

CHAPTER 1

WHY ARE THEY SO BAD?

§ 1 ~ Products of a Flawed Socialization Process

What is wrong with so many Black boys? Who is raising them to be so disrespectful? Why do they have such little regard for school and the entire educational process? Why are they so damn bad? These are the pressing questions that teachers, school staff members, parents, concerned family, and community members all across America are constantly asking.

Some ask themselves, others ask their designated leaders, yet very few people are satisfied with the vague, one-sided answers that they have been getting. After reading this book, you should better understand the answers to these popular questions.

It stands true for young Black males, just as it does for all human beings, that absolutely none of us act the way that we act out of a vacuum or simply because that's the way that we always wanted to act. We are all socialized first by our guardians and surrounding family members, later by school and our peers, and at all times by both our local communities and the greater society through powerful institutions such as the church, the government, the media, the entertainment industry, and civic/community organizations.

Socialization is the process over time through which a child is instructed and encouraged how to act, as well as how not to act. Many factors play into whether or not an individual will accept or reject the behavioral tendencies that he has been trained to follow by his parents,

school, local community, and greater society. There is no doubt however, that the stronger the socialization process is, the stronger the impact it tends to have on the behavior of developing youth.

While it truly would require a rather large book to explore all of the factors that impact upon the positive and negative socialized behavior traits of our sons, several which are crucial to understanding and saving them in school must be addressed here. First and foremost is the understanding that the crippled Black family institution, weak and unconscious Black men, an oppressive and ineffective school system, and American society in general, are all combining to socialize young Black males to act exactly as they are acting today.

Therefore, we must act to save them not just because they are our relatives and students, but also because they are the products of an extremely flawed socialization process that far too many of us play key roles in supporting or maintaining. Even the middle-class Blacks and middle to upper class whites who today love to berate young Black males and poor Blacks in general for their socialized behavior practices, exhibit many of the same socialized behavior practices themselves. They too play large roles in maintaining a flawed socialization process among young Black males. They simply use money, material items, and social status to try to cover up the same behavior. So, instead of launching another all-out attack against them and their families, this book honestly explains why our sons develop in the ways that they do, and provides those who love them with the insight needed to conduct successful behavioral intervention among them.

Given what young Black males are taught through socialization, the behavior that they witness from adults on a daily basis, and all of the contradictory messages that they receive in school regarding their self-worth and appropriate versus inappropriate behavior, nobody should be surprised at how they act.

When I ask my students why they respect and encourage the class clowns so much even though they know that they are wrong, the most common answers that I get are:

“What they do looks fun. It gets the class hype, they get all of the attention, and many times teachers don’t even do anything to them. It makes you want to join in the fun with them sometimes.”

With the three key institutions that socialize children’s behavior in the Black community - the schools, the family, and the church all having failed to live up to their responsibilities, how else do we expect them to act?

Hospitals and the entire medical establishment, the American law enforcement establishment, the funeral industry, the retail shopping industry, and the insurance industry are just a few of the many entities that are profiting immensely from the terrible plight of young Black males in school. With so many people and institutions directly benefiting from their current socialized behavior and resulting educational crisis, American society is not going to change its approach towards them anytime soon.

Those of us dedicated to building a movement to save them must work diligently to change the troubled behaviors that they are taught and encouraged to exhibit in school, in church, at home, and throughout our communi-

ties if there is ever going to be any change in their overall condition. Informed and committed educators, community activists and organizers, and guardians working together can accomplish these changes in a reasonable amount of time.

I still remember one day hearing one of my tenth grade female students begin to sing Whitney Houston's beautiful song 'The Greatest Love Of All.' As she sang "*I believe the children are the future, teach them well and let them lead the way,*" another female student rudely interrupted her:

"Don't start that 'the children are the future' stuff. We want the children to go to school and learn, but oops, the children don't have adequate books or supplies in school. We want the children to go to school and learn, but once again, its time to close their schools and lay off their teachers. We want the children to get good grades, but they're not in school because we keep kicking them out. The children this, the children that, people are out here killing and abusing the children everyday and ain't nobody doing nothing about it."

Her classmates responded to her speech with a mixture of applause, shouts in agreement, and laughter.

These are just some of the major contradictions that Black students see throughout the American educational system. They embolden our sons' views that school is a scam; a boring, non-important, waste of one's time that simply allows adults to get paid. Such views motivate our sons to continue to use school strictly as a social outlet, rebel in class and ignore their teachers, and act out in school.

