

# Urban Trends

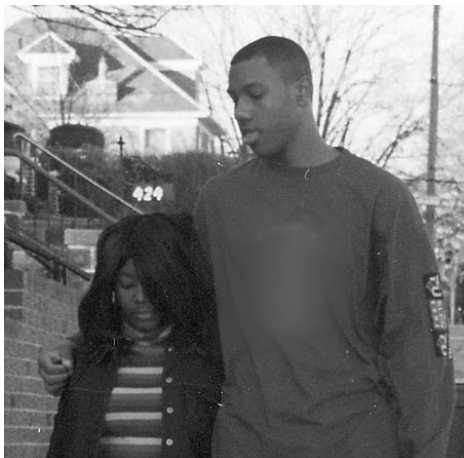
A quarterly newsletter published by



## Black Youth Sexuality and the Media Dialogue...Discussion...Debate

### Media Influences Sexual Decision-Making

**Preston Holmes** has more than 20 years experience in the entertainment industry. He produced the films *Malcolm X*, *Panther*, *Posse* and HBO's *Boycott* and co-produced *New Jack City* and *Juice*. One of Holmes' future endeavors is producing a documentary on the life of *Tupac Shakur*.



**MEE:** From your perspective as a producer, what impact do you think mass media has on the sexual and reproductive health attitudes of low-income urban, hip-hop youth?

**Holmes:** I think that media in general has a tremendous influence and effect on attitudes towards sexuality and issues of sexual health with urban youth. Producers, studios, distributors are always trying to find where the audience's head is. The media tries to identify trends and then jump onto those. I don't think it's really a case of the media creating these attitudes as much as trying to find them, follow them and exploit them. I would guess that the most influential media element is music, more so than films or television.

I wouldn't say that it's [the media] the most *influential* factor—that would be peers and peer relationships. One might wish that it was parental influence ...that was the most significant, but that clearly is not the case. Because the fact of the matter is that probably very few of the parents of these young people ever attempt to have discussions of these very serious issues with their kids, for whatever reason.

**MEE:** Why do you think music has a bigger impact than films and TV?

**Holmes:** I think music has the greater influence because it's a more pervasive element of urban culture than anything else. First of all, music, certainly far more than any other form of media, is a direct outgrowth of urban youth culture. Music is the first and to some extent the rawest and truest cultural expression for urban youth. And when you talk about music these days, it's not just the music; it's everything that goes with it [including] music videos that are created to illustrate the music. It's no coincidence that many urban films grow out of where people think the music is or the desire to create vehicles for specific [musical] artists.

**MEE:** What do you think of the messages, portrayals and stereotypes of Black urban youth sexuality?

**Holmes:** The urban audience in general and urban youth audience in particular has not been well served or well

represented by the media in that respect. But it's not because I think that the kind of images that have been presented in the media are all bad or negative or shouldn't be presented. I run away from any discussion that starts to suggest the restricting or somehow controlling freedom of expression. To me, that's not the issue as much as whether there is enough [of a] range of images that are being presented to us. I don't see anything wrong with any particular filmmaker or writer presenting any particular story

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# From The Editor

In this issue of *UrbanTrends*, several new and different voices are added to the sometimes contentious national dialogue about what's happening in America's inner cities. In these candid conversations, some of the brightest minds across the country share their thoughts and insights about some of the key issues impacting our communities—from domestic violence to teen pregnancy to the insidious influence of the media.

The abridged versions you read here are part of a much larger project that we expect will have far-reaching, national implications for communities of color. Later this year, MEE will release the results of our yearlong research study of Black youth sexuality and the impact of the media. See the article on page 6 for more information on this groundbreaking work.

In the meantime, we're proud of the breadth of experiences and backgrounds these experts represent and are excited about sharing their unique perspectives with you. Among our commentators are the most respected names in health, education and the media. These generous and wise individuals also provided guidance critical to understanding the "big picture" of the many issues that impacts the choices our youth make about their sexuality—and their lives.

Enjoy!



Pamela Weddington  
Editor

## Holmes (continued)

or image in any particular way.

My beef has more to do with the loosening of the reins a bit by the studios [and] the networks in terms of allowing African American producers and filmmakers and other people interested in reaching an African American audience to do a wider range of things, so that everything is not a 'hood comedy or a 'hood drama, presenting the same sort of images. I think the problem with African American media directed at African American audiences is that too often it follows the same sort of track or approach.

**MEE:** Where do you think the trends are going now in terms of those portrayals?

**Holmes:** I have to go back to the music, because I think it's far more pervasive than the visual images. And for lack of a better way to put it, I'm appalled at where we are and where I think it's going in a sense. Because it seems to me that much of the emphasis in the stuff I hear these days... is "playing" and "being played" in relationships and how much you can get out of it, from both sides. It's the song "Hit 'Em Up Style" about the girl [who's] pissed at her man so she's shopping on him. What concerns me is this attitude that sex is something to be used and bartered with, to get the right kind of car or clothes or be seen in the right places with the right people.

These are not new ideas from the male perspective. I think one of the more significant recent changes is that those attitudes among the male population, as hopefully we all evolve on a social level, would start to be tempered. Instead of that happening, it seems that the other side of the equation [females] just adopted more of the male attitudes. Where are the messages that have to do with commitment and responsibility and all of those kinds of things which are critical in terms of their importance to healthy relationships?

**MEE:** Do you think movies can be used as a vehicle to redefine traditional values and beliefs around sexuality in the Black community?

