

Sample Prospectus

ENGL 1102

Prof. Bishop

### Research Prospectus: Learning Masculinity

It should come as no surprise that our American culture genders our children from a very early age, as evidenced by the girly pinks, boyish blues, and anxiously gender-neutral greens to be found in any baby specialty store. However, most people just assume that gruff masculinity is something that boys just pick up along the way; we mistakenly assume that no conscious effort is made to engender them in a specific manner. Yet, there is more than ample proof that this is *not* the case. For example, one could look at Clint Eastwood's 2008 film, *Gran Torino*. In this film, the protagonist, Walt Kowalski, begrudgingly takes on mentee Thao, nicknamed Toad (who attempted to steal Kowalski's 1972 car, the title referent). In one scene, the gruff Korean War veteran Kowalski takes Thao to a barber shop in order for him to learn "to talk like a man" not like a "pussy" (*Gran Torino*). In this scene alone, Thao has to learn to navigate the masculine landscape of language. However, it becomes increasingly clear that the film is attempting, desperately at times, to show the painful process of becoming a man through speech. Likewise, in Tony Hoagland's 1998 collection *Donkey Gospel*, the poem "Dickhead" demonstrates a similar trope. The speaker must learn the linguistic ropes of masculinity through explicitly graphic and implicitly violent language. The question then becomes: How and why are men taught masculinity through aggressive and seemingly violent language? Furthermore, what implications might this have on our culture?

By looking at the works of Judith Butler, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, a white paper by Polly Sterling, Annette Kolodny, and M.H. Abrams, I examine the theoretical implications of the use of language as a gender-making tool. In doing so, I will also explore how feminism has a direct impact on our understanding of seemingly traditional identity formation in young men, revealing the importance of a thorough understanding of gender studies.