Another problem is that along with these glaring contradictions, young Black males see very few incentives motivating them to invest their time into the pursuit of academic excellence. If they work hard to get good grades in spite of all of the obstacles they face – they get a report card, maybe an end of the year honors assembly; and maybe or maybe not, hearty congratulations from their parents, family members, and teachers.

Already dogged by smothering poverty and with few short term incentives connected to urban education, more of them are additionally seeing in their own families that diplomas and degrees often times do not lead to better jobs or desirable wages. For them, so goes the long term incentives. If I had a dollar for every young man who told me: *“we should get paid for coming to school”*, I would be one filthy rich man.

All of this is adding to our sons’ socialized thinking that school is really not that important, or at least not as important as teachers claim it is. If school was really that important, they believe that:

- ★ The buildings would be cleaner, better kept, and better equipped,
- ★ Class sizes would be much smaller,
- ★ The lunches would taste better,
- ★ The students and teachers would be treated better,
- ★ The students would be paid or would benefit from greater incentives for attending; and,

- ★ The teachers would be paid more money for putting up with so many bad students each day.

They are right to expect a worthy educational system to provide these circumstances in the richest nation on earth.

You see, we can't just keep telling them that school is important and expect them to believe us when the observable facts on the ground say that it is not. We must make sure that their overall school experiences, combined with appropriate short and long term educational incentives, prove this to be an easily observable fact.

§ 2 ~ Socialization of the S–Traits Syndrome; Silliness, Sports, and Styling

In his book, *'Targets Of Oppression: Speech Essays On The Crisis Of Black Men In America'*, social worker and psychotherapist Kenny Anderson thoroughly describes what he calls the S–Traits Syndrome, which influences the behavior and decision making of many young Black males as outlined below. Teachers, parents, and all of those who work with our sons should understand the great impact that these socially ingrained traits are having on them. Learn how to recognize and begin correcting the traits of the syndrome in your students and sons.

According to Anderson, most Black males in America are detained and defeated by the specific socialization of the S–Traits Syndrome. The traits of this syndrome that are repeatedly modeled for, taught to, and

emulated by Black males throughout American society include:

- ★ A preoccupation with sports (the jock mentality);
- ★ Silliness (the comedian attitude);
- ★ Styling (obtaining the latest fads and fashions);
- ★ Sexing (womanizing or frequent sexual conquests);
- ★ Substance abuse (using or selling drugs);
- ★ Slickness (manipulating, conning, and running game); and,
- ★ Sensationalizing (exaggerating manhood, lying, boasting, fantasy thinking, and a false sense of invincibility).

All of these traits are used as coping mechanisms to ease the great pains and disappointments of Black life under systematic oppression in America, and/or as masks to cover up low self-esteem.

How many Black males do you know personally who, regardless of age, are overly preoccupied with at least four out of these seven traits? The widespread presence of a combination of these traits among Black men who were themselves socialized by the S-Traits Syndrome while growing up, promotes the continuance of a vicious cycle as they model and pass the traits on to younger generations of Black males. This cycle results in an increase of

troubled behavior among each successive generation of young Black males.

With so many Black males defeated and detained by the S–Traits Syndrome, the Black community is left wide open to be exploited by internal and external opportunists in every aspect of life. Young Black males under the heavy influence of the S–Traits Syndrome are almost certain to be extremely bored by and uninterested in school. They are also more likely to constantly break the rules and get into trouble in school, causing them to fall behind and perform poorly academically.

It is important to note that while poverty is one of the leading factors that induce the syndrome, it is by no means the only one. Therefore, even though middle–class Black male students on average are more aware of the benefits of education, have a greater wealth of educational resources at their disposal, and are more likely to achieve decent grades and test scores, the S–Traits Syndrome heavily influences many of them too. Since it heavily influences many older middle–class Black males, then why would it logically not have an impact on them also?

Most people who work closely with Black youth today are well aware of the extreme silliness that frequently manifests among young Black males in class. This growing silliness factor however can never be overstated. As students, our sons use silliness as a tactic for everything from:

- ★ Attracting attention from all others especially girls;
- ★ Disrupting or stalling class;

- ★ Frustrating teachers whom they feel often attempt to pick on and frustrate them;
- ★ Getting kicked out of class to have some time to roam the hallways with friends;
- ★ Hiding their true intellectual capabilities;
- ★ Breaking the monotony of boring classes;
- ★ Covering up severe academic deficits or personal problems; and,
- ★ Reducing teachers' expectations of them.