**Holmes:** Media in general and movies particularly, can effectively be used to sell anything to anybody if done right. All that would need to happen is that producers or directors/filmmakers make it part of their specific agenda to address some of these issues. And then it's just a matter of creating entertaining vehicles with compelling stories that include these messages. It won't be effective if it comes off as propaganda or preaching. It just has to be done within the context. [We could show, for example,] more stories that show young Black characters who have more emphasis put on the emotional commitment that two people might make to each other. Movies are all about manipulating one's emotions, and the best movies are the ones that do that most effectively.

**MEE:** What do you think is the most appropriate genre for conveying realistic and healthy sexuality messages, particularly for Black urban youth?

**Holmes:** Again, I'd have to start with the music. I remember some time ago, just driving along, and I heard on the radio for the very first time this song. And it blew me away, and I was like "Oh this is great, and I'm glad somebody did this!" and the second thought was, "My God, I wonder if it will be successful, because at the end of the day it doesn't matter what the message is, if nobody hears it." It was a song ["Video" by India.Arie] with a different kind of message, all of a sudden. And one that, interestingly enough, was embraced by enough of the audience to make it financially successful.

**MEE:** What advice would you give Hollywood producers who want to reach Black urban youth with the healthy kinds of messages you were describing earlier?

**Holmes:** I think it comes down to creating a situation or vehicle in which there are characters that the audience will admire enough to want to emulate. We've all seen that happen, from people dressing like some character in a movie, to expressions that some character uses that become part of

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# Sexuality Education Leads to Better Decision-Making

Founder of the “I Have A Future” program to reduce teen pregnancy, **Dr. Henry W. Foster Jr.** was nominated by former President Bill Clinton to become the U.S. Surgeon General. He has also held a number of esteemed positions at Meharry Medical College.

**MEE:** We know that pregnancy rates are significantly higher among Black and Hispanic adolescents than White adolescents. What do you see as the current state of Black urban youth sexuality?

**Dr. Foster:** There is some good news. Since 1991, teen births for African Americans have dropped larger than any other group —24% — and this is for young women, ages 15 to 19, from a rate of 115 per thousand girls to 88. That’s very, very good news.

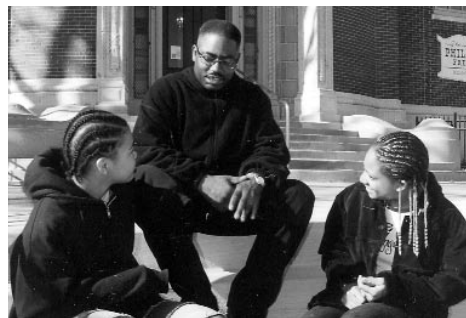
The fall in pregnancy rates, birth rates and abortion rates that we’ve seen over the past seven consecutive years, we know what has happened, we don’t know why yet. We’re trying to figure out why, but what has happened is, number one, all teenagers in America, Black and White, have delayed the onset of the first act of intercourse, and that’s important. Secondly, the kids are not as sexually active as in the past. And, third, those who are sexually active are using contraceptives better, particularly, condoms. This is probably related, to some degree, to HIV/AIDS and other things.

We’ll continue to see the rates go down in all groups, but the difference between Whites and Blacks is going to remain for a while. There are still, unfortunately, some factors in American society that will not buffer us, even with economic stability—for example, unequal access to housing and, perhaps, unequal protection under the legal system.

**MEE:** How would you describe the current environmental context for young people in urban centers? How does it contribute to risky sexual behavior?

**Dr. Foster:** There is a void and something has to fill that void. Ultimately, this problem that exists in inner city – this void, is going to have to be filled by the [large] Black middle class. We’ve got to take the lead in doing this. We’ve got thousands of retired teachers [and] engineers. We have got to come together and go into these commu-

nities and create programs like “I Have A Future” program. The name tells you what the program is about; it’s to build self-esteem. These kids have to see that there is a bigger world out there that they can be a part of, so they will have something to substitute other than pregnancy at the age of 12 or 13. These kids have to be shown that they are something worthwhile.



**MEE:** How might the policies and actions of the government, society and the media, inadvertently promote risky sexual behavior among Black urban youth?

**Dr. Foster:** In our free, open society, the media are free and they stimulate, they titillate our youth with every kind of sexual message and innuendo you can imagine, from the time they get up until they go to bed. You can’t restrict the media, but where the problem comes in, [is] when you try to educate our youth so they can defend themselves against these messages, (for which the media does not show the negative consequences) there is this voice who raises its head and says “education is dangerous.” That’s a disconnect and it’s a very dangerous one, because these kids don’t get a realistic approach, and they don’t know what the consequences are.

Frederick Douglass put this in context for us 150 years ago. He said, “Power concedes nothing without a demand; it never has and it never will.” And he was right. We want the government to do everything that it possibly can do, but ultimately, is the government really going to solve this problem for us? Maybe this is the system that’s gotten us into this problem in the first place.

I think all national Black civic organizations, as the central part of their strategic plans, should be relating to three things — voting, economics, and education. It almost hurts me to have to talk about it.

I’m old enough to remember when there were all kinds of schemes to keep Black people from voting. I think it’s a travesty that only 29% of eligible Black voters voted in the last election. Do we not get it? It’s a powerful tool, so our national leadership has got to do the job of getting people to understand the relationship between their personal standards and voting. [Voting] is our quickest change agent.

