, daily interactions were not always feasible, especially when I was required to travel for professional purposes. Fortunately I came up with a solution that at first I thought would never work.

The Internet and iTunes

José has always been technically inclined and enjoys working with gadgets. During his tour of duty in the Navy, he served as a radar technician. Yet, in the five years he had been incarcerated, the world had undergone a technological revolution—cell phones, the Internet, personal computers, digital cameras, among many other developments. Most prisons, do not allow access to technology in any broad sense. In fact, during his incarceration we rarely talked by phone to my brother. We relied mostly on hand-written notes and annual visits. José was religious about sending us birthday cards, often hand-made, when he had no access to purchasing them, and long, elaborate letters. When he was released from prison on March 3, 2005, he was driven from Florence, Colorado, a rural town 110 miles from to Denver and dropped off downtown to catch the Greyhound bus for the ten-hour ride to Salinas, California, where he was admitted to the halfway house for the next four months¹³. José had to wait 12 hours in downtown Denver for the bus to California. To pass the time, he walked up and down Denver’s outdoor mall. He was startled because many people seemed to be talking to themselves as they strolled hurriedly by. At first, he thought these people were addressing him and he would begin to respond. He then realized that they were wearing earphones and were talking on their cell phones. This was only the beginning of his constant surprises he encountered heralding the technological advances that had taken place during his incarceration.

Given his ability and interest in technology, I immediately introduced my brother to email and iTunes—two technologies that literally saved his life and mine. Soon after he left the halfway house, I gave José my aging computer on which I had downloaded over a thousand songs. I knew his love of music and I recalled how he had bought a small radio while he was in prison with the money my mother had sent him. He would listen to NPR

(National Public Radio) but his favorite activity was listening to blues stations. I gave him a brief lesson on operating iTunes, showing him how to download songs, build playlists, and burn CDs. He learned quickly and iTunes became his new passion (one that he still holds dear to his heart—this past Christmas, as a stocking stuffer, we all received CDs of his favorite songs specifically tailored to each family member). I also taught him how to do Google searches on the Internet, including locating song lyrics and biographies of his favorite artists. We opened an email account for José and created a family email alias for group communication. For the next two years, I received daily emails from my brother, giving me an overview of his day, his feelings, and his dreams. I responded to all of his emails and our relationship deepened as we reconnected as siblings and as family members. The family alias allowed us to communicate each other's milestones (José's grades, my new publications, my husband's honors, and many more family achievements). José developed an email relationship with various colleagues and friends, including his professors, fellow students, and our extended family/friendship network. During his first Christmas at home, we gave him a digital camera and he became the official family photographer. Over the years, José has taken thousands of family pictures celebrating a variety of events, building an archive that has become precious to all of us. The developments in technology saved him and us by keeping us connected and informed about each other's lives.

Individual Identity: Agentic Tools for Survival and Crucial Points of Transition

Conocimiento¹⁴: Affirmation and Consciousness Raising

My two sisters and I consider ourselves feminists. Our dedication as feminists to full integration of our brother into the family included using Gloria Anzaldúa's process of *conocimiento* as a form of consciousness raising—an activity feminists engaged in during the height of the White feminist movement in the 1970s. White feminisms used CR groups, as they were called then, to help women articulate their vulnerabilities but also to provide a feedback loop to raise consciousness about possible blind spots that could contribute to their oppression. Gloria Anzaldúa (2002) developed

conocimiento as a culturally specific method situated within indigenous beliefs about the connection between the spirit and consciousness.

