

# Urban Trends

A quarterly newsletter published by

**MEE**<sup>®</sup>  
MOTIVATIONAL, EDUCATIONAL, ENTERTAINMENT

## "Mad Luv" from the Hip-Hop Generation

Youth are very fickle. As soon as they start to "feel" the looks or skills of one artist, actor or athlete, they can turn on them, dissing them only a week after claiming they were the best thing in the world. Yet there is a possibility that that artist will once again fall back into their good graces. It's all a part of the topsy-turvy world of the hip-hop generation.

Any personality on the TV and radio or out on the field has to have the look that kids want to see and identify with. Celebrities and sports figures have to "walk the walk" and "talk the talk." Heaven forbid if they're caught slipping—not maintaining their image (good or bad)—because the same youth that put them on top, making it possible for them to ride around in fancy cars, sport the "bling-bling" that is so popular and display their home on MTV's *Cribs*, can withdraw support and dethrone any reigning industry king or queen. Several artists formerly at the top of the charts (like MC Hammer, Eric B. and Rakim or Public Enemy) have now fallen into the "where are they now?" black hole.

Today's artists have an image to maintain. They have to be out in the community, be aware of the community or be of the community for youth to keep them in high regard. They can't be conformists who give in to The Establishment's every whim. "Keeping it real" will help maintain their appeal. This is the reason youth

seem to be drawn to certain personalities more than others. Just being young, gifted and Black does not guarantee you a spot on their list. In a sense, you have to continually prove yourself.

When asked who were their favorite two types of celebrities, our Black youth survey respondents (see page 3 for methodology) chose male hip-hop artists and male athletes as the hottest, with Allen Iverson of the Philadelphia 76ers basketball team and the late rapper Tupac ranking as their top two celebrities overall. Iverson is almost an obvious choice with today's inner city youth. Though he was not the first player to wear his hair in comrows, he popularized the style among NBA players and their millions of fans. As his fame and sometimes, infamy developed, so too did the number of his tattoos.

Once again, he was a trendsetter, even in an art form that was around long before Iverson was born. Iverson replica jerseys are the rage, even for the mainstream, and his brand of Reebok sneaker has brought the company millions of dollars in sales. Some believe that Iverson could wear a belt around his head and urban audiences would mimic his choice of style, because he has so much credibility in the hip-hop community.

Tupac, both when he was performing and posthumously, has had a tremen-



dous effect on youth who live the life he so often rapped about. Tupac articulated in his music and interviews that no one was going to make a way for Black people—except Black people themselves. He spoke about life in the ghetto and its harsh realities. Tupac personified "thug life" even up until his violent and untimely demise in 1996. Though he

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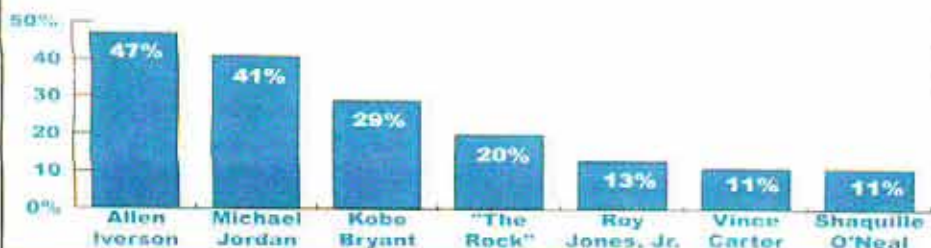
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## Favorite Male Athletes



## From The Editor

Youth are so very unpredictable. But they're really no different from when you and I were teens: we all knew everything and thought the world revolved around us. "Back in the day" we didn't have half as much to draw our attention on television as youth do today. There was no MTV, no BET, no HBO. Instead, we had *Sesame Street*, *Captain Kangaroo*, and *Mr. Roger's Neighborhood*. That's as about as exciting—and controversial—as it got.

