

## A Lifestyle Profile of Black California Youth

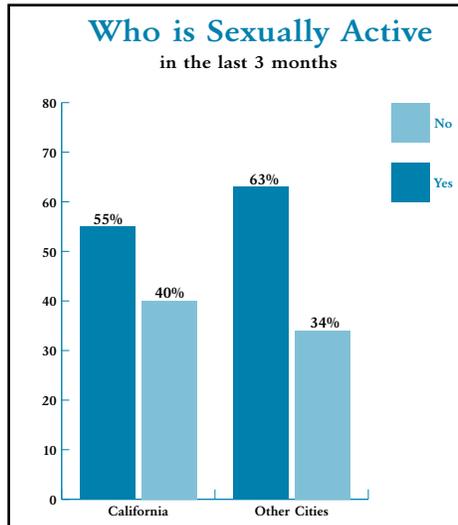
With support from The California Endowment, The Ford Foundation and other funders, MEE has undertaken a groundbreaking research project that examines and analyzes emerging trends in Black urban youth sexuality, media consumption and lifestyle choices. Such a study is important because current literature reflects limited information on Black urban youth and sexuality issues. This research, which began in the fall of 2001, will be published shortly, coinciding with the release of a hard-hitting documentary.

MEE surveyed more than 700 youth in California, and found that responses from participants on the West Coast almost always seemed to be at least a shade different from a composite of participant responses from other parts of the country. For example:

- California participants were less likely to be sexually active than their peers in other cities.
- Youth and young adults in California are more likely to have at least a part-time job.
- California youth are less likely to be aware of a health clinic in their immediate neighborhood.

But California-area survey participants at times also responded in a similar manner to their Eastern, Midwestern and Southern counterparts, which proves that no matter where youth are from, they will always have comparable opinions on some issues.

### Levels of Sexual Activity

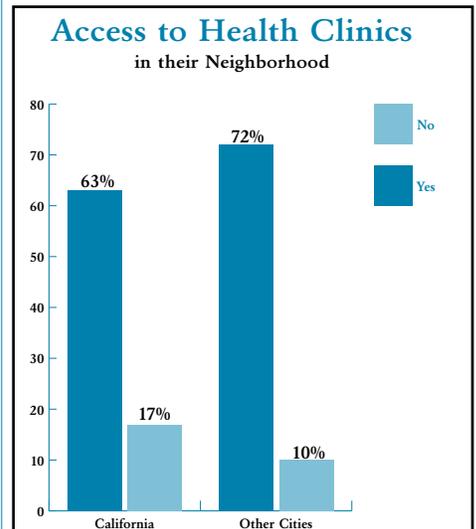


When participants were asked if they had been sexually active in the last three months, 55% of California youth said yes and 40% said no, as compared to those in other cities who were recorded at 63% and 34%, respectively.

### Access to Healthcare

Having access to healthcare is important, especially if you are sexually active. Twenty-eight percent of California participants said that they had direct access to a family doctor, from whom they had received care for years, compared to 23% of other youth across the country. Eighteen percent of California youth opted to “take care of themselves,” foregoing any professional medical care. That sentiment was mirrored by 14% of other youth. Youth were also asked if they had a health clinic in their neighborhood. While 63% of Californians said yes and 17% said no, 72% of youth in other cities said that they were aware of a health clinic in their

neighborhood. Ten percent responded no.



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## Methodology

A lifestyles survey of Black youth ages 16 to 20 was conducted by MEE Productions Inc. The national survey included teens and young adults in nine urban areas, including Los Angeles, Long Beach, Oakland and Richmond, California. Other cities were Baltimore, New York, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit and New Orleans.