When it comes to silly behavior, absolutely nothing is too extreme; from pulling down one's pants in class, to outbursts of laughter or profane language at the most inappropriate times, to mimicking a gay person either alone or with other students, to pulling countless pranks on their teachers. Sometimes their silly pranks cause physical harm to themselves or others.

On many occasions, I have called on the silliest of my male students to read aloud from the textbook only to hear a roar of laughter from the other students who highly doubt that these young men can read at all. They refuse to comply sometimes, but I have found that sooner or later, most of them momentarily come out of the comedian roles that they play and seriously read a passage just to shut everybody up and prove once and for all that they are not half as dumb as they act. They take great pride in proving this to the teacher as if to say:

“See, you thought I was illiterate. Just because I’m failing your class and I don’t do any of my work doesn’t mean that I’m dumb or illiterate.”

The next day however, they usually revert back to playing their class clown roles.

Some of the traits associated with the S–Traits Syndrome are not inherently negative such as sports and styling. It is young Black males’ obsession with watching and playing sports, and dressing in all of the latest fashions as soon as they come out that creates problems. While it is indeed positive for them to be involved in sports or to dress nice or sharp, too many of them overindulge in terms of time and money spent in these areas, that truthfully needs to be invested into more fully developing their academic skills, personal character traits, and leadership capabilities.

Over-preoccupation with sports and styling is used by many young Black males to deflect from deep-seated feelings of personal inadequacy. The S–Traits Syndrome may temporarily cover up, but it will never erase or heal such feelings, which is why the best dressed and most athletic Black male students often behave and perform the worst in school. Mandatory school uniforms are one effective way to reduce the cost, teasing, and fighting issues that surround the popular fashions that our sons wear to school.

Yet if our sons’ serious self–esteem issues are not addressed in a more comprehensive manner, they will continue to fester and cause serious problems in school, uniforms or no uniforms. By partnering with community organizations, schools can and should expose our sons to professional self–esteem enhancement workshops. En-

hancing their self-esteem is the one strategy that will both protect them from developing serious cases of the S-Traits Syndrome, and better prepare them to excel academically in school.

§ 3 ~ Slickness and Sensationalizing

Slickness and sensationalizing are two traits that young Black males are naturally exposed to at very young ages growing up in poverty stricken ghettos and rural towns throughout America. In these areas, many Black males are struggling to survive with absolutely nothing; no jobs, no homes, no degrees, no career prospects, and no assistance from the government. In order to scrape out a living and get some of the things that they need and want, they hone their talents of verbal dexterity until they have mastered the art of manipulating and conning others.

Young Black males who have been effectively locked out of the mainstream American economy often adopt the hustler's attitude that is so prevalent throughout their neighborhoods and use slickness as their primary survival technique to earn needed income and create both legal and illegal jobs for themselves.

With few role models living in their neighborhoods that have successfully used education to achieve important life and financial goals, our sons often look up to the local hustlers who do live in their neighborhoods, who spend some time with them after school, and who appear to be accomplishing their life and financial goals. It is very appealing to them how these hustlers use slickness seemingly to create something out of nothing.

Teenage Black males understand many of the obvious dangers that accompany the hustler's lifestyle in-

cluding earning a bad reputation, being hated and envied by many, frequent robberies and betrayals, intense life threatening competition, long-term imprisonment, and premature death. Yet having ruled education out as a viable career pathway, hustling appears to be a more plausible career strategy to many of them.

Given the low quality nature of the education that they receive combined with the harsh realities of the hustler's lifestyle; many of our sons view the future with a complete sense of futility. In their eyes, you are damned if you stay in school, and damned if you hit the streets to hustle.

When limited to this type of futile outlook, young Black males who grow up much more accustomed to seeing Black men hustling on the streets of their neighborhoods, as opposed to living off of the benefits of higher education, are understandably more inclined to take the risks and do as they see. They internalize the popular street saying: *"I'm just another Black man caught up in the mix, trying to make a dollar out of fifteen cents."*

Slickness, which later develops into the hustler's mentality, is such a pervasive socialized trait in Black males today that you can already see its roots in the daily behavior of many elementary school age Black boys. Poor Black adults and street savvy hustlers are not the only ones socializing young Black males with the hustler's mentality.