As noted by several scholars, prison can be one of the most racist environments systematically created by institutional policies. Prisoners are assigned living quarters based on race, and racialized groups like the Aryan Brotherhood, Black Guerilla Family, and Nuestra Familia reside in designated areas of prisons, allowing for interracial animosities to ferment, develop, and be acted upon through open displays of aggression and even murder. Furthermore, prisons are gender segregated and in high security prisons, inmates do not have intimate contact with women for years and, possibly, if serving life sentences, for their entire lives once they are imprisoned. Under these circumstances, ideologies against race difference and misogyny are not only promoted but are so deeply engrained they become naturalized. Upon leaving prison, formerly incarcerated men are required to learn a new discourse in which racialization, homophobia, and misogyny are not as freely accepted in everyday communication or banter. As feminists, my sisters and I had to confront my brother's ease with many expressions and attitudes that violated his otherwise easy-going and loving ways with everyone around him. My sisters and I had excruciating conversations among ourselves about whether we were being overly sensitive and politically demanding in criticizing his vocabulary, attitudes, and humor, or was our "calling him out" a feminist act that would ultimately raise his consciousness and make him aware that there is such thing as "words that wound" (Matsuda, Charles, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). However, we were also concerned about sending our brother into a state of shock—un *arrebato*, in Anzaldúan terms—if we pointed out his biased behavior? Would he feel attacked? Unloved? Alone? Thrown back into a dungeon of despair, the way he felt while he was in prison? After much trepidation, we decided to hold family meetings among the four of us (the three sisters and José) and begin the process of *conocimiento*.

Anzaldúa describes *conocimiento* as a seven-stage spiral process without a start or end point, moving forward continually and non-chronologically. *Conocimiento* begins with an *arrebato*—a jolt of awareness, a crash of emotional or physical sensation—igniting the second stage of *Nepantla*—a liminal space of openness to new perspectives. The *Coatlicue* state (named for a dark Mexican goddess) designates the third stage, which

is one of turmoil that new perspectives can often provoke. Growth is not easy or neat, and one of Anzaldúa's central insights is that experiencing pain is central to the process of coming to awareness. On the other side of the pain caused by the *arrebato*, individuals often find a path for action. The awareness can lead individuals to act productively in the world. The inner work may lead to public acts: the "crafting of a new personal narrative" that integrates the new awareness.

The process of *conocimiento* also requires that the new personal narrative be in dialogue with others—a potentially dangerous process because of the risks of rejection and conflict that could revert an individual back to the *Coatlicue* state. If individuals work through this stage, they can proceed to the seventh stage, enabling them to make holistic alliances with other individuals and groups to collaborate in producing positive engagements with the world. *Conocimiento* is a continuous process; all seven stages can be reached in a matter of hours or the process can take years. *Conocimiento* can change one of any of the individual's social identities, which are part of the overall intersectional identities (race awareness, for example) and yet be completely unaware of the oppression based on gender. As individuals explore every aspect of their intersectional identities, *conocimiento* can facilitate reaching these insights that lead from awareness to public, and many times, political actions.

From the beginning, the process of *conocimiento* worked well; our family meetings were full of insights and growth. The meetings gave us an opportunity to express our concerns but also to show our love and support while José listened and he, in turn, voiced his impressions and motivations for expressing himself the way he did. As a result of almost two years of these monthly meetings, we all changed. The sisters understood the trauma and isolation José had been subjected to and the context in which denigration of others is a way of survival. I, especially, came to understand the vulnerabilities that result from a socialization into masculinities, which do not allow men to connect, talk, and explore personal issues either with men or with women. We all were enriched by the experiences of our monthly meetings, as proposed by the process of *conocimiento*.

Social Psychological Reframing: The Dance of Survival through Mestiza Consciousness¹⁵

In his memoir (Baca, 2002), Jimmy Santiago Baca discusses the years he spent in prison and his will to survive and become a writer after his release. After five years in prison, Baca anxiously awaits his release on what he believes is the designated day of completion of his sentence.

April 17, my release date, finally arrived. I had my boxes packed, and I sat in my cell the whole day waiting for someone to come and get me, but nobody did. Then, toward the end of the day, a guard came to escort me to the Parole Board room. They had finally figured it out. But when I got to the door, the warden met me. Before I could walk in, he said it was the wrong day and ordered Mad Dog Madril [a guard] to return me to my cell. Where the Parole Board usually sat, the seats were empty. The warden was fucking with me. For days I said nothing, did nothing. I went to eat and then back to my cell. I was trying to hold myself together. I got another slip to appear before the Board for the following morning. All night I tossed, eyes wide open, staring into the cavernous cell-block space and wondering if I was ever going to get out. (p. 253-254)

After repeated delays of his prison release date, in one of the most poignant moments in the memoir, Baca narrates the turning point that almost resulted in his giving up hope of ever being a free man.