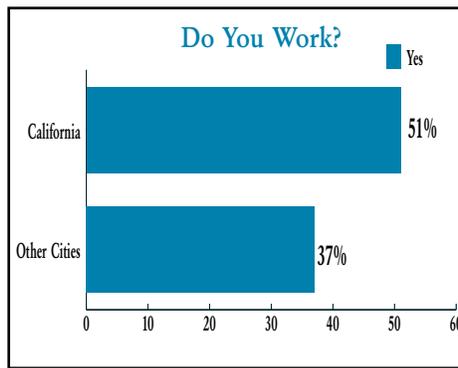
A comprehensive survey was administered to 720 California youth and young adults, who ranged in age from 16 through 20. California survey-takers tended to skew slightly younger than their counterparts across the rest of the country. More than half of the youth (56%) were under the age of 18, compared with 48% of those from other cities.

The findings and recommendations from *This is My Reality: The Price of Sex*, which includes primary and secondary research, are expected to have a profound impact on youth in America's inner cities.

We found that the majority of surveyed youth in California and across the country (56%) had access to the hospital/emergency room for care when necessary. Most participants in all areas were aware of health clinics located somewhere in their respective communities. Sixteen percent of California youth said their health clinic was located more than 10 blocks away, and 15% of others found that same distance to be accurate. Some youth in both groups seemed to take healthcare seriously, with 29% of California youth logging in visits to their doctor, nurse or clinic at between one and three months prior to the day the survey was taken. The other participants had similar results, with 31% visiting their healthcare professional within the same timeframe. In addition, 32% of both West Coast youth and youth in other cities described their last medical appointment as a scheduled one.

### Gettin' Paid: Youth Employment

Employment issues will always be a



problem for youth. Some will not be able to find a job; others will not be able to handle balancing a job with schoolwork (therefore being forced to quit their job or drop out). Still other youth are unable to find a job making the kind of money they would like. In California, finding work seems to be less of an issue. When youth were asked whether or not they worked, 51% of California youth said yes; 46% said no. However, the percentage of youth in other cities that worked was lower, at 37%. Only 21% of the West Coast participants said that they get their money in other ways than from work (parents, family, etc.), compared to 33% of youth in other places. Of those who worked, 17% percent of California youth had a full-time job, compared to 10% of youth in other cities.

Making a way for oneself financially is important to youth, who like to feel independent and have a sense of freedom and accomplishment, especially when they want to buy expensive designer clothing and accessories. Being too dependent on their parents' financial situation may keep them from "keeping up with the Jones'." Of those youth who do work, 8% of youth in other cities get money through babysitting, as do 7% of California-area youth.

### In the Spirit: Youth Spirituality

In a time when adults speculate that, because of the way some youth act out or talk back to their parents, reli-

gion is what they desperately need, almost half (47%) of California youth say they've attended religious services in the past month, compared to 39% of youth in other cities.

### Families Today

All youth surveyed had similar responses when it was time to grade their parents, on a scale of A through F, on how much they respected them. Non-California residents (75%) gave their parents an 'A' and California youth (73%), too, said their parents passed with flying colors. However, 6% of both groups of participants graded their parents 'C.' A few in both groups (2%) gave their parents a 'D' when referring to their level of respect for them.

Siblings are not always high on the list of respect. There's always an unspoken competition, whether for a parent's time and affection, for grades or for wardrobe and room space. However, 47% of California participants graded their siblings an 'A,' and 49% of other youth gave them the same passing grade. But a few youth in both groups (3%) failed their siblings with an 'F.'

### Givin' Props

Respect is a huge issue within the Black community, particularly with urban youth. When participants were asked whom they most respect, 39% of California youth said parents or guardians and 36% said God/Allah. Forty-four percent of youth in other cities said their parents or guardians and 33% said God/Allah.

When MEE asked them to grade their teachers —on a scale similar to that of a report card—on how much they respect them, 33% of California respondents gave them an 'A' and 23% gave them a 'C.' Thirty-eight percent of respondents in other

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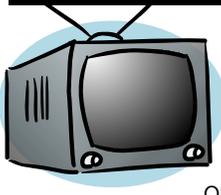
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# TV or Not TV



A favorite pastime of many youth, once they get home from school or come back home from a day of hanging with friends, is to deprogram 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. By doing that, what would they have to laugh about with their friends the next morning at school? The shows on television have a very lasting impact on youth. 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 the argument that occurred between two of the roommates—verbatim—on MTV's *The Real World* or frequently repeating catch phrases from *Martin* is a little more likely.

