

# THE BOY GAME

*A Look at Bullying Through the Lens of Masculine Gender Norms*

**A Study Guide to Accompany the Film  
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*“Not everything that is faced can be  
changed, but nothing can be  
changed until it is faced.”*

James Baldwin

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# THE BOY GAME: STUDY GUIDE

## 1. Introduction: What is the code of hyper masculine behavior for boys and why should we talk about it?

American culture, spearheaded by the media, often projects an image of manhood that is hyper masculine and aggressive. This image in no way embraces the fullness of what it means (or can mean) to be a boy or a man. The message is clear. Anger and toughness are acceptable. Vulnerable emotions or anything associated with being “feminine” is not. Psychologist Dr. William Pollack has coined the term the “boy code” to describe this regimented idea of what it means to be a boy in this culture. Boys themselves often enforce this code -- and non-compliance often results in a level of daily teasing, ostracizing and even physical assault that can be devastating. Boys, whatever role they play, are often trapped by, and become victims of, this hyper masculine code. Taunts of “You’re gay, a faggot, a sissy” are so rampant that many boys have sex early and are overly aggressive to prove their “masculinity.” And for boys who don’t fit in (because of race, body type, lack of sports ability, sexual orientation or any other perceived differences), life can be hell. Some boys become silent and withdrawn; others become violent. Not only does this atmosphere cause boys to oppress girls and terrorize gay youth, it also makes many boys who are bystanders (who want to fit in, but are ambivalent about the aggression required of them) live in a state of painful conflict.

As author of *Manhood In America*, Michael Kimmel says, this “boy code” is a kind of rulebook about what it means to be a boy, a guy, and a man. Although adults rarely are explicit about it (nobody sits a boy down at age 10 to give him the Boy Code Lesson), the rules become clear to boys as they experiment, meet new friends – and make mistakes. Once a boy makes a mistake (which can be as small as shaking his hand in pain after catching a ball) the cost can be hard: fag, gay, homo, stupid, and loser are all terms that are instantly applied – and that help a young boy understand (and adhere to) acting tougher than he is or feels. *Where did this code*

*start? How has it changed over time? Is it different in different cultures? What can I do about it as a young man? What can we do about it as a community of adults and peers who care?* This project, video and study guide, will help you explore these questions with groups of young people, both co-ed and boys alone.

Evidence is gathering that boys are different from girls in the way they learn and their need for physical outlets. Hyper masculine codes, however, are not a healthy expression of this difference. They restrict and endanger boys, as well as those around them. Approximately 160,000 students skip school every day for fear of harassment. Boys pressured to appear more masculine are the perpetrators and silent witnesses to most of these occurrences – and often of violence against girls and/ or women as well. And the damage created by these codes can last long into adulthood.

The fact that bullying has become epidemic and potentially lethal is national news, and has even led the President of the United States to appear on the Cartoon Network to offer support for efforts to prevent bullying. Rightful attention has been focused on getting schools to protect targets, but the truth is that boys can't be policed 24/7. And all boys, even those who bully (who most often have been targets themselves) suffer under the restriction of hyper masculine norms. According to psychologist William Pollack, boys desperately need a way to talk about the painful gender straitjacketing that binds them – so they can develop the resilience needed to stand up, be themselves, and redefine masculinity in terms of emotional, tolerant strength. And the girls who live and go to school with boys (who can be the victims of hyper masculine behavior and can help stand up against it or support it) need to be part of the conversation. If we are to help boys and young men develop into healthy, fully human men – fathers, partners, husbands, friends and citizens – it is important to understand, explore, challenge and transform the boy codes which limit not only boys' options, but their access to themselves.

It is important to note that while this video depicts incidences of bullying, **the film's focus is on understanding and deconstructing the boy code**, and its impact on our lives and on

our society. In this video, the bullying that occurs is deeply intertwined with the impact these codes have on the story's characters.

## **2. The Video: An Overview**

The *Boy Game* video is a dramatic scenario developed from off-the-record interviews with boys nationwide, then scripted with young actors. Shot like a documentary, it's a snapshot of boys' experiences designed to highlight key moments of pressure that lead to action or passive fear.

The film presents an open-ended story about three young men: Kenny, Reynaldo and Noel. When the film opens, it's summer; Kenny, good looking and athletic, but fearful of being teased for being left back a grade, is anxious about moving to a new school in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Then he meets Noel, a young man he used to know. Noel is different, obsessed with cartooning, and not into team sports -- but "cool" in Kenny's view. It turns out Noel goes to the new school too and the two bond. But a day before school starts, Noel's grandmother dies and he has to go away for a few weeks. Kenny is isolated and scared alone in the big school until he meets the tough and charismatic Reynaldo. Kenny, athletic and able to handle Reynaldo's tough teasing, is taken into his group. They all share being great basketball players, liking to do crazy skate boarding and hanging out. Kenny even gets a girlfriend. But this acceptance comes with small compromises on Kenny's part, as he is forced to conform to what is acceptable according to the group and their codes of acceptable behavior. The real conflict begins when Noel returns and Reynaldo begins to bully Noel. We witness how the words, feelings and actions of all three young men (the "bully", "target" and "bystander"), are shaped by hyper masculine norms (their need to seem tough enough, not to snitch, to pretend not to be hurt) as the conflict escalates.

The video is designed to be used with young people (male and female) between the ages of 11-15, in settings where a caring adult who has some facilitation skills can help the young people understand, explore, challenge and act to transform boy codes in their personal, family,

school and community lives. The study guide has been designed to highlight key talking points for each scene, help create meaningful dialogue on the issues and suggest exercises and activities to maximize understanding and impact. We strongly believe that the study guide and related conversations or activities should be given the time they require and deserve – **at least three hours**. As we suggest later, rushing through this material can do more harm than good.

### 3. An overview of the *Study Guide*

The *Study Guide* is rooted in a few important values and frameworks. We begin with the belief that **people are more than the roles that they play**. Like all humans, boys are complex, even contradictory; they hold the full range of human resources, needs, emotions, ideas, fears and hopes. Social and cultural expectations, traditions, stereotypes and pressures can constrict who they are – forcing them to play specific roles: the boy code is only one of them. These codes may look different across different contexts: city, suburb, or rural; working, middle or upper class; White, Latino, Asian, African-American or other cultural heritages; school, family or community. **All the boys in this film are complex** – whether they are “target,” “perpetrator” or “bystander” – and they are all affected by the constraints of hyper masculine norms.

The boy code shares some clear characteristics across all contexts. More than an excuse for bullying and interpersonal violence, the boy code is a form of violence itself, because it constricts and damages the full potential of boys and young men – and in that way harms their relationships to others and their communities. The boy code has been around a long time, but it is not built into our DNA; it has been created, in different ways in different contexts, and it can be changed – once it is named and understood. Finally, we believe that boys and young men who follow or enforce the boy code are not bad; like all of us, they struggle with social/cultural norms – especially in a time when these are undergoing real change. We all want to do the right thing, and we all want to connect. We are resources, for ourselves and each other. The *Study Guide* has been written with these values in mind.

The *Study Guide* is organized around the following goals:

1. To create a structure that can help young people understand and explore the roots and impact of the boy code;
2. To provide guidelines and tools for adult facilitators as they work with young people;



3. To suggest supplemental activities that address diverse learning styles, and create opportunities for peer leadership;
4. To connect understanding with action – including some concrete projects that can help transform the boy code for individuals, schools and communities;
5. To provide a brief set of resources so that the adult facilitators and young people can continue to learn, and become engaged in community and national efforts.

The next sections of the *Study Guide* include brief recommendations designed to help you as a facilitator prepare yourself and your young people to view the 15-minute film, discuss key themes, and generate action steps for their own lives and community. Because there is great variety in the experiences of the facilitators and young people who will work with the *Study Guide*, we have organized the next sections in two ways:

We present some brief lists of guidelines, warm-up activities and questions.

We provide greater detail about those resources in the Appendices that follow.

Although we strongly recommend that you give yourself time to prepare, introduce, discuss and de-compress (we suggest 3 hours), we are aware that in some contexts and for some groups a shorter period may be necessary or even preferable. **Appendix A is a sample three-hour workshop** that includes a full though brief sequence – from preparation through closing and evaluation.