Why? To vote you don’t need to have a job, you don’t need to have money in the bank, you don’t need to have an education, you only need to have a little common sense and some pride. You just need to understand its value. I mean, if 80-year-old women can stand in 90-degree heat in South Africa all day to cast a vote, we can get in an air-conditioned vehicle, a bus or a car.

One other thing about Black leadership in this country, and this is my personal feeling, I think that a disproportionate amount of energy is still given to the transgressions, and true, there have been many that have been heaped upon us. They’ve been terrible, but I think too much time is spent on that, and as a consequence I think it sends a wrong message to too many of our kids, particularly, young Black males.

I get the feeling, and I’m no sociologist, that it may give these kids an excuse for not performing. “It’s really not my fault, it’s somebody else’s fault.” And, that’s the worst message we can give our kids, because you *can* catch up. They’ve got to learn that – that message has to be reconfigured. The message has to be about productivity. Every kid may not succeed, but every kid must try. This business [where kids think] being educated, is like trying to be White—it’s the dumbest thing I ever heard in my life. And we’ve got to get away from that.

**MEE:** When you think about abstinence until marriage, how would that kind of policy help get the numbers down?

**Dr. Foster:** Abstinence is important and absolutely fundamental in addressing and dealing with adolescents. I don’t think that many people would want their 13-year-old daughters or sons to be sexually active. In

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# TV Portrayals of African Americans Are Misleading

**George Gerbner, Ph.D.**, is a Bell Atlantic Professor of Telecommunication at Temple University and the former Dean of the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. He lectures on the media industry, television, media ownership and control and minority representation in the media, and has devoted more than forty years to studying the effects of television on its viewers.

**MEE:** Young Black people make up roughly 15% of the U.S. adolescent population, but account for over 60% of all new AIDS cases. What impact do you think mass media has on the sexual and reproductive health attitudes that lead to that reality?

**Dr. Gerbner:** First of all, mass media affects young people and Black people more than others, because they watch more. The higher the income, the more diverse the entertainment and viewing patterns. The lower the income, the more media monopolize the interests and the time of the viewers. Lower-income people don't have the ability to go out and to do as many things — go to concerts, to the theater, to travel a great deal, and so on.

The first impact is that they [low-income youth] are more dependent on television [for information] about the world and about all kinds of knowledge. They get most of their education from television. Unlike school, television starts in infancy and goes on throughout life. By the time they go to school, they're pretty well embedded and pretty well absorbed in the world of television.

**MEE:** The media has certainly played a role in shaping the views and thoughts about Black people, both to Black people and to White people.

**Dr. Gerbner:** Media is viewed by a large urban, relatively lower-income population. However, they're not [perceived as] the best consumers. So it really doesn't matter who watches it, the content is determined according to the sponsors who want to sell. The owners who want sponsors, who, in turn, are demanding the delivery of "good" customers. So, even if more minorities watch it, most general media are not produced for them.

There is a very peculiar situation when it

comes to African Americans [on television and in movies]. African American males are actually represented more than their proportion of the population. But they're all wealthy, they're all healthy, most of them [are] professionals. They are misrepresented as way above the average, having a lifestyle that very few can aspire to. I call this a kind of misrepresentation that hides the facts of life. In minority communities, there is a greater sense of despair, there is more unemployment, there is more poverty, there are fewer professionals. Instead of *under*representing, what media does is something even more damaging, which is *mis*representing.

Then, of course, most people, including the majority Whites, grow up with this image of "Here they are, what's all the fuss about? They're wealthy, they're healthy, they're professional, they're doing fine. They are stars of radio and television." That is why it is so difficult, especially with the government administration that we have now, to enact welfare reform. That is why it is so difficult to allocate resources to alleviate poverty, because basically there is no public support for it.

**MEE:** What about Black females on television?

**Dr. Gerbner:** Black women are underrepresented and share the fate of all women, which is that they're twice as likely to be victims of violence. Second, they are underrepresented as young people and even more underrepresented as older women. Older women on television, especially older Black women, are either all victims or all dying.

You can't avoid or exclude the issue of violence, because that represents power. What media representation is all about is power. It's power to control the content and it is power to build in the kind of characterizations that represent those who manage, who run and who own the media — basically the White majority.

**MEE:** How do you think they've shaped the views and thoughts of Black people?

**Dr. Gerbner:** [In movies and on television] minorities are more likely than

not to be involved in representations of violence. That shapes the attitudes of children, to say not just that violence is all right, but it's not very risky, nobody gets hurt, nobody dies, there's no pain. Television shows a lot of violence, but no pain, because the sponsors don't like pain. They want to deliver the audience to the next commercial in a mood to buy and not go south by painful and otherwise distasteful scenes. So that, just like sex, it's done frequently and it is risk free.

**MEE:** What is the current media message young people are receiving about sex?

**Dr. Gerbner:** That everybody is doing it, that it's great fun, that it requires no great commitment and that it is risk-free. There's hardly ever any discussion about protection. I've never seen any discussion about the possibility or risk of disease. All that is something that sponsors will simply not allow.

**MEE:** And why is that?

**Dr. Gerbner:** Because it's not a kind of message that's very appetizing. It's not a kind of message that leads to more consumer purchases. There's no morality in the producers. They are strictly out for profit. They can't tell their stockholders "I'm sorry, you're not getting any profits, but we're very moral."

**MEE:** Are there any opportunities for media to be a part of the solution, to play a positive role?

**Dr. Gerbner:** Media content is essentially run by the market. It's the most anti-democratic situation, because the broadcasters don't own the airwaves. We, the people, own the airwaves. [Media owners] are getting a license to broadcast in what the law says is "public interest, convenience and necessity." The problem is that nobody enforces the law.

