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Fostering Boys to Men: Cultural Production in Therapeutic Foster Care

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Abstract

This article presents findings from a project that critically analyzed the naturally occurring discourse between a foster caregiver and youth. The purpose of the study was to examine the caregiver-child relationship and the way in which a child's self is negotiated through interaction with a caregiver in a foster home setting. A discourse analytic approach was used to analyze the twenty-three observations of naturally occurring data collected over four months. This article focuses on the "boys to men" discourse genre, as illustrated through a segment of interaction, which highlights several themes relating to the cultural identity of responsible manhood. Themes include caregivers' role as teachers, cultural transmission of values, and motivation. The findings raise theoretical considerations for assessing child and adolescent behavior, advocating increased attention to the sociocultural environment.

KEYWORDS: Discourse analysis, culture, identity, foster care, socialization

Fostering Boys to Men: Cultural production in Therapeutic Foster Care

Therapeutic foster care, sometimes referred to as treatment foster care, is a foster-family based placement option for youth who demonstrate challenging behaviors (Petr, Swaim, & Walter, 2003). Research on the impact of foster care has suggested that youth in care demonstrate poor identity outcomes (Kools, 1997; Wegar, 2006; Yancey, 1992), which mandates more research on selfhood in foster care to discover how the self is developing while apart from one's family. The historical developments in research have offered heightened awareness of the influence of social factors, such as group membership, cultural arrangements, role-identities, language forms, narrative practices, and so forth. It has also become evident that the self is dynamic and changing over time in accordance with its multitude of influences. Possibly the most valuable contribution of recent theories is with regard to the cultural and contextual influences on self. This article focuses on cultural definitions of manhood in one foster home and the ways in which language is used to institute cultural norms. Over four months, interactions in the foster home revealed the significance of familial culture for establishing behavioral expectations and implications for identity and selfhood. The data includes a portion of the findings of a larger study on the negotiation of self between foster caregivers and foster children,

which has attempted to fill a gap in research on identity and self-development by using naturally occurring and interactional data in foster home settings over a period of time.

Language and the Development of Self

According to Blommaert (2005), language is the point at which identities are produced. He stated that "In fact, identity is semiotic through and through, and every act of semiosis is an act of identity in which we 'give off' information about ourselves" (Blommaert, 2005, p. 203-204). The language used in conjunction with the context within which it is used together makes meaning. Therefore, context is essential for not only making sense of language but also of ourselves and others. This is what linguistic anthropologists refer to as contextualization, which includes the process by which individuals identify interactions as being of a certain sort and themselves as persons of a certain sort (O'Connor, 2003). Individuals "take up positions and position one another, with regard to the interaction and the broader communities in which they are participating" (O'Connor, 2003, p. 72).

Cultural Pasts and Future Selves

Trajectories of self are the perceived end by which present selves are understood and future selves are directed (e.g., "winner," "loser," "responsible young men," etc.). Rather than having a single possible self, that one discovers over time, the assumption maintained for this article is that one has many possible selves over time (see figure 1, Actual vs. Potential Trajectories by author). Cole (1996) augments our understanding of this in his discussion of prolepsis, which he defines as a process whereby the future is enacted in the present. In particular, he illuminates the way parents remember their cultural pasts, assume the future will be consistent with their pasts, and treat their children in the present based on these memories and imaginations. The present micro level interactions are structured in such a way as to bring the future to the present.

Figure 1. Actual vs potential trajectories

The trajectories of self that were observed in this study embody the description provided by Cole (1996), as "parents' (purely ideal) recall of their past and imagination of their child's future become a fundamental materialized constraint on the child's life experiences in the present" (p.184). Cole recalled studies examining the culturally gendered ways babies were treated by their parents, where infants wearing blue diapers were given "manly" treatment as they were bounced, while infants wearing pink diapers were treated gently and sweetly. Cole notes that human beings are unique in the way that we "can 'reach into' the cultural past, project it into the future, and then 'carry' that conceptual future 'back' into the present to create the sociocultural environment of the newcomer" (1996, p. 186). Where Cole (1996) addresses these dynamics between parents and infants, this study reveals additional factors that impact socialization and development throughout the life course beyond infancy. The caregiver-child relationship in this study involves an adolescent youth, who brings his own remembered past, imagined futures, and present

experiences. This raises two important distinctions from Cole's work that implicate ongoing socialization and development beyond infancy.