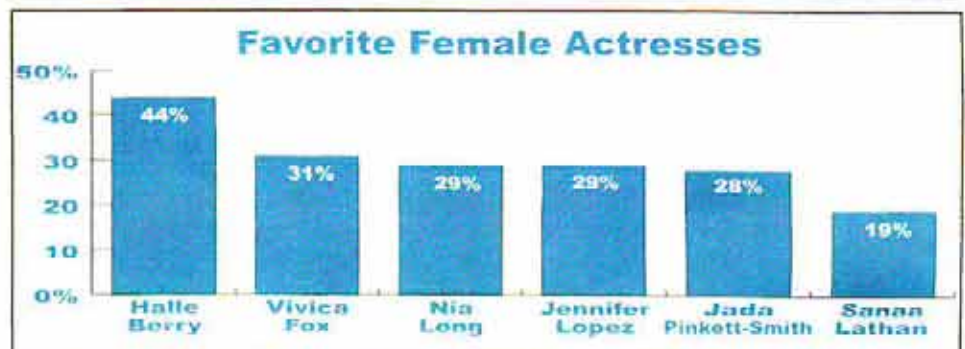
Back then, people like us were not viewed as an important consumer "market." These days, though, "Big Brother" is paying major attention to the buying decisions and entertainment choices of African American youth. The reason is simple—they generate billions for the entertainment and apparel industries, among others.

The survey results (see box for methodology) featured in this month's *UT* illustrate the choices of today's youth: what and whom they like; when they engage in their favorite pastimes; and where they spend their time. Those in the marketing business know what a valuable resource this information is.

The irony is that most of the nearly 2,000 males and females that participated in this survey have no idea of how much power and influence they wield financially. With our help, Black youth can get educated about the industries they support and figure out how they, too, can benefit from the trends they generate.

Pamela M. Weddington  
Editor

## "Mad Luv"... (continued)



wasn't the first to be considered a "gangsta" rapper, he has had a lasting impact on connoisseurs of rap and hip-hop.

One can draw parallels to current rapper 50 Cent, whose first commercial album *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* is as abrasive as it gets. The rapper, who emerged from the inner city underground, holds nothing back, unveiling the perils of the streets and sustaining himself in the rap game. He calls out the "gangsta" wannabes or "wankstas" and (having survived being shot several times) is known for wearing a bulletproof vest, even purchasing one for his 6-year-old son, and bullet/bombproofing his SUV. His version of "keeping it real" is paying off, as his record sales approach Tupac-like numbers, topping even *Billboard's* mainstream sales charts. Coming out of the box at number one, the album has gone on to sell more than 3.5 million copies in the first two months of its release.

Youth in MEE's survey were also asked to rank their favorites in the categories of male and female actor, athlete, hip-hop and R&B artist and comedy. Among female actresses, Halle Berry garnered one of the top two selections from 44%

of the youth surveyed. There were, however, notable differences in the selections of females vs. males. For example, Jennifer Lopez came in second among males (36%), but sixth among females (23%). In the comedy field, there were no significant gender variations in the preferences for male comedians. Bernie Mac

was a top choice from more than half (55%) of the youth surveyed. The next highest vote-getter was Jamie Foxx with 34%. Mo'Nique received one of the top two votes for the category of female comedians from nearly three out of four youth surveyed (69%). The next highest vote-getter was Sommore, with 40% of the votes. While Mo'Nique was the top choice for both males and females, females gave her 77% of their votes, while males awarded her with 60%.

But, of course, that could all change next week.



Halle Berry  
Photo: [unreadable]

## Keepin' it Real On-Screen: Youth & Movies



Movies are, without a doubt, the "great escape." On the big screen, many thoughts and ideas can come to life, just as they are envisioned in the mind of the writer. If it can be dreamed, it can be achieved—as long as the budget allows. This is what attracts Black youth to the cinema in droves. Urban films, with their gritty

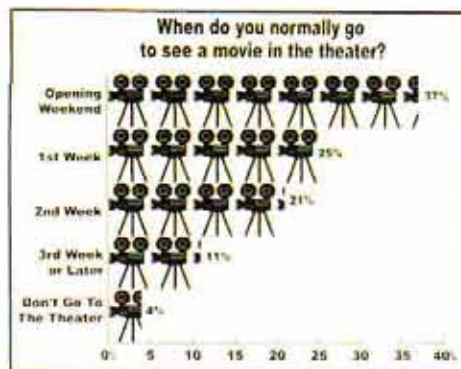
depictions of hard realities, are often perceived by youth as the most credible medium when it comes to storytelling. Youth want to see action and conflict—whether it is between competing crews or reflects the ongoing battle of the sexes.