#### **4. Before you begin: Creating a safe environment**

Talking about the video and the boy code in a group can be a powerful but challenging experience for young people. Therefore, it is critical to create and sustain a safe environment. The *Study Guide* assumes that you, as the facilitator(s), have had some prior experience with your group – that is, viewing and discussing *The Boy Game* is not the first activity that you have done with this group. Although the activities in the study guide can easily be divided into six one-hour modules, we also strongly encourage you to set aside **at least 3 hours for discussion**

**and activities.** While we encourage you to find a co-facilitator to lead these discussions and activities, we understand many of you will not be able to do that. If you are leading the group on your own, try to view *The Boy Game* with another adult beforehand, and talk through some of the ideas and issues that come up for you.

Here are some basic guidelines for creating and sustaining a safe environment. Please see the **Appendix B** for an expanded version of these guidelines.

**Prepare yourself, as an adult facilitator.**

**Assess your group’s resources, needs and prior experiences.**

**If possible, find a co-facilitator, and prepare with her/him.**

**Clarify expectations before – and with -- the group.**

**Create a physical space that is welcoming, comfortable and designed for sharing.**

**Model the values and behaviors you want to see in the group.**

**Identify group leaders and pay special attention to “uninvolved” group members.**

**Review your goals and progress as co-facilitators.**

**Have fun.**

Please note that the dynamics of discussing this film are very different in **same gender** groups than they are in **mixed gender groups**. There are advantages for each approach. If you use the film in a mixed-gender group, it will be useful to have some times when the young people work in same-gender groups and share responses.

## **5. Exploring The Boy Game: Questions and Conversations**

**Themes that guide this section of the *Study Guide***

In the following section, questions are provided for discussion around major themes and key moments of the film. The themes all revolve around the central goals of the *Study Guide*, which are to (a) **understand codes for boys** as a cultural construction – a set of beliefs, values

and behaviors that have been created by humans and that can be changed by humans; and (b) **generate actions** that young people and adults can take to change and/or transform these boy codes. Although there are many rich and generative themes in the film, the *Study Guide* focuses on four:

**Masculinity/sexuality (gender identity and gender construction).** How do boy codes restrict a boy's understanding of sexuality, gender, and what it means "to be a man"?

**Power.** How does power (among peers and with adults) shape the development and enforcement of these hyper masculine codes? How can young men find a different kind of power, so that they can resist and transform the boy code?

**Relationships (with a focus on conflict, loyalty, friendship, upstanding, and integrity).** How do these boy codes affect a range of relationships – including conflict and loyalty within friendships, the decision to stand by or stand up, relations with females, and a young man's sense of personal integrity in these situations?

**Emotional vulnerability.** Why is it difficult for boys to share their emotions, to "read" others and to communicate their feelings?

Obviously, there are other important themes that surface in this film, such as homophobia/heterosexuality, anger/aggression and bullying. In our work with focus groups, the first and most powerful responses were to the bullying aspects of the film. Although this is natural, we encourage you to provide time to explore the relationship between bullying, abuses of power and the boy code. We invite the facilitators to adapt or extend the questions to address other themes, where possible.

Section 5D – "Scenes and Themes" – includes an extensive list of questions for discussion, connected to the above themes. The questions invite young people to reflect on ways in which society, their community, their families and peers impact them. Participants will be

asked to share their observations and personal experiences with one another. As stated before, establishing a safe and trusting atmosphere is key to having an honest, open discussion.

We recognize that the film and *Study Guide* will be used in different situations. Some groups will use it in schools, meeting once a week for ten weeks. Youth groups and community centers may use the film and *Study Guide* during a weekend retreat. And there are many other possible settings or time frames for using the film. Whatever your situation, we encourage you to use student/youth-centered strategies to structure your discussions, and to include strategies that will engage the heart as much as the mind. Rushing through the activities can do more harm than good, as it may re-traumatize some participants or exacerbate already-problematic aspects of the boy code itself.

In the following section, suggestions are provided in some places for specific strategies. In other places, questions are simply listed -- ready to be used however the facilitator feels most appropriate. Many of the pedagogical strategies listed below (and in the Appendix) provide ways for students to work on their own, in pairs or in small groups for at least part of each session. It is important, especially for students who may be shy or feel anxious about talking about these issues in front of others, to have opportunities to share in a less intimidating format. Be mindful that there may be students who have been bullied, or may be perpetrators of bullying, in your group. **(Do not pair a young person who is being bullied with a person who is bullying.)** Try to include visual, aural and kinesthetic strategies that support diverse learning styles.

**We strongly suggest that a class/group contract** is created when you first begin this work with young people. The topics brought up in this film, and the themes upon which this *Study Guide* focuses, can be emotionally charged and complicated to discuss. As mentioned in the section on *creating a safe environment*, providing a space that engages and values the voices of all members is crucial to the overall goal of this work. Finally, we recommend that each session begin with a warm-up activity. Warm-ups help build community, cooperation and trust, as well as energize and, in some cases, provide a good dose of laughter. We have listed a number of warm-up activities to use in the Activities Section of this guide.

## **Suggestions for Teaching Strategies**

**(See appendix D for an expanded version of strategies)**

- 1) Engage students before discussion by starting with a “hook,” or a question you want them to explore or a question that you have about the film.
- 2) Provide diverse ways for students to respond – including pair talk or free-writes immediately after the film.
- 3) Try the K-W framework (What do you **Know** and what do you **Want** to know?)
- 4) Divide the class into small groups

## **Getting ready: Before viewing the film with your group**

To prepare your group for viewing *The Boy Game*, we suggest engaging in a general discussion about “codes of conduct” *beforehand*. The following questions could be helpful to your class to think about before watching the film. Ask members of group to explain what is meant by a **code of conduct**. What does the phrase “code of conduct” mean to each of them? (In other words, how do we learn how to interact with each other? How do we become a part of society? What do we need to know?)

What are some examples of “codes of conduct” that we, as members of society, agree to follow? (Some examples could include “the Golden Rule”, Ten Commandments, waiting one’s turn in line, stopping at a red light, saying please and thank you, etc.)

**Ask participants to think about the following questions as they watch the film:**

**What is the boy code?**

**How is it being performed and reinforced throughout the film?**

**How does it impact the characters in the film?**

## 6. Scenes and Themes: Questions to guide conversation

This section includes questions that highlight and explore key moments and themes in the film. The questions stem from the *Study Guide's* overarching focus on: (a) how the boy code is a human construct, created and maintained by members of society; and (b) what we can do to change and shape it. Please note that we have included many questions in this guide, far more than most people will be able to cover. Use the questions that best suit your group's specific needs.

There are many different ways to use these questions. Many of them are tied to specific scenes, so you might review one scene at a time after viewing the entire film. Or you may choose a set of themes and questions for each session. We have not tried to dictate how you use the questions, but we do have some suggestions along the way.

Here are some suggestions to help your group process how they felt while watching the video. Start with some guided personal writing (no more than one minute) immediately after viewing the film. These questions will let the facilitator understand what matters to this particular group of viewers; and this knowledge can help shape an effective set of conversations.

How did the film make you feel?

Which scenes were most powerful for you?

What do you think of Reynaldo, Kenny and Noel?

Were there other people in the film who caught your attention? Reactions?

Did you see something you might call a boy code?

## 7. Questions related to Specific Scenes

1. **Opening scene. (Inclusion and exclusion, identity)** How does Kenny feel at the very beginning? What is he scared about going into a new school? How does he think being left back could be used against him?

2. **Kenny meets Noel (relationships, identity)** What does meeting Noel mean to Kenny? What kind of a person is Noel? How is he different? What does it mean to be different? How do Kenny and Noel bond?

3. **Kenny's first days at school.** How does Kenny feel walking around the school alone that first week? Why doesn't he approach peers he calls "losers"? What is he afraid of/turned off by? How do young people get marginalized like that? What kinds of qualities, behaviors and interests can get a boy marginalized?

