

Playing with Anger

*Teaching Coping Skills to
African American Boys through
Athletics and Culture*

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Race and Ethnicity in Psychology
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PRAEGER

Westport, Connecticut
London

CHAPTER 3

“If We Must Die”: CPR for Managing Catch-33, Alienation, and Hypervulnerability

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If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O kinsmen! We must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

—Claude McKay, “If We Must Die”

Claude McKay (1922) believed in informing political minds and in no other poem is that more evident than in “If We Must Die.” Born in Jamaica in 1889, McKay wrote and published the poem in 1919 in the *Liberator*. Written after World War I, this poem is decidedly revolutionary in tone and emphasis and meant to remasculinize Blacks who decided to fight back against the White violence and race rioting that took place in Black neighborhoods. The fire and spirit of “If We Must Die” were not lost on the world; Winston Churchill used it to rally British troops in their fight against the Nazis, even though it was originally written for African Americans struggling against racial violence and hatred. McKay eventually

became the official poet laureate of Jamaica, but many African Americans will remember him for his words that ignited beaten spirits and helped African Americans acknowledge their strengths and contributions to the world and themselves.

In essence, the PLAAY program is also meant to help boys reframe their perceptions of themselves and the meaning-making energy they apply to daily activities. We believe that no component of PLAAY is more useful in helping Black boys do this than CPR, or cultural pride reinforcement.

“LET IT NOT BE LIKE HOGS HUNTED AND PENNED IN AN INGLORIOUS SPOT, WHILE ROUND US BARK THE MAD AND HUNGRY DOGS”: MANAGING SOCIETY’S EXAGGERATED FEARS

Few dispute the fact that Black boys are harassed by society’s exaggerated fears (Ferguson, 2000; May & Dunaway, 2000; Meeks, 2000). With that in mind, there should be little mystery about the kinds of therapeutic topics and conversations that should be developed to help Black males manage this harassment. We cannot say it any more bluntly. To create interventions for and conduct research with African American males and fail to consider the larger systemic problem of racism is to engage in what Frederick Douglass accused America of doing more than a century ago—that is, engaging in a comfortable hypocrisy by wanting “crops without plowing up the ground.” How can any intervention effort with Black males be fruitful if it fails to address, or “plow up,” the systemic racism that challenges their daily existence?

Perhaps it is useless to entertain programs that downplay or minimize the reality of systemic racism. The facts and consequences of racism do not have to be disputed as we have tried to suggest in chapter 2. Even so, disputes will occur over whether racism should be addressed in intervention and research, but those who wish to dispute its reality and impact waste the time of others who seek to address why Black youth are struggling in today’s world. Rather than ask whether exploitation of Black youth is occurring, it is more important to discuss why the world is bent on exploiting our young Black males.

Such is the critical consciousness backdrop for CPR, which is the psycho-educational and group therapy intervention component of PLAAY. This component attempts to provide cultural socialization to Black youth by integrating discussions of the how’s and why’s of racism, including strategies for managing racial politics in America, and promoting understanding of why anger management is so crucial in a culturally stylistic and relevant atmosphere.

It’s hard to be angry without consequences in America if you are Black and male. It’s doubly hard explaining this concept and reality to Black

boys. A difficult but serious truth we have learned throughout the PLAAY project, especially during the CPR component, is this: *To be Black and male does not mean that one understands the danger of such a status or the societal perceptions that accompany it. Moreover, even if one understands the unique challenges of being Black and male in America, this does not mean one knows how to combat it.* Most African American boys learn, without being taught directly, to internalize the values of Western American society (especially its dimensions of inferiority-superiority strivings); to desire and accumulate materialistic "trinkets" and trophies of their superiority; and to rest their manhood, identity, and self-worth on two major pillars—being "the Man" and being "the Man with Things." The key problem we see among many of the boys we work with is not just that they want these things and their social benefits, but that they also want the manhood clarity that these things bring. The confusion of manhood prominence is far too often clarified by the accumulation of material trinkets. To help the boys understand the Catch-33 that exists for young Black males is really the underlying thrust of CPR. And while it is not often that boys understand their Catch-33 dilemma, we believe we are dropping seeds each week in CPR that may help them begin to take notice of it. In essence, in re-addressing Frederick Douglass's wise words, we hope to plow up the ground and reap a bountiful crop from a fertile, but well-tilled soil.

"IF WE MUST DIE, O LET US NOBLY DIE": BASIC ASSUMPTIONS BEHIND CPR

Perhaps it makes sense to share our assumptions in the PLAAY project about the way traditional psychological and educational services misunderstand Black boys. These ideas are not new and have been written about extensively by scholars such as Amos Wilson, Linda Myers, Jawanza Kunjufu, Margaret Beale Spencer, and countless other African American social scientists. Although inaccurate and disturbing, we consider the following assumptions to be the most common ones directed at Black boys today:

1. Black males are aggressive and they are troublemakers.
2. Black males are overly sexual and not to be trusted.
3. Black males must be kept at a distance.
4. Black males can hurt you if you get too close.
5. Black males must be controlled first and talked to second and affectionately care for them last.

When CPR was originally created, the goal was to provide group therapy for African American boys or individuals and make it relevant to their lives. It was meant to be a place for Black males to learn and accept life-

saving information about the way the rest of the world sees them and pathologizes them, and to present this knowledge to them in a way that it can be used for self-protection. Emotional self-defense is necessary to deal with the daily challenge of racism, but it must be initiated and maintained by an individual if it is to serve that person well. The relevance of using emotional self-defense is that without it, the boys are more likely to use physical self-defense in social situations where it is inappropriate. As Bob Marley declared, "None but ourselves can free our minds." It is impossible for students to learn emotional self-defense skills unless they are in an atmosphere in which they feel safe enough to disclose their basest fears and daily vulnerabilities. The death rate of American Black young boys and men is outrageous and unacceptable to every caring human on the face of the earth, and we take this assertion as a premise: No boy should be subjected to the horrors and deadly consequences of being misdiagnosed, misrepresented, and misunderstood, without having someone there to intercede for them or to fight for them.