Whatever the reason for youth attending movies so frequently, the industry continues to thrive. According to *Target*

Continued on page 3

## Youth & Movies (continued)

Market News' statistics on the buying power of Black America, in 2001 Black Americans spent \$2.4 billion on entertainment and leisure, which includes movies. MEE's survey on Black youth indicates that a total of 62% of respondents go to the movies two or more times a month, while 27% go once a month. Only 11% of the respondents report they do not go to the movies at all.



Black youth attend all types of movies, but gravitate toward the comedy and action genres. Popular urban comedies reflect Black youth's neighborhoods, their dating situations and their language. Often Black youth identify positively with a movie just by the nature of its cast. They already assume the cast will do the things that urban people do and say things urban people say. For youth, that makes the movie more authentic and credible.

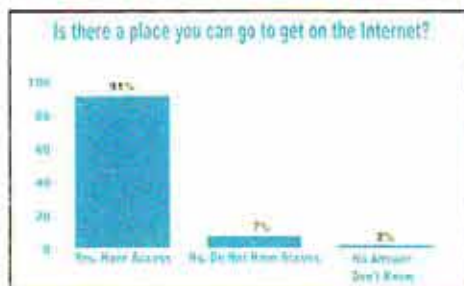
That sentiment explains why Black youth put urban-oriented films at the top of their list. When asked to rate their top two movies of all time, over half of the youth surveyed (58%) cited movies that had an urban/Black focus. Movies that fell within the sub-category of urban comedies (26%) and non-urban action movies (25%) were the top two choices of the youth surveyed. Directors who successfully combine these two genres and release them at the right times (i.e., *Rush Hour*), may have a number one movie with real staying power.

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## Access All Areas: The Internet



Remember seeing or working on your first computer? Whether it was in your home, in class or at the library, all computers pretty much had the same look: they were narrow in size, dingy in color, mouse-free and had one style and color of font on a darkened screen. The discs were liked oversized pieces of cheese (hence the name "floppy") and it had one program—on. Now in 2003, you can get a computer in every color of the rainbow, change the font from *Baskerville MT* to *Formata Italic* with the click of a mouse and do everything from download pictures and music to correspond with a friend 5,000 miles away.



But the computer world has been unforgiving to those who do not have as much access to them as others. Inner city school districts continue to go without appropriate technology, while suburban schools put their students in a position to take advantage of each advance. In spite of that reality, Black youth have stayed within striking distance of closing the Internet gap. Many of them have had to go to where the technology is, be it in a library or at a community-based organization. Ninety-one percent of the youth who participated in MEE's survey noted that there was a place where they can go to get on the Internet. Of the 91% that have Internet access, nearly half (43%) had access in their homes, with the next most popular location being their schools (27%).

The Internet is a vast resource. There is nothing you can't find if you search hard enough for it. You can seek out obscure music, find long lost friends or order that one-of-a-kind outfit. Computers can double as a stereo or DVD player. Most of the youth MEE surveyed, however, were not spending considerable time using a computer for these tasks. Even though this feeling is changing, many

African Americans still perceive the Internet as controlled by "others," and think that its messages, because they emanate from within the dominant culture, are not meant for them. With regard to frequency, only one in three youth (31%) get on the Internet daily, with 28% logging on twice a week and another 28% logging on once a week. E-mail is the most frequently used Internet capability, followed by doing a search on the Net, schoolwork, games and chat rooms. Only 13% of youth who have Internet access say they do not log on at all.

Youth who log on are spending a lot of time on Yahoo.com, a search engine that offers everything you can imagine—chat rooms, job searches, free e-greeting cards, live video, news and free e-mail addresses. This demonstrates how the Internet has evolved to reflect more of an oral communications perspective, where trends are passed on through word-of-mouth. With its many interactive features, 20% of participants chose Yahoo.com as their number one Internet site. Blackplanet.com came in a distant second at 6%.