### 4. **Kenny meets Reynaldo and friends (inclusion and exclusion)**

What is going on in this scene? Why does Reynaldo decide to accept him? What behavior does Kenny exhibit that allows him to be part of their group? How is the boy code being introduced? What do we learn about the boy code from this interaction?

### 5. **Kiss the girl (maleness, gender identity, sexuality, looking at how hyper masculine norms objectify girls)**

What does the boy code say about being a “real man”? How does the boy code affect girls as well? What happened to the girl and her feelings in this scene? How do boys enforce the code – what words or gestures did the boys use to push Kenny into kissing? What happens if a boy refuses to “kiss the girl”, or in this case, what would have happened to Kenny if he had refused to kiss this girl? What do you think Kenny is thinking when he does kiss her? How does this kind of situation challenge the integrity of a boy (or girl) who is caught in it?

## **6. Lunchroom scene (relationships, power)**

Why is Noel being teased? Would you call this being bullied? What are the costs of being different? Of not playing the boy game? How does the boy code appear here? How does it change the relationships among Kenny, Noel and Reynaldo? How does the situation challenge the friendships among Kenny, Noel and Reynaldo? How might Kenny have dealt with this conflict differently? Who else might have helped?

## **7. Kenny advises Noel on how to fit in (relationship)**

What is Kenny doing in this scene and why do you think he is doing it? What is Noel's reaction? What does the boy code say about fitting in, being cool, being accepted? What happens if a boy doesn't follow this code? What happens to Noel? Do you know of situations where the boy code had this kind of effect? Do you think boys teach each other how to maintain a code of behavior that is "boy enough"?

## **8. Flipping/Reynaldo bullying scene (power)**

What is Kenny getting out of being a member of the group? What part of himself does he have to cut off? What are the costs to his friendship with Noel? To his own integrity? What does he gain from being part of the group and not resisting their behavior? What does Reynaldo want?

Do you think Reynaldo would have been as aggressive if Chris didn't say, "Are you going to let him (meaning Noel) talk to you like that?" What would Reynaldo have lost if he hadn't tried to beat up Noel at that point? Why do you think kids who bully do it? How do you think Kenny feels when Reynaldo says, "C'mon, Kenny"? Why does Kenny whisper, "I'm sorry" to Noel? Why can't he say it out loud? What do you think it's like for Noel to watch him go? Have you ever been a bystander; if yes, how did you feel?

## **9. Post-flipping scene (emotional vulnerability)**



Kenny feels badly but doesn't say anything. Why do neither Kenny nor Noel want to really talk about the incident? What makes them uncomfortable? Would you be uncomfortable? Why is talking about emotions/being emotional often not considered "masculine"? Do you think girls in the same situation would have felt more comfortable talking to each other? If empathy is part of friendship, and it motivates Kenny to go over to Noel's house, why can't Noel or Kenny speak about it?

#### **10. Library (relationships)**

Do you think Kenny's happy not seeing Noel? What does that let him do? What does it let him avoid?

#### **11. Scene with Dad (relationships, emotional vulnerability)**

What do you think Reynaldo feels when his Dad comes down so hard on him in front of Kenny? What emotions did you see on his face? Do you think his father pushes adherence to the boy code on Reynaldo? Why might Reynaldo's father think that he is protecting his son by being tough? What do you think that does to Reynaldo? Do you think that makes him more likely to bully? How do you think Kenny feels during the scene? Why doesn't Reynaldo talk to Kenny when Kenny says, "... if you ever want to talk?" Do you think Reynaldo wants to talk? If not, why? Do you think that his anger about the way he's treated has anything to do with how he treats other boys?

#### **12. Reynaldo and Noel in bathroom (intimidation)**

Why does Noel look at Reynaldo? What is Reynaldo doing to Noel? What do you think would have happened if Noel didn't run away?

#### **13. Reynaldo posting that Noel is gay, and Kenny's reaction or inaction (power, relationships, how can girls perpetuate the boy code)**

Is bullying part of the boy code? What is the role of technology in creating and enforcing the boy code? How does Reynaldo's girlfriend work to enforce the bullying and the boy code? What does it mean to be a bystander? How could someone not be a bystander, but really do something, be what is called an upstander or ally? What kind of power does it take to be an ally?

**14. Noel and Kenny upset at home. (relationships, emotional vulnerability)**

How does Noel feel? Why doesn't he tell anyone (his parents or a teacher) how he feels? Do you think he could ever get so angry that he could bully other weaker kids himself? How guilty does Kenny feel? Do you think Kenny is trying to stand up to bullying? How hard do you think it really is to be an upstander? Do you think Kenny wishes it would just go away? Do you think it will ever just go away?

**15. Final scene (power, relationships)**

How does losing the game affect how the scene unfolds? How much is winning and seeming strong a part of the boy code and what Reynaldo's been taught is essential? What language does Reynaldo use when he loses? How do language and behavior fit into – or shape -- the boy code? Why are words that mean girl and gay male used to enforce the boy code? Why does Noel come to watch the game? What do you think Kenny will do? What do you think the other bystanders will do? What would happen if the bystanders organized together? What would happen to Reynaldo if they did?

## 8. Activities to Supplement Discussion

The following section includes different types of activities to build trust within the group, deepen the discussion and provide experiential opportunities for exploring traditional hyper masculine norms. The activities are organized into three different sections. Choose the activities and questions that best suit your needs.

The first section, **Warm-Up Activities**, includes brief, energizing activities to use at the start of each session. Warm-up activities usually take between five and ten minutes to complete. In addition to being fun and engaging, these activities build trust and cooperation within a group.

The second section, **Theater-Based Activities**, provides slightly longer and more in-depth activities, which require more extensive debriefing. These activities can be used to build trust, explore power dynamics, and experience different ways of being in the world. All are theater-based, experiential activities and are for use after warm up activities or some group coalescing has taken place. Activities in this section will require 10-30 minutes, or even longer if the debrief is extended. Suggested debrief questions are included.

The third section, **Single Session or Multi-Session Activities**, outlines activities that will need a minimum of 45 minutes (and often longer) to complete. These activities are designed to investigate different aspects of the boy code through various media – acting, music, visual arts and oral history. In addition to the outlined activities, we have included a fully detailed lesson plan on running a role-play for one of the scenes from the boy code (Appendix D). These activities require more preparation on the part of the teacher, and may require extra materials, such as art supplies for the collage.

### **Warm Up Activities (5-10 minutes)**

**What's in a name?** Pair participants, and ask them to interview their partner about his/her name. How did you get it? Do you like it? What does it mean to you? Has it caused you problems? Have each person introduce his/her partner to the group.

**Name Juggle.** A classic icebreaker where participants who don't know each other all say their name and then try to remember the name of everyone in the group, saying it as fast as they can. This activity helps participants learn each other's names and experience inter-dependence in a group.

**Ninety Seconds.** In groups of three, participants have 90 seconds to identify as many things as they can that they have in common. They introduce each other to the larger group using two items that they found in common.

### **Theater Based Activities (10 to 15 minutes)**

**Blind walk in three stages: (10 to 15 minutes)** Participants work in pairs, one person is the leader and "sighted" and the other person is "blind". The sighted person leads the "blind" partner -- first by holding hands or palm to palm, then (after a few minutes) switch to leading through fingertip to fingertip, then switch to leading through calling partner's name. Partners switch roles. *Debrief questions:* What is it like to trust someone to look out for your safety? What is it like to have someone trust you? To be responsible for someone else's safety? What is it like to be needed and to live up to fulfilling that need?

**Mirror exercise (10 minutes):** Working in pairs, one person is the leader or "mirror" and the other person is the follower or "reflection". The reflection must follow what the mirror does. The mirror must move slowly to ensure that its reflection is always in sync. After a few minutes,

switch the leader/mirror. Switch back and forth until it is hard to distinguish who is the mirror and who is the reflection. The point is to work together, not to compete or trick your partner.

*Debrief questions:* What does it feel like to work with someone, not compete, but try to establish connection? What is it like to stay connected throughout?

