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Boy talk: Critical literacy and masculinities

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The purpose of this study is to describe, interpret, and explain the changes in four young adolescent boys' awareness of how masculinity constructs and is constructed by texts—written and spoken. To do this, the participants—Peyton and Marshall Young (my sons) and Blake and Dylan Smith (pseudonyms)—and I explored critical literacy activities within a homeschooling education project. Specifically, this was my research question: How do critical literacy activities within a homeschooling setting sustain or transform the participants' awareness of gender identities and inequities in texts?

In this study, critical literacy practices facilitated talk about gender that questioned the participants' common sense notions of masculinity and encouraged an awareness of how practices of masculinity become normalized and are regulated within everyday talk and action (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997). My use of critical literacy involves an understanding of how social contexts and power relations work together in and through texts to produce unequal social practices. This notion of critical literacy is based on the belief that the language of texts and our responses to texts are not neutral, but instead are shaped by the text, by institutionalized literacy and language practices, and by the larger society (Fairclough, 1995; Kempe, 1993). In other words, readers' responses to texts are informed by their past experiences as people of particular races, ethnicities, social classes, and genders. Critical literacy activities, then, enable readers to produce and analyze alternative readings, instead of passively accepting the dominant readings that tend to support particular social relations and institutions.

Important to my use of critical literacy is the understanding that the word *critical* in *critical literacy* is derived from critical, social transformation theories that assume that we live in a world of unequal power and resource distributions (e.g., Foucault, 1977; Freire, 1970; Giroux & McLaren, 1986; Luke & Gore, 1992). Critical theories reject the notion that there can ever be objective and neutral productions and interpretations of texts due, in part, to these unequal distributions of power and resources. Critical theory explains the production and interpretation of texts as mediated by hierarchical social institutions and relations of power. It assumes that if people understood how the unequal distributions operated, they might resist them and work toward a more just social order (Lenzo, 1995). Critical literacy activities are a means to this end.

Rationale

As a middle and high school literacy teacher, I explored many alternative literacy practices and instructional options in an effort to find ways to encourage students to become readers, writers, and learners (Young & Mathews, 1994). As a mother, I have often longed for my sons' school literacy experiences to be different from traditional textbook methods. I wanted them to be exposed to literacy activities like the ones I facilitated with my students. I often wished that instead of helping my sons complete homework assignments that I did not value, I had opportunities to guide them through literacy activities that I do value. I am also concerned with the limited view of gender that my sons are learning as they participate in written and spoken literacy practices in school. I would like my sons to be aware that they have legitimate choices about their identities as boys and men. I believe that humans are not passively shaped, but that they actively take up as their own the practices of the Discourses (see the section on related literature) that have shaped

Boy talk: Critical literacy and masculinities

The purpose of this study was to describe, interpret, and explain the changes in four young adolescent boys' awareness of how masculinity constructs and is constructed by texts, both written and spoken. Specifically, the research question was: How do the critical literacy activities within a homeschooling setting sustain or transform the boys' awareness of gendered identities and inequities in texts? I used Fairclough's (1989, 1995) critical discourse analysis as the framework in which to analyze the boys' participation in critical literacy activities within a homeschooling setting. The boys and I participated in critical literacy activities that focused on masculinity, a topic that they had not talked much about before the study began. As the boys talked, they became more aware of the practices of masculinity and of how masculinities were portrayed in a variety of texts. They began to question the rigidity of these practices. However, as this analysis demonstrated, the boys' awareness of gendered identities and inequities was unstable and was at times, uncertain. Highlighted in this study were two themes: (a) the instability and uncertainty of the boys' awareness of gendered identities, and (b) the impact of power relations within and among the local, institutional, and societal contexts on the boys' participation in the critical literacy activities. These themes were discussed in relation to Bakhtin's (1984) notions of word with a loophole and dialogism.

Charlas de varones: Alfabetización crítica y masculinidad

El propósito de este estudio fue describir, interpretar y explicar los cambios en la toma de conciencia de cuatro adolescentes varones acerca de la forma en que la masculinidad construye y es construida por textos, tanto escritos como orales. Específicamente la pregunta que guió la investigación fue: ¿De qué manera las actividades críticas de alfabetización en un contexto hogar-escuela sostienen o transforman la toma de conciencia de los varones acerca de las identidades e inequidades de género en los textos? Utilizé el análisis del discurso crítico de Fairclough (1989, 1995) como marco para analizar la participación de los adolescentes en actividades críticas de alfabetización en un contexto hogar-escuela. Los adolescentes y yo participamos en actividades críticas de alfabetización que estaban enfocadas en la masculinidad, un tópico del cual no habían hablado mucho antes del inicio del estudio. A medida que el estudio avanzaba, los adolescentes se volvieron más conscientes de las prácticas de la masculinidad y la forma en que se presenta la masculinidad en una variedad de textos. Comenzaron a cuestionar la rigidez de esas prácticas. Sin embargo, como este análisis demuestra, la toma de conciencia de los varones acerca de las identidades e inequidades de género era inestable y por momentos inciertas. Dos temas se destacaron en este estudio: (a) la inestabilidad e incertidumbre de la toma de conciencia de los varones acerca de las identidades de género y (b) el impacto de las relaciones de poder en los contextos locales, institucionales y sociales sobre la participación de los adolescentes en las actividades críticas de alfabetización. Estos temas se discutieron en relación a las nociones de palabra evasora y dialogismo de Bakhtin (1984).

Jungen unter sich: Kritisch-entscheidendes Schreib- und Lesestadium und Maskulinität

Der Zweck dieser Studie war es, bei vier heranwachsenden Jungen Veränderungen zu beschreiben, zu interpretieren und zu erklären, wie das Bewußtsein von Männlichkeit sich aufbaut und sich in Texten niederschlägt, beides–gesprochen und geschrieben. Die Forschungsfrage hieß spezifisch: Wie wirken oder verändern sich die geschlechtsbedingten bewußt ausgeführten Schreib- und Leseaktivitäten und -mängel innerhalb einer vertrauten heimischen Schulumgebung bei den Jungen fördernd oder transformierend auf das Bewußtsein ihrer eigenen Geschlechtsidentität und Unausgeglichenheit in solchen Texten aus? Ich wandte Faircloughs (1989, 1995) kritisch-analytische Abhandlung als Rahmen an, in welchem die Teilnahme der Jungen an entscheidenden Lese- und Schreibaktivitäten in vertrauter heimischer Schulumgebung analysiert wird. Die Jungen und ich nahmen an ausgewählten Schreib- und Leseaktivitäten teil, die das Augenmerk auf die Männlichkeit richteten, ein Thema über das sie vor Beginn der Studie nicht gern sprachen. Im Verlauf der Gespräche mit den Jungen wurde ihnen mehr und mehr ihre praktizierte Männlichkeit bewußt und wie sich diese Männlichkeit aufs Unterschiedlichste in Texten widerspiegelt. Sie fingen an, die vorgegebene Strenge von Entscheidungen in Frage zu stellen. Wie jedoch diese Analyse beweist, war das Bewußtwerden geschlechtsorientierter Identitäten und Mängel noch instabil und zeitweilig recht unsicher. In dieser Studie wurden zwei Themen hervorgehoben: (a) die Instabilität und Unsicherheit des Bewußtseins der Jungen über ihre geschlechtsbezogene Identität, und (b) die Auswirkungen des Einflusses innerhalb und unter lokalen, institutionellen und gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhängen in bezug auf Teilnahme und Mitarbeit der Jungen bei kritisch-entscheidenden Schreib- und Leseaktivitäten. Diese Themen wurden unter Bezugnahme auf Bakhtins (1984) Ideen von der 'Ausflucht des Wortes' und der 'inneren Zwiesprache' (Dialogismen) diskutiert.

少年の語らい：批判的な読み書きと男らしさ

この研究の目的は、男らしさが、書かれたテクストと話されたテクストの両方によって、どのように構築されるのかについての、４人の思春期の少年たちの認識の変化を記述し、解釈し、説明することである。この研究の問題は、ホームスクーリングにおける批判的な読み書き活動がテクストのジェンダー化されたアイデンティティーと不平等への少年たちの認識をいかに維持するのか、或いはいかに変化させるのか、ということである。ホームスクーリングの場に限られた批判的な読み書き活動への少年の参加を分析するための枠組みとして、私は Fairclough の重要な言説分析を用いる。少年たちと私は男らしさ（この研究に参加する前に彼らが意識することはほとんどなかった話題である）に焦点を当てた批判的な読み書き活動に参加した。話し合うにつれて、彼らは男らしさの実践について、および、男らしさがさまざまのテクストのなかでどのように描かれているかということについて、意識的になっていった。彼らはこの実践の厳密さに疑いをもつようになったが、分析が進むつれて、ジェンダー化されたアイデンティティーと不平等への少年たちの認識は揺らぎだし、ときおり不確かにさえなった。この研究では以下の２つのテーマが強調される。(a)ジェンダー化されたアイデンティティーの少年の認識が揺らぎ不確かになること。(b)地域的、制度的、社会的な文脈内での力関係が少年たちの批判的な読み書き活動への参与に影響を与えること。また、これらのテーマはバフチンの「抜け道」と「対話」という概念によって論じられる。

Le discours des garçons: littératie critique et masculinités

Cette étude avait pour but de décrire, interpréter, et expliquer les changements chez quatre jeunes adolescents de la conscience dont la masculinité construit et est construite par des textes, tant écrits qu'oraux. La question spécifique de recherche était : comment des activités de littératie critique dans une situation de scolarisation à domicile peuvent soutenir ou transformer chez des garçons la conscience des identités et des inégalités de genre dans les textes ? J'ai utilisé l'analyse critique du discours de Fairclough (1989, 1995) comme cadre dans lequel analyser la participation aux activités de littératie critique en situation de scolarisation à domicile. Les garçons et moi avons participé à des activités de littératie critique qui ont mis l'accent sur la masculinité, thème dont ils n'avaient pas beaucoup parlé avant le début de cette étude. En parlant, les garçons ont pris davantage conscience des pratiques de masculinité et de la façon dont les masculinités sont présentées dans différents textes. Ils ont commencé à mettre en question la rigidité de ces pratiques. Cependant, comme l'analyse l'a démontré, la conscience qu'avaient les garçons des identités et des inégalités de genre était instable et parfois incertaine. Cette étude a mis en lumière deux thèmes : a) l'instabilité et l'incertitude de la conscience qu'ont les garçons des identités de genre ; et b) l'impact des relations de pouvoir dans et entre les contextes locaux, institutionnels et sociétaux de la participation des garçons aux activités de littératie critique. La discute de ces thèmes est faite en relation avec les notions de mot et de loophole et de dialogisme chez Bakhtin (1984).

them (Davies & Banks, 1992). To make choices, we must develop a critical awareness of the constitutive force of the dominant Discourses of gender and of how our actions and beliefs, in turn, can and do shape the practices of the Discourses of gender.