I was falling deeper and deeper into melancholy. The warden has finally won, I thought; he has finally broken my spirit. I was thinking of things I wouldn't ordinarily entertain. There was a certain convict who had taken a baseball bat and beaten a Chicano over the head. I had been playing handball when I saw it happen at the far end of the field. After finishing the game with Macaron, I walked over to the convict and told him that if I didn't get out, I was coming for him. (p. 254)

In addition to considering committing violence that was unthinkable for him before, Baca was also rethinking his long-term adaptation to a warped

environment where there was little room for affection and long-term physical comfort. In his words:

About this time a beautiful boy by the name of Chiquita had come to my cell and asked if I would be her sugar daddy. I had never messed around with a guy, fearing that it might ruin the pleasure I found in being with women. But now, thinking I might never get out, I told her that if I didn't make my Board, we'd talk, and in the meantime, I'd keep her under my wing and make sure nobody raped her. I'd never talked to fags in prison. But as Chiquita began to sit at my table in the chow hall, and as I listened to her talk, for the first time in my life I realized that some men really had female spirits. When I spoke to her, I was speaking to a woman. (p. 254-255)

The continued delays and lack of information drove Baca further to his breaking point:

By the beginning of June, I was cracking up. I had lost a lot of weight and I had sleeplessness circles under my eyes. I was belligerent and surly because I was supposed to be free but was still sitting in prison. I was already beginning to think that I might have to stay indefinitely or do my sentence over. (p. 256)

Then without warning, Baca was released from prison at four in the morning in June, three months after he was supposed to be released. To those who have not been incarcerated a three-month delay may seem trivial after so many years in prison and the rewards of freedom that await the newly released. For many inmates, however, who are denied freedom in all realms of their existence, any delay feels like death—a death they experience daily by being constantly monitored and by not exerting their human agency. Because of this psychological experience of loss of control, what seems like a “trivial postponement” can result in an inmate's throwing away their accumulated “credits” and reverting or even venturing into more destructive behaviors than before. For Baca, when he nearly gave up, he prepared himself to adopt the mentality of the incarcerated, including sexual practices that were not enticing before, as a way to survive this hellish environment from which he saw no escape.

69 *Hurtado – Redefining Latino Masculinity*

These choques (collisions) in Anzaldúan terms, come unexpectedly; even inmates are unaware of what will trigger an *arrebato* (cataclysm). In José's case, he had been on probation for four years¹⁶. As part of the conditions for the first six months of his probation, he had mandatory monthly visits to his probation officer in San Jose, California¹⁷. I always accompanied José to the probation office and we had lunch afterwards to alleviate the stress. In addition to the monthly visits to San Jose, other probation officers came to José's home to inspect his living quarters. For the first six months, José was required to call in every night from his home phone at 8 PM. If we had a family gathering, we rushed to his home so he could make the call. When the scheduled date for the end of his probation approached, José was beyond excited. He felt his absolute freedom within reach. Like Jimmy Santiago Baca who packed his belongings and waited in his cell expectantly, José gleefully called me on the day officially marking the end of his probation. We went out for a celebratory dinner and I commemorated the occasion by taking José's first photo as a free man. However, during the evening, he learned that the end of his probation had been delayed. In my eyes the delay seemed like a minor matter, given how much progress he was making otherwise—he was thriving at the university, he had a great job at BU that he enjoyed and for which he was receiving internship credit toward his undergraduate degree, and he was fully integrated into our family. Psychologically, none of these successes prevented José from becoming depressed upon hearing that the probation was still in place. It was the first time I felt scared that he might regress and do something unpredictable. I knew from reading my husband's work on reintegration that the feelings were real and I could not talk him out of them. Yet I could not risk José possibly undoing all that he had accomplished. Fortuitously, at that time I was writing a chapter on Gloria Anzaldúa's work and her influence on my work (*Hurtado, 2011*). As I re-read her sections on *mestiza consciousness* (*Anzaldúa, 1987*), I came across the following passage:

The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. (p. 79)

in my husband's area of work) that a delay in freedom was not a simple disappointment for José. I knew he felt defeated and put back in "the cage," as he often referred to his cell in prison. I knew it was urgent that I respond to his email quickly with an alternative "reframing"—one that would come naturally to most folks that had not experienced incarceration or those who have the facultad (the gift) to trigger a mestiza consciousness that rescues one's value from defeat. It is not to say that a mestiza consciousness necessarily averts the initial anger when one's agency is blocked, but that the facultad permits a reframing to avoid sinking into the dark place of depression and reactance that can lead to destructive behavior. It is normal for individuals when confronted with failure to initially feel disappointment, followed by anger, and then, hopefully, to find a way to reframe the events in order to pull out of "their funk." Furthermore, most individuals have multiple sources of support to accomplish reframing—a partner, friends, parents, colleagues. When the failure is constant, unpredictable, and out of one's control, it can lead to a cycle of reactance that can be followed by destructive behavior. My brother was relying on me to help him recalibrate his feelings, to feel his feet on firm ground, and avoid resurfacing feelings of "failure."

I also intuitively knew that I had to reinforce the aspect of José's life that he was most proud of—reintegration into our family. Through my readings in the literature on incarceration, I had learned that, while in prison, small material possessions—a radio, writing paper, cigarettes—have great significance. These small accouterments are ways of reconstituting the self in order to feel worthy. I had promised my brother an iPhone because he loved the technology and the new features the iPhone promised—iTunes, texting, digital camera, and email—the technological features that kept my brother connected on a daily basis to all of us regardless of where we were geographically. José by no means is a materialistic person, and never has been. True to his "hippie" philosophy of life, material things come and go. He has always been more interested in the relationships that material things can facilitate, like a computer enabling communication with his family rather than the computer itself. The gift of an iPhone was simply a reminder that he would have more access to our family and that he was not alone.

73 *Hurtado – Redefining Latino Masculinity*

Another important aspect of our exchange is that reframing through mestiza consciousness does not simply provide a way to see the proverbial “glass half full rather than half empty” to avoid the abyss of despair; reframing is most effective when there are alternative activities or behaviors to distract the individual from thinking solely on the disappointment. In José’s case, we had worked out an arrangement where I would prepare lunch for him everyday, which he would then pick up at my house. He thoroughly enjoyed this small gesture on my part and he loved my cooking. In addition, he helped with small errands for which he earned the equivalent of a graduate assistant’s pay. He loved exploring different stores, parts of the city, and services he had never been exposed to as a result of “running errands” for our household. As a student on a limited budget, the extra cash came in handy. By shifting the content of the email message to the more enjoyable and mundane aspects of our relationship, it was easier for Jose to “snap out of it” and feel joy again. His email that followed my message convinced me that despite the longer-than-expected probation we had averted a potential setback and he had regained his psychological and emotional balance after what may appear to most people as a very minor and temporary setback.

Tying it all Together

Because of its pragmatic feminist origins in community organizing with diverse groups of women, intersectionality as conceptualized through social identity is a powerful framework. In this respect, intersectionality in action is similar to peace work among gang members in urban areas. According to Ms. Connie Rice (as quoted in [Acosta, 2007](#)), when writing about the work Barrios Unidos performs to end gang warfare, she notes:

It is important to understand that those who promote community peace, gang alternatives, and violence prevention do not usually or automatically contextualize their work as part of the ongoing struggle for civil rights. Many have come to embrace the values of the struggle, such as nonviolence, but didn’t go to a Gandhian course or study the work of César Chávez to get there. The various fronts traditionally associated with civil rights are not always the immediate driving force for community peace workers. They come to this intersection

organically from their experiences on the streets and the conditions in their communities. Typically, this occurs over time as they expand their work to address the root causes of violence. The commitment and identification of such leaders relative to civil rights comes directly from working at ground zero of the struggle. (p. 178-179)

Barrios Unidos, as well as other organizations working toward peace and against gang violence, are committed to this work because of the issues they deal with on the ground, not through exposure to courses on nonviolence or Gandhian techniques. Intersectionality in fact derives from the same source. Both anti-gang activity and the Chicana feminist development of intersectionality came from working with communities trying to find solutions to their social problems when no other methods were effective. These similar ontologies bind the anti-gang/nonviolence and Chicana feminist movements in ways that make for rich collaborations. Activists from both camps understand the value of centering lived experiences and the quotidian nature of struggles to form strong alliances and potential solutions.