**Columbian Hypnosis Exercise (10 minutes):** (From Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*)

In pairs, one person is the leader, and holds his/her hand, palm out, fingers upward, from his/her partner's face. S/he then starts moving his/her hand about, experimenting with different heights and speed, while the partner tries to keep her/his face at exactly the same distance from the partner's hand. Switch leaders after a few minutes. *Debrief questions:* What is it like to have the power? What is it like to follow? What are the advantages and disadvantages to both? What happens when you switch? In what role do you feel the most comfortable? What does it teach you?

**One or Multi-Session Activities (45 minute minimum)**

**Role Play Activities**

Please see the extensive lesson plan (Appendix E) for role playing a specific scene in the film. Use this structure as a guide for role-playing other scenes in this film. Participants can also create their own role-plays based on experiences in their own lives.

**Oral History Activity**

**Develop a "Boys will be Boys" Oral History Project.** Interview men of all ages in the community, or, if you have limited time, invite one or two male members of the community to come talk to your group. With the participants, explore the following questions: What does this expression mean to them? What codes for boys' behavior existed when they were growing up? What did they think of the fact that there were such specific ideas for how boys were supposed to behave when they were young? Did they like it? Accept it? Rebel against it? Have they seen it

change in their lifetimes? If they could make changes to it, what would those changes be? How would those changes impact them personally? How might they impact the larger world?

### **Popular Culture Activities:**

**Identifying and defining characteristics in music videos.** “Deconstruct” the boy code by analyzing music videos. Select a music video that is currently popular with middle and high school youth and examine how the males are being portrayed in the video. Develop a list of the different attributes/characteristics the males have and examine each of those attributes in depth. Identify how those attributes are being expressed or defined and create a “video dictionary” for those words. For example, if one of the attributes identified is “tough”, explain how tough is being defined. Is it mental toughness? Are the men anguishing over a difficult and complicated emotional decision? Or are they exerting power over others through demeaning or diminishing others? Is it physical toughness? If so, what type of physical toughness? Is it the ability to endure great pain and suffering, like someone suffering through a debilitating disease? Or it is the ability to run at Olympic speeds, or the ability to exert power over others through physical force? Be as specific as possible when identifying how the attribute is being expressed and “marketed”. What is the viewer supposed to understand about men through watching this video? How is the boy code being reinforced and/or expanded?

### **Marketing the boy code:**

Create an advertisement for “the boy code” such as, “The Army wants you!” but this time, it’s the boy code that wants you. What attributes will you be emphasizing to recruit appropriate people to your code? Think about what kind of Boy Club you want. Do you want to keep the status quo and adhere to the existing boy code or do you want to transform it and create something different? Extension for this activity. Create a “boy code club”, based on your advertisement. What will your “boot camp” be like? How will you indoctrinate people into your “code club”? Will there be a hierarchy in your “boy code club”? If so, how will you reinforce the code at different levels?

**Visual Arts Activity:**

**Splintered feelings collage:** Use the form of collage to express the splintered feeling or disconnected parts of one's personality that the boy code can create within oneself. For example, "I want to tell someone I'm being bullied and get help, but I don't want to be perceived as weak/a snitch." Another example: "I'm tired and I don't really want to beat this kid up, but my friends are watching me and egging me on. They'll think I'm soft if I don't." Participants can choose to express the splintered self through separating the parts either through top/bottom or side/side (of paper) or somehow interwoven throughout the piece. The collage can show what the boy code is promoting – the tough, unflinching male with action figures, etc. What other parts of the self are not included or allowed to be shown in the boy code? What lurks behind that bravado? Separate out what parts of the person the boy code allows to be seen and expressed -- and what parts it doesn't allow.

## 9. Taking Action

Here are a few ideas for actions that you can take to help others understand and change the boy code.

**Small group conversation with Peer Leadership group or Student Council.** Ask to meet with your school's Peer Leadership club or Student Council. Present the film and lead a small discussion of what you learned. Ask for their support in creating a school-wide public awareness program.

**Presentation to PTO or faculty meeting.** Request time on the agenda of the PTO, faculty meeting or any other of adult leaders. Present the film and lead a brief discussion of it with the adults. You might focus on the roles of adults or media in creating and enforcing the boy code. You may consider asking for financial support to create a public awareness campaign using billboards, radio or local community access cable TV.

**Offer to show the film and facilitate discussion in health classes.** After preparation and practice, you may offer to lead a discussion of the film in a health or physical education class. If you do this, it is important to work closely with the faculty teaching the class, and to prepare the ground before you present.

**Bring in a guest speaker** from violence prevention, LGBT, suicide prevention or other groups working to combat youth violence or offer support for a more inclusive view of masculinity. For example, the Center for Sport and Society at Northeastern University (Boston, MA) has resources that connect athletes with young people around these themes. Young people as speakers can be especially effective.

**Public Service Announcements.** Working with art classes, media or film classes, a school or community print shop, or local public access station, create a video or poster PSA campaign about inclusion or Upstander behavior, ads and op edit pieces in the local newspaper.



**Start an Upstander Alliance.** Transforming the boy code requires alliances, including partnerships across generations and locations. The National School Climate Center (NSCC) has created materials to help start cross-generation partnerships that prevent and heal bullying. Visit their website <http://www.nationalschoolclimatecenter.org> for a free download of their *Upstander Alliance* toolkits (one for young people and a second for adult sponsors): *Bully bust: Promoting Community of Upstanders*. The site has other useful resources and links.

**Link with young people** in other schools, churches, youth groups, or community agencies. The local United Way may be able to help create and fund these links. You may consider a youth summit, shared projects with younger children, shared public presentations or a community-wide public awareness campaign.

## 10. Resources

### Partnering Associations

*A Call to Men: The Next Generation of Manhood* [www.acalltomen.com](http://www.acalltomen.com)

**What they do:** A CALL TO MEN works to create a world where all men and boys are loving and respectful and all women and girls are valued and safe. It is a leading national violence prevention organization providing training and education for men, boys and communities. Their aim is to shift social norms that negatively impact our culture and promote a more healthy and respectful definition of manhood. They recognize that the underlying causes of violence and discrimination against women are rooted in the ways women and girls have been traditionally viewed and treated in our society. They provide men and boys with tools, practical methods and strategies to understand this connection and how to positively address these social issues. They partner with schools, universities, corporations, government, social service agencies and communities to end all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls.

*Men Can Stop Rape* [www.mencanstoprape.org](http://www.mencanstoprape.org)

**What they do:** Man Can Stop Rape's mission is to mobilize men to use their strength for creating cultures free from violence, especially men's violence against women. They are based in Washington, DC, and their work includes youth programs, public awareness campaigns, and training for youth professionals.

*Boys to Men* [www.maineboystomen.org/](http://www.maineboystomen.org/)

**What they do:** The mission of Boys To Men is to reduce interpersonal violence by offering programs that, support the healthy development of adolescent boys, provide assistance and educational resources to boys and those who help raise them, and increase community awareness about the specific needs of boys. Based in Maine, their work includes programs for educators, students, and parents.

*National School Climate Change* [www.schoolclimate.org](http://www.schoolclimate.org)

**What they do:** The organization's goal is to promote positive and sustained school climate: a safe, supportive environment that nurtures social and emotional, ethical, and academic skills. NSCC helps schools integrate crucial social and emotional learning with academic instruction. In doing so, they enhance student performance, prevent dropouts, reduce physical violence, bullying, and develop healthy and positively engaged adults.

## Books

Barbara Coloroso, *The Bully, The Bullied and the Bystander* (Harper Collins, 2008)

**Synopsis:** In this edition of *The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander*, which includes a new section on cyberbullying, one of the world's most trusted parenting educators gives parents, caregivers, educators—and most of all, kids—the tools to break the cycle of violence. Barbara Coloroso explains, the three kinds of bullying, and the differences between boy and girl bullies four abilities that protect your child from succumbing to bullying, seven steps to take if your child is a bully, how to help the bullied child heal and how to effectively discipline the bully, and how to evaluate a school's anti bullying policy

Devine and Jonathan Cohen. *Making Your School Safe: Strategies to Protect Children and Promote Learning* (Teachers College Press, 2007)

**Synopsis:** In this practical manual, the authors demonstrate the important relationship between social emotional and ethical education and school safety. They combine traditional crisis management and emergency planning with all of the principles that have become the cornerstones of the field of evidence-based, social emotional learning and character education. Featuring real-life examples and best practices, they cover widespread concerns, ranging from student behavioral issues such as bullying and social exclusion to gang-related violence and other tragic events. This essential resource will help schools be proactive in preventing tragedies, as well as effectively reactive when they occur.