And why don't they enforce the law? Well, the Federal Communications Commission [FCC] issues licenses. The FCC is an arm of Congress. Congress is so beholden to the big contributors, who are the same people who monopolize the media, that

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# Rebuilding the Village

**Carl Bell, M.D.** is president and CEO of the Community Mental Health Council in Chicago and a leading expert on public health issues and school and community violence. He is known for his work related to the mental health of African Americans and for his contributions to framing violence as a public health issue.

**MEE:** What is your take on the current state of sexuality among low-income, Black urban youth?

**Dr. Bell:** The last six years, I've been doing HIV prevention research in four schools in Chicago and part of that study was based on doing some basic empirical research about Black youth sexuality habits, pre-adolescent and adolescent. We recently wrote a second grant to go do this in New York and one of the grant reviewers wrote back that maybe we should start the intervention after [age] 13.

The problem was that the first basic research on sexuality habits of this population showed that by age 13, a third of the girls were no longer virgins. So by the time you start doing HIV prevention at 13, you've missed a third of the population, easily.

**MEE:** Are the sexual and reproductive health development needs of Black urban youth unique or different?

**Dr. Bell:** I think they're different and unique for a lot of reasons. First of all, you have Black urban youth living in poor situations — communities with no infrastructure, poor schools, no healthcare services, no social services, nothing. You have structural problems, which makes the situation that Black youth are living in unique by virtue of poverty, not by race, ethnicity or culture. Then, to a great extent, Black youth are different. They've got different language, code words, signals and styles. And if you don't craft messages and interventions to be welcoming to Black youth, they don't think it has anything to do with them. And it just goes past them — "That ain't me they're talking about. They're talking about somebody else."

I think it's important to try to understand the cultural slant, so people understand that "this is your message" and "this is somebody who knows who you are, and it's some-

body you need to listen to."

**MEE:** What roles do you think the media and our different social institutions, including religious and educational ones, play in establishing attitudes, norms and values related to Black urban youth?

**Dr. Bell:** All of those infrastructures tend to be less well developed in the Black community, because the Black community tends to be poorer in general than White communities. If you go into the Latino community there's a little bit more social fabric there. There's a language that's unique, there's religious stuff that's very Catholic-based, there's a closer relationship with Latin American countries. Black folk tend to be a bit more disadvantaged in terms of having resources to help either shape positive messages or do prevention/intervention. So what you wind up with is kind of a black market, bootleg street culture of sorts.

**MEE:** You've talked about "rebuilding the village." How do you define that?

**Dr. Bell:** There appears to be a fairly high correlation between the integrity of social fabric and Black sexuality. What we're finding out from our HIV prevention research is that if you're able to rebuild the village, if you're able to recreate social fabric within a very poor Black community, you have a greater level of social control over youth, and they tend to delay their sexuality expression and their risk-taking behaviors. So [for] intervention strategies, the whole issue is rebuilding the village and trying to recreate social fabric if it's not already there.

There are all different types of village-building activities, with different types of players at the table, ranging from government, community-based organizations, churches, schools, health care institutions, private businesses, fraternal, social clubs ... all of those people have to come to the table and agree on a vision. Once they get at the table, they [need to] have fairly high-level conversations to try to get everybody working in the same direction.

**MEE:** Even in the lowest income Black



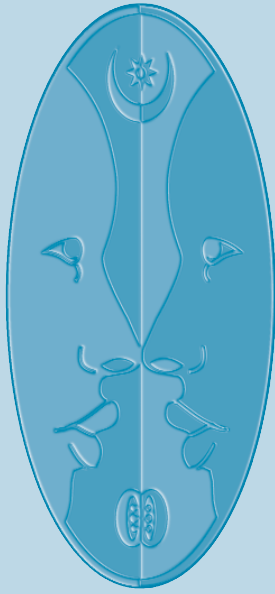
communities, media consumption is often very well developed. What role do you think that plays in terms of attitudes, norms and values around Black youth sexuality?

**Dr. Bell:** That's a hard question. Some would say, for example, that rap music has a huge influence, but I guess my issue is, which came first, the chicken or the egg? Is it life imitating art or is art imitating life? I think they both kind of mutually feed on one another. My experience is that media or "art" is a factor, but so is real life. You see the various rappers doing whatever and promulgating whatever. And then you see real live people in your community doing real live stuff. And for the most part, they kind of line up. The stuff you see in the media is kind of what you see in the street. So, again, it's really hard for me to tell. Is life imitating art or is art imitating life?

**MEE:** You've done pioneering work on [those] witnessing media violence vs. seeing real-life violence. Is there any connection there in terms of sexuality?

**Dr. Bell:** The first [thing I found about] witnessing violence was that the real-live stuff was more important than the stuff on the media. I think the stuff on the media gets everybody's antenna and radar up and everybody can share the same experience because they're seeing the same video or the same movie. But I'm still not convinced that those messages go as deep as the real-life stuff. Hopefully, there are some other messages that you're getting from real life. Behavior is multi-determined; it's very complex. So I could sit and watch all the

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## BLACK YOUTH SEXUALITY and the MEDIA

- What's the impact of the negative, conflicting and often destructive messages urban youth receive about sex and sexuality?
- Is abstinence a joke in the inner city?
- Who's "calling the shots" in today's urban youth relationships?
- When it comes to sex, are adults walking the walk or just talking the talk?
- Can entertainment programming be a tool to promote healthy sexuality?