TV serves as an easily accessible escape for youth. It's so easy to sit still and immerse yourself in the world of television for 30-minute increments, laughing at all of the "that could never happen" situations of sitcoms and daytime soap operas. Just like the radio, youth

seem to watch TV anytime they can. For some, television shows showcase particular things that teens go through during adolescence. One station in particular tries to remind Black audiences that neither they nor their unique experiences are forgotten—UPN. Many shows youth watch can be found on this station. It's the one station, not on cable, where they can turn and see themselves as leading actors in shows that focus on them, as opposed to supporting actors on mainstream shows, where many times, minority faces are here today, gone tomorrow. Youth do not always want to see directors bring in a Black male or female to stir up controversy in one episode focusing on interracial dating or bring a minority in as the wise cracking secretary or neighbor who provides comic relief. Black youth want to see what other Black youth would do in certain situations. Black youth want to see the reality of how a struggling one-parent household keeps it all together in the world that exists today. Black youth want to know that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, that even though they don't have a lot of money or material possessions, that contentedness can be found elsewhere.

MEE's survey found that 15% of California youth watch only one hour of TV a day, while 11% of other

youth watch an hour also. Four or more hours of daily television is taken in by 37% of other youth and 30% of California youth.

Of the youth that are watching TV, 16% of Californians and 11% of other youth prefer cartoons. In addition, 21% of California youth and 28% of other youth surveyed preferred television shows that deal with the lives and situations of minorities.

## A Lifestyle Profile (continued)

cities graded their teachers an 'A,' while 18% gave them a 'C.'

Youth take their entertainment seriously, and had a chance to grade their favorite artists. Thirty-two percent of West Coast participants gave their favorite rap artists an 'A,' while 41% of other participants gave their favorite rap artist the same rating. Forty-three percent of youth in other cities gave their favorite athletes an 'A,' compared to 35% of California residents.

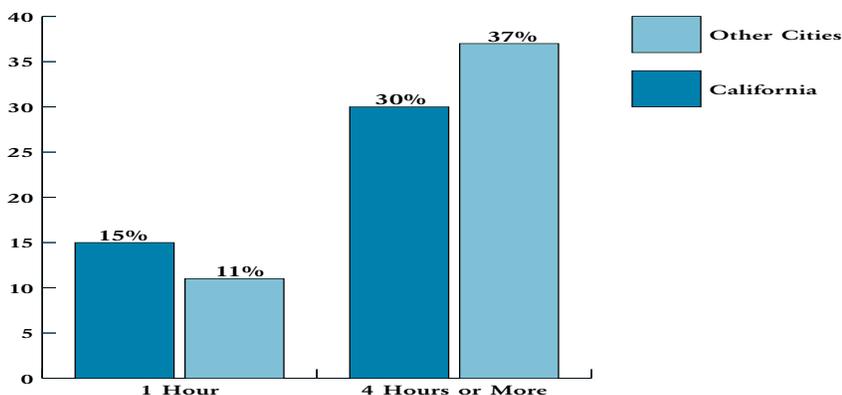
## Getting Around

Though most California youth drive to work and leisure activities—because many areas, particularly in Los Angeles, are inaccessible by public transportation—the same percentage (11%) of them and youth in other cities walk to their destinations.

## Making Connections

With ads for cell phones and cell phone services permeating the airwaves, it is no shock that 25% of California youth keep in touch with their friends via cell phone, similar to 28% of youth in the other cities. However participants still primarily rely on "Ma Bell," with 61% of youth in other places keeping in touch with their peers largely by home phone. Fifty-nine percent of California youth used the home telephone to communicate.