First, once a child begins to accrue history, a parent continues to "reach back" to the remembered past, project forward to an imagined future for the child, and treat the child in the present accordingly. However, now the parent's past includes memories of the child in addition to their own memories. The trajectory of self as a result of the additional history of the child now requires the parent to "reach back" to the remembered past, consider the developing history of the child and how (in)commensurate that history is with the imagined future, then imagine a likely resultant future, and treat the child according to the presumed future.

The second distinction is that a child also accrues memories from which a future is predicted and the present is understood. The result is that a new trajectory of self emerges for the child that may or may not be congruent and that must be negotiated with the trajectory of the parent or family. Therefore, a parallel process of competing trajectories begins. As Cole (1996) noted, "the ideal aspect of culture is transformed into its material form as the mother and other adults structure the child's experience to be consistent with what they imagine to be the child's future identity" (p. 185). This "material form" of structuring a child's experience according to the imagined identity and interpreting the child's behavior as indicative of such an identity is the point at which an empirical self is observable. That is, when a general consensus is achieved about a child's identity, whether inhabited or ascribed (i.e., self-proclaimed or imposed by others), and the child's behaviors are taken to be supportive of the identity, the empirical self has emerged.

Procedures

This article presents a portion of the findings of a larger project (cf., McKinney, 2011) in which two therapeutic foster families were observed on twenty-three occasions over a period of four months to note the naturally occurring interactions and negotiations of self at the beginning of a foster care placement. A discourse analytic approach was used to analyze data sources of field notes and video and audio recorded observations, which were transcribed verbatim. Analysis followed the recommendations of Fairclough (2001) for completing a discourse analysis. The phases include describing, interpreting, and explaining. In order to describe the interactions, the observations were transcribed using the transcription conventions of Atkinson and Heritage (1999). Below are the conventions used:

Transcript Conventions

<p>[]</p> <p>[descriptions]</p>	<p>Sam: I don't even want to tell the story [looks to the floor].</p>
<p>...</p> <p>Drawing out a portion of a word</p>	<p>Sam: Everythi::::ng</p>

Portion of unintelligible speech (xxx)	Sam: "Alright, um, could you let them in since (xxx)..."
Interrupting speech =	Donna: = because they all know by the end the year...
((describing expressions)) (())	Sam: It was two. No she don't. ((smiling))
False Starts -	Sam: it like - I wa - I thought I was on time.
Overlapping Speech [	Sam: [I'm 'a have you in everything. Jeff: [I don't wanna hear it.
Brief Pause ...	Sam: She said, "No." ... She did me dirty like.

The interactions were transcribed in detail and were reviewed for themes and patterns noted in the research on foster care and adoption related to this study, thus using previous research as an initial effort to ensure transferability. These potential themes, as identified in the literature, were anticipated to broadly represent foster care issues for youth regarding complexity, ethnic identity, stigma, and stability and served as a guide for identifying segments of interaction for further analysis. In addition to these themes, gaze was directed toward interactions that were explicitly related to identities (e.g., being a "man," being "bad," or being a "winner") and included discussions about preferred or avoided identities (e.g., the foster youth's view of self) and ascribed identities (e.g., the way others view the youth). With regard to identity, Fairclough (2003) suggests considering what people commit themselves to and what they say or write about truth and obligation; therefore, commitment was considered as well. The interactions that were selected were based on these themes.

Once interactions were identified for further analysis, the focus shifted to the textual-linguistic aspects of observations, to "describe the relationships among certain texts, interactions, and social practices..." (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, & Joseph, 2005, p. 371). The interpretation in this study focuses primarily on Fairclough's approach, which is to examine

how social agents make texts (i.e., segments of language) by “setting up relations between their elements” (Fairclough, 2003, p.12). For example, by linking the word "good" to particular sorts of language, such as a "good student," and defining the qualities of such as being on time to school, getting good grades, not serving detention, etc., participants make local meaning. The interpretation phase is more about the interpretation of language use rather than the local meaning, which is during the explanation phase.