The essential ideas of PLAAY are based on the works of several noteworthy scholars, including Arthur Whaley (1992), Amos Wilson (1990; 1991), Carl Bell (1997), Rodney Hammond and Betty Yung (1991), and Roderick Watts and Jaleel Abdul-Adil (1997). In addition to offering boys opportunities to discuss their fears and strengths, CPR is useful because it provides the boys with opportunities for receiving additional reinforcement about their behavior in the movement interventions of TEAM and MAAR. The primary goal of CPR is to discuss the meanings, realities, and consequences of being young, Black, and male today. Because violence has claimed so many lives and dreams of young Black boys, CPR lessons often focus on topics related to violence prevention. Other topics, which are indirectly related to violence, include understanding how to cope with fear and anger, developing and implementing anger management strategies, understanding one's cultural heritage and the importance of gender and racial identity socialization and protection, and visualizing future success and aspiration. In addition, to make the sessions more relevant, most workshops include discussion of current events from the popular media that involve real life experiences of African Americans (e.g., "Driving while Black"). Our hope is to reach these kids and make these discussions meaningful to them, so we use videotapes, guest speakers, role-play activities, writing assignments, and small-group interaction as teaching tools.

The theoretical model of PLAAY is filtered throughout the curriculum. In addition, care is taken to include metacognitive strategies throughout each session to help students think and feel about *how* they think about certain topics and *why* they think what they do. Each hour-long session may include two or all of the following three components: teaching, which

lasts for 20 minutes; acting, which can include role playing and often lasts 15 minutes; and discussion/talking about the major topic, which lasts for 10 to 20 minutes. African psychological values and racial socialization processes are applied, and there is a concerted effort to teach students to deconstruct the world around them using gender, race, and culture as particular themes, and then to act out their thoughts or recollections through role-play activities. Examples of aggression (as well as solutions to prevent aggression) that take place in life as well as those that are observed in professional sports (including basketball) are highlighted throughout the CPR education, mostly in the teaching component, to demonstrate precipitating factors, or "triggers," related to aggression. A few sessions address situations that occur during the basketball (TEAM) or martial arts (MAAR) components in order to reinforce teachings about self-knowledge and self-management. The CPR curriculum is divided into two main groups related to African American psychology. The first group of sessions target self-knowledge or -awareness and the second set focuses on community-knowledge or other-knowledge.

Teaching self-knowledge involves helping students gain awareness of what precipitates violence among young people (i.e., their triggers), what hinders it, and what helps people avoid it. But CPR discussions are also realistic, so they also focus on what the boys can do when they feel that they cannot avoid violence, keeping in mind strategies that may be age-appropriate and culturally and gender-relevant for them to use. We try to have the boys discuss how they might avoid violence without invoking the image of being "sweet" or a punk. A second goal of CPR is to help youth become more aware and appreciative of others as an extension of themselves, especially those in their families and communities.

A major part of the CPR intervention is to promote an appreciation for communalism and community responsibility by having young adolescents share stories about their lives, their neighborhoods, and their fears and triumphs regarding potentially violent situations. Some of this communalism can be reinforced in the TEAM basketball component. In addition, it is important to help these boys maintain skills that can be reinforced at home if their parents are involved in the COPE component (described in chapter 6). Learning how to discuss these issues with family members is a vital skill to learn, and we gather data on the teens' abilities to actually engage in this type of family communication. A final goal of CPR is related to helping teens gain a historical and contemporary perspective on issues of race, culture, gender, and violence. Keeping in mind the way the past is linked to the present, we initiate discussions with the boys that focus on how historical events have affected their lives, hoping that it will raise their level of consciousness about racial and gender politics in America.

“SO THAT OUR PRECIOUS BLOOD MAY NOT BE SHED IN VAIN”: INCREASING YOUTH INVESTMENT THROUGH CULTURAL RELEVANCE

This line of Claude McKay's poem helps us realize how important it is to create and implement a program that is culturally relevant and meaningful to the boys so that they feel safe to share their worries and fears. But what exactly is “cultural relevance” as it applies to the PLAAY program? In our opinion, cultural relevance must involve an experience and include an atmosphere that reflects the basic cultural expressions implicit in the language, mannerisms, looks, and style that the participants identify with. The boys identify with this atmosphere because it might resemble that found in the homes and neighborhoods in which they live. Asa Hilliard (1983) is quite right when he asserts that psychology cannot be separated from the language style of a people, and so the appreciation of Ebonics or hip-hop language is really the appreciation of a way of being. With that in mind, from the start of the PLAAY program it was important for us to ask ourselves these questions: Can the boys talk in the group the way they would talk if they were home, comfortably at home, with family and friends? And can they talk as if they were on the streets, comfortably on the street (if that is possible)?

To us, cultural relevance is more complex than language. It's about connection. It's about taking a thing and massaging and adjusting it so that it comes alive for the person or people that a teacher is communicating with. This thing, a lesson for example, should connect on a number of levels (e.g., language, mannerism, rhythm, and way of expression). As the audience, the culture of urban Black males requires a fluidity of style and expression in the learning and appreciation of the thing (lesson). In African American communication contexts, Asante (1987) says that cultural relevance in speaking transmits more than words. Styling becomes an example of cultural relevant communication and “a key element of style is rhythm created by tone, accent, and meaning. Thus to *style* is an action, and when one styles one is engaged in creating a relationship” (p. 39). Cultural relevance is a combination of spontaneous stylistic communication that fits with the communication patterns, and meaning-making values of the audience.