### Daily Television Consumption



## 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. There is no such thing as unimaginable in the world of cinema: wars are recreated, unsinkable ships are reconstructed and historical figures are brought back to life. Many things youth learn about in school have been rewritten to paint a picture of the past. As a matter of fact, youth, unfortunately, will opt to rent the movie on a particular subject they are learning about instead of reading about it. Conversely, information that has not been taught has made even more of an impact. So while youth will go see the movies of Steven Spielberg, George Lucas and Jerry Bruckheimer, they learn historical accuracies as well as the biting truth about the realities many Black people face from the tales of Spike Lee, John Singleton and the Hughes Brothers.

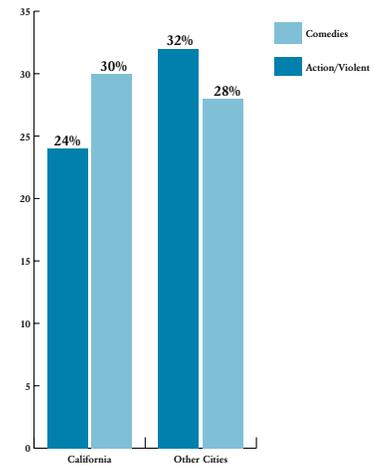
But movies do not always have to be a learning experience. Sometimes you just want to see car chases, find out whodunit or witness two people falling in love. It even serves as the perfect first date because many times you're too nervous to talk, so you let the screen do it for you. Afterwards the movie will be the topic of conversation and sparks will fly from there. Whatever the reason for attending movies so frequently, the industry continues to thrive. According to Target Market News' statistics on the buying power of Black America, in 2001 Black Americans spent \$2.4 billion on entertainment and leisure, which includes trips to the movie theater.

Black youth attend all types of movies, but California youth specifically gravitate toward the action and comedy genre. Comedies take youth away from the seriousness of their day-to-day realities. And if the movie is an urban comedy, it is sure to be attended by Black youth because they believe that whatever occurs, it will be reflective of their neighborhood, their dating situations and their language. Thirty percent of California youth flock to comedies and 28% of other youth surveyed also like that genre

of movie. In addition 24% of Californians and 32% of other youth surveyed preferred action/violent movies.

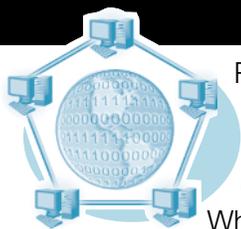
California youth have mixed feelings about how important it is that the main character is African American. Forty-two

### Favorite Types of Movies



percent say it is somewhat important and 31% say it is very important. Youth in other cities say that is somewhat important (36%) and very important (37%), respectively.

## 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 like 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 **Sand** to **Hoefer Text Black** with the

click of a mouse and do everything from download pictures and music to correspond instantly with a friend 5,000 miles away. My, how far technology has come. Whether or not you have kept up with the technological metamorphoses, computers will continue to expand in every way, seeking to make our lives a little easier.

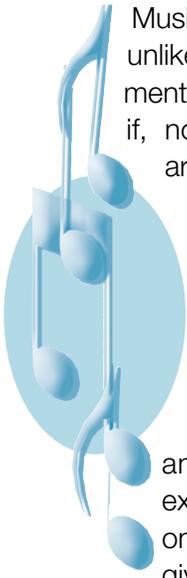
But computers have been unforgiving to those who do not have as much accessibility to them as others. Inner city school districts continue to go without or close to it, while suburban schools seem to operate

solely on the keyboard. And although funds are attempting to be raised, grants won or an occasional altruistic spirit takes action, minority children continue to push forward.