As part of the interpretation process, several questions were asked of the interactions, following the recommendations of Gee (2005). Gee recommends asking the following seven questions to better identify and understand the discourse(s) in use:

1. How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?
2. What activity or activities is this piece of language being used to enact?
3. What identity or identities is this piece of language being used to enact?
4. What sort of relationship(s) is this piece of language seeking to enact with others?
5. What perspective on social goods is this piece of language communicating?
6. How does this piece of language (dis)connect things; how does it make one thing (ir)relevant to another?
7. How does this piece of language (not) privilege specific sign systems? (2005, p. 11-13)

These questions served as potential starting points for assessing the discourses in use.

The final phase of analysis consisted of connections between the participants' activity and discourse and the ideological underpinnings of the participants, thus explaining the local meanings of discourse, which are referred to as "indexicality." For example, being a "man" is an indexical word that can only be understood within the context of its usage. In this study, being a man is understood based on the discourse of the foster parent, who said "Since you boys are movin up into being young men..." and provided a definition (e.g., "Men handle their responsibilities and they manage their homes"). Using grammatical resources, such as "since" and lexical meanings together, local meanings are understood. According to Gee, “to be a particular who and to pull off a particular what requires that we act, value, interact, and use language in sync with or in coordination with other people and with various objects (props) in appropriate locations and at appropriate times” (2005, p. 23). Meaning arises as a result of understanding interactions as situated in cultural contexts.

Gee (2005) and Fairclough (2001) were selected for approaches to guide analysis of language since they offer particular attention to identity. While Gee and Fairclough offer approaches to analyze language, Rymes (2001) serves as a model for structuring an analysis of discourse, beginning with broader features, describing the discourse genres, external structures of language, emerging themes, and then moving into more micro level linguistic tools and interpreting indexical meanings. The purpose for presenting the analysis in this way is to situate the more micro level analysis within the broader interactions during which they took place.

Participants

Participants were recruited by a foster home recruiter (an employee at a local foster care agency), who provided foster parents with an information letter and flyer describing the study. To participate in this study, a participant must have been a certified foster parent with a child placed in his/her home, within three months of participation in order to capture a newly developing relationship. Any foster parent meeting the inclusion requirements (i.e., child placed within three months of beginning participation) was invited to participate. For the purpose of this article, interactions from one family will be presented, focusing primarily on the interactions between one youth who met the eligibility requirements of moving to the home within three months and his foster father.

The foster home is composed of a divorced African American foster father, Ervin, who is in his mid-fifties. He is the second of two children and was raised by his grandmother until the age of eighteen years. His grandparents were Christian ministers, and he is now very involved in his church. He is a strong believer in family traditions and uses regular family meetings to address any concerns in his home. Regarding discipline, Ervin feels that time out, rewards and removal of privileges are most effective. For over twenty years, he has been fostering and after his marriage of ten years ended, he began to foster only young men. Ervin has chosen to foster youth, rather than adopt, feeling as though this would afford greater opportunity to help more youth. He has expressed feeling as though his role as a foster parent is to help young boys develop skills for living independently, serving as a teacher both professionally and personally.

Presently, Ervin fosters an eighteen year old Caucasian foster son, Matt, and a seventeen year old African American male, Tyler, who is the most recent addition to the foster home and the focus of this study. Matt has lived in the foster home for several years; therefore, while an important participant in the study, his interactions will only be discussed where relevant to the newly developing relationship between Tyler and Ervin. Tyler was adopted at the age of two years after being removed from his mother's home due to drug use and neglect. Tyler's adoptive mother reported having "troubles" with him since the fourth grade. Then at the age of eleven years, Tyler reported having been physically abused with a brush, belt, and extension cord by his adoptive mother. He was later deemed a "person in need of supervision" due to "ungovernable behavior."

Tyler was placed in a residential treatment facility as a fourteen year old. A year later, he was moved to a group home, and was considered to be such an exceptional youth that he "deserved" to be placed with a foster family. Tyler was noted as being very driven to succeed in school. In his most recent report card, he earned a 3.06 grade point average, earning two A's, five B's, and two C's. The group home staff began establishing weekend visits with Ervin and his foster son, Matt, who Tyler met while placed in the residential facility.