So where is this kind of culturally relevant atmosphere? Anywhere in most poor and not-so-poor Black neighborhoods, of course! But, for many Black men, one place that provides the most openness and freedom and opportunity for intense debate is the barbershop. More politics, religion, sports, and scandal of all kinds have been debated, deciphered, and dissected by Black men in barbershops than this world will ever know. The vibrancy, passion, and unbridled freedom for people to say what they want regardless of how ridiculous it may sound is the hallmark of barbershop

talk. People don't even have to have a point or good argument to participate in that freedom. They just have to assert their theory and assert it strongly. This is a different type of group therapy, but similar to most therapeutic encounters in which clients can feel open and free to be and to express themselves. The only difference is that the barbershop is missing a therapist or a maestro (like the one Ernie Barnes, the Black artist portrays in his artwork, of the same name, "Maestro" who leads a radio) to orchestrate the multiple cultural strands of expression. That's where CPR comes in.

In observing the way other psychologists and researchers over the years have constructed group work or interventions that do not consider the specific realities of young Black males, it appears that many do not know what this culturally relevant mandate means. Most are used to saying the words "culturally relevant," and some truly want to integrate this concept into their work, but few are able to pull it off because it seems to require making real a concept that most would rather keep abstract. It is difficult to make any intervention truly culturally relevant, but, even so, it is necessary to make it more meaningful to students and increase their investment in it.

**"THEN EVEN THE MONSTERS WE DEFY SHALL BE
CONSTRAINED TO HONOR US THOUGH DEAD!":
WHEN FEAR FUELS BOYS TO LIVE EACH DAY AS
THEIR LAST**

As therapists, we are obligated to focus on the most essential matters and dangers that affect youth and their families. As researchers, we have an equal obligation to study the most salient aspects that affect children's lives, and waste less time on esoteric, hypothetical psychological realities that are distal from the challenge of preventing needless injury and death to Black children. As human beings, we are compelled to feel the pain of Black boys who every day find a way to hide their tragedy, incredible losses, stigma, and fears of imminent nonexistence. So while it may not be visible that these boys contemplate death, and while they may not initially admit that they fear for their lives, we believe as village parents and fellow human beings that overexposure to poverty, violence, and family disconnection can eventually create an unhealthy, self-destructive paranoia. This is true for children all over the world, not just in urban America, but still our focus here is on Black youth, who disproportionately face dangers to their lives and limbs. These dangers make it necessary for us to teach about death and its meaning in the youths' lives. Yet, because we can't assume that Black youth will reveal a fear of death (as if they are not human enough, while being and pretending to be the toughest motherfuckers in the neighborhood), we must ask the difficult questions: Do you think about death? Are you scared to die? And what would you die for?

To assume that boys who live in violent contexts do not contemplate death is to assume that, by closing their eyes, the thing that they fear has disappeared. But there is a psychological death as well that people must consider in addition to their physical expiration. The young men in CPR are constantly asked to consider the meaning of living healthy and whole as well as dying young. The fear of living is not much different from the fatalism of death and without deconstruction or examination fatalism wins over life choosing. Contemplation is a funny thing for adolescents, and often Black boys ponder death or nonexistence by acting out their thoughts and fears through certain behaviors.

We take issue with a general view of Black boys exposed to violence or living within violent contexts as people indifferent to pain and suffering. This view suggests boys so disposed contract a chronic deadening of the senses towards human tragedy and can lead to a justified inhumane harassment of them by authorities who will not extend themselves intellectually, emotionally, or morally on behalf of the boys.

Furthermore, we reject the notion that Black males *cannot* ponder existentialism. CPR is often about bringing to the discussion some of the scariest things these youth face, so that they might ponder those things ever so differently than before (in contrast to when their “homies” are the advisors and the audience). To have caring, therapeutic adults, family, and peers around them who understand the larger racial, cultural, and health consequences of being Black and male is absolutely necessary when these boys have these discussions—and it brings meat to the notion of village.

We know that it is difficult for children of all ages and ethnic backgrounds to wrap their minds around racial intolerance and violence. Hate crimes seem absurd by their very nature, so the human reaction to deny, disbelieve, or pause before contemplating their reality is normal. We should not shudder when we see such reactions. Yet, without teaching, how should students come to grips with the sad reality that some Americans are negatively targeted, simply because of their skin color, gender, sexual orientation, physical size, or other quality, as menaces to society?

“THOUGH FAR OUTNUMBERED LET US SHOW US BRAVE”: THE IMPORTANCE OF VILLAGE IN CULTURALLY RELEVANT INTERVENTION

In its purest form, CPR is a Black psychology class on race, class, and gender. In its most practical form, it’s culturally relevant group therapy. The therapeutic skills used by group leaders in CPR cover a wide range of methods, such as using confrontation; hugging; rapping; uncovering family dynamics; deconstructing the meaning of rap and hip-hop music and lyrics; engaging in role plays about relationship troubles; and having leaders confess their own challenging life issues. In addition to providing nur-

Table 3.1
CPR Curriculum and Themes

Topic	Target Areas of Change	Activities, Discussion Questions, Tools
Introduction to CPR	Introduction to the program; Cultural Pride – What is it?; The need for support and encouragement	What is CPR? Why is it necessary for survival? What is Culture, Pride, and Reinforcement?
Mind Control: Who's zooming who?	Who's zooming who?; Reactive vs. Proactive decisions; Who makes your decisions?	Video segment: BOYZ 'N THE HOOD Responses to "Boyz 'N the Hood" segment What happens when others make choices for us? Are some of us "puppets on a string"? Video segment: TALES FROM THE HOOD
Violence: options to fighting	Self-defense; Aggression; Strategies for de-escalating conflict	Why do people fight? Is fighting worth it? What do we accomplish by fighting? Do people really want to fight? What can we do to avoid fighting? What are some alternatives to fighting? Video segment: TALES FROM THE HOOD
Manhood	Fatherhood; Manhood apart from physical and sexual prowess; Black man issues	What is a (black) man? How do you learn to be a man? Who in your life would you identify as "men"? Video segment: SOUTH CENTRAL