The political rap group 'Coup', made a song called *'Fat Cats Bigger Fish'*, to illustrate how local politicians and corporate bigwigs imbued with the hustler's mentality routinely fleece Black communities out of their land and housing. A level of hustling that is rarely discussed even

though it is just as prevalent as and more damaging than any form of street hustling.

The song tells a story in which the Coup's lead rapper Boots, a common street hustler, sneaks into a social gala of politicians and elite businessmen, disguised as a waiter. His mission is to pick pockets for money and steal as much expensive jewelry as he can. But in the process of doing so, he overhears a conversation between his city's Black Mayor and an owner of Coca-Cola Bottling that teaches him a tremendous lesson about hustling that blows his mind to the point that he calls off his mission for the night. The following lyrics are excerpted from the most powerful passages of the song:

"Mr. Coke said to Mr. Mayor, 'you know we have a process like Ice T's hair.

We put up the funds for your election campaign, and oh, um, waiter could you bring the Champagne.

Our real estate firm says that opportunities are rising to make some condos out of low-income housing.

Immediately, we need some media heat, to say that gangs run the street, and then we bring in the police fleet.

Harass and beat everybody till they look inebriated, when we buy the land motherfuckers will appreciate it.

Don't worry 'bout the Urban League or Jessie Jackson, my man that owns Marlboro donated a fat sum.'

That's when I stepped back some, to contemplate what few know, sat down, wrestled with my thoughts like a sumo.

Ain't no one player that could beat this lunacy. Ain't no hustler on the street could do a whole community.

This is how deep shit could get. It reads macaroni on my birth certificate.

Puddin-tang is my middle name but I can't hang, I'm getting hustled only knowing half the game."

The Coup is rapping about gentrification, the slick process through which politicians, elite businessmen, and powerful corporations routinely unite to remove poor people from their homes and hustle them off of large tracts of land for bargain basement relocation prices, or no money at all. As the song illustrates, gentrification schemes are usually perpetrated under the false public claim of urban renewal or economic development.

In the passage above, the hardened hustler Boots is stunned when he learns that compared to these gentrification hustlers, he is actually a small time 'penny-ante' hustler. Boots is even greater dismayed by the ease with which he knows that their grand hustle is going to work, along with their utter lack of concern for all of the poor people that are going to be victimized by it. He leaves the party considering the fact that despite the degree to which poor young Black male hustlers are despised, they cannot single handedly increase the rates of the homeless, arrests, or property values like gentrification hustlers do.

In almost every large urban city in America, mass numbers of Black and poor people are being displaced by dishonest gentrification schemes that will not benefit anyone except the corporations behind them, and the local hustling politicians to whom the corporations pay under the table financial kickbacks for their invaluable assistance.

In New York, Detroit, Atlanta, Washington D.C., and several cities throughout California, entire housing projects are being torn down and replaced with condos that range in price from \$250 thousand dollars to \$2.5 million dollars per unit. The displaced residents are paid little or nothing for the loss of their homes or their moving challenges, and are promised that they will have the first shot at buying into the new housing developments that they will never in their lives be able to afford.

Gentrification is such a popular practice today that it is influencing changes in the Black and homeless population counts of both urban and suburban American cities. So as we battle the socialized slickness character trait and hustler's mentality that is ingrained in many young Black males, let us simultaneously fight to resist gentrification, and the other similarly harmful practices of the ultimate corporate hustlers.

Sensationalizing is just as prevalent among young Black males as is slickness. If a youngster scores ten points in a basketball game, he is likely to claim to his peers the next day that he scored twenty-five. If he fights another youth to a tie, he is libel to tell you that he slaughtered him. If two girls in a class like him, expect him to gloat that all of the girls in the class like him. Sensationalizing is not lying just for the sake of lying as many adults believe it is. Simply put, it is a learned coping mechanism

intended to make one feel good about oneself amidst the most adverse circumstances of abject poverty and oppression.

Sensationalizing is their way of denying to the world around them that such desperate conditions exist in their lives, or fazes them in any way at all. Boasting and bragging about people, places, and most often material things makes our sons look important to other people, and temporarily feel more important to themselves.