Though he had been adopted previously, Tyler did not wish to return to his adopted family, nor did he want to be adopted. The reason for a permanency goal of another planned permanent living arrangement is unknown, whether a result of his disrupted adoption, the prospect of adoption at 17 years of age, or any other number of possibilities.

Boys to Men: An Emerging Discourse Genre

Generally speaking, a genre is born when common features are categorizable, whether music, art, literature, etc. A discourse genre emerges when common lexical and grammatical tools become noticeable across interactions. In this article the "boys to men" interactions are used to present the patterned deployment of linguistic tools. Often a discourse genre shares patterned ways of communicating that are connected to particular context. For example, as Gee (2005) notes, he talks in a certain way when acting as the chair of a committee. In this project, Ervin shared similar features when speaking about the responsibilities of adulthood, reminding foster youth that they are a developing from boys to young men. During formal "family meetings," Ervin often spoke of his responsibility to teach the boys and in two meetings in particular, he spoke of becoming men, though only one interaction will be presented for the purpose of this article. In this section, I present the external features of the genre, themes, linguistic resources, and indexicality within the genre.

External Features of the "Boys to Men" Genre

Though situated in natural interaction, spoken communication still has an analyzable structure. Similar to literary works, a story is thought to have at least four parts: 1) a setting; 2) an initiating event; 3) an attempt or plan; and 4) a consequence (Stein & Policastro, 1984, as cited in Rymes, 2001). In addition, a story may also contain a "coda," which according to Labov (as cited in Rymes, 2001) is the bridge between the story and the participants to which the story is being told. For example, it answers the question, "why is this story meaningful for the audience here and now?" It is as if the narrator finishes a story and says, "So what does this have to do with you?"

Consider the structure of the following to note presentation of the setting, then the problem or initiating event, possible solutions, and coda.

"Boys to Men"

Setting	Ervin: Now... in life you'll find that just because you get jobs and everything don't eliminate - certainly have to reschedule, restructure
Problem	the way you run your home. You filthy rich. You filthy rich...swimming pool, tennis court, two swimming pools at the crib. Even if your swimming pool covered and leaves don't go in it, you still gotta change the water. So although you work, there's still things to do at home. You just have to re- do that. So in other words, when we get our jobs that everybody gonna get, it don't mean that the garbage don't get took out. It don't mean that the carpet don't get vacuum. It don't mean rooms don't... you're not eliminating anything. Whatch you're doing is you're moving out of being little boys to being men.
Possible Solutions	Men handle their responsibilities and they manage their homes. Well, the wife will do this; the wife will do that; or this-that-or-the-other, but while you're at college, you got your own place, independent living... or your car. You'll need to go to Delta Sonic, or you'll go to Delta Sonic and you'll wax your own car. But because you doin' a nine to five ain't goin' to say that you aint goin' to wax or clean your car, cause you gotta pick your girl up. Ain't nobody gonna pick their girl up with no four- thousand dollar rims on for what? No, I worked all day, but...
Possible Solutions	So now you young boys are movin' up into young manhood, eighteen, nineteen, goin' on twenty, and you workin'. So what we gonna do now is... work and manage our responsibilities around the home around what's comfortable for you. That's why we havin' this meeting now. Some people need to come home, have an hour to themselves before they do this-that-and-the-other. Some people come home knock out what they need to knock out so they don't need to do nothin the rest of the evening. But more importantly is huh - cause he's gettin ready to go to work too. More importantly is schedules so that you can come home and make sure that the things you're responsible for is aced. Now, getting in front of the thing is
Coda	always the best way to go about it. Between now and when you go to bed tonight, the carpet is already done, whatever your chores are, the garbage is out, your room is already aced. Your room is already aced, you get off work tomorrow, you gonna post up chill. "Did everything I did."

Consider the above speech and the major structural components. The example in the chart shows how this conversation is formatted.

"Boys to Men"	
Setting	Ervin: Now... in life
Problem	you will find that just because you get jobs and everything don't eliminate - certainly have to reschedule, restructure the way you run your home.
Possible Solutions	Some people need to come home, have an hour to themselves... Some people come home knock out what they need to knock out...
Coda	Between now and when you go to bed tonight...whatever your chores are...Your room is already ached, you get off work tomorrow, you gonna post up chill. "Did everything I did."