(continued)

urance to young and old boys in efforts to develop their critical consciousness and engage them in cultural socialization training, the goal of CPR is to help these boys develop their divine, phenomenological, and affective symbolic consciousness. We are not always successful in stimulating divine appreciation, but often the topic of religion, faith, God, and "higher powers" is brought up and discussed in conversations about the death and dying that so often accompanies urban life for these boys. In effect, we use CPR to trigger the lofty goal of future healing of the boys' emotional challenges, but it is also meant to offer them opportunities to

Table 3.1
Continued

<p>Fathers/ Fatherhood</p>	<p>Experiences with fathers & father figures; Learning to be a man; role playing "If Dad Should Come Back"</p>	<p>What is the role of a father? What happens when fathers are absent? How can you learn to be a good father if your father was absent? Video segments: BOYZ 'N THE HOOD, HE GOT GAME, or SOUTH CENTRAL; Song: JAY ZEE (DYNASTY)</p>
<p>Image/Perception of Black men</p>	<p>Stereotypes of black man; Self-fulfilling prophecy;</p>	<p>How are black men perceived by others? What's it like to be thought of in this way? Song: MOS DEF (MR. NIGGA)</p>
<p>Getting Stopped by the police</p>	<p>Self-protective skills; Survival; Understanding law enforcement and the criminal justice system;</p>	<p>Have you ever been stopped or picked up by the police? How did this make you feel? How did you respond? How do you think you should respond? What happens when you challenge police? What's your goal in this situation? Song: KRS (ONE) Video segment: MALCOLM X OPENING</p>
<p>Racism/Prejudice</p>	<p>Oppression; Diminished opportunity; Maintaining positive sense of self despite racism</p>	<p>What is racism, prejudice, do they exist? Give examples of racist experiences Discuss examples in media and press How does racism compromise your life chances? Song: MOS DEF (MR. NIGGA)</p>
<p>Fear is not an option</p>	<p>Fear is a natural and adaptive response;</p>	<p>What are you afraid of? Are we all afraid of something?</p>

Table 3.1
Continued

	Does fear or emotional distress compromise decision-making?	How we react when we're afraid Are you a punk if you're afraid?
Cool pose: Avoiding victimization in peer groups	Our public face (the self we show to others) vs. our true self; Why image is so important	Are you who you show us? Is it necessary for guys to project an image of toughness? What happens when others see you as soft or sweet?
Respect	Respect/Disrespect; Fear vs. respect	What is respect/disrespect? How do you show it? Who do you respect/disrespect, and why? Are you respected? Why or why not? What can a person do to get respect?
Trust; Ask staff about who they are	Depending on others; Trusting ourselves/Trusting others	What is trust? Who do you trust, why or why not? How do we know when someone is trustworthy? What happens when we aren't able to trust the people that we care about the most? Do others trust you? Why or why not?
Faith: Believing in something larger than ourselves	Belief; Hope	What is faith? Do you believe in things that you cannot see or touch? Does hoping, believing and praying make a difference?
What would you work for? What would sacrifice for?	Investing in things that are important to us; Disappointments; Getting what we want out of life; Working to potential;	Is there anything that you do or would work for? Why did or would you work for this? What do you think would happen if you sincerely worked for something? Do people really work for what they want or
	Maximizing talents	is it luck?

(continued)

Table 3.1
Continued

<p>“If we must die”: What would you die for?</p>	<p>What’s important to you; Things/people worth dying for; Values</p>	<p>What does Claude McKay mean in the poem? Is there anything you would die for? Do you know anyone who has died for a good reason? And one who has died for no reason at all?</p>
<p>Drugs and the Black Community</p>	<p>Drug involvement (use & sales); Street economy</p>	<p>What are some of the reasons that people use and deal drugs? What are the short and long-term consequences of drug involvement? TIPS FOR TEENS</p>
<p>Relationships: Part I</p>	<p>Interactions and communication patterns between males and females</p>	<p>Do young men and women talk to one another respectfully or disrespectfully? Why and how does this relate to mind control? How are women vulnerable (likely to be hurt) in relationships with men? In what ways are men vulnerable in relationships with women?</p>
<p>Relationships: Part II</p>	<p>Relationships with parents; Productive vs. destructive relationships</p>	<p>Do we inherit our lives (the quality) from our parents? How do family patterns or cycles disrupt our lives? What happens when people disappoint us?</p>
<p>Anger</p>	<p>“Triggers”; Anger management strategies</p>	<p>What makes you angry? What makes you calm? When was the last time you got angry? When was the last time you got into a fight because you were angry?</p>

receive support from elders and see it modeled for them, so that, ideally, they can learn how to band together and support each other. Indeed, it may take a village to raise young Black males today, so it seems useful to teach these boys the skills necessary to support each other early on so that they can build a village together to help them heal emotionally.

Table 3.2
Therapeutic Skills Used by Facilitators in CPR Intervention

Skill to Be Observed		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Affection	Greets students as they enter or during CPR session									
	Create atmosphere that encourages students to speak or disclose personal life issues ("passionate barbershop"); structures group									
	Provides emotional support and encouragement to students									
	Shows respect/respectfully handles disrespect from students									
Correction	Connect issues that arise in CPR to the child's emotional, family, neighborhood, school, or male life									
	Challenging distorted, underprocessed or mistaken beliefs or knowledge about self, others, or society									
	Therapeutically Explores potential emotional conflict; posing reflective questions; asking for clarification									
	Uses cultural style and expression to intervene									
	Illuminate students personal/familial trigger or vulnerable situations									
	Uses warning, step-outside, and removal system, if necessary									
	Explains/shows ways to manage emotions w/o losing status;									
	Physically mediates conflicts between students, if necessary									
Protection	Follows daily topic/uses multiple methods (role-play; video; rap)									
	Culturally socializes boys to ponder cultural identities/realities/histories									
	Flexibly shifts strategies based on student's strengths and limitations									

An example of the CPR curriculum over the course of 15 or so sessions can be found in Tables 3.1. Table 3.2 describes the affection, correction, and protection therapeutic skills that the PLAAY staff uses to conduct CPR effectively.