William Pollack, Kathleen Cushman, *Real Boys Workbook: The Definitive Guide to Understanding and Interacting with Boys of All Ages* (Villard; 1st edition, 2001)

**Synopsis:** The Real Boys' Workbook is a unique, instructive workbook, full of advice, exercises, and stories to help parents, professionals, and boys themselves understand boys—and how to make life with them better. How to listen to boys, talk and be with them, exercises to teach new ways to handle situations, and strategies for coping with problems (drug and alcohol abuse, gender identity, depression, bullying) are addressed, as readers are encouraged to respond to questions and situations, to learn how to think about boys with new understanding, and to react more creatively. Through writing in the workbook, using the charts and summaries, and taking part in the provocative question-and-answer sections, you will gain insight into boys and their problems and be better able to be with them in effective and powerful ways.

William Pollack, Todd Shuster *Real Boys' Voices* (Penguin Books; 5th edition, 2001)

**Synopsis:** In *Real Boys' Voices*, Pollack reveals what boys today are saying and explores ways to get them to talk more openly. "Boys long to talk about the things that are hurting them; their harassment from other boys, their troubled relationships with their fathers, their embarrassment around girls and confusion about sex, their disconnection from and love for their parents, the

violence that haunts them at school and on the street, their constant fear that they might not be as masculine as other boys." In *Real Boys' Voices* we hear, verbatim, what boys from big cities and small towns, including Littleton, Colorado, have to say about violence, drugs, sports, school, parents, love, anger, body image, becoming a man, and much, much more.

Michael Kimmel *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (Oxford University Press, USA; 3 edition, 2011)

**Synopsis:** For more than three decades, the women's movement and its scholars have exhaustively studied women's complex history, roles, and struggles. In *Manhood in America*, Michael Kimmel argues that it is time for men to rediscover their own evolution. Drawing on a myriad of sources, he demonstrates that American men have been eternally frustrated by their efforts to keep up with constantly changing standards. Kimmel contends that men must follow the lead of the women's movement. Only by mining their past for its best qualities and worst excesses will they free themselves from the constraints of restrictive masculine ideals.

Michael Kimmel, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* (Harper; 1 edition, 2008)

**Synopsis:** The passage from adolescence to adulthood was once clear. Today, growing up has become more complex and confusing, as young men drift casually through college and beyond—hanging out, partying, playing with tech toys, and watching sports. But beneath the appearance of a simple extended boyhood, a more dangerous social world has developed, far away from the traditional signposts and cultural signals that once helped boys navigate their way to manhood—a territory Michael Kimmel has identified as "Guyland."

## 11. Films

*Bully*. Dir. Lee Hirsch. The Bully Project, 2011.

**Synopsis:** A documentary on bullying in schools across America. The film follows the stories of five students who face devastating harassment by peers.

*Let's Get Real*. Dir. Debra Chasnoff. New Day Films

**Synopsis:** *Let's Get Real* gives young people the chance to tell their stories in their own words and the results are heartbreaking, shocking, inspiring and poignant. It examines a variety of issues that lead to taunting and bullying, including racial differences, perceived sexual orientation, learning disabilities, religious differences, sexual harassment and others. The film not only gives a voice to targeted kids, but also to kids who do the bullying to find out why they lash out at their peers and how it makes them feel.

*Straightlaced: How Gender's got us all tied up*. Dir. Debra Chasnoff. New Day Films

**Synopsis:** Straightlaced unearths how popular pressures around gender and sexuality are confining American teens. Their stories reflect a diversity of experiences, demonstrating how gender role expectations and homophobia are interwoven, and illustrating the different ways that these expectations connect with culture, race and class.

*Tough Guise: Violence, Media & the Crisis in Masculinity.* Dir. Sut Jhaly. Media Education Foundation, 1999.

**Synopsis:** Tough Guise systematically examines the relationship between pop-cultural imagery and the social construction of masculine identities in the U.S. at the dawn of the 21st century.

## 12. Websites and Resources

[www.bullybust.org](http://www.bullybust.org)

National School Climate Center's resource for bully prevention, Bully bust: Promoting a Community of Upstanders

[www.adl.org/education/combatbullying/becoming-an-ally.asp](http://www.adl.org/education/combatbullying/becoming-an-ally.asp)

Anti-Defamation League workshops and training to Address Name Calling and Bullying

[www.adl.org/main\\_internet/Cyberbullying\\_Prevention\\_Law](http://www.adl.org/main_internet/Cyberbullying_Prevention_Law)

Anti-Defamation League Cyberbullying Prevention Law

[www.StopBullyingNow.hrsa.gov](http://www.StopBullyingNow.hrsa.gov).

This site includes two rich sets of resources: The Youth Leaders' Toolkit and the Youth Have the Power! (YHTP!) website. Here you can find tools to organize alliances at your school and in your community

[www.inthemix.org/bullying](http://www.inthemix.org/bullying).

This website includes a 30 minute documentary for teens about bullying. *In The Mix* is an award winning PBS teen series.

[www.pacer.org/bullying](http://www.pacer.org/bullying).

This site is the home of the National Bully Prevention Awareness Month activities and provides key resources, including links to two age-appropriate student-focused web sites.

[www.teensagainstbullying.org](http://www.teensagainstbullying.org)

A site where teenagers can locate resources, learn how to respond to bullying, organize their peers, and act out against bullying.

[www.kidsagainstbullying.org](http://www.kidsagainstbullying.org).

A site where kids can play kid oriented games and see what their peers have to say about bullying.

[www.oasiscenter.org](http://www.oasiscenter.org)

Oasis Center, Nashville, Tennessee. The Center is the source of some ideas for youth organizing that are contained in this toolkit.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Sample Three-Hour Workshop

The following outline is designed for facilitators to do an introductory workshop for The Boy Game. Three hours are allotted, which we believe is the minimum time needed to show the film and engage in a discussions about The Boy Game. Ideally groups will have more than three hours to process and engage in activities that explore the impact of the boy code on their lives. However, we understand there are time restrictions, so are providing this outline. We strongly believe that The Boy Game needs a full three hours to process and explore; inadequate time to process could have a detrimental impact on participants.

In the outline, you will find a warm up activity and activities to do prior to watching the film, and discussion questions and activities for after viewing. The activities are selected from the *Study Guide*. Please feel free to substitute alternate activities that are listed in the study guide. (For example, you can select a different warm-up, or choose a warm-up activity on your own.) Breaks and time allotments for each segment of the workshop are provided.

### Goals

- To introduce the concept of codes of conduct
- To introduce the concept of a boy code
- To explore the impact the boy code has on our own lives and on our society
- To identify a way(s) to take action on ways to disrupt and transform the Boy Code

The central goals of the *Study Guide* are to (a) **understand** the boy code as a cultural construction – a set of beliefs, values and behaviors that have been created by humans and that can be changed by humans; and (b) **generate actions** that young people and adults can take to change and/or transform the boy code. To that end, the *Study Guide* focuses on four themes, which are listed below.



**Emotional vulnerability.** Why is it difficult for boys to share their emotions, to “read” others and to communicate their feelings?

**Masculinity/sexuality (gender identity and gender construction).** How does the boy code restrict a boy’s understanding of sexuality, gender, and what it means “to be a man”?

**Relationships (with a focus on conflict, loyalty, friendship, upstanding, and integrity).** How does the boy code affect a range of relationships – including conflict and loyalty within friendships, the decision to stand by or stand up, relations with females, and a young man’s sense of personal integrity in these situations?

**Power.** How does power (among peers and with adults) shape the development and enforcement of the boy code? How can young men find a different kind of power, so that they can resist and transform the boy code?

