The situation of male subjectivity in North America has become problematic and this is reflected in current popular culture. The ways of looking at men have changed, and with them, the ways of becoming and being a man. Since its appearance, the cover of the June 1978 edition of Hustler magazine, which depicts a woman in a meat grinder up to her torso, has been regarded by many as the worst example of the patriarchal view of women, both literally and metaphorically. It is a sign of our times, then, that this image was echoed in a recent Toronto Star montage of a man being melted in a pot of wax up to his torso (15 June 2000, J1). These visceral images frame a period of significant debate and political negotiation over gender roles and the second calls our attention to major shifts in how masculinity is seen. The image of masculine diminishment makes us ask—since masculinity may be in decline, but the actual numbers of men are not—how men learn how to be men. The diminishment of masculinity has not come without significant costs. Pulitzer Prizewinner Susan Faludi’s books, Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women (1991) and Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man (1999) attempt to detail these costs. In her research, Faludi finds that in an age in which corporations are constantly downsizing and outsourcing in order to increase profits, men can no longer look to these traditionally patriarchal institutions for paternal acceptance and confirmation of masculine success. The image of the boss or company as a fatherly provider has been replaced by the pink slip. Indeed, “there is no passage to manhood in such a world” (Stiffed 39). Yet, men are told that they are the masters of their world-by the men’s movement, by advertisers, by the media. It is important, then, to produce increasingly sophisticated work that elucidates recent shifts in male subjectivities, through a discourse that is conversant with feminist theory since the ultimate goal is the same: the elimination of the patriarchal enforcement of rigidly defined gender roles. Without such work, the backlash against women and the betrayal of men that Faludi documents will be perpetuated and a void between males and females will continue to widen. Moreover, victimized or oppressed persons will be trapped between competing discourses. Given the shifting ways in which men are represented in popular media, my dissertation will examine three general areas: 1) how shifts in the location of masculine endeavours are conveyed by shifts in media genres, 2) how the roles of spectators or participants in certain new media actually reshape gender roles and relationships, and 3) how exclusions of men from certain roles in popular media circumscribes potential points of coalition between pro-feminist activism and masculinity studies. In the first area, I examine the lone hero fighting an oppressive state system, a type Paul Smith finds in 1970s westerns (Clint Eastwood, 1993) and William Warner finds in 1980s action films (Rambo, 1992). As an example, this figure now fights a corporate power, or even his boss, in professional wrestling storylines. Similarly, the father-son narrative that Susan Jeffords traces in action films from the 1980s (The Remasculinization of America, 1989) and which she claims had disappeared by the early 1990s (Hard Bodies, 1994), has in fact been taken up by the sports film genre, but now it is the father-figure rather than the son who is searching for redemption. The second section considers shifts in masculine identification such as the cross-gender identification Carol Clover suggests is possible in horror films (Men, Women, & Chainsaws, 1992). This can now occur for players of virtual reality video games typified by Tomb Raider and Dino Crisis. These feature female protagonists in traditionally male roles. Female wrestlers such as Chyna and the recent film, Girl Fight, provide similar opportunities for cross-gender identification in the earlier cited genres. As well, Laura Mulvey’s critique of the “male gaze,” a critical commonplace for over twenty years, cannot account for the viewing of these productions (“Visual Pleasure,” 1978). In the words of Robert Connell, these media once portrayed “competition and hierarchy among men, exclusion or domination of women producing social relations of gender both realized and symbolized in bodily performances” (Masculinities, 1995 54). Now men’s bodies are objects of the gaze and of domination, nurturing supersedes violence, and instead of excluding women, men are encouraged to identify with them. The final area considers one of Faludi’s conclusions, that being a man is less about dominating than about not being dominated, in terms of the media treatment of men who have been victimized. The TV movies depicting former NHL player, Sheldon Kennedy, who was abused by his coach, provide excellent examples of how men are silenced by a society that refuses to accept that men can be victims. This chapter is a fitting end to the work since it combines previous discussions of body image, gender stability, and gender performance in a pressing area of commonality between feminism and masculinity while providing a discursive link between the two.
Then he looked over at my 2-year-old. Pointed at him. “Look at that boy over there. He’s not crying. He knows you’re not supposed to cry.” Masculinity—usually associated with competition, logic, rational thinking, boldness, action and strength—is only a problem when it's operating in excess. And the excessive masculine bravado in our culture will only get worse—until we quit shaming the feminine. Feminine qualities include intuition, emotional expression, receptiveness, quietness, gentleness, communication and nurturing. We're sold some fiction about the inferiority of femininity on every street corner. We buy into the myth that the superior leaders are the ones who are tough and uncompromising, not the ones who use gentleness and compassion to light the way. Yes, hey look me over Lend me an ear Fresh out of clover Mortgage up to here But don’t pass the plate folks Don’t pass the cup I figure whenever you're down and out The only way is up. And I'll be up like a rose bud High on the vine Don't thumb your nose But take a tip from mine I'm a little bit short of the elbow room But let me get me some And look out, world Here, I, come More on Genius. About “Hey Look Me Over”. (Unreviewed). Hey Look Me Over is the 6th track on Louis Armstrong’s album Hello, Dolly!. It is a cover of the original song written by Carolyn Lei My readings illustrate that masculinity is not a homogenous category that any boy possesses by virtue of being male. Rather, masculinity—as constituted and understood in the social world I studied—is a conglomeration of practices and discourses that different youths (boys and girls) may embody in different ways and to different degrees. Masculinity, in this sense, is associated with, but not reduced or solely equivalent to, the male body. I argue that adolescent masculinity is understood in this setting as a form of dominance usually expressed through sexualized discourses. 1. Through extensive el