Hence, this study was designed to combine my interests in critical literacy, my concerns for my sons' experiences with literacy, and homeschooling, a growing alternative instructional option. Free from many of the institutional constraints and the boundaries of school-dictated curricula and pedagogy, homeschooling enabled me to think about literacy in different ways. It is, of course, naïve to believe that we can ever completely escape the influences of the dominant Discourses of school that produce and reproduce institutional constraints and boundaries. I think, however, that within a homeschooling learning environment, these influences were less, and I was able to engage more freely in critical literacy practices that are often viewed as controversial within schools (Alvermann, Commeyras, Young, Randall, & Hinson, 1997; Gilbert, 1993).

This exploration provided opportunities for me as a teacher and researcher to develop new insights about how critical literacy activities work to question practices of masculinity. Like Davies (1996), I believe that unless we develop strategies in which boys and young men can work toward destabilizing hegemonic masculine practices that define men in opposition to women and subordinated males (e.g., gays, "weenies," and "wimps"), gender equity will be superficial, at best. Critical literacy activities have the potential to become such strategies.

This study also provided me with opportunities to develop insights into how critical literacy activities could be facilitated. The boys' and my experiences and reactions to these activities and my previous experiences as a school-based literacy teacher served to inform and stimulate such insights so that I could contribute to the current discussion aimed at reconceptualizing and reinventing adolescents' literacies (Alvermann, Hinchman, Moore, Phelps, & Waff, 1998; Luke & Elkins, 1998).

Before continuing this formal research report, I will share an aside. I decided to use asides throughout the research process to write about the personal feelings I had about my data, my children, homeschooling, and about opening spaces for boys to explore the Discourses of masculinity. I used asides to provide a temporary release from the constraints of academic writing (St. Pierre, 1997a). An aside in the theater is an actor's lines that are supposedly not heard by the other actors on stage, intended only for the audience to hear. I wrote asides when I needed a textual space to pause and to reflect (St. Pierre, 1997a). The placement of the asides in this article does not necessarily represent a chronology, but rather where I think they will best add context to the study.

> *An aside.* I must tell you that this is a story about my sons and their two best friends. It is hard for me to tell it to you. I love them very much and do not want to embarrass them in any way. It is also about me as a mother, teacher, and researcher. I think I am trying to hide in the prose that I write—hide me and my children. When I read over what I write, it seems so distant and cold. But when I think and talk about our experiences it makes me happy and feel warm inside. I also know that the so-called critical literacy activities did make a difference. Peyton's comment about the social class differences he observed in the movie *Titanic* and Marshall's critique of a sub sandwich advertisement led me to believe that the boys were beginning to think critically about texts. What I want to do in this report is to interpret what we did through a critical lens and within the framework of academic theory, but I also want to tell the audience that what the boys and I did was hard and at times very uncomfortable for me and for them. I want to write in such a way that the audience knows that this project—homeschooling my two sons—was one of the most important and wonderful experiences in my life. I got an opportunity that many parents do not ever take or have. Homeschooling is so different from helping your children with their homework after school when everyone is tired and following the school's required curriculum. We experienced learning together and exchanging ideas about things of interest to them and to me. We were able to pursue topics that were not part of the school curriculum. But that is another story that won't be told here. Here you will read about critical literacy and our talk about masculinities.

Theoretical perspective

Critical literacy assumes that language is a social practice (Fairclough, 1992) that represents and constructs gender. Language, then, is seen as both a practice that shapes gender and one that is shaped by gender. Relations of gender, power, and difference operate in and through language practices (Kamler, 1994) and affect how gender "gets done." Through language the boys learned how to do gender correctly in different social contexts (West & Zimmerman, 1987). This perspective enabled me to see how the boys' gendered identities (Discourses of masculinity) were constructed as they interacted with texts. It also made more visible how the boys' gendered identities influenced their construction of meanings.

Related literature

Discourses

Gee (1996) defined Discourses (with a capital *D*) as our ways of being in the world. Each Discourse has a tacit theory as to what counts as a normal person within the Discourse and defines what the right way is for each person to speak, listen, act, value, think, read, write, feel, dress, and gesture. A Discourse is like a club with tacit rules about how the members of the club are supposed to behave. We learn the practices of Discourses as we participate in them and take up the rules and values of the club as our own. In other words, Discourses are "ways of being people like us" (Gee, 1996, p. viii).

We are all members of many different Discourses and represent our multiple identities or ways of being within varying contexts. Discourses are embedded within social institutions such as family, school, and church. They shape and are shaped by the power relations within such institutions and society as a whole (Gilbert, 1992). We position ourselves as we take up the practices of particular Discourses. Likewise, we are positioned by the practices within that Discourse. In addition, the practices of a Discourse are social and the products of history; therefore, they are not fixed or stable, but are constantly negotiated and changing within social contexts (Gee, 1996).

Gender

Gender refers to the accomplishment of managing the social activities one does to proclaim membership in a Discourse of masculinity or femininity (J. Gee, personal communication, June 12, 1997; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Like the other Discourses in which we are members (e.g., woman of a certain sort, teacher of a certain sort, or researcher of a certain sort), we accomplish gender or claim membership in a Discourse of gender as we speak, listen, act, value, think, read, write, feel, dress, gesture, and so on within various social contexts (Gee, 1996). In other words, gender is something we do as we talk and act in ways that constitute us as masculine or feminine within social structures (West & Zimmerman, 1987) so that we appear to be "people like us" (Gee, 1996, p. viii). Doing gender produces and reproduces social differences between what is considered male and female. Gender is not something one accomplishes once and for all at an early age; it has to be publicly displayed time and time again in accordance with the structures of social contexts (Butler, 1990). By doing gender over and over, these differences begin to seem natural or essential (Butler, 1990). From this perspective, gender is more than an aspect of what one is: "it is something that one *does*, and does recurrently, in interaction with others" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 140, emphasis in original).

Masculinities

During the last decade, there has been new thinking about the concept of masculinity (Jackson & Salisbury, 1996). This thinking questions the notion of a unified definition of the term and challenges the notion that there is one way to do masculinity. The concept of a natural or essential way to do masculinity has given way to a notion of masculinities, signifying multiple Discourses or ways of doing masculinity (Connell, 1987, 1995, 1996; Hearn & Morgan, 1990). This concept allows one to think about the relational nature of the practices of masculinity to race, class, sexual orientation, and social contexts.

There are three key points to this way of thinking about masculinities. First, "there is no such thing as masculinity—only masculinities" (Jackson & Salisbury, 1996, p. 107). History tells us that there is not one Discourse of masculinity that can be found everywhere (Connell, 1996; Kimmel, 1996); different periods of history and different cultures construct practices of masculinity differently. Second, Connell (1987) argued that power and domination are not shared equally among men. In what he coined the gender order, Connell described the hierarchies present between and among Discourses of masculinity and femininity. He believed that the Discourses of masculinity—some hegemonic, some marginalized, and some stigmatized—interact with institutional and societal relations to construct and negotiate differences and hierarchies. These differences and hierarchies are influenced by interactions with race, class, and age. Third, masculine identities are actively constructed and accomplished in everyday actions within institutions such as families, sports, armies, schools, and corporations (Connell, 1996). Institutions define and sustain practices of masculinity in which individuals can be held accountable (Connell, 1996; West & Fenstermaker, 1993).

Critical literacy and discourses of masculinity

Masculine identities and practices are also constructed, defined, and sustained in and through the language of texts (Walkerdine, 1990). These practices become common sense and naturalized as they are constantly repeated within social contexts (Butler, 1990; Gilbert, 1997; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Critical literacy activities can open up possibilities for boys (and girls) to explore how their gender identities are defined by the language of texts and, in turn, how their construction of gender influences their interpretations of texts.

Gilbert (1997) suggested that critical literacy is a way to explore and denaturalize the language that constructs and maintains dominant Discourses of femininity

and masculinity. Deliberate strategies are necessary to open up "the constructedness of language practices: the sets of social conventions on which they have drawn, and the cultural set of meanings through which they are read" (p. 71). In other words, in order for readers to become aware of how texts construct their gender identities in stereotypical ways, critical literacy activities are needed. These activities range in purpose from recognizing sexist language in TV commercials or magazine advertisements, to noticing the inequitable representations of men and women in books or movies, to seeking to break down the dualistic positioning of men and women (Gilbert, 1993, 1997).

In a study conducted by Simpson (1996), student responses to critical literacy activities were examined. She found that getting 11-, 12-, and 13-year-old students to develop critical understandings and become conscious of how text manipulated them was difficult. She found that the students were able to identify stereotypes portrayed in texts, but they tended to accept them. In other words, simply identifying gender stereotypes did not encourage the students to question or resist them.

Davies (1996) also observed that critical literacy was difficult to achieve, particularly for the adolescent boys in her Australian gender equity study. It was difficult for the boys to see through their own power base and not translate the critique of hegemonic masculinity into a criticism of themselves. They resisted destabilizing the Discourses of masculinity that allowed them privilege. Davies believed that grounding critical literacy activities in the boys' own gendered experiences was necessary for their thinking and doing of gender to change. Such grounding, Davies posited, would facilitate an awareness of how their experiences as boys affected their ways of doing gender, and how, in turn, their experiences are influenced by the Discourses to which they had access.

Method

The homeschooling project took place at the residences of the Youngs and the Smiths during the second semester of the 1996–1997 school year. Over the 18 weeks of the project, the two brother pairs withdrew from public school and participated in a thematic, inquiry-based program of study. The four boys met together at my house 3 days a week and at the Smiths' house 2 days a week for $4^1/_2$ hours a day in accordance to the state attendance policy for homeschooling. The critical literacy activities took place exclusively at the Youngs' house and were embedded in the reading, writing, and social studies curriculum.

Context of the study

The Youngs and the Smiths lived in small neighboring rural counties in northeast Georgia when the study took place. Both sets of parents had completed at least 4 years of college, were from European American ancestry, and could be considered as middle class. We had become acquainted through our sons' participation in competitive youth soccer. Prior to making the decision to withdraw our sons from public school, we investigated and discussed the pros and cons of such a move. We also discussed my research plan to facilitate critical literacy activities that focused on gender. We included the boys in many of these discussions. Finally, after weeks of discussion, the boys and parents jointly agreed to an integrated thematic-based homeschool curriculum that included critical literacy activities focused on gender. We hoped that in addition to becoming aware of how masculinity constructs and is constructed by texts, the boys would become more independent and motivated learners. We had individual goals for the boys. For Marshall, our goal was to help him become a stronger reader. Our goal for Peyton was for him to become a more fluid writer. And for Blake and Dylan, we hoped homeschooling would provide them the opportunity to improve their oral communication skills.

The boys. The two brother pairs have been close friends for 4 years. Peyton Young and Blake Smith (both 13 years of age) attended a rural county middle school as seventh graders prior to the study. They were in advanced classes at school and played on the same soccer team. The younger brothers, Marshall Young (age 11) and Dylan Smith (age 10), attended the same elementary school. Marshall was in fifth grade, and Dylan was in fourth. Like their older brothers, they also played on the same soccer team.