These questions and more are answered in MEE's latest study on the urban youth experience. A hard-hitting follow-up to 1992's The MEE Report: Reaching the Hip Hop Generation, this new project illuminates what has changed—and what hasn't—in the world of urban youth over the past decade. The research project was co-sponsored by The Ford Foundation, The California Endowment and the Reproductive Health Division of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Findings and recommendations will be released later this year, in a series of public briefings and forums.

This unique health communications project reflects and validates the voices of the inner city. In more than 35 focus groups across nine urban areas, MEE talked and listened to young African Americans, ages 16-20. We traveled to Baltimore; New York City; Los Angeles/Long Beach and Oakland/Richmond, CA; Chicago; New Orleans; Detroit; and Atlanta. In those same cities, MEE administered a survey to more than 1,900 youth about their lifestyles and media (entertainment) consumption.

The main goal of the research is to provide a better understanding of Black urban youth

and their sexual and reproductive health, by examining the impact of media content and consumption, social factors and emerging or underground trends. Critical to that process is understanding the dynamics of urban youth subculture, including the role of peer pressure; how young people define healthy intimate relationships; and how *they* (compared to adults) define responsible sexual behavior.

The report delivers new information about the attitudes, motivations and perceptions of Black youth about issues related to healthy sexuality and reproductive health. Topics include teen pregnancy, sexually-transmitted diseases and gender equity.

Most mainstream prevention campaigns have been a dismal failure in dealing with such issues, and in encouraging responsible sexual behavior with the "hip-hop" generation. Along with starting a much-needed dialogue, the report will help community-based organizations develop innovative and effective messages, programs and services for youth. This latest research is an extension of MEE's socially-responsible mission and adds young people's voices to the dialogue about sex in America's inner cities.



# Television as a Channel for Positive Messages

**Dr. Robert E. Raleigh** oversees network and first-run television sales, marketing and research for Carsey-Werner Distribution, and runs CW e-Distribution, a full-service Internet syndication company. Previously, he was senior vice president of domestic sales for Worldvision Enterprises and vice president of sales at MCA.

**MEE:** From your perspective as a television executive, what impact do you think mass media has on the sexual or reproductive health attitudes of Black, urban youth?

**Dr. Raleigh:** I think that group, probably more than any group is particularly susceptible to the issue of stereotyping and limited character development. Mass media is tremendously impactful to that group simply for economic reasons—it's accessible, it's essentially free, and it's ubiquitous.

**MEE:** Why do you think the media has stereotyped Black urban youth?

**Dr. Raleigh:** It's easy and it's socially acceptable. A lot of it's caught up in the relationship between the minority culture and the majority culture. Because the entertainment community is predominately run by the majority culture, so many people who are promoting and continuing these stereotypes really are almost oblivious to it, because those issues, on a very personal level and professional level, never get challenged. When a show is cast or a story's being told, it's typically told through the perspective of the writer or the producer. And since most of them are typically White, European descent people, it's told from that perspective.

**MEE:** Part of your resume as a TV executive is being associated with the show *Moesha*. That may be a positive

example of urban youth culture or at least a family culture where the main character was a teen. What's your perspective on that type of programming?

**Dr. Raleigh:** The creative genesis of *Moesha* was people of color who were very, very committed to an accurate portrayal of Black family life. And it was very, very positive and uplifting. The reason the show, frankly, made it to air and lasted as long as it did is [that] it caught the industry at just the right time. There were two emerging networks, the Warner Brothers network and the Paramount network, and both were struggling to find a voice. It's been very consistent history in our industry that when you want to introduce a new entertainment-based programming, you leverage it on the back of the largest users of television in all the land, and that is Black youth. *Moesha* happens to be a case where some folks with great creative intent and credentials met an opportune time in the marketplace. I suspect it would be very difficult to launch that show today.

When *Moesha* was on the air, about 80% of the viewing came from Black households and in a mature marketplace, that's not a big enough audience to sustain it economically. *Moesha* had a very difficult time in the world of syndication because it was so targeted. When you got to marketplaces without a large urban, Black population, the show did not sell particularly well. Even though Brandy was a very big crossover star, the show was perceived as very targeted.

**MEE:** How can "new media" be used to communicate positive messages to Black, urban youth?

**Dr. Raleigh:** Mass media can perform a tremendous service in terms of giving

people permission to act responsibly. Perhaps we can encourage people and model appropriate behavior and show those who have the sense of, or desire to act responsibly, high-status role models [who act] responsibly. In terms of direct messages of how to behave, I think a lot of the new media are probably a little better able to be harnessed. The Internet, for example, creates more of a dialogue, one-to-one, as opposed to the passive experience of the mass media. There we can get into giving people the chance to practice responsible behavior, giving people a chance to role-play, giving people a chance to have dialogue around issues or responsibility in a very private way.

You could take the branded elements of [a popular urban] movie, move it to the Internet, attract an audience there, and then they could come in to watch that movie or some clips or a behind-the-scenes interview with the stars, and then it could generate into a one-on-one around issues raised in that movie.

**MEE:** What advice do you have for television executives who want to reach Black, urban youth with healthy messages?

**Dr. Raleigh:** I'm not sure that there's a whole lot of folks in the entertainment business that are sitting around thinking about delivering healthy messages. All things in the business revolve around commercial viability. We can delude ourselves about anything that we want, but the whole entertainment business is built upon other people's money. It's built upon sponsors and advertisers who choose to support programming because it delivers their message. If we think that altruism and other issues of personal responsibility are going to change that, I think we'd be sorely mistaken.