Tying intersectionality to social identity theory facilitates an understanding of how micro and macro social and therapeutic interventions effect change in individual behavior. *Personal identity* can be used to understand individual outcomes (micro-processes). *Social identity* can be used to understand group outcomes (macro-processes) based on intersectional identities as assigned by ethnicity, gender, race, class, sexuality, and physical ableness. The distinction between personal and social identity precludes the treatment of social issues as rooted in individual psychologies exclusively correctable by reshaping individual behaviors and leaving structural forces (macro-processes) unexamined. In addition, this theoretical distinction validates *individual-level interventions* (for instance, participation in Alcoholic Anonymous for addiction), as well as *group-level interventions*, such as those provided by Barrios Unidos (for example, participation in group cleansing rituals at the sweat lodge).

Here, I have returned to the origins of intersectionality by providing an analysis of social interventions that may succeed in reconstructing masculinities away from patriarchal definitions. [Figure 1](#) represents the application of intersectional theory through social identity, which may aid in understanding José's successful reintegration. We began the analysis by

describing the context José had to function within: a feminist, progressive community with an ethos of redemption and rehabilitation that is systematically manifested through non-profits in the community, elected into city offices, and embodied in the faculty, staff, and students at the local university. The context of the community is reinforced in José's family structure with three strong feminist sisters at the helm of his reintegration, all of whom are committed in resources, time, friendship, and love. The larger family context is composed of individuals actively involved in the criminal justice system and dedicated to making reforms that would help individuals like José, who happen to be members of the family but also represents the larger constituencies of concern to all members of the family. This context is represented in the larger of the circles in [Figure 1](#).

Second, José had to enter a life space ([Lewin, 1948](#)) and engage in developing and fortifying social relations based on his intersectional identities—that is, working class man, previously incarcerated individual, racially mestizo, of Mexican culture and language, heterosexual, and engaged with various individuals based on these categorical memberships or social identities. Different social outlets provided different solutions. Barrios Unidos helped José as a man, who is Latino, culturally Mexican, Spanish bilingual, and working class. The women mentioned in this chapter identified as feminist and were crucial in José building relationships that helped with his transitions. These women—his sisters, UCSC staff and faculty, and BU female employees—perceived José's intersectional identities as important in understanding his previous incarceration around his non-violent offense based on a drug addiction. They understood that incarceration rates are higher among men of Color, who are working class, and grow up in poverty. Furthermore, as proposed by Chicana feminisms, José's experiences with the criminal justice system are not independent of the feminist concerns in Chicana/o communities. All of the Chicanas mentioned in José's narrative have male relatives (sometimes more than one) affected by the criminal justice system in the form of incarceration, arrest, juvenile detention, and unwarranted police harassment. To some extent, the Chicanas in this narrative felt that José was like one of the family because of their experiences with their own male family members. It is noteworthy that the Chicanas mentioned in José's narratives, although originating in working class families (many times from farmworking

backgrounds), were successful professionals now, yet the men in their lives had not escaped being touched by the criminal justice system. As such, the relationships José was developing in his new context were with individuals who understood his experiences and who were willing to undergird his commitment to reintegration after incarceration.

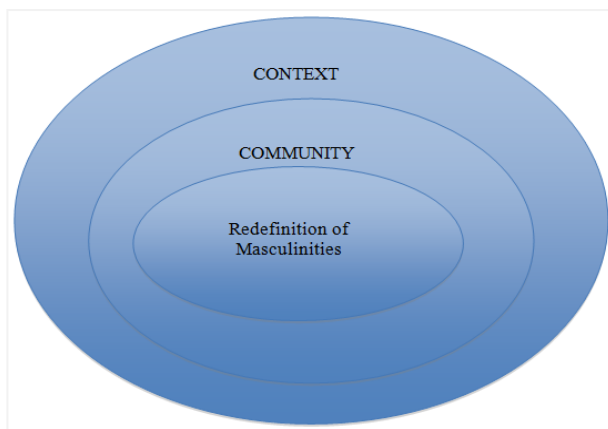


Figure 2. Different levels of Interventions

Intersectionality based on social identity theory also takes into account personal identity; that is, regardless of the context and social relationships (based on a common set of experiences and facilitated by intersecting social identities), individuals have individual will and agency. However, unlike Western theories of self in which individual will trumps social identifications and group memberships, individual identity within the intersectionality realm is relationally constituted so that individuals gain agency because of the context and relationships in which they are embedded (the *mestiza* consciousness). In José's case, the acceptance and instrumental help he received fortified him to listen to feedback on his individual behaviors because he knew he was loved unconditionally and the feedback was relationally communicated—it was not only himself but the needs of the individuals around him that he cared about. When he was asked by his sisters to be more aware of his racialized language because his