"PRESSED TO THE WALL, DYING, BUT FIGHTING BACK!": WHAT WOULD YOU DIE FOR?

Using a culturally relevant perspective, the second half of this chapter provides an example of a CPR session with our psychological interpretation of the interactions among the boys who participated in that session. At the start of this session, a staff member recites McKay's poem, "If We Must Die," which provides a challenge to its listeners regarding senseless violence and death (the uselessness of dying for an unjust cause). The poem encourages people to fight for freedom and just causes. We ask the boys to

dissect the meaning of the poem and apply it to their lives, while we interject how this plea to devote one's life to a noble cause is not applied very well among today's youth—many of whom are risking death and dying over the way somebody looks at them or disrespects them in public.

This CPR group session reveals how the boys describe and manage their feelings of hypervulnerability within violent neighborhoods and contexts. The group even reveals several strategies to the PLAAY project staff. The boys discuss their experiences of being victimized and having to fight for their personal belongings which represent their hypermasculine identities. This leads to a discussion of what the boys could envision themselves dying for. For this reason, we have titled this session, "What Would You Die For?"

During each CPR session, boys sit in chairs arranged in a circle. To this particular session, seven boys, ranging in age from 14 to 19 years of age, are in attendance. Three African American male staff members sit interspersed in the circle along with the boys in the group. One of those three, Coach, is designated the group leader that day. The other two staff members, who are women, sit along the periphery of the circle, listening and joining the conversation at different points.

The session begins with Coach, the group leader, reading McKay's poem. Before he begins reading the poem, the boys are in conversation, looking at each other, at the floor, or around the room. Once Coach starts reading the poem, they sit quietly and give him their attention. The poem is read.

Coach: Anybody tell me what the poem is about? Anything you remember about the poem—just tell me what you think it's about.

Dandridge: About having pride.

Coach: OK. Having pride. Anybody else?

Dandridge: Standing up for what you believe in? (The rest of the boys in the circle are quiet and do not show much expression.)

Coach: Standing for what you believe in. Definitely. Anything else? (long silent pause) What about this part? What about "If we must die, let it not be like hogs." What does that mean?

Mitchell: Go out fighting. (Mitchell answers Coach immediately in a loud, clear voice with no apparent hesitation. He looks at Coach, then looks over his shoulder.)

Coach: OK. That's almost it, but that's not exactly it. (Mitchell looks at Coach again.)

Mitchell: For a purpose and a moral (again, Mitchell's voice is clear and loud).

When we first observe Mitchell's behavior during this part of the session we think that he appears confident. His behavior seems, in many ways, hypermasculine. He answers without hesitation and speaks in a

voice that is noticeably louder and clearer than that of the other boys. He seems fearless and brave, but we soon realize that this façade has a hypervulnerable dimension hidden beneath it as we observe and listen to Mitchell some more.

Coach: OK. That's it. What kind of purpose? (Mitchell is looking down at his hands as Coach is talking.)

Mitchell: (still looking down at his hands) Any purpose that suits you, so that you don't die like a coward.

(Mitchell's voice is higher than before. He places emphasis on the word "coward.")

Coach: Oh, that's good. (Coach looks around the room at other students.)

This interaction reflects the hypervulnerability that might underlie Mitchell's manly outward "toughness." He diverts his attention away from Coach when he is pushed to describe the kind of purpose that is worth dying for. His response is vague; he does not provide details of a purpose that is truly worth dying for. He does, however, reinforce his "manly" point: It is a purpose worth dying for as long as the person dies as a man, not a coward or punk.

In the next sequence it becomes clear that Mitchell and other students continue to focus on the way they might die rather than the reason for their death. They seem focused on superficialities (how did the man seem when he died? Did he seem scared?), but they are not prepared to look beneath the surface and figure out whether some steps leading up to fights or death are truly worth the battle.

Staff3: You said a type of purpose. (She looks at Coach) What type of purpose would he say? In the poem they named a purpose.

Mitchell: I don't know. What is it?

Staff3: They said noble. Do you know that word "noble"? A noble purpose? What would be a noble purpose to die for? (Pause)

Dandridge: Die with heart.

Staff3: Die with heart. OK.

As Dandridge's response shows, these boys seem to ask themselves, "Does the person seem fearless when he dies?" If so, then he died for a good reason. What seems to matter to them is the end, whether the person died as a true man, not the means. They understand the meaning of the poem which is if they die for something that is brave, the death is not senseless. However, maintaining manhood is a noble thing and dying or living like a punk is the most senseless thing to the boys. The conversation continues, and we soon learn that Mitchell has thought about noble purposes for which to die.

Coach: What would any of you die for that has a noble purpose? (Mitchell responds immediately)

Mitchell: My family.

Coach: Family. Who else? But first, would any of you die for a noble purpose?

Mitchell: It depends on what it was. (Mitchell is looking around the room)

Coach: OK. What is a noble purpose for you? What is your name?

Mitchell: Mitchell.

Coach: Mitchell, what is a noble purpose for you?

Mitchell: Depends on what it was! (His voice is higher when he says the word "was.") My mother. (His voice is lower once again when he says this)

Coach: OK. You would die for her.

Mitchell: Yeah. Um, (pause) probably do me my family. I don't have nothing else, really, except for that.

Mitchell shows a softer side in this moment. He admits that he would die for his family, especially his mom, and that he values them. He may even feel calmed by the realization that he has something precious enough to sacrifice himself for, as was indicated by his voice returning to normal when he talked about his mom. As we see in the following interaction, however, he seems animated and upset when he discusses other "noble" things for which he would die.

Coach: Uh hum. How 'bout a stranger? (Would you die for a stranger?)

Mitchell: My sneaks.

Coach: You'd die for your sneaks?

Mitchell: Yeah. (He responds in a voice that is higher, louder than before)

Coach: What's so special about your sneaks?

Mitchell: I'm not gonna let nobody take nothing from me.

Coach: What about your shirt?

Mitchell: That too! Anything that I paid for. Ain't nobody take nothing.