The external structure of the scenario indexes the likelihood of a discourse genre that surrounds socialization of foster children for Ervin. The structure and content that was observed across multiple interactions suggests a style of talking about "becoming young men." During an exit interview, Ervin noted that his work with youth is centered around preparing young men to move on to college and/ or independent living.

The elements of the interaction are common to the English language. Therefore, by situating the interactions in context, the connection to societal influentials is not minimized since context also includes the social, cultural, historical, political, etc... By starting with the external features of the genre, I hope to situate the following themes, linguistic resources, and indexical resources within this story and within this foster family, rather than suggesting a discourse genre for foster care in general.

Themes of the Genre

Several themes are raised in the "boys to men" genre, including caregivers' role as teachers, cultural transmission of values, and motivation. In this section, themes are introduced as topics of consideration, but not expanded upon at great length. After introducing themes, linguistic resources of the genre are presented.

Caregivers as Teachers. Ervin noted his sense of duty to prepare the boys to become young men, saying "I got to." By using the word "got" Ervin portrays a commitment or obligation to the task. He alludes a few times to what it means to be responsible young men (i.e., values), and raises incentive for the boys to share his values through his future scenarios.

Cultural Transmission. Cole (1996) discusses a process whereby cultural norms and values are handed down. He refers to this process as prolepsis. The "boys to men" genre raises the theme in the way that Ervin deploys particular linguistic resources to accomplish the task of

teaching a value of responsible "young men." Of particular import is that the words "responsible" and "men" require unpacking, as their meanings are morally bound and contingent upon the culture of the speaker. In this case, the cultural values include gender roles (e.g., the wife will do this. The wife will do that), financial management values of saving and helping others in need, household responsibility of contribution (e.g., vacuuming, cleaning rooms, etc.), and time management (e.g., "the best thing is always to get in front of the thing," i.e., don't procrastinate). In order to effectively instill these values, however, Ervin must make these consequential for the lives of the youth, which he does through the use of codas that serve as motivators.

Motivation. The issue of motivation is one that seems to be universally applicable to caregiving. Whether foster, adopted, or biological children, caregivers inevitably encounter the task of motivating children. Certainly different forms of motivating are employed from one family to another. In Ervin's case, he utilizes codas and future scenarios as a way of inciting a sense of urgency in the youth.

Analysis and Discussion

In this section, I present two linguistic tools common in the "boys to men" genre. The first involves the use of connecting devices and lexical forms that together function to implicate the self-based on a cultural definition of "being a man." The second tool incites urgency around the lessons being taught by posing future scenarios that highlight how the lessons will be useful in life. Finally, I highlight indexical meaning in the genre.

Implicating the Self

Using connecting devices, Ervin makes household expectations (e.g., chores, paying for one's own juice, managing money) consequential for the youth's identity as a "man." Consider the following examples and the linguistic devices used to make the connection to manhood.

Ervin: It don't mean that the carpet don't get vacuum; it don't mean rooms don't... you're not eliminating anything. Whatch you're doin' is you're moving out of being little boys to being men. Men handle their responsibilities and they manage their homes.

According to Gee (2005), information that is fronted in a statement is generally background to that which follows. Ervin makes four statements of what he does not mean before stating what he does mean. After prefacing with an implied "but" or "rather," Ervin then suggests the ways that men are expected to act. Another linguistic connector is the word "so," which suggests a consequence.

Ervin: So now you young boys are movin' up into you manhood...eighteen, nineteen, goin' on twenty and you workin'. So what we gonna do is... work and manage your responsibilities around the home around what's comfortable for you.

Deploying a logical connector, such as "so," accomplishes a task similar to using "as a result." In other words, as a result of the boys moving into young men, they are expected to work and manage their responsibilities around the home. What is also being suggested, though implied, is

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that young boys are not expected to work and manage their responsibilities around the home. This implicit assertion is accomplished by way of using the temporal connector "now." This situates the statement in time, differentiating the context and expectation from that which preceded (i.e., being young boys).