The teacher's stance. Homeschooling was generally a freeing experience for me. I was able to teach without the usual constraints associated with teaching in public schools. For instance, there were no bells, no strict schedules, no principals supervising, no regulations as to when we could eat or go to the bathroom as I had experienced during my previous 12 years of teaching. This freedom allowed me to encourage the boys to pursue their own developing interests instead of having to follow strict curriculum guidelines.

As the parent-teacher, I initiated and sustained all the critical literacy activities in which the boys participated. All four boys, at one time or another, complained and resisted participating in the critical literacy activities. Often, I exercised my institutional power over them as a mother and teacher to continue facilitating critical literacy activities and bringing up the subject of gender. Other times, I missed opportunities to model critical literacy due

to my hesitancy to push my agenda on them. My determination to continue facilitating critical literacy activities about masculinity was fueled by the boys' stated beliefs that gender was not relevant to their lives, a view that I did not share. My determination was also fueled by the reality that my research question could only be answered if the boys and I talked about gender.

Homeschooling at the Youngs'

Each morning when the Smith boys arrived at the Youngs', we began with silent reading. During this 30- to 60-minute period, the boys would read books of their choice in comfortable places around the house. Table 1 lists the books that each boy read during homeschooling.

After reading each day at my house, the boys usually wrote about what they had read in a Reading Response Journal (RRJ). I responded to their journal entries by writing questions to clarify their responses or to stimulate a critical analysis. I also wrote my opinions about the books they were reading. On a typical day, after completing their RRJs, the boys had a quick jump on the trampoline or a run around the house and a snack. Then we began writing time. This time usually lasted about an hour but was often extended by either the boys or me. For instance, on several occasions when the boys were writing and editing their Thomas Jefferson report, they spent over 3 hours a day writing, rewriting, and keyboarding on the computer. During writing time, the boys wrote stories, research reports, autobiographies, or news stories. They also (a) conducted research for the written reports; (b) participated in minilessons that focused on note taking, Internet research, prewriting strategies, editing, or word processing; or (c) keyboarded drafts on the computer. Writing time was followed by a 30-minute lunch recess. The afternoons were spent reading and discussing nonfiction books pertaining to our social studies topics, working math problems that supplemented what Mary Smith was teaching the boys, studying grammar, going to the library, or playing educational language games. We stopped school around 2:00 p.m.

Table 1 List of books read

Peyton
Heinlein, R. (1991). *Stranger in a strange land.* New York: Putman.
Malone, D. (1933/1986). *Thomas Jefferson: A brief biography.* Charlottesville, VA: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation.
Clavell, J. (1962). *King rat.* Boston: Little & Brown.
McMurtry, L. (1985). *Lonesome dove.* New York: Simon & Schuster
Marshall
White, E.B. (1945). *Stuart Little.* New York: Harper & Brothers.
Dahl, R. (1983). *The witches.* New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.
Monsell, H.A. (1939). *Tom Jefferson: A boy in colonial days.* New York: Bobbs-Merrill.
Dahl, R. (1988). *Matilda.* New York: Viking Kestrel.
Blume, J. (1972). *Tales of a fourth grade nothing.* New York: Dutton.
Blume, J. (1980). *Superfudge.* New York: Dutton.
Dylan
Shorto, R. (1987). *Thomas Jefferson and the American ideal.* Chicago: Children's Press Choice.
Rawls, W. (1961). *Where the red fern grows.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
Lewis, C.S. (1970). *The magician's nephew.* New York: Collier.
Wade, L.R. (1989). *Jimmy Carter: The encyclopedia of presidents.* Chicago: Children's Press.
Lewis, C.S. (1970). *The lion, the witch, and the wardrobe.* New York: Collier.
Dahl, R. (1983). *The witches.* New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.
Blake
Herbert, F. (1965). *Dune.* Philadelphia: Chilton Books.
Johnston, J. (1961). *Thomas Jefferson: His many talents.* New York: Dodd, Mead.
Clavell, J. (1975). *Shogun.* New York: Atheneum.

Note. Books are listed in the order in which they were read.

Critical literacy text-analysis activities. About once a week, I facilitated a critical literacy activity that focused on gender. One of the activities in which the boys participated was a text-analysis strategy (Kamler, 1994). Kamler believed, like Brodkey (1992) and Fairclough (1992), that readers can examine texts for traces of Discourses that are operating. She advocated a lexical classification strategy for use with adolescent students to analyze how word patterns operate to build particular gendered representations of words. The intent of the strategy was to make visible the ways in which gender was constructed and represented in written texts. For example, Blake, Dylan, Marshall, and I examined the language used in two *Soccer America* articles about internationally known soccer players—one male, one female. Both articles were about the same length. During the first step, the boys listed all the words used to describe the players. Then they listed all the verbs used that were associated with the players. Finally, I led a discussion comparing the lists of words for an understanding of how femininity and masculinity were represented in each article.

Another example of text analysis took place as the boys and I looked closely at how the textual features of advertisements, pictures, and articles in popular teen magazines and some newspapers portrayed masculinities and femininities. We also discussed the intended audiences of these, raising issues of social class and gender.

Critical literacy text-based discussions. Critical literacy text-based discussions were held on numerous occasions, including when I read to the boys *The World of Young Tom Jefferson* (Hilton, 1986) or the short story "A

Brief Moment in the Life of Angus Bethune" (in Crutcher, 1991). One discussion also focused on an episode of the television cartoon, *The Flintstones*. Most of the critical literacy discussions, however, took place during what the boys and I called book club. I conducted a textual analysis (Hicks, 1995/1996) on snippets of four critical literacy text-based discussions to develop a better understanding of my role in these discussions. This analysis revealed that the book discussion lasted about 30 minutes, and I talked about 30% of the time. The discussions were interactive and followed a traditional IRF (Initiation-Response-Follow-up) pattern (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Wells, 1993). That meant that I usually asked the boys an initiating question, the boys responded to me and to one another, and I asked a follow-up question to clarify their answers, or I made comments to build on what they had said.

The book club discussions began with each boy updating the others about what was happening in his respective fiction book. Then I asked questions intended to facilitate an awareness about how gender had been represented and how these representations related to their personal experiences. I guided the critical literacy discussions in the following manner: (a) What characteristics or actions does the author use to describe the male characters and female characters? Why do you think the author describes the character the way he or she does? (b) What gender stereotypes are found in the texts? (c) Are there characters in your books that don't do gender in the expected way? Explain. (d) Who do you think is the intended audience for the book? What makes you think so? (e) How do you think your experiences of being a boy affected the way you read the book? (f) What does this book tell you about being a boy?

The boys and I also met to discuss the different biographies and autobiographies we were reading about former U.S. presidents Thomas Jefferson and Jimmy Carter. These discussions were usually held apart from the book clubs and focused on sharing and comparing what we were learning about the two former presidents. I also asked questions intended to stimulate discussions about how gender identities and inequities were represented in different periods of history. The questions I asked included the following: (a) How does each book describe what life was like for men and boys during the time period in which they lived? (b) Why do you think the authors described being male and female in this way?

Data sources

The primary data sources included audiotapes and transcripts of the boys' participation in all the critical literacy activities. Ten of the critical literacy activities were also videotaped to capture the nonverbal actions of the participants. I noted these actions directly on the audiotaped transcripts of the same critical literacy activity. Field notes were also written by me on the 3 days each week when I was responsible for instruction. On the days that a critical literacy activity had taken place, I listened to the audiotape of the activity as I typed my field notes. Secondary data sources included participants' written questionnaires that were completed before doing any critical literacy activities (see Appendix A), the boys' written reflections about their ongoing participation in critical literacy activities, artifacts of the boys' participation in activities related to gender identities or inequities (e.g., written autobiographies and collages of words and pictures), and transcripts of audiotaped parent interviews.

Critical discourse analysis

Fairclough's (1989, 1992) critical discourse analysis (CDA) provided a guide for analyzing the boys' and my participation in the critical literacy activities. As a method, CDA permitted a study of how the boys' local interactions interrelated with their personal knowledge, beliefs, values, and assumptions. It also enabled an exploration of how institutionalized social practices of family and school, and the larger societal Discourses such as gender and social class, influenced the boys' local interactions as they talked about gender. CDA considers language as a social practice and assumes asymmetrical power distributions within and among three different social contexts—an immediate local context (e.g., homeschooling), a wider institutional context (e.g., family, youth sports, school), and the larger societal contexts (e.g., Discourses of gender and social class). It seeks to uncover and understand these unequal power relations (Fairclough, 1989, 1995). Critics, however, suggest that Fairclough's analysis does not account for the struggles that take place within and between the local, institutional, and societal contexts (Gilbert, 1992). Some believe that Fairclough's emphasis on the strength of local, institutional, and societal contexts in shaping unequal power relations leads to a highly inferential and overly deterministic approach to data analysis (Gilbert, 1992).

In an attempt to confront these criticisms, I did three things. First, as I conducted my analysis, I examined the local interactions carefully. I paid attention to who talked, what was said, how it was said, and what was not said. I made inferences about how the boys' tone of voice and body language may have shaped their local interactions. Second, I used the three dimensions of CDA—description, interpretation, and explanation—to lessen the potential for my analysis to be overly deterministic. These three dimensions, as outlined in the next section, served as checks and balances and helped make visible the struggles that took place within and between the local, institutional, and societal context.

The third way I confronted these criticisms was to seek response data (St. Pierre, 1997b). St. Pierre posited that the purpose of response data gathered through activities such as debriefing and member checks is to help researchers keep their ideology from "overshadowing the logic of the evidence" (Lenzo, 1995, p. 18). Gathering response data was my attempt to identify weaknesses in my emerging conceptual analysis that may have been due to my inability to see beyond my own ideology. I gathered response data as I talked to my debriefers—professional colleagues and the four boys, especially my two sons. I also gathered response data from my husband and the other two parents. Their responses, along with those of the other debriefers, helped to challenge and disrupt my own ideological understandings.

Data analysis

CDA procedure. Fairclough (1989) laid out three dimensions of CDA—description, interpretation, and explanation. The nature of the analysis, which shifts from one dimension to another, is not linear. The descriptive dimension provided an initial starting point for my analysis. I examined the textual features of the transcripts and visual records of a discourse event (discourse with a lowercase *d* denotes connected stretches of language, such as the boys' and my participation in a particular critical literacy activity). Then I wrote descriptions of discourse events that included the textual features (e.g., vocabulary, tone, turn-taking, directness of speech, and facial expressions) as well as what the boys and I said or did. I included selected transcripts in the description of the discourse event. I returned to this dimension often to clarify, add, or delete as I wrote my interpretations and explanations.

After I had begun writing a description, I started to interpret the boys' and my interactions. Interpretation is concerned with how the texts and interactions are mediated by the participants' backgrounds, beliefs, values, and assumptions. This meant that I used what I knew about the boys and their families to make inferences about why they said or did certain things. I also used information from the data collected from interviews, participant questionnaires, and written reflections to guide my interpretations.