77 *Hurtado – Redefining Latino Masculinity*

family was multiracial, including his two nephews who are of African American and Latina ancestries, he understood immediately that it was not only a personal criticism but a relational one that affected his standing in the family. He was reassured that his individual behavior was not a matter of pass/no pass for familial belonging. In true feminist practice dedicated to social transformation and not moralistic judgments, alternative behaviors were proposed to José as another adaptation to familial belonging. José embraced many of the opportunities for personal growth through his relational networks. He became a better family member and a better counselor to youth because he was able to integrate personal feedback and become more fully integrated into his context and relationships.

The New Mestizo: Redefinition of Masculinity

An important part of José's growth was his very personal redefinition of masculinity. Like most men, José had very few venues in which to talk intimately about many of the matters discussed in this narrative. He was taught to be jovial, easy-going, and kind. Whenever he was hurt or something was troubling him, he learned to withdraw and "deal with it alone." Through the process of social and psychological reintegration, José was better able to express a wider range of emotions; for instance, many times he used email (or card writing) to express his love for his family. This email sent to me on the occasion of my birthday was not atypical:

Good morning Chatoski!

I hope that when you receive this you are well in both health and spirits...I woke up this morning feeling grateful for having you in my life...I think about it and it is probably the most important thing that has happened to me since prison...to re-integrate with you, Craig and the rest of my family would not have been possible without your forgiveness and understanding. My life as it is right now would never have happened if you did not offer me a place next to you as I was released from the cage. That being said, it goes much further than that. You have been my inspiration, my foundation, my guidance and my example. When I get into an overwhelming situation I ask myself "what would Chata do?" "What would Craig do?" Some people ask themselves what would Jesus do, I ask myself what would my sister

and brother do? Ha, it works for me! You are an amazing person; I am in awe of you and your life. You manage to be so good to all those that you love, every one whose life you touch is the better for it. I am blessed that you were born my sister. Not only do you do for us, you also have the best sense of humor of all of us, you make life fun and your wit makes me laugh, even when laughing is the last thing on my mind! Your home is a haven for me, a place that I find peace and the joy of feeling like I belong, the warmth of family that has so eluded me in the past and has sent me in tailspins of self-destruction. As I ponder my life in my bear cave over here in San Leandro, I may be alone but I know that I am not lonely, you walk this earth and I walk right next to you in spirit! To have that is one of the best things in my life! To have your affection and your cariño is to me one of the biggest blessings that I have in life...I know that I am not a perfect brother, I could have done so many things different and avoided throwing much of my life away, but that was not my fate. I am what I am, and chose what I chose, and I have put it all to rest in the past, burying my broken bones and all the pain that comes with them...But one thing I know for sure, in the now, I love you more than my words can express! It is your birthday, and I for one am celebrating that you were born my sister!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Te quiero chingos carnala!

PEPE

As the email illustrates, a central development in his redefinition of masculinity was his admiration and respect of women—feminist women at that. A respect for women’s expertise and guidance grew as José experienced the many women who helped him in his recovery. He has come to pride himself in being a man who works well with women, including those in supervisory positions at work, and he acknowledges learning from the women (many of whom are self-identified feminists) who have contributed to his recovery and reintegration after incarceration.

In 2010, José completed the Master’s program in Social Work at San Jose State. He is currently working as a social worker in Alameda County in the Bay Area. He has twenty-nine foster young people under his charge. He has become a specialist in transitioning young people from foster care to

79 *Hurtado – Redefining Latino Masculinity*

becoming self-sufficient, productive adults. José, in conjunction with a team of specialists, teaches young people the life skills that are ordinarily learned within families—for example, opening a bank account, applying to the local community college, planning for an educational future, and taking them off the streets and helping them find housing. José also makes court appearances and writes briefs advocating for foster youth. Not a month goes by when he fails to write an email to the family expressing his profound happiness at having such a meaningful job.