Coach: What kind of sneaks you got?

Mitchell: It's not what I got! I could have Bobo's. They're not taking them either. (A few others laugh. However, throughout this conversation about sneaks and clothing, the other boys do not give Mitchell eye contact. They look at Coach, at the floor, or at their feet while the two of them talk.)

Coach: So, it's just the stuff that belongs to you.

Mitchell: Yeah. It's the point that somebody disrespecting me and trying to take your stuff.

Coach: OK, that's good. So being disrespected is a noble purpose.

Mitchell: Yeah. (The other boys in the room are quiet. They do not respond.)

Coach: To die for. All right.

Again, Mitchell's high voice, his strong inflection on certain words, and his loud speech indicate that this is an emotional topic for him to talk about. When we see these kinds of behaviors in people, we often assume that they are scared, angry, or reflecting an experience of having been disrespected. Mitchell may very well be feeling both of these emotions, but he might also be feeling something that so rarely is attributed to young Black males: sadness and depression. This may be a difficult reality for Mitchell to admit to himself. He answered the question in a socially acceptable way by saying that he would die for his family. Most people would agree that it is a noble cause to die for one's family. Now, however, he is venturing into territory that few can understand—except for the other boys in the room, who seem to share Mitchell's sentiment by acting in similarly distressed ways as he talks. Mitchell seems to be the spokesperson for the group when he dramatically declares that he, like the other boys in the room, feels compelled to stand up for his manhood when his masculinity is at stake. Who cares what the reason is for the fight? The fight is not about the Bobo's or the shirt. It is about someone threatening his very manhood and demanding that he answer them, in the moment: Are you "sweet" or are you "the man"? In the next dialogue transaction, we can see an example of hypervulnerability in the immature view of being disrespected. Disrespect to hypervulnerable youth means to be rendered inconsequential, meaningless, and inferior. A less fragile identity would not so easily believe that an insult could change who an adolescent is.

The discussion continues. Now Montrose joins the conversation and begins to challenge Mitchell's opinion. For the first time during the session, an opinion is introduced that stresses that all fights may not be necessary to show one's manhood.

Coach: Somebody else. What else would you... What noble purpose would you die for? Somebody said family....

Coach: OK. What did you say, Montrose?

Montrose: (He is reclining, as if stretching) I'd get shot for my family, but I ain't takin' a hit. I ain't tryin' to die for 'em. If I'm there—If I'm there while they shooting, then I get shot. (Montrose is smiling). You know what I'm sayin', but, man, look! I ain't jumpin' in front of nothin'. I'll come to your funeral, you know what I'm sayin', and cry. (Nervous laughter comes from the crowd)

Staff3: Let me ask you this. If a situation was going down that involves your family and people was coming in there, and there was some shooting going on....

Montrose: That don't matter—my man.... I wouldn't get shot at if I ain't got nothing to do with it. I ain't got nothing to do with it.

Staff3: If you thought you could step in and pull it out. Would you try to step in and help?

Montrose: Yeah, that's one thing if I could talk someone out, without somebody getting hurt, but if somebody come up on you and start shooting, man, I'm gonna be across the street.

(Montroses' voice is higher as he says this last sentence. Nervous laughter comes from the crowd. Somebody says, "That son of a bitch!" Montrose continues.) Look, I ain't taking no bullet for *nobody*! (Laughter continues. One boy pretends to shoot someone as he's laughing. He says, "Someone come right up to you and go 'Pop!'" Mitchell is looking at this boy across the circle and says, "Get shot there right after the fight!" (Montrose continues) I'd never do that. I'd never do that.

Coach: What about your family? Somebody said family. Is everybody your family? (The group responds: No.)

Coach: Cousins?

Daniel: It depends. If I think, if I think they'd do it for me, I'd do it for them. Not everybody in my family.

Mitchell: To me, it depends on if they're older or younger though. My mom... though if it was somebody younger than me, I'd die for 'em because they gonna live longer than me.

Montrose: (jumps in) Ain't nobody here talking about no moms on the corner getting shot. For *real* (higher voice), man, be serious. If it was my mom, yeah....

Mitchell: I'm talking about family.

Montrose: But if me and my cousin standing there, somebody run up on you shooting... What's the first thing you wanna do if you ain't got no gun? You want to run. Am I right or am I wrong? Ain't gonna try to stand him, man, you ain't gonna just do it!

Coach: Let's just say that people who we might care for who might get shot or die is a rare thing. It doesn't happen every day. We hope dying doesn't happen—it only happens to us once in our lives, right? So the question really is, if you had to be in that place in that choice, what would you do it for? So maybe it's a rare thing that your mom might get shot, but if the situation came up, that's the issue.

Montrose: Well, if me and my mom was walking and someone started shooting, I'm sayin', yeah, I'd lie and go for cover, you know what I'm saying? (Montrose reads disagreement on the face of another group member) Come on, but, man, that's not... If you're standing on the corner with your man and someone run up and go, Pop, Pop, Pop!, and you ain't got no gun, watcha gonna do? (His voice gets louder and higher so as to defend his remarks to the rest of the group which he may feel is questioning his comments. At this moment, Montrose is demonstrating the absurdity of confronting an armed person. His arms are outstretched in a culturally embattling fashion or in a manner to imitate someone who is unarmed and foolishly confronting an armed person.) You ain't gonna stand there and go, "Ah, Shit What? What? What?" (The boys begin laughing and have side conversations. Montrose continues.) You'd turn around and run!

Montrose is a realist. He is aware that there are circumstances during which a person is more at risk to being hurt or killed. He is the wise one in the crowd, the one willing to step up and present a voice of dissent. He

brings the conversation back to a point where the real danger in their lives is discussed. His argument is well taken: Though it is not particularly common for their mothers to be shot at, shootings among young Black males on street corners is common. As the wise man in the group, Montrose offers a unique position. Maybe the real "man" should choose to run instead of fight, especially if he is not prepared to go against others who are better equipped for the challenge. Soon, others start to respond to Montrose's point, including Mitchell.