Finally, I wove into the analysis an explanation of how the Discourses of masculinity and social class shaped the boys' interactions during the critical literacy activities. Explanation connects the description and interpretation to the larger social contexts. The objective of this dimension is to portray a Discourse as part of a social practice. That is, explanation seeks to show how the practices of a Discourse are determined by social structures and how, in turn, the practices shape those structures. In this study, explanation was guided by questions adapted from Fairclough (1989), such as the following: (a) How did the relations of power between the boys and me and among the boys affect our interactions within the homeschool contexts? (b) How did the institutions such as family or youth sports influence the boys' participation in critical literacy activities and their thinking about masculinities? (c) How did the local, institutional, and societal contexts work together to sustain or transform the Discourses of masculinity for the boys? My explanation was enhanced as I compared my data to the existing literature on masculinities and critical literacy (e.g., Alloway & Gilbert, 1997; Connell, 1995; Davies, 1996; Jackson & Salisbury, 1996). Often what I read in the literature inspired me to return to the original data and add to my description, identify another discourse event, or revise my explanation.

Ongoing analysis procedure. During data collection, I regularly selected a discourse event (e.g., the boys' and my participation in a particular critical literacy activity) that I wanted to think more about. This event became the focus of what I called a CDA vignette (see Appendix B). The purpose of writing a CDA vignette was to interpret the event by relating the textual features of the boys' interactions to the local, institutional, and societal contexts. I incorporated the three dimensions of CDA—description, interpretation, and explanation—into the written vignettes. I built upon these written vignettes during my final analysis. To do so, I used the following analysis procedure.

Final analysis procedure. After data collection was completed and all transcripts were typed and corrected, I coded the data. The purpose of the coding was to identify traces of the three social contexts—local, institutional, societal—in the data. For example, when Blake referred to the influence his father had on his beliefs about masculinity, I coded that institutional (i.e., family). Coding helped me trace how the different social contexts like family and youth sports influenced the boys' participation in the critical literacy activities and ultimately their talk about gender.

I also sorted the data into different word processing files based on specific criteria. For instance, prior to writing about the boys' understanding and critique of gendered stereotypes, I sorted all the data that related to this topic into a file labeled Stereotypes. This technique helped me organize and reduce the data set. Another way I sorted the data was by making a data wall. I taped four large sheets of brown paper to the walls in my office. Each sheet represented one of the boys. As I reread all the data, I wrote on each boy's wall any written or spoken comments he had made about himself or the other boys. I also taped photographs and artifacts the boys had produced on their respective walls. This graphic representation served not only as a sorting strategy, but also

as a way to make the boys become real again. I had read and reread the data so often that the boys had simply become objects of study to me.

Next, I wrote in a double-entry journal. I adapted double-entry journals, a study technique suggested by Vacca and Vacca (1996), to my research. As I read professional literature, I took notes on the left side of the page. On the right column of the page, I wrote about how the literature related to my data. I often included brief snippets of data as I made connections between the data and the literature. For example, as I read about subjectivity, I took notes on the left side of the page. Then I found examples in my data that seemed to relate to what I had read, and I recorded how my data related to this reading. For a sample entry see Appendix C.

Finally, I followed Fairclough's (1989) suggested CDA procedures as outlined previously to build upon or write new CDA vignettes. As I wrote, I moved within the three dimensions (description, interpretation, explanation) and focused on answering my research question: How do critical literacy practices within a homeschooling education project sustain or transform the participants' awareness of gender identities and inequities in texts?

Results and discussion

> *An aside.* The tea party. After our guided tour of places of interest in Plains, Georgia, home of Jimmy Carter, Mary and I took the boys to tea at the Magnolia Tea Room. To our surprise, the hostess invited us to select a hat to wear during tea from the many that were arranged around the room. The room was full of hats, gloves, lace, and furs. Quickly, she showed the boys where the boy hats were and they each selected one from that group. Marshall chose a brown fedora and looked a little like a gangster; Peyton looked like a man in Renoir's *Boating Party* with his straw boater hat; Dylan looked like my Virginia gentleman grandfather in his straw Panama; and Blake in his captain's white cap had the look of the Skipper on *Gilligan's Island*. Mary selected a feathered black velvet hat, and my navy hat had a wide brim and veil. We laughed and teased each other as we made our selections and found our seats. As we waited for the fresh scones to come out of the oven, Marshall left for a few minutes. When he returned, he was decked out in mink from head to toe. He had found a mink hat and a mink cape that he donned for the occasion. After much laughter, Marshall changed back into his fedora. It seemed to me that Marshall was playing with gender. Was he experimenting with crossing traditional gender boundaries? Did our critical literacy discussions about gender influence his playfulness? Tea came along with delicious scones, homemade strawberry jam, whipped cream, and homemade candies. We all loved the scones; they melted in our mouths. The tea, however, was another matter—the boys did not like it at all. Not to hurt the hostess's feelings, the boys slipped quietly out onto the front porch wearing their hats and threw out their tea. When the hostess returned, they pretended to have liked the tea. The boys enjoyed the tea party (I think), although Blake and Dylan said it was boring. Marshall admitted later to having fun trying on hats, and Peyton chalked it up as an okay new experience—one he predicted would not have happened if the fathers had been on the trip. Indeed, practices of hegemonic masculinity run deep.

I offer the following interpretation and explanation of the boys' participation in the critical literacy activities in which they examined practices of masculinities. I focused on what the boys said about the texts. In this section, I first present profiles of the boys. These profiles represent what the boys said and wrote about themselves and each other. Next, I provide a CDA analysis of the critical literacy activities that focused on the representation of masculinities in texts. Last, I reflect upon how the boys began to question the rigidity of the practices of masculinity and how power relations influenced their participation in critical literacy activities.

Masculinities through the eyes of the boys

Peyton Young. At 13 years old, Peyton's gendered identities were closely tied to his participation in sports. When I asked Peyton what his autobiography said about him as a boy, he replied, "It tells that I'm an athletic person. I like cars and swimming. I have a brother and I sometimes forget things." Blake agreed that Peyton's autobiography pictured him as an athletic boy, and added it also said that he had high hopes. Blake based his observation on Peyton's written goals:

> In my future I hope to have a nice wife. And to have two good kids. I would also like to be a pro soccer player making lots of money. I would like a big house as well. If I cannot play soccer, then I hope to get a doctor's degree and be a marine biologist.

Both of Peyton's career goals—getting a Ph.D. in marine biology and being a professional soccer player—showed Blake that Peyton had high expectations for himself. As Peyton participated in white middle-class Discourses, he actively took up the practices of those Discourses (Davies & Banks, 1992). According to Althusser (1971) and poststructuralist theory, a person is not socialized into the social world, but rather he or she actively takes up the practices of a Discourse as he or she is being shaped by that Discourse. In other words, as individuals learn to speak and act within a Discourse, they come to see the knowledge, beliefs, values, and assumptions of the Discourse as stemming from their own desires and choices, rather than from the coercive force of

the Discourse. Thus, the practices of the Discourse are not something to challenge, but to accept and take up as one's own.

For Peyton, this meant that middle-class social practices, such as obtaining a good education, getting married, having children, and making lots of money, became practices that he desired and chose, not ones that he felt forced to take up. Specifically, Peyton's stated goal of getting a Ph.D. portrayed the emphasis on education within white middle-class Discourses (Connell, 1995, 1996). Peyton, as a middle-class boy with college-educated parents, believed he has educational options (Messner, 1992) and his experiences in school supported and have perpetuated this belief.

Marshall Young. Like his brother, 11-year-old Marshall's goals reflected the Discourse practices of white middle-class masculinity. They included going to college, getting married, and being a professional soccer player. Marshall's gendered identities were closely tied to his participation in competitive youth soccer. He strived to be the fastest and best on the field. His identity as a "very, very, very good soccer player" helped earn him the status of being cool with his peers, a status that he coveted.

Apparently part of acting cool for Marshall was displaying an interest in girls' and women's bodies. For instance, when I asked the boys to write how their lives would be different if they woke up as a girl, Marshall immediately began laughing and said that he would "be sexy!" He then wrote if he had to be a girl (though he would prefer not to be) he would want to be sexy and look like Cindy Crawford. He could hardly wait to share his written answer with the other boys, and in turn the others anxiously waited for him to share. They laughed as he read his answer, especially the part where he described that he "would have jiggly things on his chest." Similarly, during a critical examination of teen magazines, Marshall made lots of comments about "the babes" that made Blake and Dylan laugh. In one instance, Peyton did not laugh. For not laughing Marshall called Peyton a "nerd." Apparently, to be a "cool boy" you were supposed to join in the talk and laughter about girls' bodies. The boys seemed to expect Marshall to make comments about girls' bodies and reinforced his comments with their laughter. Often, Marshall lived up to their expectations.

Marshall wanted to be recognized as a boy—the kind of boy who liked attractive girls. He displayed masculinity in a way that he perceived would clearly mark him as such. He had already learned to display gender in ways that he perceived appropriate for his sex (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Gender display pertains to the behaviors (e.g., talk, dress, bodily manner) one exhibits to establish a correlation with one's sex, a process embedded in every social interaction and informed by social contexts (Goffman, 1977; West & Zimmerman, 1987). This meant that Marshall displayed different practices of masculinity in different social contexts. For instance, Marshall practiced masculinity on the soccer field differently than he did during homeschool. On the soccer field, Marshall displayed physical prowess and a competitive nature. During homeschool, he displayed a form of heterosexual masculinity that required him to publicly acknowledge a sexual interest in attractive females (Cameron, 1997; Fine, 1987) and express it through his face-to-face interactions with the boys as he sexualized girls and women (Davies, 1993). As he made comments about "the babes" to the other boys, the boys in turn encouraged him to continue this sort of display. Through his interactions, Marshall constituted himself as a heterosexual male (Cameron, 1997; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Blake Smith. Thirteen-year-old Blake saw himself as opposite to girl. Reflecting on how his autobiography represented him as a boy he wrote, "I'm 100% boy because I do not want to be a girl. I did not actually say that in my book (*Short Stories of My Life*) but it is true." Blake was adamant that he not look like a girl in any way. My first inkling of this was in his response to the question (Sadker & Sadker, 1994), "How would your life be different if you woke up as a girl?" He wrote:

> If I woke up as a girl I think I would hate myself. Everything would go down the drain. I would have to quit my soccer team.... I couldn't play for A.C. Milan or Ajax when I grow up or anything. I would have to be a teacher or secretary. Luckily, they do have a women's national soccer team. Committing suicide would be right along the line.... I would even have to act like a girl, making those high-pitched noises whenever I saw a spider....

Blake's response both saddened and alarmed me. He would not explain to me why he felt this way. Perhaps one of the reasons for Blake's thinking was his perception of gender inequities in sports. For Blake, his goal of being a world-class soccer player was closely tied to him being male. Being a girl, Blake thought, would limit his ability to reach his goal of playing professional soccer in Europe. This would be devastating given the amount of time and energy he devoted to practicing soccer.

Or perhaps, Blake's intense desire not to be a girl could have been his oppositional thinking about gender: boys are brave, girls yell when they see spiders. Although he said that not all boys were brave ("computer nerds probably weren't brave") most boys were "braver and will do more dangerous things than girls...." If they were not brave, Blake said, boys did not admit it. He said he based his beliefs about gender on what he had seen on television, the books he had read, and his own life experiences.