José is now in his third year as a practicing social worker. He has become known in his office as an expert on helping the foster youths who are the most difficult to reach—both young men and young women. He fights hard when these youths fail to respond to opportunities and his supervisor directs him to “dismiss” their case. A dismissal means that someone as young as 15 years old can have all resources withdrawn and let out on the street to fend for themselves. José knows to always try harder, to invent new tactics to reach these young people, and most importantly tries to see their gifts rather than their vulnerabilities. His “hippie” philosophical point of view of non-judgmental manner, nascent mestiza consciousness, and deepening respect for women (which he learned by loving and admiring his sisters) have resulted in a heightened sensitivity toward young women and men. He has convinced a young woman to forgo prostitution, found her an apartment, and successfully enrolled her in community college; he has reunited a foster adolescent with his out-of-state grandmother instead of assigning him to yet-another foster family; and, for a 15 year old who was in over 10 foster homes in one year, he placed her in a foster home near her siblings, realizing she is more likely to stay with them because they are the only family she knows. As Chicana feminists proclaim, we are not individuals only; we are relationally constituted in such a way that if our brother or sister hurts, so do we. Chicana feminists are dedicated to the goal of social justice, which includes the welfare of families and communities and all causes that create more just human arrangements (Fregoso, 2003).

Jose received the following card from the estranged mother of one of the foster youth he helped leave the streets behind.

Jose, where do I begin? What words could I possibly find that would describe my feelings? Twenty years I have been involved in the

system three reunifications for Kyli alone. Every new worker initiating the standard items, counseling, therapy, psychological evaluations, parenting classes, anger management, etc., etc.... and I have honored them all! However, in this last involvement to do what I have done over and over again almost sent me over the edge. To have my daughter missing and to be admitted 8 times to the hospital last year I was ready to die...literally. Then you came on board. Yet I thought after 20 years of dealing with social workers the to-do list was going to appear! I couldn't have done it yet you were the kindest, most attentive, problem solving oriented person I have ever met. Even after I verbally attacked you on our first phone conversation because of the Prozac that I took for work. I finally have been able to stabilize and achieve some clarity. You are my final angel, my answers to my prayers to the universe, they were heard and you were sent upon us! You are amazing and I can't tell you that there are days I cry because you believed in my daughter and have helped her to move forward. Why couldn't they have found you for us earlier? As you can see I have an amazing incredible daughter in this world. To have found her and to see the change in her was the last thing I could have imagined. You are wise beyond the master's degree you hold. You are gifted with a special empathy and objectivity not of this world. Thank you, thank you and thank you from the core of my being and God bless you on your journey. A huge hug, handshake and my deepest wishes of peace and happiness. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

The sentiments expressed in this card are for Jose, but also for every single person that helped Jose in his journey to happiness. The circle is complete.

José's story is not meant to be a "Cinderello" narrative of unbridled triumph over adversity, a Chicana/o version of *Les Miserables*, or a psychological Horatio Alger story. Now and then we are reminded that he carries a deep sorrow that his experiences in prison gave him, a perspective that the rest of the family do not have. For example, he sent the following email after my husband obtained a life verdict (instead of a death sentence) in one of his cases.

There is a man in a cell right now feeling unimaginable gratefulness for the fact that Craig Haney is alive and doing what he does...I am

81 *Hurtado – Redefining Latino Masculinity*

grateful too Craig, you are awesome! I am so blessed to be a part of this family!

José (October 6, 2011)

All José ever wanted (as many men in his situation do) is a shot at a family life with individuals who love and support him and, in my brother's parlance, "have his back." José strove to use his talents to help others like him and to live the mundane details of life without fear, turmoil, violence, loneliness, and isolation. He is a human being with foibles, as we all are. But instead of his shortcomings and history being used as indicative of his "criminal nature" or his inability to live productively, let alone use his amazing intellectual and social talents to be a productive member of society, that was not a possible narrative for José before his arrival in Santa Cruz and his reintegration with his family and extended network of caring family and friends. Intersectional understandings allowed everyone involved to help José become the full human being he always aspired to be.

Notes

¹ A DEA agent is a person working for the U.S. Department of Justice under the Drug Enforcement Administration, a federal agency. According to their website: "DEA Special Agents are a select group of men and women from diverse backgrounds whose experience and commitment make them the premier federal drug law enforcement agents in the world" (<http://www.justice.gov/dea/careers/agent/faqs.html#question001>).