## Activities

Welcome, framing and ice-breaker (20 minutes)

Ice Breaker (Section 7A of *Study Guide*)

Select one of the warm-up activities. If group members don’t know each other, the Name activity is a good start.

Frame the workshop (Section 1 of *Study Guide*)

Guidelines and commitments (Section 4 of *Study Guide*)

Before the film (30 minutes)

Codes of Conduct activity (Section 6C of *Study Guide*)

After introducing the activity, defining and providing examples of various “codes of conduct”, break up into small groups of three to four and have each group work through

selected questions together. Select three to five questions on which groups should focus their discussion. Come together as a whole group to share thoughts and discoveries.

Brief framing of the film and generating questions (Section 2 of *Study Guide*)

After framing the film, ask participants to reflect on the following question: **Why would someone make this film?** Generate a list of questions about the topic. Ask the group to think about some of these questions as they are viewing the film. Another option is to select two or three questions/themes that emerge from group's comments on which to focus.

***Break (10 min)***

The film (20 minutes)

Check for comprehension after the film. Guided writing immediately after viewing.

Possible prompts for writing:

Watching this film makes me think about.....

Watching this film makes me feel/remember/wish...

Imagine yourself in one of the scenes in the film. See yourself in the specific location, be it in the cafeteria, on the basketball court, in the hallway. Look at what is going on. How do you feel?

The conversation (40 minutes) (Section 6A and 6D of *Study Guide*)

Review and renew commitments

Identify 2-3 key themes from Sections 6A and 6D of *Study Guide* and focus on the questions associated with those themes

***Break (10 min)***

Taking action *or* other activity (40 minutes) (Section 8 or Section 7 of *Study Guide*)

Begin conversation about concrete ways of taking action, which can be found in Section 7 of the *Study Guide*. (If appropriate, try to identify at least one specific way the group or individuals could take action in their school/community.)

**OR, if participants have “talked” enough and need to move, choose an activity from Section 6 of the *Study Guide*.**

Closing (10 minutes)

Thoughts as we leave

Evaluation

Appreciation. With group standing in circle, have a quick go around with each participant sharing one thing (one word?) they appreciated about the workshop and/or people in the workshop.

## Appendix Expanded Version of “Before You Begin” Guidelines

**1. Prepare yourself, as an adult facilitator.** Reflect on and talk about your own values, experiences, fears and hopes. Assess and articulate your strengths as a group facilitator, and be clear about those areas where you need help. If you have a co-facilitator, talk about your strengths and needs, and plan how to complement each other. Anticipate some of the dynamics you will encounter, and walk through them in your mind. Review the film and the *Study Guide*. What areas feel most comfortable or most challenging?

**2. Assess your group’s resources, needs and prior experiences.** Think about your group and what you have come to know about them. Where are their strengths as individuals and as a group? Where do they struggle and where are they vulnerable? Which activities have been successful with them in the past, and which have failed? Who will be your leaders? Who will struggle or resist? Who will talk, who will stay quiet, who will talk too much and who will be silenced? Is the group homogeneous or mixed in terms of gender, age, and cultural background?

**3. If possible, find a co-facilitator, and prepare with her/him.** Co-facilitation has many advantages, but it also requires pre-discussion and regular planning. It requires a commitment to managing differences. Co-facilitation can model positive social skills, and allows one facilitator to observe the group or help individual students. Co-facilitation allows for negotiating power and teamwork – and modeling that work with students. Read the *Study Guide* and clarify your ideas about how to move forward. Plan out the first few sessions, and assign roles for each of you. Decide who will lead and who will support – and how to share these roles. Practice some techniques, including role-plays, guided discussion, discipline, and conflict resolution.

**4. Clarify expectations before – and with -- the group.** It is important to establish norms and expectations with the group, as a first activity – even if you think things are ok and students

know each other. Expectations should be simple and clear. Here are some sample expectations to clarify:

- 1) Respect yourself and each other; avoid put downs, threats or fights.
- 2) What is said in this group stays here; our conversations are confidential, unless we as facilitators believe that anyone in the group is in danger (give some examples). We are legally required to report this.
- 3) Everyone gets a turn; everyone has important ideas; listen as much as you talk.  
(You might begin with your own core rules, then open up space so students can contribute. You might do some role-plays so students can see what respect looks like).

Project Adventure's *Full Value Commitment* is one example of this approach; Open Circle, Responsive Classroom, Teen Empowerment and others have also created guidelines to assist group work – as have many classroom teachers. Use them for support.

### **5. Create a physical space that is welcoming, comfortable and designed for sharing.**

A circle is an important structure, because everyone can see others and because some of the hierarchies of a more traditional seating arrangement are gone. A circle says that everyone is included and welcome.

### **8. Model the values and behaviors you want to see in the group.**

You can support the development of an effective group (even in the short term) by your own behavior. Sometimes it is helpful to refer problems back to the group: how will we respond to the hurtful statement that was just made? Use the term “group” often and in a positive way; evaluate the sessions and conversations, ask questions to those who are shy, allow time for responses to develop, and remember those goals and values that you described earlier.

**9. Identify group leaders and pay special attention to “uninvolved” group members.**

Sometimes a few moments of personal attention will help. For other young people, a special role can be created that minimizes personal exposure. Some low-exposure roles include serving as class secretary, keeping time during discussions, or doing the visuals for class discussions. Give students time and let the group know that you will encourage each person to speak: create a “challenge by choice.”

**10. Review your goals and progress as co-facilitators.** Pause to reflect on progress and challenges. It is critical to do this with your co-facilitator. However, it is also important and useful to review and evaluate with the young people themselves.

**11. Have fun.** Young people watch adults carefully, even if they do not appear to be listening. It is important to have fun with the topic and the activities. Be prepared for the difficult sessions, and seek support from colleagues. But be aware of, and celebrate, progress. The work you do with young people matters!

## **Appendix C: Expanded Version of “Suggestions for Teaching Strategies”**

**1. Engage students before discussion by starting with a “hook”.** If you ask students to share their questions, you can understand their current thinking, and build your teaching on a foundation of real inquiry. For example, you might ask students to:

- a) Visualize: “Close your eyes and imagine yourself talking to one of the characters in the film. What would you say to him or her?”
- b) Draw a picture: “Draw a ‘close-up’ of one of the characters in the film. What is s/he thinking or feeling? How can you express these thoughts and feelings visually?”
- c) Think of/write down/state out loud an “I wonder...”: “I wonder why Reynaldo acts the way he does toward Noel?”

**2. Provide diverse ways for students to respond** (beyond oral responses) so that you engage multiple intelligences and learning styles. For example, you might use:

- a) Post notes on board: Give students a pack of small post-it notes, and invite them to “post” thoughts, questions or ideas on a board or chart paper;
- b) Vote with your body: Write different responses or reactions to a discussion question around the room, and have people walk and stand next to “their” answer.
- c) Thumbs up/thumbs down: Ask a question or make a statement, and have students respond with thumbs: (Yes is up; no is down; and maybe is sideways)
- d) Stand up/sit down: Ask a question and have people stand up/sit down for yes/no.

**3. Try the K-W framework.**

Organize each session as an inquiry by using the K-W method. Ask students: “*What do we **Know** about the issue?*” (the Boy Code, power, masculinity, etc.), and then, “*What do we **want to learn?***”

**4. Divide the class into small groups.**

Organize the groups across typical patterns of friendship and socialization – support students in working with new partners. Give different questions to each group. Then ask each group to share one question and their answer. Rotate from group to group until all questions have been shared.

**Here are some other strategies that can help enliven discussion and deepen the learning process.**

Pre-writing/Journaling: Ask students to write a few sentences before each session, focused on questions or responses to the previous discussion.

Concept Web: This is a diagram or visual organizer (using shapes connected by lines) that visually represents relationships among ("<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concept>") concepts; for example, write the word “power” at the center of a large piece of paper, and work outwards with all the ideas/concepts/images that connect to that word.

Graffiti Wall: Participants respond to a given prompt through writing on large pieces of paper pasted on walls. Participants can also respond to each other’s thoughts and questions, as they emerge on the paper. Activity is done silently.