Unfortunately, those who are around them long enough at some point begin to see through their many exaggerations. Naturally, being exposed makes them feel terrible, but it doesn't break the bad habit of exaggerating for they have not been taught any other more productive ways to deal with the challenges of being poor, Black, and oppressed in a racist, money hungry society.

In the past two decades, rap music and hip-hop culture have bolstered Black males' usage of sensationalism exponentially. Rappers have perfected and popularized the art of super sensationalizing flaunting extravagant clothing, cars, and jewelry that they do not own, poetically claiming to have performed super human feats that they would never dare try, swearing to have committed murders and survived real life violence that never took place, and fantasizing about being drug kingpins and rich business tycoons when the large majority of them still owe their record companies money.

For every one widely idolized Puff Daddy or Master P that amasses estimated net worth's of \$400 million dollars each from successful careers in hip-hop, fifty to a hundred other once popular rappers will retire from the so-called rap game penniless after recording one or two

commercial albums. This point must be clarified for all young Black males, especially those planning to pursue careers in rap music, in order to prevent them from being misled by the sensationalism, lying, and materialism that run rampant throughout the industry.

The Rap Coalition's Wendy Day wrote an excellent article entitled "*Artists Still Don't Make Money From Record Deals,*" which appeared in the 2005 Issue I – Volume I of the Southfield, Michigan-based rap newspaper called, '*The Rap Files.*' The article lays to rest once and for all, the false notion that droves of rappers are destined to become successful millionaires. It teaches many important business, economic, legal, and real life lessons in the process. All young Black males should read this article or have its main points summarized for them in school starting around the eighth grade and definitely in high school.

Day asks the logical question of how can we really expect the artists to live such glamorous lives when the artists are always the last to get paid. She breaks it down like this:

"Everyone gets their cut first: the label, the manager (15%–20% of all the artist's entertainment income), the lawyer (by the hour or 5%–10% of the deal), the accountant (by the hour or 5% of all income), and of course the IRS (28%–50% depending on the tax bracket). Add in the artist's own responsibilities – fan club, web sites, security, office and/or studios etc., and family members he/she is expected to support or help financially."

On top of all of this, the artist's fans and closest supporters unrealistically still expect to see him/her dress well, drive an expensive car, and live in a big house.

Day goes on to give concrete examples of how standard industry payment formulas guarantee that the vast majority of rap recording artists will either break even or owe their record companies money at the end of their contract deals. In one example, she walks readers through what the industry considers to be a relatively fair record deal for a new, evenly contributing three man rap group with some clout in the industry, and a terrific negotiating attorney. Please note that such 'fair' conditions rarely ever happen for new rap artists, for the terms of most negotiated record deals are by nature very unfair to the artists.

Surprisingly, the group hits the jackpot with their first album becoming a big hit. It goes gold selling 500,000 copies at the retail rate of \$12.98 per unit. The group's contract entitles them to 12% (normally a scale of 8%–13%) royalty payments off of each unit sold.

After 15% for product packaging and 15% for free promotional products are deducted off the top, the group's 12% equates to \$1.13 per unit sold which = \$565,000. Out of this, the record label recoups \$300,000 worth of costs that it spent to make the album, the videos, and support the group before any money was made. Despite gold record selling success and newly found fame, after paying all of their expenses and finally dividing the profits by three, the artists in the example group found themselves totally broke and still in debt to both their record label and the IRS.

Now you can see why real commercial rap artists like Mystical, Red Man, the Goodie Mob, and the Lox; all

broke with tradition and publicly admitted that they were dead broke after their first albums went gold, and even platinum at one million copies sold. Unless they own the record labels that they record for, or own close to 100% of the publishing rights to all of their music, which very few artists do, the artists must sell a whole lot of records before they can make any money at all. So much for the popular fantasy of the ‘big–baller’, ‘shot–caller’ rapper who just went gold.

Ironically, the group in the example above would have faired much better financially had they taken the self–determination / hustle route of organizing themselves and their top supporters into a small, dedicated team to finance, package, promote, and distribute their own album independently – using a well designed Internet web site with E–commerce, graphics, and song samples – to sell it directly to hip–hop fans around the world. No, they probably would not have sold nearly as many units, but they would have greatly increased their royalty percentage off of each unit sold by cutting out several greedy middlemen and unnecessary fees. This is yet another important lesson for high school economics teachers to guide them through learning.