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## Methodology

Between April and August 2002, MEE conducted a survey of nearly 2,000 Black youth between the ages of 16 and 20. We talked to youth in ten cities: Baltimore; New York City; Los Angeles, Long Beach, Oakland and Richmond, California; Chicago; New Orleans; Detroit; Philadelphia; and Atlanta. The survey, *Inner City Truth*, focused on urban youth lifestyle and media consumption patterns. The resulting profile details where urban youth are and what they are doing on a typical day. As part of a larger study, *Black Youth Sexuality and the Media*, the survey's "insider" information also provides a first-hand understanding of how the "hip-hop generation" navigates its way through sexual situations and responds to sexually-explicit messages in movies, TV and music. This *UT* gives you just an overview of the invaluable survey data. For information on purchasing the full report, e-mail [wjuzang@mee productions.com](mailto:wjuzang@mee productions.com).

Sometimes, in our haste, adults will try to group all urban youth into one huge category. Yet, if you spend the time to really talk to young people, you learn that they are as individual as they are the same. To try to color them with one broad stroke of a brush simply misses the mark. In reviewing our survey data, MEE examined the responses in several different ways, in an effort to develop as complete a picture as possible. Both the differences and similarities among different subgroups of youth provide food for thought, especially since both groups live in the same neighborhoods, and are exposed to many of the same cultural and environmental influences.



In one comparison, MEE analyzed responses from what we



described as "Sexually active, Non-scholastic, Non-religious" youth and "Not Sexually Active, Scholastic, Religious" youth. Overall, the number of young people who fell completely into these two categories was a small portion of the sample size. However, we still believe that there are lessons to be learned by taking a closer look at their lives.

There were overwhelmingly significant differences in the responses of these two sub-groups. (See summary comparison) Keep in mind that these youth all come from the same types of neighborhoods, socioeconomic background and had the same types of schooling. They were Black urban youth from poor neighborhoods who are being educated (or not) in the public school system.

For instance, two-thirds of the sexually active subgroup (66%) chose hip-hop/rap music as their favorite type of music, compared to only 40% of the

## Tamika and Kevin

Age: 16

Less likely to have dropped out of high school

Has not had sex within the last three months

Has attended church or other religious service in the past month

Enjoys reading

May also have a part-time job, but mainly focused on education

Likes comedies; more likely to prefer drama/romance and PG-13 movies

Likes both hip-hop/rap and R&B

Likes to watch TV sitcoms

Likes the music of Ja Rule, Nelly, Ludacris, Tupac, Usher, Lauryn Hill and Missy Elliott

Favorite actors: Chris Tucker & Martin Lawrence



non-sexually active youth. What draws sexually active youth in higher numbers to this genre? One can only speculate why. Is it because the lyrics are so explicit in rap music that sexually active youth can identify with it more? Or is it because they are not turned off or even alienated by the

## Jahlil and Myesha

Age: 18

More likely to having dropped out of high school

Has been sexually active within the last three months

Has not gone to church or other religious service in the past month

Does not like to read

Hustles for money or has a part-time job

Likes action/violent movies, or those with sexual content, R-rated films

Likes hip-hop/rap almost exclusively

Likes to watch TV shows with violence, action and sexual content

Favors the music of R. Kelly, Biggie Smalls, Jay Z, Tupac, Foxy Brown, Lil' Kim, Trina

Favorite actors-Chris Tucker & Martin Lawrence

suggestive discourse of many hip-hop artists?

In the area of film, 37% of sexually active youth preferred action/violent movies, compared to 20% of non-sexually



active youth. Young males and females who were not having sex preferred the comedy genre of movies and ranked action/violent movies as their second choice.

Why is it that two teens that may live on the same block and have similar life experiences have such a variance in what they prefer? How is the choice to have sex or not reflected in the media's impact or in the uniformity of choice in youth entertainment trends? When it comes to youth who live in some of our toughest neighborhoods, even though they're living *in* it, that does not mean that they're living *it*! Only further study can "peel the onion" to get to a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. What we learn, however, could be the key in providing hope and a new vision to those most at-risk.