Blake's dualistic male/female view of gender was fundamental to his interpretations of texts and his life experiences (Davies & Banks, 1992). This way of thinking about gender helped him to maintain the gender order between males and females, which was an important distinction in Blake's accomplishment of masculinity. This distinction between masculinity and femininity organizes the social world and is created as humans do gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Dylan Smith. Dylan was the youngest of the boys at 10 years of age. Like the other boys, playing soccer was very important to him. His goals included being a national soccer team player and playing professional soccer, which strongly influenced his participation in youth soccer. Soccer did not seem to be the overriding influence in Dylan's life as a boy, however. He described himself as tall, smart, and nice, with brown hair and eyes. He said he liked ice cream, and his favorite cars were fast sportscars. Dylan seemed less concerned about the practices typically associated with masculinity than the other three boys. He did, however, admit that he did not want to be a girl because you would have to "sit on the pot for number one" and you would have to do girl pushups and neck traps instead of chest traps in soccer. He also thought his hair would have to be longer. Other than being a bit inconvenienced, Dylan's response to the question about waking up as a girl did not seem very dramatic compared to Blake's.

The institution of white middle-class family greatly influenced how Dylan did masculinity (Coltrane, 1998; Connell, 1995; West & Fenstermaker, 1993). Dylan imagined that his adult life would include marriage and children and be similar to his present family life. His goals included going to college, having a big house, having two great kids, and later being a grandfather. The majority of Dylan's knowledge of family came from his own experiences as a member of the Smith family. As Dylan participated in his family's activities and interacted with texts, he learned how to be a son and a brother. Dylan's ideal family—a wife and two good kids—mirrors his own family and those portrayed in popular media. Such an arrangement points to the power of the institution of family to influence one's beliefs about gender.

The boys' ways of "doing gender." The boys' ways of doing and thinking about masculinities were shaped by the Discourses to which they had access. These Discourses were located within the white middle-class structures of family and youth sports and aligned themselves with the more hegemonic practices of masculinity—heterosexuality, power, dominance, privilege, and competition. These Discourses limited the boys' capacity to name and to think about gendered discursive practices that may exist beyond their own lived experiences (Britzman, 1994).

Recognizing and questioning dualistic practices of masculinity

The division of people into male and female categories is fundamental to much of our talk and understanding of identities. It is hard to imagine a world not so divided (Davies, 1993). However, such division is far too simplistic as the literature on masculinities suggests. The practices of masculinity differ within and between social contexts and throughout history. In other words, there are multiple identities or ways of doing and thinking about masculinity. This section focuses on how a variety of texts portrayed the way "boys are supposed to be" (Peyton Young, personal communication, January 25, 1998). It seemed to the boys that the minimal requirement for being a boy was not being a girl or "not being a wuss like a woman."

Boy not girl. Marshall knew right away that the character Stuart Little in the book *Stuart Little* (White, 1945) was male even though he was a mouse. He said that he could tell Stuart was a boy because "the mouse had to be pretty brave to go down into the drain, something could go wrong, probably lots of bugs and it would be pretty scary and dark...." For as Marshall stated, "boys are more braver than girls." This belief was only briefly questioned by Blake when he asked, "Are all boys and girls like that?" Marshall decided that most girls were, in fact, not as brave as boys with the exception of maybe "redneck girls, they aren't afraid of spiders." Here Marshall recognized a practice of hegemonic masculinity—bravery. It appeared to be common sense to Marshall that bravery was a masculine practice. He also hinted at an awareness of how social class affects practices of gender when he said that redneck girls were not afraid. For Marshall, *rednecks* described some of the working-class people in our rural community—people who worked on farms or in factories.

Bravery also made the character Billy in *Where the Red Fern Grows* (Rawls, 1961) recognizably male to Dylan. He recognized Billy as a boy because, "he likes dogs and hunting, he lives in the mountains and he is not afraid of the mountains." Peyton, Marshall, and Dylan agreed that they admired Billy's bravery and acknowledged that they were not brave enough to camp in the woods by themselves. Blake said that he would camp alone and would not be convinced otherwise:

Josephine: Would y'all be that brave?

Dylan: No.

Blake: Yeah.

Josephine: [sarcastically] Yeah, you would go into the woods?

Marshall: You would not!

Peyton: [Laughing in a way to tease Blake]

Blake: I bet you I would.

Dylan: Maybe at the end of the woods.

Peyton: I bet you wouldn't go back into the deep woods, like he [Billy] hunts in!

Josephine: [to Peyton] Would you?

Blake: Bet me, bet me!

Dylan tried to find a way that he could be recognized as being brave like Billy when he said that he might camp at the "end of the woods." Marshall attempted to resolve the bravery issue by suggesting later in the discussion that "being a little bit scared of stuff" didn't necessarily make you less of a boy. Dylan and Marshall tried to shape recognizable practices of masculinity to fit their own desires. However, Peyton later disagreed with his brother's comment; he said that being afraid would make you a "weenie." By making this comment Peyton contradicted his own earlier statement that he would not camp alone. Apparently, it was hard for Peyton to give up the masculine ideal of bravery in the face of Blake's proposed bravery.

In addition to the hegemonic masculine practice of bravery, Blake also recognized the practices of control and power as being characteristic of one's masculinity. Blake reported that Paul, a character in *Dune* (Herbert, 1965), was obviously male because he had "lots of control...and power." Blake believed that Paul, a "walking god," could not have been portrayed as a female because he had a powerful voice and was not a wimp. He also had control over people. Blake compared Paul to his father, who he said had lots of control. The boys agreed that Paul sounded like their fathers. When their fathers spoke (unlike when their mothers spoke), the boys reported they did whatever they had been told to do. Blake also compared Paul to women. He imagined that if Paul had been female, his powers would have been different—Paul would have made people be kind. Clearly, the social institution of the middle-class family influenced Blake's and the other boys' recognition of masculine practices. Blake knew Paul was male because, like his father, he had control and people listened to him. In keeping with a dualistic form of thinking about gender, Blake recognized masculine practices as being different from feminine practices.

Marshall, however, questioned power as an exclusively masculine practice. Interestingly, the characters in the books Marshall read who exhibited power were not always male. For instance, according to Marshall, the Grand Witch, a character in the book *The Witches* (Dahl, 1983), was very powerful. He admired her and said he wanted to be like her. The other boys tried to talk Marshall out of wanting to be like the Grand Witch, but Marshall would not be talked out of it, not even after it was pointed out that all witches were women.

Josephine: Marshall, who would you like to be?

Marshall: The witch, because she had lots of power.

Josephine: So everybody here wants power.

Blake: But they're bald and they don't have any clothes.

Dylan: And they've got funny noses.

Josephine: Aren't they missing a thumb or something?

Blake: They're missing toes and they have to wear gloves. They have to wear gloves because what?

Marshall: They have claws like cats.

Josephine: Oh, they have cat claws?

Blake: So you'd want to be like that? Bald, no toes, and claws?

[Marshall laughs]

Dylan: And no toes.

Blake: And a woman! All witches are women. That's what they say in the book, isn't it?

Dylan: They're mean old witches.

Josephine: So you want to be a witch because they're real powerful and they could do magic—is that what you are saying?

Marshall: [nods head yes]

Marshall wanted to be a witch because of the power she had (e.g., magical powers and power over the witches she ruled). He did not seem to care if the witch was mean or ugly as Dylan pointed out. Even Blake's strong argument that all witches were women did not persuade Marshall to change his mind. It did not seem to bother Marshall that the character was female, despite his earlier pronouncement that male characters were more exciting than female ones. Power is usually associated with hegemonic Discourses of masculinity. This may have made it easier for him to stand by his choice of the witch as a character he wanted to be in the face-to-face interactions with his brother and friends. Marshall exercised his power by sticking to his convictions, which were questioned by his peers.

Another masculine practice that the boys eventually questioned was the one of men not crying. Men who cry

was a topic brought up during a discussion of U.S. President Jimmy Carter's life. Blake shared that he had read that Jimmy Carter was described as having cried like a baby after losing his first bid for governor of Georgia. Blake could not understand why a grown man like Jimmy Carter would cry "over just one little thing." Peyton, who had also read about Carter crying, defended Carter by saying that he [Carter] had cried in private. To Peyton it was apparently okay for men to cry in private. Blake adamantly disagreed, saying it was bad for men to cry. To support his belief about crying, Blake argued that in the movies "you never see men break into tears and fall into the arms of women. It's always the woman, and John Wayne comes along and saves them." This was the impetus for a critical literacy text-based discussion that contrasted how masculinity was represented in texts with how the boys experienced it.

It turned out that, with the exception of Blake, all the boys admitted to crying and acknowledged that crying was something a boy or man did when he was sad or disappointed. They argued with Blake about the practice of crying and tried to remember a time when Blake had cried. Marshall brought up the recent death of the Smiths' family pet Ollie in hopes of getting Blake to admit to crying. Marshall felt fairly sure Blake had cried then. Marshall had recently experienced the untimely deaths of two of his family pets and could not imagine Blake not crying at such a time.

Marshall: I know you felt sad when Ollie died, and you cried.

Blake: Did I cry?

[Marshall and Dylan looking at each other]

Marshall: Yes, at home I bet you did.

Blake: Did I cry, Dylan?

[Dylan shakes head no]

Marshall: Then that's pretty weird!

Peyton: And he won't have a very good feeling because...

[Peyton drawing]

Josephine: [Interrupting]...I don't like to hear you say that someone doesn't have feelings because they don't cry.

Blake did not admit to crying when the family dog Ollie died. The boys, however, later reminded Blake that he cried when he had accidentally shot Dylan with a BB gun and almost cried during a recent argument with his mother. During the above transaction, I interrupted Peyton from further critiquing Blake's admission that he did not cry. This conversation made me uncomfortable. While I was concerned about Blake's lack of outward emotion, a stereotypical masculine practice I did not sanction, I also did not want Blake to get hurt. It should be noted that Blake was known not to talk at school or in most social situations. Blake's oral participation during homeschool was unique and very special to me. I was glad to be privy to his talk and did not want him to stop talking. I felt as though the three boys had ganged up on Blake, so I guided the discussion back to the text:

Josephine: Okay. Let's talk some more about Jimmy Carter instead of Blake and crying. Well, Blake gave an example that he [Jimmy Carter] cried, and that would be something that you think women would do more than men. Is that right?

Marshall: I think that's true but men also cry...men may cry one time less than a woman, but...

Peyton: Yep, they [women] do cry lots more than men.

I think this discussion represented a breakthrough of sorts. The boys were practicing critical literacy as they questioned Blake's common sense belief that boys and men did not cry. They defended Jimmy Carter's right to cry. Peyton, Marshall, and Dylan did not want to support the masculine practice of men not crying. However, they were tentative about not adopting it for themselves as suggested by Marshall's and Peyton's statements that women cry more than men. Marshall and Peyton were attempting to shape a masculine practice to legitimize their way of practicing masculinity, that is, boys who cry, but less than girls.