While something that is said in a song should never be readily accepted as being true to real life, the insistence of rappers that they are “*keeping it real*” resonates with our sons whose minds are literally consumed by the same type of rags to riches fantasies that are espoused in most of today’s rap songs. Constant fantasy thinking and day–dreaming about vast material wealth leads to tunnel vision and poor decision making. This prevents our sons from exploring many positive avenues that are open to them.

Perhaps the most dangerous flaw of sensationalizing is the tendency that it promotes of exaggerating manhood. Since many young Black males live in very tough neighborhoods, they tend to adopt hard-core attitudes. Those who become over preoccupied with their hard-core attitudes grow to believe that they are actually physically hard-core; not just delicate skin, bones, and blood like the rest of us, but somehow built tougher. Exaggerated senses of manhood lead many young Black males to tragic and preventable deaths.

For example, two Detroit high school students recently described to me a shooting incident that took place just outside of their school. They explained that a group of male teens were arguing with another male teen in the passenger seat of a car, encouraging him to get out of the car so that they could beat him up again like they had done just days before. He told the crowd to meet him at a spot across the street, and he got out of the car and met them at that spot. According to the witnesses, as several teens moved forward to physically confront him, the teen from the car said *“nall, it’s too many of ya’ll to fight.”* He pulled out a gun and everybody started running except for one teen that I will call Greg.

The saga continued when Greg said to the teen with the gun, *“you ain’t going to do nothing with that punk so put it up and take this beating I’m going to put on you!”* The teen opened fire and shot Greg four times to the arms and legs. Greg started running, all the while laughing and saying *“he shot me, he shot me!”* Then he fell to the ground bleeding. Fortunately, seventeen year old Greg survived this senseless act of violence and stupidity. Yet if his extreme senses of silliness, exaggerated manhood,

and false invincibility were not checked thoroughly enough by this incident, Greg might not survive the next one.

§ 4 ~ Sexing / Womanizing

In high schools, junior high schools, and yes, elementary schools across America, young Black males are now obsessed with sexing/womanizing. They are definitely not alone in suffering from this socialized character trait, for young Black females and children from all ethnic backgrounds across America are exhibiting this trait right along with them. The Michigan Department of Community Health reports that 40% of all 15 year-olds are sexually active, which averages out to 14 students out of every class of 35 tenth graders.

This percentage soars much higher among our sons in areas or educational facilities that badly lack adequate recreational and extra curricular activities, along with adequate adult supervision and leadership.

Just as troubling is the fact that many of our sons who are not yet sexually active are vigorously seeking any possible opportunities to break their virginity; an act that they falsely believe will transition them into manhood. Their over-preoccupation with sex is causing them irreparable harm in many ways, and must be seriously addressed.

Each of the following factors contribute largely to the ongoing sexuality crisis among young Black males:

- ★ A lack of responsible adult supervision in school and at home;
- ★ Oversized schools that are poorly monitored;
- ★ The saturation of sex and sexual innuendo throughout practically all facets of

American culture especially TV, popular music videos, and female fashions;

- ★ The pervasiveness of the sexing trait among Black men;
- ★ The easy access and overexposure that many children have to pornographic and sexually stimulating materials;
- ★ The rampant sexual molestation of little boys and girls by adults; and,
- ★ Today's much faster physical child maturation process.

The American media and business sectors now generate trillions of dollars annually by intentionally over-sexually stimulating adults, and making no serious effort to safeguard children from exposure to such stimulation.

Even throughout the daytime and early evening, the majority of TV shows and radio songs that are aired on the major networks openly discuss sex in an extremely enticing manner.

Ironically, the same society that openly over-sexually stimulates children is incredibly quick to demonize our sons, label them sexual predators, and advocate locking them up and throwing away the key once they surrender to the seductive sexual temptations that they are bombarded with daily, and begin to act out or break rules sexually.

Society sanctions, and we as Black adults often allow, the placement of all kinds of sick, sexually perverted thoughts and scenes into the minds of our very young sons including child pornography and rape. Yet when they act

on them inappropriately, those who oppose our sons leap forward in essence to demand the killing of the rats that have been caught in the youth sex trap.