Inciting Urgency through Future Scenarios

By posing hypothetical future scenarios, Ervin incites urgency for the youth to learn the lessons he proposes to teach them. For example:

Ervin: You filthy rich. You filthy rich...swimming pool, tennis court, two swimming pools at the crib. Even if your swimming pool covered and leaves don't go in it, you still gotta change the water.

In this scenario, Ervin poses a very desirable future and underscores the responsibilities of taking care of the home. He then foretells,

While you're at college, you got your own place, independent living.... or your car. You'll need to go to Delta Sonic, or you'll go to Delta Sonic and you'll wax your own car. But because you doin' a nine-to-five ain't goin' to say that you ain't goin' to wax or clean your car, cause you gotta pick your girl up. Ain't nobody gonna pick their girl up with no four-thousand dollar rims on for what? No, I worked all day, but...

Again, in this scenario Ervin proposes a future scenario of apparent economic success and status symbols (e.g., four-thousand dollar rims, girl) and highlights the responsibilities apart from employment. These examples incite urgency to accept the idea that a person must complete responsibilities even while working. The following examples incite acceptance of an idea as well as action.

Ervin: Now, gettin' in front of the thing is always the best way to go about it. Between now and when you go to bed tonight, the carpet is already done, whatever your chores are, the garbage is out, your room is already aced. Your room is already aced, you get off work tomorrow, you gonna post up chill. "Did everything I did."

A perspective is being proposed and a course of action is being recommended. The perspective suggests that being proactive is always the best approach (i.e., "gettin' in front of the thing"), and the recommended action is that Matt do his chores tonight so that tomorrow he can relax. It is important to understand this portion of text as situated within other conversations as well. It may be relevant that Ervin noted previously that he does not like when the boys are up late at night doing chores because he can't sleep; therefore, "gettin' in front of the thing" would also help Ervin sleep. Given the extent and frequency of external motivators used, the intention becomes more convincing. For instance, while discussing the importance of the boys doing their laundry, Ervin warned that dirty clothes attract centipedes. While discussing the importance of keeping the basement clean, he warned of bats and disease spread through bat urine. When introducing the idea of the boys contributing to a household fund for expenses, he warned of the boys getting evicted as adults not paying for utilities. As noted previously, the use of a coda to

make assertions relevant is a common external feature of the genre. Using scenarios and enacting conversations is a linguistic tool that Ervin deploys in accomplishing the task and making the scenarios more descriptive.

Indexicality in the "Boys to Men" Genre

The previous sections have outlined the patterned usage of particular linguistic tools within the genre. According to Rymes (2001), however, grammatical tools in and of themselves do not communicate the themes presented. Instead, she proposes that "the way speakers systematically organize these resources communicates the thematic concerns" of the genre (p. 53). For example, the use of logical connectors like "so" does not in and of itself suggest household responsibilities as consequential for one's identity. However, Rymes notes that "lexical forms, in combination with grammatical categories, do acquire localized meaning" (2001 p. 53). Rymes was speaking with regard to her own research; however, the principles apply here as well.

While many words have a fixed definition, an indexical word is one that requires a context for its local meaning. For instance, Gee (2005) offered the indexical meaning of the word "coffee." Whether someone is drinking coffee, making coffee, sweeping up spilled coffee, mopping up spilled coffee, or eating coffee, tells the type of meaning that is given to the word. This example shows how context and words interact to construct meaning. In the present study, indexical meanings are generated from which generic social identities emerge.

Being a man. What it means to be "a man" goes beyond being male. It is a term that suggests a gendered identity. It is an indexical term in the way that its meaning differs from one culture to another. In this genre, the meaning of being a man emerged through the combination of linguistic tools and lexical categories. As previously noted, using a connector "so" alone does not index the implication of being "a man," but taking the form of language (e.g., "so") in conjunction with the content (e.g., "Men handle their responsibilities and they manage their homes") affords greater insight into both the local meaning of words and the social identities that are at stake.