I think that what's important is for people to recognize that it's not an either/or issue, that simply to develop a message that has appeal to urban, Black audiences does not preclude that project having success in the general market. There's clearly many more similarities in audience interests than there are defining differences. It requires challenging traditional, mainstream, majority culture assumptions, but

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## Raleigh (continued)

it can work and be tremendously popular. I can think of a lot of great examples of how it hasn't worked the other way. For example, with *The Queen Latifah Show*, she broadened her audience appeal through her movie career, her music, to becoming a pretty big crossover star with a lot of appeal in the general market. And when that show was produced as a talk show, it totally lost its general market appeal and went to a very urban, targeted audience. That forced it to rely on a core, loyal audience that wasn't large enough to sustain it in any meaningful sense in the general market. So the show was cancelled.

As a producer or a funder of programming, I want most people to

come and watch it so that it returns its greatest return on my investment. But again, it's important to drive home the message that there are other ways to view the world and viewing it in a different way doesn't make it less profitable. In fact, you can make it *more* profitable. If we can create big, broad-based entertainment experiences that are created with a sensitivity to multiple audiences, it doesn't have to mean that it's a less fulfilling experience for anybody.

**MEE:** What is the most appropriate media for conveying realistic and healthy sexuality messages, particularly for Black, urban youth?

**Dr. Raleigh:** Television has the capacity, at

least more of an appetite, for presenting things positively. But the problem with television is that, because it sugarcoats a lot of stuff and glosses over a lot of things, because it doesn't want to challenge and create any controversy, the message is oftentimes really discounted. In movies, you have more of an opportunity to create a realistic impact. But both of them, produced in concert, could have a tremendous impact — television by its ubiquity and movies by virtue of being “big” experiences, as opposed to just watching them every Tuesday night.



## Bell (continued)

garbage — abusing women, using-women-for-sex messages — in the world. But if everybody around me is doing a very ethical, stand-up moral thing, I may not go the media route.

**MEE:** What impact does the availability and accessibility of sexual and reproductive healthcare services have?

**Dr. Bell:** It's problematic. If you can't get access to healthcare, you're in real trouble. You're not getting good information, you're getting bogus information. It's like the people in South Africa who believe that condoms have the HIV virus in them and if you have sex with a virgin, you get cured of AIDS. That's just crazy and that's a lack of healthcare access. Part of the problem is that there's no access to healthcare for poor Black folk and that's just promulgating the epidemic. And to some extent, that's kind of criminal.

When I drive through the community I service, [there's] nobody there. The few folk that *are* there are pretty much helping, but are so strapped and have our resources spread so thin, we can't even begin to meet the needs. There are some — a handful of token city clinics, a handful of token satellite, not-for-profit hospital clinics — but those are mostly for people who have a way to pay. If you've got a way to pay, to some extent you're in the club.

**MEE:** Let's get to some solutions then.

What are your thoughts on what providers and health care professionals can be doing?

**Dr. Bell:** The key is how do you clearly identify what works? And then once you've clearly identified what works, how do you get everybody to do it? The problem is that frequently, in White institutions, when they find out what works, the population they've used [as research subjects] is White American middle-class males. Then when you try to apply that to a different cultural group, it breaks apart. People aren't very good at taking what they've done in the “ivory tower” and moving it out to the street. It's a complete breakdown.

So, for me, the issue is how do we move what they've learned in those White institutions into the Black community and translate and deliver it in such a way that it's useful to us? Black service providers and healthcare workers need a power base in a Black-run institution that's got status, clout, does good work, some level of research and education that's connected directly to the community. How do we then take those Black institutions, connect them with research, science and technology so that the agenda in the Black community becomes the agenda for the academics and the research and technological institutions? That's the issue.

**MEE:** While we're trying to rebuild our social fabric, what media messages should we use?

**Dr. Bell:** All of my messages would be “rebuild village” messages and strategic planning messages. And I'm hoping that social marketing, if done right, could make a huge difference. I don't know that anybody's interested in developing the kind of process that would make social marketing actually work, because it's too much money and about stuff nobody cares about — “don't smoke, don't drink, have safe sex.” This is a very individualistic kind of society, and people don't try to shape social fabric with social marketing, unless they want you to buy something. It seems to me that if all the effort and energy that went into getting people to buy something went into healthy lifestyles, there might be a shift in behavior.

**MEE:** So where do you start with young people?

**Dr. Bell:** You've got to start with self first. [Say to them], “You're not going to have a future if you're not in school, if you're not learning something, if you're shooting up drugs, if you're engaging in unsafe sex. If you think that not working and getting paid is getting over, if you think education is ‘Whitey's thing,’ if you think scholarship is ‘Whitey's thing,’ if you think science is ‘Whitey's thing,’ that's not helpful.”