² Pepe is short for José in Spanish; as Bill is to William in English.

³ Arcelia Hurtado, the youngest in the family, is an attorney and currently Deputy Director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights, a nonprofit legal organization in San Francisco, California, dedicated "to advancing the civil and human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people and their families through litigation, public policy advocacy, and public education" (www.nclrights.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_overview). Maria Hurtado, the second youngest in the family, holds a master's in social work and is currently Assistant City Manager for the city of Tracy, California. Formerly she was a practicing social worker running two nonprofits dedicated to helping individuals with substance abuse problems. One of them, Hermanas (Sisters) Recovery Program, is a residential treatment program specializing in providing Latinas substance abuse treatment services (<http://directory.intherooms.com/Treatment-Centers/Hermanas-Recovery-Program/1866>).

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⁴ The city of Santa Cruz has a population of 58,982, with 56% white residents and 34.8% Hispanics (www.santacruzchamber.org/cwt/external/wcpages/facts/demographics.aspx).

Connie Rice obtained her undergraduate degree from Harvard University and her law degree from New York University. In 2006, prior to co-founding the Advancement Project,

⁵ See: <http://www.barriosunidos.net/about.html>

⁶ Ms. Rice was Co-Director of the Los Angeles office of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund. Ms. Rice “has led multi-racial coalitions of lawyers and clients to win more than \$10 billion in damages and policy changes, through traditional class action civil rights cases redressing police misconduct, race and sex discrimination and unfair public policy in transportation, probation and public housing” (www.advancementprojectca.org/?q=node/305).

⁷ See: www.advancementprojectca.org/?q=What-we-do

⁸ See: www.advancementprojectca.org/?q=What-we-do

⁹ At the time I was a member of the BU board.

¹⁰ The community college has since been renamed Minnesota West Community College.

I AM DELETING THIS ENDNOTE SO THAT EVERYTHING THAT FOLLOWS IS CORRECTLY NUMBERED.

¹¹ José was first incarcerated in Worthington, Minnesota until his trial, which was held in Iowa. My youngest sister Arcelia and her partner Niki, both of whom at the time were public defenders in the city of San Francisco, attended José’s trial and spoke on his behalf to plead to the presiding judge to give Jose a lesser sentence. José was transferred to a prison outside Minneapolis where my mother, my husband, and I visited him. After, José was transferred to the prison in Florence, Colorado, my sisters, my niece, and I visited him every year until his release in 2005.

¹² See Jimmy Santiago Baca’s powerful prison memoir on the role of reading and writing in aiding his survival in prison and eventual rehabilitation (Baca, 2002).

¹³ The family was not allowed by prison rules to buy Jose an airline ticket to California or to accompany him on his commercial bus ride. Needless to say, we were extremely worried about his traveling alone after so many years in prison and exposure to alcohol and drugs while on his own with no support for the transition.

¹⁴ Conocimiento can be thought of as the process of “coming to a spiritual and political awareness that moves from ... inner work to public acts” of accountability, personal growth and contributions to social justice(<http://womenscrossroads.blogspot.com/2006/01/gloria-anzaldua-personal-is-political.html>).

¹⁵ The four-year probation requirements included attendance in an outpatient drug treatment program for six months, and drug testing four times a month for the first three months, then twice a month for the next three months.

¹⁶ San Jose, California is a 45-minute drive from Santa Cruz. This requirement alone would trip most former inmates who normally do not have access to a car and are required to use unreliable public transportation risking delays. When on probation, formerly incarcerated individuals are not given much leeway if they are late or miss appointments with their probation officers.

¹⁷ According to Delgado Bernal (2001) “A mestiza is literally a woman of mixed ancestry, especially of Native American, European, and African backgrounds. However, the term mestiza has come to mean a new Chicana consciousness that straddles cultures, races, languages, nations, sexualities, and spiritualities—that is, living with ambivalence while balancing opposing powers.”

¹⁸ At this time, Jose was attending San Jose State for his master’s in social work. As mentioned earlier, I usually drove from Santa Cruz to San Jose to meet him on the days he had appointments with his probation officer.

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