Mitchell: (His voice is high and he is talking above the crowd) I would run too if you and your boy were caught with no gun!

Brandon: We're talking about your mom.... If you were on the corner with your mom. Would you go running from your mom?

Staff1: I think you guys need to listen to what Coach said. He said, "What noble cause would you die for?" OK, what you guys are talking about are isolated circumstances. He's asking for what noble cause. What is it in your life....hold up....

But all members of the group are showing that they are distressed during the conversation. As was the case before, they speak in high voices, stress certain words to get their points across, and talk in loud voices. Most, at this moment, are talking in side conversations.

The conversation now takes a more somber turn. While before the boys talked about how they would die for their mothers, they made no mention of fathers. At this point, Coach talks about his son and how he would die for him, especially to protect him from harm. Most of the boys have their arms folded and are sitting quietly. This is the first time during the session that fathers and fatherhood are discussed. The conversation continues, and now some of the boys, especially Mitchell, focus on talking about their dads.

Coach: There might be something you might do differently if the person you loved for and cared for was around you. Now some of you said there is somebody I wouldn't die for.

Mitchell: If I was closer to my dad, I would die for him too. Since you're not close to somebody, it's just like being strangers. (Someone from the crowd says, "Yeah.")

Coach: All right, so you would die for him.

Mitchell: So just like you see someone on the street—they getting shot, I don't know a fuck about 'em. Like that—excuse my language. (Kalenga laughs)

This is a sad moment because Mitchell is putting a caveat on the issue of family. He makes a strong point that there are some people in your family that you would die for and some you may not want to do anything for.

Mitchell is talking about the loneliness attached to father loss and absence. He is longing to be closer to his dad—in some ways, he seems to *want* to die for his father—but, in reality, the opportunity is not there for him to do that.

Coach: OK, what were you saying before? (Coach looks at Brandon)

Brandon: If it ain't my mom, my grandmom, or my grandfather, I'm ain't dying for them.

Coach: OK.

Brandon: All right, people who live in my house, let's put it that way and my grandmom. But anybody else, I ain't jumping in front of no bullets, no trains, no cars, nothing. I ain't jumpin' in front of nothing.

In the following sequence, Montrose once again forces the boys to be realistic, not hypothetical, and think about who would die for them. Again, the conversation turns to focus on fathers.

Montrose: Man, we sittin' here talking about people we'd die for. Gotta start thinkin' about the people who'd die for you, man. Know what I mean? (His voice is higher at the end)

Coach: Who would die for you? Do you know somebody?

Daniel: There's a lot of people who'd die for you. You just don't know. (The boys are all talking, having side conversations. Someone says, "That's what I'm saying!" Another says, "There's a couple of people.")

(Daniel continues): There's a lot of people who'd die for you, you just don't know. OK, you might say that all right, it's like, you might like, you said, you said, you ain't close to your pop, but you never know your pop...

The boys seem to be wishing for father involvement and caring despite all evidence to the contrary. It's possible that the boys could have been taken to the philosophical and psychological place of processing who would die for them through many of the group role-play strategies. These kids may seem to have faith that their fathers will protect them and that there is a loneliness that comes from the fact that they haven't experienced this protection yet.

Mitchell: (He interrupts Daniel) My pop might take a bullet for me, but I wouldn't take one for him! (Montrose laughs, arms crossed)

Staff1: But the point is, who would die for you?

Mitchell: Well, it's probably fewer people who'd die for me than I'd die for them being as though I would fight for anybody that I know—I would fight with anybody I know. But if it's like 15 and I'm running 2, I ain't gonna lie... (laughter from the crowd)

(Mitchell continues): If it's like 10, I'm gonna fight. If it's like 15 or 20 and I'm not ready. I'll catch up with them later!

(There's a suggestion that retaliation would be possible when the odds are against you. Someone from the crowd says, "Yeah.")

Coach: Do you know somebody who will die for you? The invisible man or super-person that will show up that you don't know. Let's just put them on the backburner. Do you know somebody who will die for you?

Again, the boys talk about hypothetical situations instead of discussing realistic situations in which others might die for them. Dandridge talks about a hypothetical situation of pushing an old lady away at the train station if someone tries to shoot her. The boys join in and talk about other hypothetical situations in helping strangers. It seems much safer for them to discuss the "what if" rather than the "what really is."

The conversation soon turns again to issues of manhood and respect. Perhaps they return to their discussion of these topics to feel powerful again after they exposed their hypervulnerable sides in their discussions of father loss and absence.

Coach: What if, um, do we have brothers, do we have brothers, who die like hogs? (They continue talking about hypothetical situations and stories in the news—the Jasper, TX lynching, a bullfight).

(After some diversion in the discussion, Coach continues): A lot of brothers—Latino and African American—like what Brother Hassan was talking about last time—sometimes we might die over a pair of sneakers. The sneakers might mean something like respect—like you (Mitchell) were saying...

Mitchell: It's not the fact that it's materialistic. I can go buy another pair today or tomorrow. It's but the point that somebody's just looking at you like "Damn, this thing is sweet. Let me get him right there." Looking at you like that—I've never been robbed.

(Someone from the crowd says, "Me neither.")

Coach: But would that be a cause to die for...

Mitchell: In a way... (He is trying to talk over the crowd. His voice gets higher and louder.) Yeah. Look, look. In a way, yeah, in a way, no. Because of the simple fact, because of the simple fact—when somebody took something from me when I was older—when I was younger—I said it would never happen again. And ever since then, like when I was little, growing up like that, nobody never really tried to take nothing from me. So why should I let this person take something from me and have me feeling like now I'm a bitch now cuz somebody took something from me. I feel like that's disrespect.

Staff1: ARE you a bitch?

Mitchell: NO!

Staff1: Like Coach said, that's dying like a hog....

Mitchell: I didn't say I would die for it.... I said nobody gonna take nothing....

Staff1: You said that earlier....