By the time those children reach their teen-age years, they are able, however, to go where technology is, be it in the library or at a community-based organization. Here, those teens are instructed on how to properly use the computer and will hopefully be able to constructively apply that learning to future endeavors. Twenty percent of youth in California

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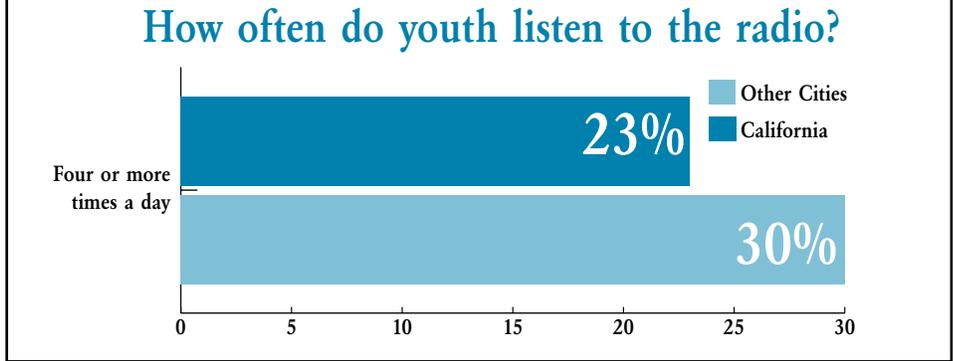
# The Urban Soundtrack: Hip-Hop Music and Radio



Music affects urban youth unlike no other entertainment medium. It seems as if, no matter what youth are doing, music surrounds them. They walk down the streets with discmans, watch TV with the volume of the stereo turned up, instead of down and are known for expressing themselves on the dance floor 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 hung.

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 times of slavery. Singing signified a certain strength, one that said to slave masters, that no matter how hard you work us, our spirits will not be broken. Slaves also used songs to pass secret messages, to relay emotions when things were particularly unbearable and just to pass the time of picking cotton and cleaning houses. I guess it’s no mystery why music is so interwoven with

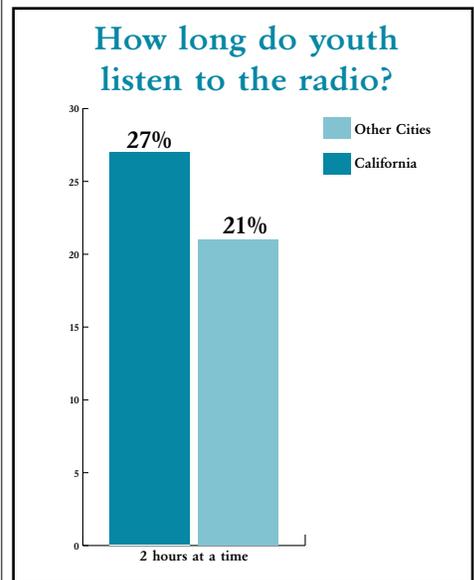


African American culture. Today, the messages that are relayed through rap music, for instance, are ones of struggle, the pain of being without and life on the streets. It doesn’t leave much to the imagination because the things that rap artists talk about are anything but imaginary. The lyrics are hardcore because their lives are. In this instance, art imitates life. You can also see the connection between how important and just how necessary music is to African and African American culture.

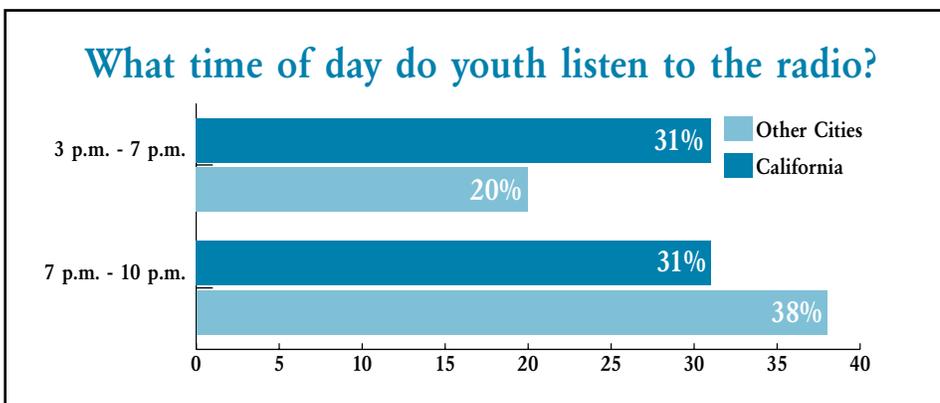
But teens’ musical preferences are not relegated to just one style of music across the board. Younger teens have more of an appreciation for the urban grittiness of rap and hip-hop, while older youth are gradually seceding from that genre to the smoother melodies of R&B.