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## TheBLUNTTruth

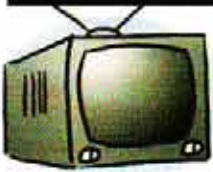
MEE has created three guides for talking to urban youth (ages 10-17) about marijuana. English and Spanish versions include:

- The latest, up-to-date "street" names for marijuana
- Signs a teen may be using marijuana
- Resources for help and additional information
- Authentic and respect-maintaining tools for handling peer pressure around smoking marijuana
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# TV or Not TV



A favorite pastime of many youth, once they get home from school or come home after hanging with friends, is to relax by watching TV. A surefire way to punish a youth is to take away the one thing that is located in almost every room in the house — a TV set and maybe a VCR. If that happened, what would youth have to laugh about with their friends the next morning at school? They may not remember how to properly apply the Pythagorean Theorem in geometry class, but they will be able to tell you what happened on *Girlfriends* or *The Bernie Mac Show* the night before. Quote Shakespeare's famous soliloquy from *Hamlet* or recite Langston Hughes' *I, Too, Sing America*? Maybe not. Regurgitating a raunchy joke — verbatim — from BET's *Comic View* or frequently repeating catch phrases from *Martin* is a little more likely.

TV serves as an easily accessible escape for youth and the shows on television often have a lasting impact. It's so easy to sit still and immerse yourself in the world of television in 30-minute increments, laughing at all of the that-could-never-happen scenarios of sitcoms and daytime soap operas. Just like listening to the radio, youth seem to watch TV anytime they can. MEE's survey found that nearly two in every five Black youth watch four or more hours of television per day (34%). Another 47% watch between two and three hours a television each day.

The survey shows, however, that males and females concentrate on different types of programs. Females clearly prefer dramas, talk shows and shows that feature Black actors. Males, on the other hand, tend to gravitate toward

sports, action/violent programs and shows with sexual content.

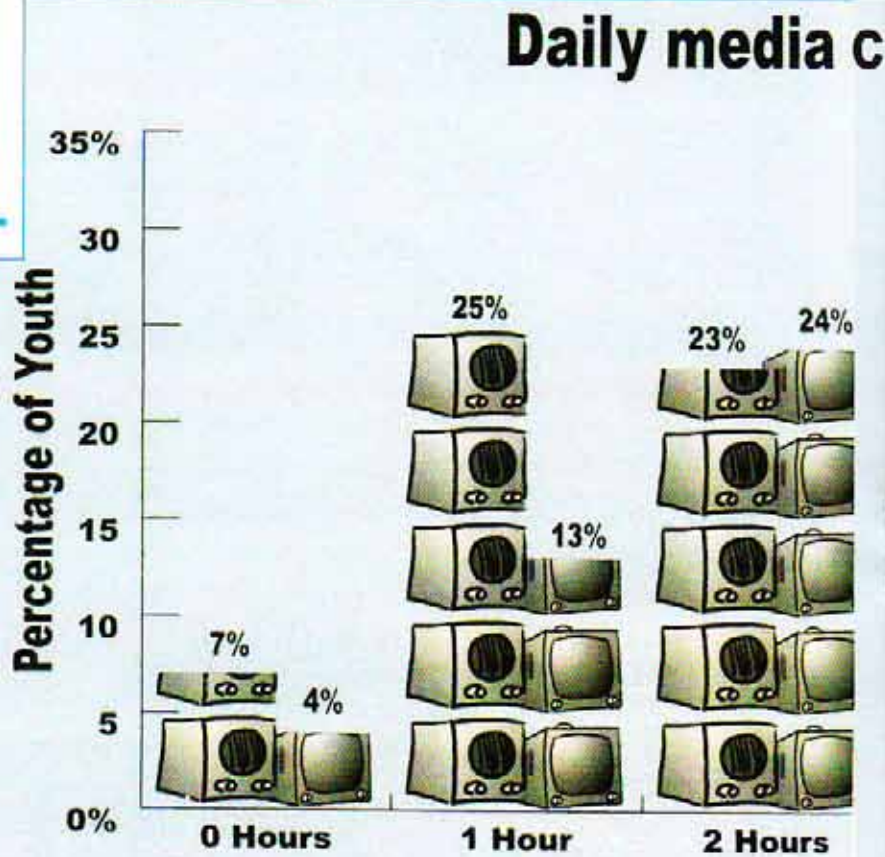
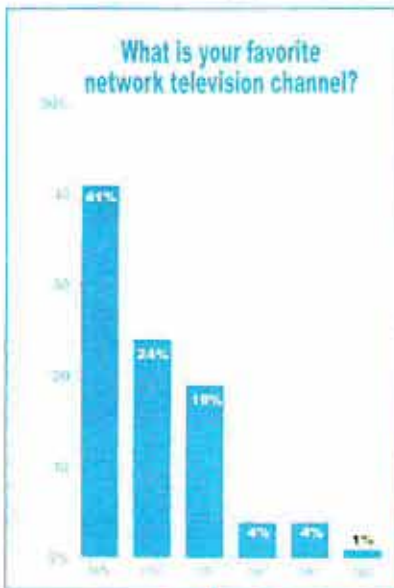
The most popular youth-oriented television programs showcase particular things that teens go through during adolescence. One network in particular tries to remind Black audiences that neither they nor their unique experiences are forgotten—UPN. It's the one non-cable station where they can see themselves as leading actors, as opposed to supporting actors on mainstream shows, where many times, minority faces are here today, gone tomorrow. The favorite non-video cable channel among youth is HBO (32%).