Boy over girl. During one of the text-analysis strategies (Kamler, 1994) the boys investigated how gender inequities operate in and through language. While teaching this strategy, I shared with the boys possible interpretations of how the words used in the articles inscribed gendered inequities, in order to model critical literacy.

The text analysis required the boys to first identify the words used to describe a female soccer player (Mia Hamm) and a male soccer player (Franz Beckenbauer). (See Table 2 for the words the boys identified.) After the boys identified the words used in the texts, we talked about the how the authors' choices of words worked to inscribe gendered inequities. I began the discussion by asking the boys why the authors used the female athlete's first name and the male athlete's last name almost exclusively in the two articles:

Josephine: How are the groups of words different?

Dylan : One's longer.

Josephine: Let's first look at the nouns...[I read the words on the list] He [the author] used his last name [Beckenbauer], lots of pronouns.

Table 2 Text analysis strategy

Words used to name Mia Hamm	Words used to name Franz Beckenbauer	
Mia	Franz Beckenbauer	his
Mia	His	Beckenbauer
Hamm	His	Beckenbauer
Mia	His	his
her	He	Kaiser
Mia	Beckenbauer	he
She's	Beckenbauer	his
Mia	he	his
She	His	Beckenbauer
Mia	he	
Mia	him	
Mia	he	
her	Beckenbauer	
Words used to describe Mia Hamm	**Words used to describe Franz Beckenbauer**	
young	player	
girl	skills were subtle	
recognizable endeavors	played mid field	
talent	great	
top woman		
19-year-old		
unselfish		
World Championship		
youngest		
Verbs associated with Mia Hamm	**Verbs associated with Franz Beckenbauer**	
has become	had	
is	played	
has helped	won	
got	made	
is	pass	
is	running	
is	glided	
stirs	played	
gets	revolutionized	
plays	played	
get to race	stayed	
will often work	arrived	
can't wait		
did		
can stay		

Marshall: [interrupting] His name is on the back of my shoes.

Josephine: [ignoring Marshall] Only one time did he [the author] use his full name or his first name over here. [looking at the other list] He [the author] uses her first name a lot more than her last name.

Blake: Hamm just doesn't sound right.

Josephine: Is that why, you think?

Marshall: Yeah, Mia is shorter.

Josephine: But Beckenbauer is certainly longer than Franz. Why do you think they [the authors] did that?

Marshall: Maybe they [the players] get a choice; they tell the person who is interviewing them.

Blake: Maybe Mia might get married and take the man's last name.

Josephine: So you are saying since she may get married and change her name, they use her first name? That makes sense. What could be another reason they used her first name and his last name? Do you think the readers are allowed to know her more personally, as Mia? Do you think it's more personal to call someone their first name than their last name?

Marshall: Yeah.

Josephine: So maybe the author thinks we can know her more personally than we can him.

Blake: Well, he's from a different country, and he is older.

Josephine: He's older, okay. Beckenbauer is sure harder to say than Franz.

Marshall: I think Beckenbauer is easier to say because they are the name of shoes.

The conversation continued as Blake, Marshall, and Dylan tried to figure out why the soccer players were represented differently in texts. By suggesting that the author was letting the reader get to know Mia Hamm more personally, I was attempting to call attention to how her gender may have contributed to the more personalized language used in the article. Blake noted, however, that this difference may have more to do with age than gender. Franz was much older than Mia. Marshall had another idea; he thought Beckenbauer was easier to say because it was the name of his soccer shoes.

At first glance, Marshall's comment about Beckenbauer being easier to say than Franz seemed strange. However, upon reflection, *Beckenbauer* had become a common word to Marshall because of the soccer shoes. Many of the boys on Marshall's team owned a pair of Beckenbauers, as they were a very popular shoe. Beckenbauer's status as an athlete was such that a soccer shoe company thought his name would help sell shoes. However, his name not only sold shoes, but also sold practices of masculinity (Connell, 1990). When the boys and I examined the verbs associated with Beckenbauer (see Table 2), it became clear that he represented manliness and one who glided on the field and revolutionized soccer.

The boys concluded that there were more action verbs associated with Franz than with Mia. I asked the boys why this was true:

Boys: Hummm...

Marshall: I wish I was a writer, then I would know.

Josephine: This is one of those intended, undercover messages, those messages that the authors are giving you without intention, the, the undercurrent, I think they are saying that men are more active than women. They are kinda giving you that idea even though we have seen Mia Hamm play, and she is tough on the field, she plays hard. But they still don't use the same kinds of words they do with him? Probably unintentional, why would they do that?

Boys: Hum, ah, hum.

Blake: Just to point out, maybe authors think men have more action.

The look on the boys' faces told me they were a bit confused about how Mia was represented. They had seen Mia Hamm play soccer during the Olympics and believed that she was as active as Franz, if not more so, but it was clear to them that the author used many more action verbs in the article about Franz. I ended the activity by telling the boys:

> This is what I wanted you to get out [of this activity]. Sometimes in text—written and spoken—we use words that represent our societal, um, beliefs. Like...men do more action than women, these things that we have always believed, but it may or may not be true. In this case, I doubt that Mia is any less active than Franz.

In the text analysis activity, the boys and I touched on one way texts help perpetuate the gender order—through word choice. Very subtly, the authors' choice of words inscribed practices of masculinity that perpetuated the gender order. Men are more active; women are more personable. I viewed this activity as a beginning or as a seed planted in their developing awareness of how texts position readers and inscribe practices of gender.

Summary dualistic practices of masculinity. As the boys participated in critical literacy activities they talked about gender—a topic they reported not having talked much about previously. The critical literacy activities served to make the boys consciously aware of gender. The boys identified practices that represented masculinity in the texts they read and compared these practices to their own experiences—a practice recommended by Davies (1996). On the one hand, it was easy for the boys to recognize practices of masculinity that were exhibited by the characters in their books. Masculine practices were not feminine practices—boys were braver than girls, and men had more control and power than women. Yet, on the other hand, it was impossible to recognize these practices as exclusively masculine. Were all boys braver? Could female characters be powerful? Could boys cry and still be masculine?

The boys' responses to my questions about masculine practices portrayed in books reflected the power of hegemonic Discourses of masculinity to influence how "boys are supposed to be" (Peyton Young, personal communication, January 25, 1998). The boys tended to support the male stereotypes portrayed in the books they read. However, while they recognized certain practices as masculine, the boys began to question the rigidity of these beliefs—boys could be a little bit scared and cry on occasion, and some girls were powerful. Challenging the boys' common sense view of masculinity was difficult for the young adolescent boys in this study, especially since they were working very hard at becoming men (Whitson, 1990). To discount such practices as legitimate male prac-

tices was not an easy or comfortable process. As the boys said, the critical literacy activities "made their brains work too hard" and made them feel uncomfortable and a bit unsteady.

Recognizing and questioning hierarchical masculine practices

In addition to recognizing and questioning masculine practices that defined maleness as opposed to femaleness, Peyton, Marshall, Blake, and Dylan also discussed practices that defined boys/men in relation to other boys/men. Participation in critical literacy discussions called attention to the hierarchical relationships among men, or what Connell (1995) referred to as the gender order. These hierarchical relationships are produced and reproduced as gender interacts with race, social class, and sexual orientation. For instance, middle-class men's masculinities are constructed not only in relation to women, but also in relation to men of lower socioeconomic status. In this section, I present an account of how practices of masculinity that portrayed boys/men in relation of other boys/men were displayed in texts.

Boy not boy. The boys listened intently as I read the picture book *Willy the Wimp* (Browne, 1984), and were obviously amused. The problem with Willy, the gorilla, was that the suburban gorilla gang bullied him and called him "Willy the Wimp." He hated being called a wimp and decided to follow a stringent exercise and diet routine to build up his muscles. As the story goes, he gets strong, rescues a cute female gorilla from the gang, and becomes her hero. In the end, however, he was still mild-mannered and polite, even though he changed his physical looks. Willy was the antithesis of the bully gorillas and represented a stigmatized male—a wimp. I suppose the point of the book was to challenge the masculine practice of physical prowess and to point out the unequal relations among men. The boys' reactions to the book, however, showed me that they had gotten contradictory meanings from the book.

Josephine: What was the author trying to get across in this book about masculinity?

Marshall: It doesn't matter if you are a weenie, you can still do stuff.

Josephine: What else?

[Boys all look down, wiggle, scribble on paper in front of them]

Josephine: What do you think that the author thinks is the ideal man?

Peyton: Big, muscular, order people around....push people around...

Josephine: ...Would you have done the same thing as Willy did if someone called you a wimp?

All: YEAH!

Josephine: Why?

Dylan: Because I wouldn't want people calling me a wimp....

The boys put themselves in Willy's position. Dylan especially related to Willy's plight because he had occasionally felt like a wimp. Dylan told us that Blake had beat him up before, this event had made him feel like a wimp, and he did not like that feeling. In fact, all the boys reported that they did not like to be called a wimp or to be made to feel like one. Dylan and the other boys agreed that Willy had done the right thing to become more physically fit. They confessed they would have done the same thing if they had been Willy. In essence, the book and the related discussion served to sanction and reproduce practices of strength and physical power usually associated with hegemonic Discourses of masculinity. Masculine bodies are supposed to have a certain look to them (Connell, 1995), and Willy's did not have that look initially. The boys seemed to believe that Willy was better off after he became more physically fit. In other words, it was better for Willy when he was able to display his masculinity appropriately. In addition, Peyton reasoned that working out had made Willy feel "better inside about himself" even though, as Marshall said, it really did not change him.

In our discussion, the boys and I neglected to challenge Willy's desire to become strong and muscular. This is not surprising given the boys' membership in a Discourse of competitive youth soccer that influenced their daily participation in physical conditioning and training. Marshall's first statement, "it doesn't matter if you are a weenie you can still do stuff" acknowledged the many ways of doing masculinity. However, by using the word *weenie*, Marshall lowered the status of that sort of masculinity. *Weenie* in the Young and Smith families was a term used disparagingly to describe a boy or girl who is weak, cowardly, frail, or unathletic. This term was also used by the middle-school boys in Eder's (1995) ethnography to insult boys who were not athletic and tough. Marshall was saying it was maybe okay to be a weenie, but weenies are not strong, brave, or tough (Kimmel, 1994). The terms weenie and wimp served to insult Willy by labeling him as a stigmatized, lesser male (Edley & Wetherell, 1997). They also served to make visible a hierarchical relationship between boys who are wimps or weenies and boys who are strong and muscular (Eder, 1995).