Gallery Walk: Each group posts their work around room for others to see. All groups walk around the room (“gallery”), reading other groups’ work. If desired, participants can respond to work with post-it notes. This strategy can also be used with quotes, images, etc.

Iceberg Diagrams: What lies “below the surface” of a statement or conflict?

Fishbowl: Begin with a few people in the center of the room who discuss an idea or question; others watch and enter by tapping one of the participants to “step in.”

Interviewing: Pair young people and ask them to interview their partner around key questions or themes; you can decide whether or not to have a report-back.

Think, Pair, Share: Ask participants to respond to a question individually through writing or drawing, then discuss their thoughts with a partner before sharing with the larger group.

Human Barometer/Spectrum: Create a barometer in the room by designating different areas of the room as: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Read a statement



such as, “Boys should never cry in public,” and ask participants to respond by standing in appropriate area.

## **Appendix D: Facilitating Role Play on The Boy Code**

### ***Guidelines for Facilitator***

Role-plays can be powerful learning experiences because they allow the participants to experience different ways of acting in a safe environment. They can also bring up difficult or vulnerable feelings. Think about how you will handle situations in which students might become emotional or upset, and prepare your environment to be as safe as possible for all students.

This activity is designed to take between ninety minutes to two hours, including the suggested warm-up activities. It could go longer, depending on how you choose to debrief each role-play.

We suggest that you assign participants the specific characters for the role-plays, as opposed to having participants choose their own roles. This enables people to play against type and experience being in roles they don't usually play. If you choose not to assign roles, do take extra caution to make sure that participants who have been (or are being) bullied are not playing the bullied character (Noel) and that participants who have bullied are not playing the bullying character (Reynaldo). Also, if there are two participants who are in a bully/bullying dynamic, do not put them in the same group.

This role-play is focused on one scene in the film, described below. You can use the same format to develop role-plays for other scenes in the film. The goal is for participants to understand more fully what it feels like to be in that dynamic, and to think of and try out options that are available to them. Each group can choose to end the role-play differently than it ends in the film. Or, a character can try out a different tactic earlier on in the role play, and see how that change impacts – or doesn't impact – the action.

**NOTE:** Always clap for the actors when they are finished. Acting in front of other people takes courage, and it is important to recognize and applaud this courage. When debriefing the role-play, do not judge or criticize participant's acting talent. Focus on their experience of playing the character and being in that dynamic. However, if participants are giggling, being silly or unable to take the role-play seriously, stop the action and help them refocus. If they can't refocus, move on to another group.

***Brief synopsis of scene:***

Reynaldo and Chris see Kenny and Noel practicing flipping on a street outside of school. Reynaldo insults and then threatens Noel, egged on by Chris, and is stopped from potentially physically hurting Noel by a woman who is passing by in her car. Reynaldo and Chris leave Noel, telling Kenny to come with them. Kenny whispers, "I'm sorry," to Noel, and goes with Reynaldo and Chris.

**Procedure:**

**Preparing for the Role-Play**

\_\_\_\_\_ Warm up activity

Show clip of the scene. You may want participants to view it twice.

Explain to participants that they will be doing a role-play based on the scene in the film. Each group can choose to alter the ending, depending on how they decide their characters will act.

Divide participants into groups.

Distribute *The Boy Game Role Play: Group Instructions* and *Character Sheets* for each of the four characters. Review instructions with participants so everyone understands what to do.

After participants have finished discussing and preparing, allow ten to fifteen minutes for each group to get up on their feet and practice running it through a few times.

### **Performing the Role Play**

If you are doing the role-play in two sessions, do another warm-up activity before performing role-plays. Suggested warm-up:

Remind participants of the importance of having a safe space for the role-plays. You might want to review guidelines such as respecting the efforts of all, not criticizing the acting, and appreciating the efforts of the people on stage.

Make sure there is a clearly delineated space for performing the role-plays and for the audience.

Ask for a group to go first. Each group will perform their role-play twice, playing the same character. If there is more time at the end, you can choose to have participants play a different character.

Call “Action” to start the scene. When the group is finished, ask “actors” to stay on stage and debrief with questions below. After debriefing, the group will perform a second time, and debrief a second time. **See debrief questions below.**

After each group performs their first role-play, allow them a few minutes to incorporate the suggestions into their second version.

**NOTE:** If actors seem “stuck” in their role-play, do a quick “Stop and Talk”. Ask actors what they are feeling, as their character. You can prompt them with questions like, “How

did you (as your character) feel when Reynaldo said/did such and such....” Then resume the role-play.

## **Debrief Questions**

### *Questions for “Actors” in Role-Play:*

How do each of you feel right now?

Did you learn anything new about your character when you were performing? Did anything surprise you? (Were you surprised by your feelings? By your actions?)

Did you learn anything new about the other characters?

Tailor the following questions to what the characters specifically did/said:

How did you feel when \_\_\_\_\_(one of the characters, such as Kenny) did \_\_\_\_\_ (a specific action)?

Why did you react in \_\_\_\_\_ (describe reaction, such as saying something angrily, hesitantly, confidently, or not saying anything, or doing something such as walking away) when \_\_\_\_\_ (name of character) did this?

What reaction were you hoping to get when you did/said \_\_\_\_\_? Why did you want that reaction?

What could you change in your behavior to have a different (better/more constructive) outcome?

### *Questions for “Audience”:*

What struck you? What did you see going on?

What surprised you? Did any of the character’s actions or reactions surprise you?

How did you feel when \_\_\_\_\_ (name of character) did \_\_\_\_\_ (name what the character did or said)?

Could you see this happening in your school?

Did you feel empathy for any of the characters? If so, when? And why?

Where did you see the boy code being reinforced? How is it impacting the way the characters are interacting?

If you could give any of these characters advice, what would you say? How might you help them?

### **Debrief Questions for Second Version of Role Play**

#### *Questions for “Actors”:*

You made some different choices this time. (Cite some specific choices they made.) How did that feel? How did those choices impact your character and the outcome of the scene?

Did you feel different this time? Why?

Did anything surprise you?

#### *Questions for “Audience”:*

What struck you about the role-play this time? What differences did you notice? How did those differences impact the characters and/or the outcome of the scene?

What changes, if any, did you see to how the boy code was being enforced?

## **HANDOUTS FOR ROLE PLAY**

### **The Boy Game Role Play: Group Instructions**

*For this activity, you will work in groups to create a role-play based on a key moment in the film – when Reynaldo and Chris interrupt Kenny and Noel as they practice their flipping. Reynaldo threatens Noel and is getting in his face, when a woman yells for Reynaldo to leave Noel alone. Your group will prepare your own version of the conflict between Reynaldo, Noel, Kenny and Chris. Below are steps for your group to work through together. Each of you will also fill out an individual character sheet, depending on which character you play. The group leader/facilitator will assign the characters for each role-play.*

#### **Recounting the Scene**

As a group, recount the scene. (Read over the script of the scene?) Discuss what struck each of you as you watched it. What interested you? What upset you? What impressed you? What did you want to know more about? Did you feel similarities to any of the characters? Could you empathize with any of them?

#### **Identifying The Action Points**

As a group, discuss what are the big “moments” or “action points” of the scene. “Moment” or “action point” could be defined as a time when something significant happens that pushes the plot forward – an action needs to be taken, a decision needs to be made, someone’s feelings are hurt, etc. For example, one key “moment” could be when Noel says, “Why don’t you try picking on someone bigger than you. Like really, lay off.” Discuss why you feel these are key moments.

Next, list the five key moments your group feels are most important to this scene. You can list more if you want but try to keep your list less than ten. The list should be in chronological order.

This list of key moments will form the outline for your role-play; you will include these moments in your role-play. However, you can choose to handle them in a different way than is represented in the film. For example, if one of your key moments is when Noel says, “*Why don’t you try picking on someone bigger than you? Like really, lay off.*” In the film, Chris responds, “*You gonna let him talk to you like that?*” In your role-play, you could choose to have Kenny (or another character) react in a different way.

### **Working Through The Moments: Your Group’s Choice**

As a group, decide how your group wants to act out the key moments you have identified.