Mitchell: Yeah, cuz somebody gonna take it from me, ain't nobody gonna take anything off my back.

Staff1: So it's worth dying? Like Montrose was saying.... He was saying on the side somebody put a gun up in my face and say, "Listen, give me your sneaks...."

Mitchell: (He leans forward and points at the boy across the circle) Half the time they ready to kill you any old way!

(Then he leans back. Conversations develop among the boys in the crowd)

Mitchell: So what's the point (voice raised higher than before)? I'd rather die with my sneaks on than die with them off!

(He is leaning forward)

Mitchell stands firm that it is worth dying for his respect and manhood. Montrose, however, once again interjects with a voice of reason. Montrose points out that, even when you fight back, you may not be in control and may have things taken from you. Fighting for what's yours does not prevent others from taking things from you. Dandridge eventually agrees with Montrose.

Montrose: (Montrose's arms are crossed) There's a good chance they're gonna take your shoes off after you die! (He laughs)

Dandridge: If you hesitate to take them off and then you take them off, they might bust you off then too!

Mitchell: Look. Look. Look. (People are talking. Mitchell is pointing to those across the circle from him) If they gonna shoot you, they gonna shoot you, regardless. If they gonna kill you, they gonna kill you, regardless, cuz it's your time to go. You don't know when it's your time to go. If you've given up or...or...some people.... I seen somebody they didn't give them nothing. They didn't take it from them. They just went about their business. They weren't trying to kill nobody. They just had a gun and just wanted to see if they could stick someone up. If it's your time to go, it's gonna be your time to go. Don't nobody in here know when they're going to die.

Dandridge: I disagree.

Sadly, Mitchell's comments reflect the fact that he seems to feel powerless over his fate. These comments reflect an ironic disparity between his outward behavior and his true feelings. Perhaps he acts in hypermasculine ways in efforts to gain control of situations around him, while, on the inside, he feels a hypervulnerable hopelessness that stems from feelings of resignation and lack of control over his own fate. To the boys, avoiding being a bitch means to prevent dying like a hog. The irony is that boys risk dying like a hog, honorless and humiliated (at least in the eyes of the

group facilitators), as they protect themselves from public ridicule. Is it possible that underneath the hypermasculinity is the hypervulnerable fear that their fate includes "dying like a hog?"

The group concludes with Coach talking about how they, as young men of color, are in the highest risk group to be killed or injured from acts of violence. The boys express an awareness of the fact that their safety and lives are at risk each day. On another sad note, Kalenga concludes with a final thought about respect. Throughout the session, a few of the boys talked about how it was necessary to engage in violence to earn respect from others. As a final thought, Kalenga notes how violence among and against young Black males actually reflects how they, as a group, receive less respect, not more, as a result of the violence they experience.

Coach: You guys are at the highest risk to be murdered and shot than any other group in America.... You are a target... The statistics bear this out.... And some days, we are also at risk, Brother Staff1 and I are also at risk.....

Mitchell: You at risk every day!

Kalenga: But we're at higher risk though. People don't do things wrong to old heads like that, man. You ever thought to do something wrong to old heads? You gonna do something wrong?

Daniel: They would mess our heads up!

Kalenga: EXACTLY! It's just like that! People respect old heads more than they respect you.

We end the session by first appreciating the sharing, then summarizing the thoughts and wisdom generated, and finally by trying to explain how the sharing is connected to growth, development, and psychological safety. The CPR group is the backbone of the PLAAAY project. It's the place we are able to interact with the boys on the most intimate basis. It is especially important that the staff be on the alert to challenge any disrespect by other students as the boys reveal their most personal selves. While many of these sessions may end on a note of caution, over time the boys not only come to expect the sharing but long for it. When a staff member misses a session because of unforeseen circumstances, the boys want to know where they are and why they were not in the CPR group. The elements we expect in most therapeutic encounters, such as attachment, transference, and demand for equanimity of self-disclosure, are all visible in this experience.

As we try to explain to Black boys more about the complexity of being Black and male in this society, there is a certain sadness we share with them. This sadness comes from the experience of wondering why we even have to culturally socialize them in the first place. If we don't tell them about the complexity of Black manhood in America, we are allowing them to remain vulnerable. If we tell them about this Catch-33, we extend their

vulnerability to some degree. Damned if we do, damned if we don't. The benefit, however, is that by doing so, we have the opportunity to challenge the last and final "damned." This is possible not only because boys have a choice to accept or reject some or all of society's negative conception of them as they explore these deeper dynamics. It is possible also because the Catch-22 is no longer invisible. Sometimes, it is only when people are at the bottom of the well that they are most ready to look up and see the light calling them. Our boys are not damned if we don't accept that premise. They don't have to accept it either. And they are our boys because we or someone we know must interact with them sooner or later. The late Robin Harris, a very well-known Black comedian, used to have a comedy sketch called "Bay-Bay's kids." These were children who would terrorize babysitters, family, friends, and the entire neighborhood with their negative behavior. In our view, even Bay-Bay's kids need love and support and the opportunity to know and reject the mantle of Catch-33. Even Bay-Bay's kids are our kids.

CPR is named so for a reason. If Black males do not get in touch with the sadness that underlies the insecure masculinity, they are taking risks with their lives, which our current society is all too ready to snuff out. Developing critical consciousness skills can be life saving for Black boys who live under our current circumstances in a "patrol and control" nation. Knowing the Catch-33; understanding how Black male anger triggers fears in our majority culture; and how this fear has historically been violently exercised on Black males; and embracing choices to sidestep, challenge, and jump over these fears can save a brother's life. And we hope it saves more than just one brother's life.

The next chapter explores one strategy to shake up the internal self-control challenges that Black boys experience. Martial arts represents one way we try to teach boys to know themselves and the internal frustrations that arise at the most unpredictable moments. Defending yourself is important. CPR represents a psychological self-defense. Knowing themselves before they battle a dangerous world is essential to survival on the streets. Let's discuss how psychological and physical self-defense work together.

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