Boy over boy. The hierarchical relations among men were also evident as the boys participated in critical literacy discussions that focused on differences created by social class and sexual orientation. One example of an inequity created by social class was discussed as I read to the boys from *The World of Young Tom Jefferson* (Hilton, 1986). I asked the boys what they thought about the practice of the eldest son always inheriting the land. I had hoped to stimulate a discussion about the gender order (Connell, 1987). Dylan thought it was a great custom if you were the oldest. They eventually agreed that it was an unfair custom, but reasoned that it existed because people of Jefferson's day believed that boys were more able than girls to run plantations. Peyton explained that the boys back then had to do chores around the plantations so, of course, they would be better prepared. No one could explain why boys worked on the plantations instead of girls. They finally decided that it was "just the way it was back then." However, I think that Blake was beginning to think critically about this custom. He stated that the practice of the eldest son inheriting the land only applied to socially elite landowners known as "Virginia gentlemen," and he recognized that Jefferson later worked to change this seemingly unfair custom.

By asking the boys to critically examine the practices of growing up a boy in Thomas Jefferson's time, I asked them to question why certain historical practices of masculinity existed. They were able to identify ways that boys were apprenticed into manhood and became plantation owners. They were unable or unwilling to examine the unequal power relations evident between boys and girls and among boys, however. Their response "that's just the way it was back then" seemed to be a way to avoid an in-depth analysis of the gender order. Perhaps the boys' location within white middle-class Discourses of gender shaped the way they interpreted the past and limited their capacity to think beyond the more hegemonic practices of masculinity. Or, perhaps they saw their responses as a safe way to talk about the past so as to not disrupt their own values and beliefs about masculinity. It is also quite possible that this event took place so long ago that they truly could not explain it.

Another inequity that they could not explain was one created by a book character's sexual orientation. In Peyton's book, *King Rat* (Clavell, 1962), a gay man was the object of prejudicial treatment:

> Peyton: Oh, yeah, there is a gay man in the camp, and nobody stays near him. [giggle].
>
> Josephine: Why?
>
> Peyton: He's gay and nobody's ever seen him. Most of the men walk round naked or half naked... They've never seen him naked or half-naked. He never showers or anything with them in the public showers. He's got his own room with showers...
>
> Josephine: But why is that?
>
> Peyton: I don't know. He's a strange gay guy...he runs the theater, the main theater. He's gay.
>
> Josephine: But why is that significant?
>
> Peyton: I don't know...Peter Marlow [the "king" in *King Rat*] saw him [the gay guy] and didn't want to talk to him, but he came over to Peter...and he had to talk to him. Apparently, they had been in the Air Force...they were best friends, but now they're not because Peter apparently doesn't like gays.
>
> Josephine: So...do you think there is prejudice being shown in your book?
>
> Peyton: A little.

Peyton was aware that the gay man was not treated the same as the other men and that he had friends who turned on him when they found out he was gay. From Peyton's perspective, the gay man was being treated like a social outcast. Peyton, however, could not explain why. By repeating the phase "he's gay," Peyton led me to believe that he thought that being gay was reason enough for this man to be treated differently. It probably even seemed natural to Peyton that the gay man was treated in this manner. Challenging the naturalness of this notion, Blake and Dylan told about Kevin, a gay man they knew and liked. Peyton and Marshall also knew and liked Kevin but had not been aware that he was gay and were surprised to find out. Blake commented in a know-it-all voice, "You don't notice it, do you?" To this Marshall said that he believed Kevin to be a "regular guy—drinks beer..." and explained that being homosexual did not affect how you were as a person, "but sexually" it did. This comment hinted that Marshall was trying to denaturalize the relationship between gender and sexuality (Gutterman, 1994). Denaturalizing this relationship would work toward more equal relations between men. It would interrupt the maintenance of the gender order, which is partially informed by one's sexual orientation.

The boys talked about the relational nature of masculinity as they participated in critical literacy discussions. Talking about masculinity without contrasting it to femininity was different for the boys. Although they discussed differences between wimps and real men, a more common practice was to compare boys to girls. When they did compare boys to boys, it felt unsafe. For example, when Peyton attempted to talk about the ways masculinity was portrayed in *King Rat*, he said that he could not do so because "there are no women at all in the book,

they're in a prison camp. So there really isn't any safe way that men are supposed to act." Peyton's comment shows his belief that masculinity only exists in opposition to femininity. Without women in the book, Peyton said he could not talk (safely) about the ways masculinity was represented in the text.

Summary of hierarchical masculine practices. The boys talked and read about different ways of being masculine. On one hand, the critical literacy discussions essentialized the differences between men—wimps were not athletic boys. Identifying stereotypical male differences did not necessary lead them to resist or challenge such practices. On the other hand, by critically examining these differences, the boys' common sense beliefs about masculinities were beginning to be challenged. For example, why were gay men treated differently? This seemed confusing and uncertain to the boys. However, according to Peyton, talking about gay men "in reference to a character in a book instead of talking about a real person" was easier and more comfortable for them.

Considering the boys' awareness of masculinities

While reflecting on how the critical literacy activities sustained or transformed the boys' awareness of gendered identities and inequities in texts, I thought about the notion of "word with a loophole" (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 232-233). Bakhtin's word with a loophole represents the notion that words have no final or ultimate meaning,

> ...that is, the loophole left open, accompanies the word like a shadow. Judged by its meaning alone, the word with a loophole should be an ultimate word and it does present itself as such, but in fact it is only the penultimate word and places after itself only a conditional, not a final period. (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 233)

In other words, word with a loophole represents the notion of unfinalized and contextualized meanings and allows for meaning to be unstable and like a chameleon, "always ready to change its tone and ultimate meaning" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 234).

Word with a loophole is situated within Bakhtin's theory of dialogism. Unlike the more common meaning of dialogism as an expression of an author's ideas by means of a dialogue between two or more people, Bakhtin's use of the term refers to the messiness, uncertainty, and unpredictability of social relations among and between people and texts (Clark & Holquist, 1984). Dialogism ensures the primacy of contexts over texts for governing meaning. That is, at the moment of utterance, the meaning constructed will depend upon certain social contexts and a variety of other social factors such as body language, tone of voice, and any previously held meaning by the listener or the speaker (Danow, 1991). Meaning construction, then, is viewed as contextually determined and unrepeatable. Dialogism acknowledges that people are *not* mere puppets of institutional and larger societal contexts by taking into account the power relations and confusion of everyday life (Danow, 1991).

Loopholes and practices of masculinity. Critical discourse analysis revealed that the four boys were aware (at least sometimes) of the chameleon-like nature (or loopholes) of the Discourses of gender. As they participated in critical literacy discussions, they found examples of how gendered identities were represented in texts, and they began to see loopholes in their taken-for-granted notion that masculinity was the opposite of femininity. They identified loopholes when they talked about men or boys who were not always brave. These loopholes became especially visible when the so-called masculine practices did not match with their own experiences as boys. When this happened the boys tended to transform the practice to better fit their own experiences.

For example, during the critical literacy discussions that focused on bravery and crying the boys attempted to transform the meanings of those practices. As they interacted with one another, they talked about the appropriateness of boys crying and being brave. They drew upon their past experiences as boys who were not always brave and upon their experiences with texts that portrayed powerful men and boys who were braver than girls and less emotional than girls and women. They desired practices of masculinity that would allow them to cry and be a little bit scared, but still be recognized as masculine, *not* feminine. Through this talk, within the homeschool context, three of the boys transformed crying into a practice men did when sad or disappointed. One boy sustained his belief that crying was not a masculine practice, and the others modified their beliefs about crying—boys do cry, but they cry less than girls.

Likewise, the boys questioned bravery as a masculine practice. They transformed their understanding of bravery when they admitted they were not as brave as a character in a particular book. They also decided that boys could be a "little bit scared" and still be braver than most girls. The boys produced a new meaning for men being brave as they interacted with their texts and one another. However, even after a discussion in which their talk led me to believe they might transform the meaning of masculine bravery, all four boys returned to describing themselves and one another as brave. The inconsistencies in their personal meanings for the practices of masculinity, such as being brave, exemplify the notion of unfinalized and contextualized meanings, or word with a loophole.

The boys also talked about loopholes in their common sense thinking about the practices of masculinity that defined men in relation to other men. The critical lit-

eracy text-based discussions provided a space for the boys to explore the dissonance or loopholes between their own feelings and actions and the social practices that are hegemonically defined as male (of a certain sort). Recognizing loopholes did not necessarily mean a transformation in their thinking about these practices of masculinity. In some cases, loopholes encouraged them to sustain their common sense notions of masculinity. For instance, they recognized that some boys were wimps, but as Dylan explained, he did not like being called a wimp or being made to feel like one. Wimps are stigmatized males. The boys wanted to look like regular guys—strong and muscular—not wimps. However, their thinking became a bit unstable, possibly a little transformed, when they talked about homosexuality.

Homosexuality, a loophole in the assumed match between gender and sexual orientation, was the topic of several critical literacy discussions. Homosexuality and the inequities associated with it were discussed in relation to book characters and people they knew. Critical literacy discussions encouraged them to talk about these inequities and challenged their thinking about masculinities. For example, the gay prisoner in the book *King Rat* used to be heterosexual, but now he was gay and stigmatized. This was confusing to the boys. Loopholes are confusing. Within the context of homeschooling, the boys grounded their discussion in their personal experience of knowing and liking a gay man. This led them to begin to question the inequities associated with homosexuality.

The boys became aware through their participation in critical literacy text-based discussions that there were many Discourses of masculinity and not all Discourses are viewed equally in society (Connell, 1995; Connell, 1996; Jackson & Salisbury, 1996). In other words, masculine identities and inequities in texts became unfixed, unstable, and inconsistent in the boys' thinking—like a word with a loophole.

Dialogism and power relations. Critical discourse analysis revealed how the power relations among the boys and me and different social contexts shaped the boys' interactions. For example, CDA allowed me to see how Peyton changed his stance on bravery in the face of Blake's perceived bravery within our local context and the power struggle between Marshall and the others as they attempted to sway Marshall to change his mind about being like the Grand Witch. To highlight how the power relations within the local (e.g., homeschooling), institutional (e.g., family), and societal contexts (e.g., social class, race, gender) dynamically influenced the boys' participation in critical literacy discussions, I employed Bakhtin's notion of dialogism as a guide. This notion helped to demonstrate that the boys' interactions were not just structured by social contexts, but shaped and were shaped by the power relations within the local contexts (Fairclough, 1989). In the following example, I summarized the interplay of the power relations among the local, institutional, and societal contexts during the boys' discussion of men crying. For the sake of explanation, I have identified a specific social context and some possible influences. My example begins after Blake stated that men crying was bad (societal context—a belief of hegemonic masculinity). Then Peyton and Marshall (local context—brothers who both cry on occasion) confronted Blake's belief (local context—tone of voice, choice of words) that men who cry are not masculine (local context—tone of voice, choice of words). Blake stood firm (local context—body language, tone of voice) on this hegemonic belief (societal context). I exercised my power as mother and teacher (institutional context—condoned practices of mother and teacher; local context—my discomfort and desire to keep peace) to stop my two sons from what I perceived as ganging up on Blake (local context). Peyton and Marshall softened their stance (local context—tone of voice), perhaps because of my interruption (institutional context—mother/teacher), or perhaps because they did not want to challenge Blake (local context) or the practice of men crying any longer (social context).