Black youth want to see what their peers would do in certain situations. Black youth want to see the reality, for example, of how a struggling, one-parent household keeps it all together in the world that exists today. When youth were asked to name

the television shows they watch the most, 25% of the shows selected had an ethnic perspective. Cartoons (13%), sports (8%) and drama (8%) were also popular among the youth surveyed.

As for music video channels, an astonishing 76% of youth rated BET as their favorite, which far surpassed MTV, which has a wider variety of programming. BET, which specializes in rap and R&B videos, ensures viewers that they don't have to sit through one hour of hard rock and pop videos to get to see one rap video.

Youth frequently let their remote controls rest on channels that play music videos, the creative joining of music and cinema. These mini-productions and their storytelling have captivated youth since their creation in the mid-1980s and have continued to become more innovative in the ways that artists interpret their lyrics for the small screen.



# The Urban Soundtrack: Hip-Hop Music and Radio



Music affects urban youth like no other entertainment medium. No matter what youth are doing, music surrounds them. They walk down the streets with Discmans pumping music through headphones, watch TV with the volume of the stereo turned up, instead of down, and are known for expressing themselves on a

packed dance floor on any given weekend. Where does this music "jones" come from? Is it the beat that makes teens run to the store and cop the new Missy Elliott or Mary J. Blige CD? Or is it the lyrics of Dr. Dre and 50 Cent that make inner city youth wanna holler? The jury remains divided.

One thing is true—rhythm and song have been with Black people since the beginning of time. They used this medium to comfort each other even during slavery. Singing signified a certain

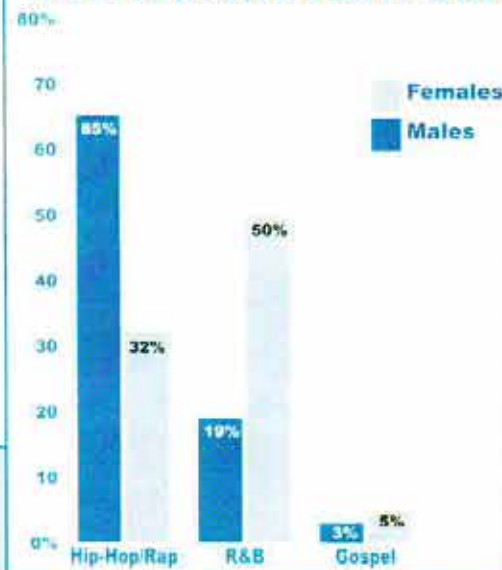
strength, one that said to slave masters, "No matter how hard you work us, our spirits will not be broken." Slaves also used songs to pass secret messages and to relay emotions when things were particularly unbearable.