# Preview



## MEE's National Lifestyle Survey Provides Critical Insights Into a Profitable Market

MEE's survey of nearly 2,000 Black youth examines the latest media consumption trends and provides marketplace insights into the most influential and trendsetting youth market in the world. The poll, conducted in nine U.S. cities uncovers trends related to media consumption behaviors and choices; movie, radio, television and Internet preferences; and "Who's Hot" among a wide range of actors, actresses, hip-hop celebrities, R&B stars, sports figures and comedians. The study also analyzes the general lifestyle markers of inner-city youth as they navigate through the days and hours of their typical week. Here's just a small window into the lives of this hard-to-reach market:

### YOUTH AND MUSIC

Nearly half (48%) of Black inner city youth report that Hip-Hop/Rap music is their favorite musical genre. In second place in popularity is Rhythm & Blues (R&B) with 35%. Survey findings show an inverse relationship between the age and popularity of Hip-Hop/Rap music. While more than half (54%) of 16 and 17 year olds prefer Hip-Hop/Rap music, the percentage drops down to 40% among 19 and 20 year olds. On the other hand, youth ages 19 and 20 prefer R&B more than 16 and 17 year olds, by 40% to 31%, respectively.

### YOUTH AND TELEVISION

Just over one out of three (34%) youth that participated in the survey watch 4 or more hours of television per day. Forty-seven (47%) percent watch between 2-3 hours of television per day. Cable television is very commonplace in the households of Black urban youth, with 81% of those surveyed having the service in their homes. HBO is the favorite "non-music video" channel, according to 32% of the youth surveyed. The favorite network television channel is UPN (41%), with Fox in second place at 24% and WB in third at 19%. One third of youth surveyed (33%) stated that their favorite types of television shows are comedies/sitcoms. When asked to name their favorite television show, one in four youth (25%) chose shows that reflected an "ethnic" perspective.

### YOUTH AND THE MOVIES

Movie attendance is a popular pastime for Black inner city youth. A total of 62% of the respondents surveyed go to the movies two or more times a month and another 27% go once a month. This entertainment choice alone generates millions of dollars a year: nearly half (46%) of the youth surveyed report that they spend \$16 or more per trip to the movies. Only 11% of the respondents do not go to the movies at all.

More than one-third (37%) of the youth surveyed normally attend movies on their opening weekend. Two thirds of youth surveyed stated that they normally see "R"-rated movies at the theater. Youth surveyed said that their favorite types of movies were "action/violent" movies (29%) and "comedies" (29%). "Horror/scary" movies received 14% of responses.

### WHO YOUTH LIKE

Though deceased, Tupac Shakur still garnered the highest percentage of "top two" selections among Male Hip-Hop Celebrities, with 43%. In the category of Female Hip-Hop Celebrities, Eve was chosen among the "top two" by 42% of the youth surveyed. In sports, two athletes – Allen Iverson and Michael Jordan – garnered the most votes by far, with 47% and 41%, respectively. In the category of Male Actor, nearly two-thirds (62%) of the youth surveyed selected Chris Tucker as one of their "top two" choices. In the category of Female Actress, Halle Berry garnered one of the "top two" selections from 44% of the youth surveyed.

they get clobbered if they criticize the media. There's no other country that would tolerate the fact that the air is not divided equally among different minorities, different religions, different regions.

The FCC simply does not enforce the law of licensing or diversity, and Congress has no will or power or both to enforce the antitrust laws. People in Congress are too dependent on the same corporate establishment that runs the media. The only solution is political. Political campaigning should encourage and support candidates to say "No, the airwaves belong to the people. Let's use the airwaves on behalf of the people in a more diverse way and not monopolize it by a handful of sponsors." This is also the reason why you never see poor people on television.

**MEE:** What about Fred Sanford? He was poor.

**Dr. Gerbner:** There are two or three shows in a hundred. They're a tiny minority, they're an exception and they are what they call niche marketing. They are designed for a particular pocket of viewers that few advertisers can really afford to [pursue].

**MEE:** There has been a trend in the last ten years where there is a lot more niche programming targeting urban youth.

**Dr. Gerbner:** That kind of programming is a positive sign, because historically, the way in which minorities gained entry into prime time is through comedy. I think comedy is a very serious matter, because the bitter pill can be swallowed with a sugar coating much more easily. But most people don't take comedy seriously. It is a wedge to entering into primetime. Now, we have to try to move on to the next step — very serious dramatic fare which includes minorities not only as victims, not only as poor people to be assisted or pitied, but as leading characters, in fact, as heroes and not as villains.

**MEE:** How should we go about evaluating the content of "Black" programming?

**Dr. Gerbner:** I would recommend that

every viewer become an analyst, a critic. Once you learn some of the elements of analysis and of criticism, even a dull program becomes more interesting, because you're actively interacting with the program. The way to do that is to put on your television in prime time, get a piece of paper and a pencil and write down the characters — maybe make a circle and put the characters' names in the circle and look at the show, scene by scene. A scene or unit begins when a character enters, and ends when the character leaves or another character enters. Each sheet of paper is a different scene, a different unit.

On each scene, a circle stands for the characters in the scene. Connect the circles when the characters interact. Who is talking to whom? Who is attacking whom? Who is helping whom?

Turn off your TV and add up who is talking to whom, etc. And you will find that, just out of ten minutes of prime time viewing, you'll find a very interesting picture. You'll find the message behind the message that you've been absorbing all the time while you're watching television, without knowing it. You find that men talk to men, and men talk to women much more often than women talk to other women. You find that there are certain kinds of relationships that are very stable, that are very frequent and that hardly ever change. We absorb these underlying messages as we watch television. What this exercise does is bring to consciousness the fact that we are learning all the time — we're learning about life, we're learning about relationships, we are learning about success and failure, and about the context of our society.