### **Character Sheets**

Each person should fill out the appropriate character preparation sheet. There is a different one for each of the four characters.

### **Putting It Together**

After each person has completed his/her character sheet, revisit your key moments. Discuss what is motivating each character – what’s the driving force – at each of the moments.

### **Rehearse**

Rehearse your role-play a few times before performing it in front of the class. Make sure you have the audience in mind (don’t turn your back to the audience) when you are doing it. Make sure you know what your key moments are and that you are including them in your performance.



## **Perform!**

When performing your role-play, have fun, stay focused and let your hard work be expressed. Remember to remain “in character” even if your character doesn’t have a speaking line.

### **Character Preparation Sheet for Noel**

This “Character Sheet” is for preparing you to act in the role-play. There are two parts:

**In Part A**, answer the questions from the perspective of Noel. In other words, you are imagining that you are Noel and responding to the questions as if you were him.

**In Part B**, identify the “moments” that are most important to your character (Noel) in this scene. These are moments in which directly impact your character.

#### **Part A:**

Write five words to describe yourself (as Noel):

What is something you like about yourself (as Noel)?

How do you feel about the other three characters in this scene?

How are you feeling before Reynaldo and Chris show up?

How do you feel when you see Reynaldo and Chris?

How do you feel when Reynaldo first insults you?

**Part B:**

Write down the most important moments of the role-play for your character. For each moment you list, write down the driving emotions you feel in that moment. For example, when Reynaldo first insults you, you might feel angry or scared or frustrated or cautious.

Once you have finished the list (of between three and six moments), you will have the base of your script.

## Character Sheet for Kenny

This “Character Sheet” is for preparing you to act in the role-play. There are two parts:

**In Part A**, answer the questions from the perspective of Kenny. In other words, you are imagining that you are Kenny and responding to the questions as if you were him.

**In Part B**, identify the “moments” that are most important to your character (Kenny) in this scene. These are moments in which directly impact your character.

Write five words to describe yourself (as Kenny):

What is something you like about yourself (as Kenny)?

How do you feel about the other three characters in this scene?

How are you feeling before Reynaldo and Chris show up?

How do you feel when you see Reynaldo and Chris?

How do you feel when Reynaldo first insults Noel?

What would you like to happen in this scene? How would you like everyone to act, and what specifically could you do to help make that happen?

### **Part B:**

Write down the most important moments of the role-play for your character. For each moment you list, write down the driving emotions you feel in that moment. Once you have finished the list (of between three and six moments), you will have the base of your script.

## Character Sheet for Reynaldo

This “Character Sheet” is for preparing you to act in the role-play. There are two parts:

**In Part A**, answer the questions from the perspective of Reynaldo. In other words, you are imagining that you are Reynaldo and responding to the questions as if you were him.

**In Part B**, identify the “moments” that are most important to your character (Reynaldo) in this scene. These are moments in which directly impact your character.

Write five words to describe yourself (as Reynaldo):

What is something you like about yourself (as Reynaldo)?

How do you feel about the other three characters in this scene?

How are you feeling before you see Kenny and Noel?

How do you feel when you see Kenny and Noel playing together, and Chris says, “Looks like Kenny is better friends with that wuss than you”?

Why do you threaten Noel? What is motivating you?

### **Part B:**

Write down the most important moments of the role-play for your character. For each moment you list, write down the driving emotions you feel in that moment. Once you have finished the list (of between three and six moments), you will have the base of your script.

## Character Sheet for Chris

This “Character Sheet” is for preparing you to act in the role-play. There are two parts:

**In Part A**, answer the questions from the perspective of Chris. In other words, you are imagining that you are Chris and responding to the questions as if you were him.

**In Part B**, identify the “moments” that are most important to your character (Chris) in this scene. These are moments in which directly impact your character.

Write five words to describe yourself (as Chris):

What is something you like about yourself (as Chris)?

How do you feel about the other three characters in this scene?

How are you feeling before you see Kenny and Noel?

Why do you say to Reynaldo, “Looks like Kenny is better friends with that wuss than you”?

What would you like to see happen in this interaction? Why?

### **Part B:**

Write down the most important moments of the role-play for your character. For each moment you list, write down the driving emotions you feel in that moment. Once you have finished the list (of between three and six moments), you will have the base of your script.

## Appendix E: Additional Theater-based Activities for Exploring Boy Code

**Creating Human Sculptures:** (20-30 minutes for each round of sculptures or variation) In groups of two, three or four, one person is the "sculptor" and the others are the "clay." The sculptor "sculpts" his or her partner's body into a sculpture of his or her choosing. The sculptor may do this by physically moving the partner's body into position, or by telling or showing the "clay" how to stand. Take time to sculpt small details like the position of a finger or the tilt of the head or the expression of the mouth. Do a gallery walk around the different sculptures so everyone can view each one. *Debrief questions:* (Based on Visual Teaching Strategies Methodology) What's going on in this sculpture? What do you see that makes you think that? (Ask participants to point to specific details, such as the way a head is tilted, a lip is curled, a fist is clenched, etc) What more can you find? What does this make you wonder about?

The following activities are variations on the Human Sculpture activity (described above).

Feel free to create your own variation:

Boy code Sculpture: Working in groups of three or four, create a sculpture that shows the Boy Code in action. The group will discuss together what they want to demonstrate about the Boy Code, and then create a sculpture to express it. One person will be the sculptor, and the others the clay. If preferred, one in each group can opt to be a narrator, and read out their story. *Debrief questions:* Use the same debrief questions as above to start debrief, and then use their observations and wonderings to link back to boy code. For example, if someone has created a sculpture of a boy confined by other bodies, use the VTS questions and then ask how this sculpture helps us understand the impact of the boy code on our lives – on the life of this one boy, and on the lives of others? Who is confining him? How is he being confined? Is he aware that he is confined? Is he choosing it, rebelling against it?

Power sculpture: Think about different kinds of power that people have. What different kinds of power do we see in the film? What kind of power does Reynaldo have? How about Kenny, Noel and Chris? Create a sculpture, or series of sculptures, based on scenes from the film – lunch table, etc. Show how different people are expressing their power. What kind of energy and positioning do you see? *Debrief questions:* Use the same debrief questions for Human Sculptures, and, as described above, use them to then link to larger questions about power.

**Experimenting with Limited Mobility. (10-20 minutes)** Establish a starting point and end point, at least 25 feet apart. Going one by one, participants must move from start to end using only one leg and one arm. Try out different variations of limited mobility (using no legs), and go through the exercise a few times. *Debrief questions:* How does having limited mobility change the way you are able to move? Interact the space? Interact with others? When we operate with the boy code, we operate with limited capacity. How might that be impacting us as we move throughout our daily lives?

**Status Exercise (15-25 minutes)** (Adapted from Keith Johnstone's book, Impro. Activity located at: "<http://www.shakespearehigh.com/faculty/teachers/lessons/status.html>")

<http://www.shakespearehigh.com/faculty/teachers/lessons/status.html>) Four students are each given a slip of paper with a number (1, 2, 3 and 4) which they are to keep as their status number. They are not to tell anyone else their number. They are then given a situation in which the group must make a consensus decision, such as choosing a movie to see or video to rent, planning the menu for a party, or selecting one of the group to run for class office. In pursuing the objective, each member of the group is to maintain his or her own status number and to determine the status number of the others, without asking or divulging. In playing their status the numbers work as following:

#1: Always in charge.

#2: Participates in leadership, but defers to #1. May offer mediation.

#3: Offers suggestions, but not leadership, and defers to #1 and #2.

#4: May offer suggestions, but always defers to rest of group.

After the scene is played, ask each player to identify what the status numbers of the others were before divulging their own. Ask audience members if they concur or differ in their perceptions of the status chain of command that they observed.

*Debrief question/points:* The hierarchy of “status” is created. What is status? How do we exert status? What do we give status to in the **boy code**? Why do you think these things have been given such importance? How did that evolve? What if we were to value other things instead? Or just as much? How would that change the way we interact and perceive ourselves? What happens when certain attributes are valued and others demeaned? What happens if you want to express those other attributes?