Theoretical Considerations and Implications for Practice

Given the influential role of culture for establishing meanings by which identities are established and evaluated, it is important for researchers and social service providers to closely examine the social environment in foster care placements. In particular, future research is needed to ask, "What role does the cultural factor play in the outcomes of children and youth in care?" As noted previously (McKinney, 2011), it is a temptation in foster care to attribute a child's behavior to his/her individual success or failure. More and more, research using naturally occurring data sources collected over time reminds us of the situated nature of selfhood, including the meaning ascribed to behavior. This study in particular echoes social work theories of *human behavior and the social environment*, which advocate assessment of children's behavior in concert with critical analysis of the sociocultural context. As Tyler learned in this study, there is a pre-existing and culturally defined behavioral rubric for becoming a man, which is linguistically established by the foster parent, not the foster child. In fact, the placement was disrupted as a result of the behavioral expectations that accompanied the cultural definition of

manhood. Tyler maintained a different version of manhood, one that defines gender roles differently. This raises questions of whether success or failure in a foster care setting is located at the individual level, the familial level, or even better as an act of cultural production within which the individual youth, foster family, biological relatives or other pre-placement families, service providers, and communities participate. In the same way, that cultural production in the foster family is constitutive of social identities; cultural production within the family of origin also establishes local meanings for social identities, plausibly even mediating the effects of safety and risk. Doyle (2007) found that children who remained at home with their families despite allegations of abuse and or neglect fared better than their counterparts placed in foster care, facing higher delinquency rates, teen birth rates, and lower earnings. While safety is of utmost importance in child welfare, so is well-being. Therefore, it is important that researchers seek further clarity regarding the dual interest of child safety *and* well-being, considering the cultural component as a potential mediating factor.

Situating a child's behavior in the social environment, within the process of cultural production introduces another question, whether the overall functioning of a youth in foster care can be adequately assessed as if the youth were in his/her natural pre-placement setting. Since placement decisions (e.g., reunification, step-down/up, etc.) often include consideration of the child's behavior in the present living environment, as indicative of the potential for success at a new placement, more research is needed to determine whether such judgements can be effectively made based upon different sociocultural contexts and without considering the impact of the present context within which the behaviors are enacted.

Child welfare systems should take special caution to avoid "blaming the victims," which have been displaced from their native environment and culturally transplanted to a new environment and who, regardless of efforts to ensure goodness of fit between the foster child and foster family, will likely experience cultural disconnects. Efforts should be made to augment the traditional behavior checklist approach used to determine future placement needs to also include information from the current social and cultural environment as well as the pre-placement environment to provide a more detailed social, cultural, and historical assessment of child behaviors. More research is needed in this area that examines cultural experiences of children and youth in foster care from dynamic, local, and discursive enactments of culture in the foster family juxtaposed with the family of origin or pre-placement setting. Since families are not culturally homogenous, it is anticipated that cultural disconnects would also exist in kinship placements, though plausibly at a lesser rate than non-relative placements.

Conclusion

The "boys to men" genre was primarily reflective of formal family meetings during which household expectations were often the topic of discussion. The foster parent systematically presented information, structuring narratives in a way common to the English language, beginning with the setting, presenting the problem, possible solutions, and concluding with a coda - that is, a statement of why the information is relevant for the listeners. Within the interactions, this particular foster father used future hypothetical scenarios as a way of inciting urgency. The "boys to men" genre was most notable for the way the self was implicated by defining what it means to be a responsible man. The term "man" was culturally defined to imply

behavioral requisites for graduating from boyhood to manhood, such as taking care of household responsibilities while also working. Using connecting devices, the foster father makes his assertions consequential for the youth's identity as a "man." The observations in this particular foster home showed how cultural values are handed down through language. Theoretical considerations were drawn regarding assessment of youth behaviors in tandem with examination of the social environment, the role familial culture plays in the success (or failure) in both foster family settings, as well as within the family of origin. It was noted that children who remained with their family of origin have fared better than those placed in foster care (cf. Doyle, 2007), inquiring as to whether the familial culture with its constitutive power to establish norms for meaning making and identity could be the essential need that is neglected when youth are displaced into foster care. Finally, it was recommended that social service providers are careful not to "blame the victim" through assessment of children and youth in foster care by including both the pre-placement social environment as well as the current environment in order to understand the child as situated in the social, cultural, and historical world.

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