Today, the messages that are relayed through rap music, for instance, are often ones of struggle, the pain of being without and of life on the streets. The connection between how important and just how necessary music is to African and African American culture is continued, yet in a new, more aggressive form.

Teens' musical preferences are not relegated to just one style of music. R&B, a more

traditional form of Black music, is equal to hip-hop/rap in popularity among older Black youth. As they get older, youth seem to be less solely focused on the grittiness of rap and hip-hop. MEE's survey discovered that 54% of 16- and 17-year-olds chose rap and hip-hop as their favorite style of music, while only 40% of 19- and 20-year-olds chose that style. Conversely, only 31% of 16- and 17-year-olds said R&B music was their genre of choice; for those ages 19 and 20, the percentage rose to 40%.

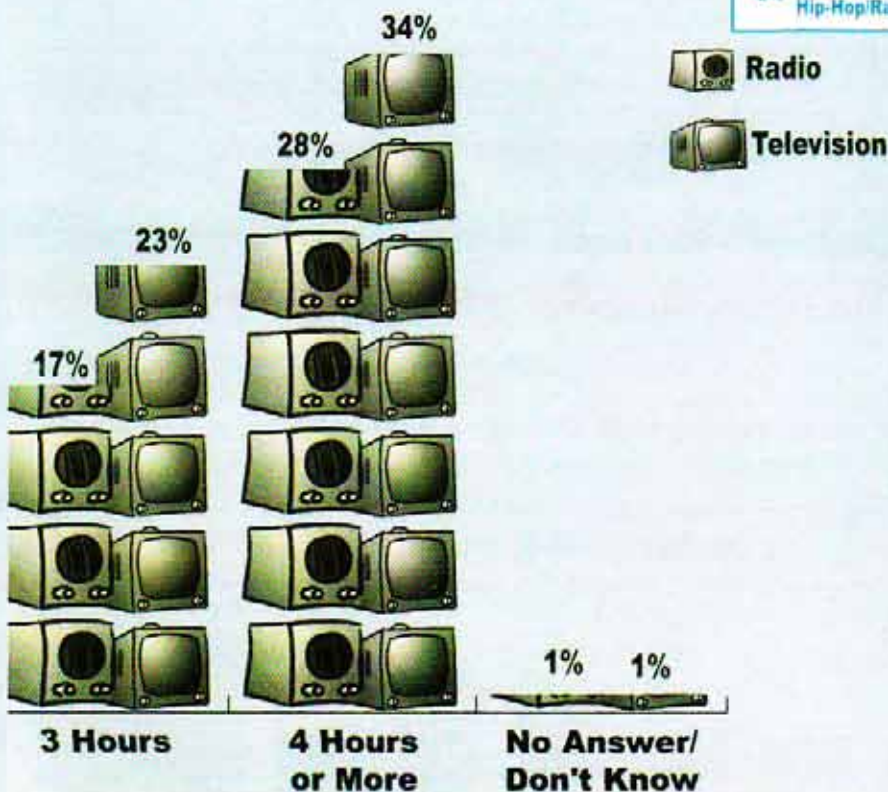
Gender Differences in Music Preference



The survey findings also show striking gender differences in music preference. Black male teens prefer hip-hop/rap music at a rate of more than double that of their female counterparts (65% to 32%). Black female teens, on the other hand, prefer R&B more than males do by a 50% to 19% margin.

Not every young person has access

## Consumption



to a Walkman or can stream on the Internet, but the majority of them do have access to the radio—and they spend a lot of time listening to it. According to MEE's survey, nearly three in every 10 Black youth listen to the radio for four hours or more per day. Another 17% listen to the radio for at least three hours per day.

Youth listen to the radio mostly during the evening hours. The largest percentage (35%) prefer to listen to the radio between the hours of 7 and 10 p.m., followed by late nights after 10 p.m. (25%). A quarter of the youth (25%) listen to the radio in the after school or drivetime periods, between 3 and 7 p.m. Only 13% said their favorite time to listen to the radio was in the morning.



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