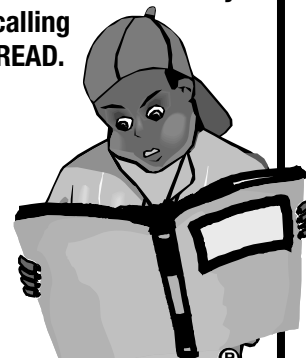


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### DON'T FORGET TO JOIN!

The MEE Community Network brings together hundreds of community-based organizations across the country that are committed to improving the lives of those they serve. Recognizing its members as the gatekeepers dealing "on the front lines" of some of today's most pressing urban issues, the Network joins these organizations together to build stronger communities and promote responsible access to and interaction with their constituents.

To become a member or to find out more about Network initiatives, go to [www.meeproductions.com](http://www.meeproductions.com). You may also contact our Community Network Coordinator Vonnya Pettigrew at 1-877-MEE-PROD or by e-mail, [communitynetwork@meeproductions.com](mailto:communitynetwork@meeproductions.com).

## Foster (continued)

our “I Have A Future” program, our firm position was that being sexually active as an unmarried adolescent was not the norm. So, our first defense was abstinence, absolutely, but that is diametrically opposed to something called abstinence-only until marriage. That makes a lot of presumptions that are unrealistic. For example, you can have a 13-year-old and a 19-year-old. Both are teenagers by definition, but there’s a difference.

My feeling is, as both a physician and as a humanitarian, I have a moral responsibility to protect the health, the fertility and the lives of those who are in my charge for care. So, if an adolescent, for whatever reason, ignores my message regarding abstinence, then I have an obligation to educate them to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS, which can be fatal, and against sexually-transmitted diseases, which can end their fertility capacity. Whenever abstinence fails, you’ve got to give kids something to defend themselves with. If not, they’re going to wind up sick, or worse, dead.

The majority of people in this country who oppose sex education are frightened parents that are desperately trying to protect their children, but

they’re confused. They have the mistaken notion that discussion about sex and sexuality is the trigger that causes teenagers to start thinking about what they’re already thinking about. In fact, they’ve got it just backwards: you need the knowledge *not* to have inappropriate sex and that’s one of the major things that we have to do for all of the youth in this country, but particularly our inner city youth.

Clearly, one of the major deficits that we have in this country is the lack of sexuality education. Western Europe has a lot of racial diversity in France and the United Kingdom, but in those countries, all of their rates—birth, pregnancy, abortion — are lower than in this country. What [is] different in those countries? Well, there is [grades] K through 12, family-life education that is age- and grade-appropriate. Teachers in those countries, by and large, are not harassed and browbeaten for teaching human biology. [And] the media in those countries are much more open in airing of subjects that relate to reproduction [and] contraception.

**MEE:** What do you think our media could be doing?

**Dr. Foster:** They can do more about airing issues on sexually-transmitted diseases and the consequences of premature sex, showing the consequences of these things. They can talk about the value of children being reared in a stable socioeconomic environment, and how to prepare for that.

**MEE:** How can parents learn to address their children about sexuality?

**Dr. Foster:** I call it a cycle of ignorance. [Often] they don’t get the education themselves, as parents. In the “I Have A Future” program, we actually brought parents and children in to talk about sexuality issues; we educated them together. That’s a tough issue, raising kids. We aren’t going to all have guaranteed successful outcomes, but you can almost assure yourself a failure if you have no input.

**MEE:** By the community?

**Dr. Foster:** Yes.

UT

## Holmes (continued)

the lexicon.

That character [has to be] drawn in such a way that the audience will admire this person enough to emulate that person. When that person is also shown in their dealings with their wife or with their girlfriend. I think that’s how you do that. Everybody wants to be hip.

But then you really have to make that the most appealing character, too. Go back to *Juice*. Tupac was not the good guy in the movie, and most people don’t even remember who the good guy was. In the film itself, the more appealing character was not the Omar Epps character who was “the hero.” It was Tupac’s character, so when the audience went to see that film, they didn’t come out wanting to emulate the Omar Epps character.

**MEE:** Same thing with *Menace II Society*.

**Holmes:** It’s often in movies that the bad guy is a more interesting character than the good guy. But the bad guy could be a guy who the messages are conveyed through. Just cause he’s a bad guy doesn’t mean he’s stupid. He could be getting ready to do something and make his man go get him some condoms. If he’s still the coolest guy in the movie, [and] he just insists on protecting himself, it just means he’s smart. I think the audience thinks being smart is cool, too, when you’re smart enough to always come out on top, to outsmart the bad guy or the good guy. They admire that.

**MEE:** How effective can TV be in sending messages?

**Holmes:** TV would be without question the most difficult place to do this, because the way the business of television operates is a lot more controlled top-down than film. They don’t want to offend anybody, and so what

ends up on TV ends up being the most bland and washed out and goes through the most hands. Network TV has never been much interested in servicing the urban audience. They could care less. That’s what created the void that the UPNs and the people like that came to fill.

**MEE:** You mentioned earlier about how today’s music puts out there that sex is so good. Can that explain why people don’t use protection or why people get caught up in having sex with someone they’ve known only for a month?

**Holmes:** Not only is it [the sex] so good, it’s like the whole point. You are here to get as much as you can get, money, cars, sex, the “bling bling.” Rather than try and change that, I think the emphasis should be “Okay, even if you’re going to do all that, you need to be protecting yourself.”

UT



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**THE VILLAGE IS NO LONGER RAISING OUR  
CHILDREN:** Dr. Asa G. Hilliard, III

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THE SEXUAL ATTITUDES OF THEIR  
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