And true, not every child has access to a Walkman or can stream on the Internet, but the majority of children

have access to the radio. According to MEE’s survey, 23% of California youth listened to the radio at least four or more times a day as opposed to 30 percent of youth in other cities. Of youth surveyed, 27% of West Coast youth listen for two hours at a time while 21% percent of youth in other areas listen to the radio for that same amount of time.



Among youth listening to the radio, California youth seemed to listen primarily during the early hours. Thirty-one percent listened between the hours of 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. with 20% of youth in other areas listening at that time. The majority of California youth fill their time in other ways, leaving 31% to listen to the radio between 7 p.m. and 10 p.m. Thirty-eight percent of youth in other areas surveyed listened at that time.



# “Mad Luv” from the Hip-Hop Generation

Youth are very fickle. As soon as they start to “feel” the looks and or skills of one artist, actor or athlete, they turn on them, “dissing” them a week after claiming they were the best thing in the world. What’s even stranger is that 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 being a teen-ager.

Any personality on the TV, 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 — 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 join together and dethrone any reigning industry king or queen. Why do you think, during the award shows, artists thank the “fans?” They know who’s really in control, that’s why.

They have an image to maintain for more reasons than one. 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 keep their appeal. This is the reason youth seem to be drawn to certain personalities more than others. Just being African American does not guarantee you a spot on their “A” list. In a sense, you still have to prove yourself.

Youth were asked to rank their favorite people in the categories of male and female actor, athlete, hip-hop and R&B artist and comedy. In the category of female actresses, Halle Berry garnered one of the top two selections from 44% of the California youth surveyed. The actress also received 43% of the vote from other youth surveyed. Twenty percent of West Coast youth liked the work of Omar Epps, whereas 28% of other youth felt that same way.

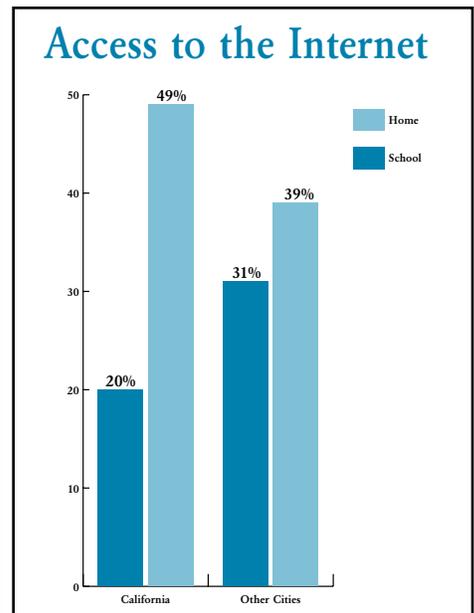
Basketball player Allen Iverson, of the Philadelphia 76ers, was liked by 40% of California youth and 51% of youth in other cities, whereas Kobe Bryant was admired by 37% of Californians and 25% of other youth (a distant third nationally). In the comedy field, Bernie Mac was a top choice from more than half (59 percent) of the youth in other cities for

the male comedian category. He also received the majority of votes from California youth at 48%. Mo’Nique received top votes for the category of female comedians. Sixty-five percent of West Coast youth voted for her and 72% of youth in other cities said she was the favorite in this category.

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

## Access All Areas: The Internet (continued)

have Internet access at school and 49% can access the Internet at home. Thirty-one percent of youth in



other cities get their Internet usage at school and 39% have access at home. Of the youth with Web access, 11% of youth in California primarily use it to download music as compared to 7% of other youth.

## Favorite Celebrities