In short, the larger societal context of hegemonic Discourse of masculinity worked to sustain Blake's belief that men do not cry. However, this practice did not match the other boys' experiences of crying. The local context—either my intervention or the boys' responses to Blake—shaped how Marshall and Peyton eventually compromised on their stance about men crying. My responses were influenced by the practices of certain societal Discourses of woman, teacher, and mother. This example shows how the three social contexts—local, institutional, and societal— worked together to sustain and transform the boys' awareness of practices of masculinity during one of the critical literacy activities.

Parting thoughts

Reflections about the research process

I was very much aware of my multiple positions as researcher, mother, friend, and teacher throughout the research process. As the boys and I participated in critical literacy activities and began to develop a critical awareness of gender identities and inequities, I experienced some inner tension. I was very excited when one or all the boys expressed a developing insight about masculinity. I was proud when they questioned and found loopholes in some of the hegemonic practices of masculinities. I was interested when the boys talked

about the sexual orientations of book characters in a serious and thoughtful way. But I was also worried. The boys were at various stages of puberty. Puberty is known by psychologists as a period when adolescent boys and girls experience increased social pressures to conform to traditional masculine and feminine practices (Galambos, Almeida, & Peterson, 1990). On one hand, this seemed like a great time for the boys to become aware of all the many masculine practices which they might sanction and adopt as their own. Yet, on the other hand, I worried that by challenging their common sense notions of masculinities, they would feel badly about themselves or feel unsure of themselves as they grew into men. I also worried at times that the critical literacy activities were merely making the practices of the hegemonic masculinities more visible and appealing.

Relatedly, I was unaccustomed to merging my academic feminist life and my personal family life. While merging these two lives provided the boys and me with wonderful memories that we will always cherish, it also made me more aware of the inconsistencies and contradictions within these two Discourses. These inconsistencies and contradictions may have contributed to the boys' unstable awareness of gendered identities and inequities and their inconsistent desires to transform practices of masculinity. As I asked them to challenge and disrupt hegemonic practices of masculinity, they observed me condoning some of the very same practices. An example follows.

As the facilitator of a critical literacy text-based discussion that centered on why Willy the Wimp was teased and wanted to look like the other more muscular male gorillas, I challenged the boys to question whether being more physically fit and muscular made one more of a man. Yet, as a mother I supported the boys' physical development as soccer players. I encouraged them to practice hard, run faster and more, play their best, and not be "weenies." I was certainly interested in their physical development that related to them keeping their positions on competitive soccer teams, which was in opposition to my stance about Willy. I could have encouraged them to play on less competitive teams and use practice time for other nonphysical activities, but I did not. This is but one of the many contradictions I am sure exist between my life, my expectations for my sons, and the intent of the critical literacy activities.

The contradictions and inner tensions described above contributed to my discomfort as I facilitated critical literacy activities. Unlike the rest of the homeschooling day, facilitating the critical literacy activities did not feel natural to me. I suppose that my discomfort could also have resulted from the newness of teaching from a critical perspective. I had never taught such activities, and like the boys, I did not know what to expect. It could have also been that I was cognizant that gender was my interest and not the boys' and that talking about gender made them uncomfortable. As a mother and teacher, I often strove to "make nice" (Alvermann, 1995), to ensure that my family and students were comfortable. However, the critical literacy activities that I facilitated asked the boys to question their beliefs and challenge what seemed like common sense to them. This made me and the boys uncomfortable.

These discomforts contributed to my hesitancy during the critical literacy activities to exercise my institutional power (Shannon, 1995) over the boys. My hesitancy caused me to lose some teachable and researchable moments and may have worked to sustain the boys' common sense awareness of gendered identities and inequities. There were many times when I failed to exercise power over the boys by initiating a critique or calling attention to a gendered inequity.

My ethical decision to honor personal relations over my research agenda may have also contributed to my hesitancy to conduct more critical literacy activities with the boys. It certainly hindered the research opportunities I may have had with the other parents. For example, I planned to conduct weekly interviews with the parents as a group to uncover the parents' assumptions, values, and beliefs about gendered identities and inequities. No doubt, this knowledge would have helped me to better explain the boys' participation in talk about gender. However, I conducted only two formal interviews and for only one did all the parents attend. I was very apprehensive about calling the parents together to talk about our sons' participation in critical literacy activities that focused on masculinity. My apprehension stemmed from the private nature of the information we shared about our sons and about ourselves during the first group interview. We quickly forgot the tape recorder was on. I became unsure if this information would have been shared had the level of trust been less among us. I became uncomfortable thinking about the interview transcripts as data. Although the other parents never told me, I believe they felt the same way. One by one, they politely declined my invitations to get together again. They did, however, talk to me individually without the tape recorder on, and once the boys interviewed them about their beliefs about gender. This was not the same sort of data I could have acquired though more formal interviews.

Thoughts about critical literacy

One insight that was particularly interesting to me as a literacy educator was how the success of critical literacy discussions depended so much on the local contexts and power relations. Each boy's individual responses dur-

ing a critical literacy text-based discussion were unpredictable and inconsistent. Take, for example, the impact of the power relations on the boys' talk about bravery. Among friends and within the homeschool contexts, Dylan admitted that he was not always brave, Marshall redefined bravery, Blake said he was brave, and Peyton thought if a boy was scared he was a weenie (even though Peyton had earlier confessed that he was not as brave as the main character in the book they were discussing). Power relations became visible when Peyton verbally changed his opinion of boys being afraid. Remember, he did not say that boys who were afraid were weenies until his friend Blake would not admit to being scared. Perhaps one way to diffuse some of these local power relations when facilitating critical literacy activities would be to incorporate more written responses. In this way, the boys could privately critique practices of masculinity, until they were ready to critique them out loud with their peers.

A related insight that deserves further attention came from Peyton. He said that talking about the practices of masculinity of particular book characters was easier than talking about the gendered practices of people he knew. This insight validates a suggestion offered by Martino (1995) who posited that choosing texts for adolescents to read that already raise questions about gender stereotypes facilitates their thinking about gendered identities. Moving gender outside of one's self is a way to talk about hegemonic masculinity without personal confrontation. It could address the dissonance felt when conversations about gender get too personal.

Critical literacy discussions tended to transform the boys' awareness of gendered identities and inequities when the masculine practices portrayed in texts did not match their own experiences. This supports Davies's (1996) belief that grounding critical literacy activities in boys' own gendered experience is necessary for boys and young men to work toward destabilizing hegemonic masculine practices. She posited that by doing so boys would develop an awareness of how their experiences as boys affected their ways of doing gender and how, in turn, their experiences are influenced by the Discourses to which they have access. Conversely, when the practices represented in texts matched the four boys' own practices, these practices tended to be sustained and condoned. This should not be viewed as a reason to disconnect critical literacy discussions from lived experiences, but a reason to continue them. Through such discussions, boys will have opportunities to hear how others experience masculinity and listen to various viewpoints. This might eventually lead to transforming their awareness of gendered identities.

Participating in the critical literacy activities enabled the boys to gain insights about their personal and social relations and become aware of how texts provide selected versions of masculinities. The boys began to destabilize hegemonic masculine practices that define men in opposition to women and other subordinated males. The critical literacy activities provided the boys a space to think about multiple possibilities for how they could think, feel, and act as males. These activities also allowed me, as Peyton's and Marshall's mother, a special time with my sons and insights into the kind of men they may become. Perhaps, as they grow into manhood, I will continue to see the impact of my study.

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APPENDIX A

Participants' written questionnaire

1. Pretend you are moving to a new school. You know one person who attends that school. In the space below, write how you would like this friend to describe you to the other kids who will be in your class. In other words, what would you like them to know about you as a person before they meet you?

2. Suppose tomorrow morning you woke up as a girl. How would your life be different?

APPENDIX B

CDA vignette excerpt

Male/female dualism

Dylan. Reflecting on what he had learned from the critical literacy book discussion, Dylan wrote, "To be a boy or a man [according to the books discussed] you should be strong and brave and have more muscles. I don't think all boys should be this way, you don't have to be brave and strong and have lots of muscles...but you look more like a boy when you are strong and brave" (March 6, 1997). Dylan's comments represent some of his confusion over how to talk about being a boy. On one hand a boy doesn't have to be brave, on the other, you look more like a boy if you are strong and brave. He is struggling to come to terms with this inconsistency.

Some of his confusion comes from the dissonance he feels between his actions and feelings and how some texts—written and spoken—portray the way boys should be. For instance, as he read *Where the Red Fern Grows*, Dylan noted on several occasions that the main character was a young boy and very brave. The boy camped in the woods alone and did other things that showed his bravery. Several book club discussions brought up bravery as an important social practice of being a boy. This is significant because Dylan is not known for his bravery. For example, this winter we went to Virginia and all the boys skied except for Dylan. He was afraid. During one book club discussion right after our return from Virginia when bravery was brought up, Marshall said that if boys were afraid of things it wouldn't make them less of a boy, it would mean that he "would be just a little bit scared of stuff" (Feb. 7). Marshall's comment protected his friend from feeling embarrassed. It also may have represented a less stringent dualistic view of masculinity [see Davies (1993) for quote of dualistic definitions of gender].

APPENDIX C
Double-entry journal

Literature to draw from when I approach my own subjectivities...

Journal writing seems so self-centered.

St. Pierre, B.A. (1997b). Methodology in the fold and the irruption of transgressive data. QSE. 10 (175-189) Tells about how she had to examine her own subjectivity in ways that allowed her to think differently about herself and her participants, "inside as an operation of outside" (p. 178).

Emotional data discussed (see a Sage book titled, *Emotional Data*).

Marcus, G.E. (1994) What comes (just) after "post." *Handbook of Qualitative Research*.

Describes different kinds of reflexivity.

Jones (1992) quotes Donna Haraway as warning us that there is not much point of reflexivity without a critical examination of power relations within our accounts.

Quinby (1991) talks about too much self in ethnography. An example is in Agee's and Evans's *Let Us Praise Famous Men*. But I like the biography about him before the book begins. It helps me situate his experience with the tenant farmers. So far in my reading of *Let Us Praise Famous Men*, I have enjoyed his biography more than the text itself.

I am certainly in the fold! I am an insider and an outsider simultaneously at times and separated at other times. How do I represent myself?

It is obvious that I cannot leave myself out of the analysis. In fact, I put myself in the middle of the action by being simultaneously—mother, wife, teacher, adult friend, researcher, and feminist. For example, in my prospectus I wrote "This exploration will include the participants and their parent-teachers (one of whom is me), as producers and interpreters of texts, in negotiating the social contexts of power relations that contribute to gendered inequities in institutions and in society at large." While I enact many different subjectivities, I am also all of them at once—and all of them apart! My committee was a bit concerned about how I was going to separate myself—I convinced them that by keeping a journal as a mother and writing field notes and reflections as a teacher and researcher I could keep them separate when they needed to be—how could I believe I could do this! It's close to impossible. I'm not even sure if it's desirable. When I thought the mother in me was taking over I wrote about it. There were conflicts between my selves as I progressed through the study. At times, I wished I was working with other people's children.