This is indeed a serious crisis when elementary school children are already viewing each other as sex objects, and junior high school kids are turning their schools, homes, and garages into low-key hotels for everything from one-on-one sexual intercourse, to orgies, to paid prostitution. This is why smaller schools, smaller classrooms, alert teachers, and increased adult supervision at home and in school are so crucial to today's educational process.

Teachers see the signs of this crisis on a daily basis. Little elementary school boys and girls no longer simply run around hitting each other in school. They frequently hit and grab each others' private parts right out in the open. Already socialized with such errant cultural views as the strongest Black man is the 'Mack', the 'pimp', the sexual stud with the young ladies, many of our sons come to school on the prowl.

Instead of paying attention to their teachers, they are busy staring intensely at or fantasizing about having sex with the female students that they like. While boys have always had, and always will have, deep crushes and sexual fantasies about their female peers and teachers, too many of our young sons today are all but paralyzed by these extremely powerful urges and ready to act on them at any given time.

In addition to detracting their attention away from education, over-preoccupation with sex is increasing Black children's risks of teenage and pre-teenage pregnancy, AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, and being sus-

pended from school or legally charged with criminal sexual conduct.

While teachers and the courts are ignoring the fact that our poorly socialized and often impoverished young Black female students are increasingly initiating sexual offenses in school, it is still primarily Black male students that are being suspended and legally prosecuted for sexual harassment and other sex related offenses.

I have personally been asked by several parents to sit in on school sexual misconduct hearings for their third to fifth grade sons who were accused of improperly touching girls in their private areas during class or on school grounds.

In each of the hearings that I attended, student and faculty witnesses testified that the two students involved called themselves going together as boyfriend and girlfriend before the disputed incidents occurred, and that they were both touching each other inappropriately, or that the girl had allowed the boy to touch her sexually up under or around tables over a period of time before deciding to tell, or getting caught by the teacher. Yet, the hearings all proceeded as though the girls were automatically the innocent victims, and the boys automatically the deviant sexual criminals.

Incidents of girls and boys touching each other inappropriately in school used to be handled by somewhat rational thinking adults. Today however, adults are quick to resort to threats of violence or filing police reports against children instead of working together and seeking counseling when necessary to solve these difficult, yet common problems among our children.

This serious crisis is causing increased numbers of young Black males across the country to be removed from their homes and placed into juvenile detention centers, having been accused or convicted of sexual misconduct offenses. These youth suffer perhaps the most harsh consequences of being introduced into the juvenile system labeled as sexual predators, one of the system's worst labels that might follow them forever, and possibly provoke other youth or adults in the system to sexually assault them.

We must all do a better job of getting our daughters and sons to understand how serious situations can develop out of the most playful incidents. I recently grilled a young man who had been suspended from his high school following a related altercation with a young lady in his class. After pressing him intensely for the whole truth, this is what he told me:

"It was the final two weeks of class and we weren't doing any work in our classes. So all of us kids were having some fun in between classes playing butt tag, which we call something else. Butt tag is a game where we, boys and girls, chase each other and hit each other on the butt. This girl had been playing it with us all day. In the hallway, she caught me and hit me on my butt. The bell rung and as she ran in the classroom, I hit her on her butt. Some students saw me. She said ouch, that hurt! She turned around and swung at me. I ducked but wound up getting hit right in the nose. My nose started bleeding so the teacher asked me what happened. The class told her that I hit the girl on the butt, so she socked me in the nose. I went to the bath-

room to clean up my nose. When I returned, both of us were sent to the office. The girl wasn't even mad at me, she just said that I hit her too hard."

According to him, both students were suspended from school for six days.

In talking with the young man, I emphasized how silly it was for him to get suspended, miss his final exams, allow his final grades to drop considerably, and possibly have a charge of sexual harassment entered into his school record – all just to play butt tag. He himself then rationalized that landing one good whack on the butt was not worth all of this.

In order to get him to see the bigger picture, I discussed with him the fact that the young lady's family could have gotten involved and made this incident much more serious for him. If she did not admit to playing the game, the school or her parents might have taken more severe action against him. He could have been charged in court, and a sexual harassment charge or conviction could have gone on his legal juvenile record. Or her father or older brother could have personally confronted him and really turned this into an ugly situation.

There is no doubt that he will most likely play the game again. But at least on that day, I got him to seriously consider the fact that butt tag could get his butt in a world of trouble.

Interest in sex and interest in the opposite sex are natural biological desires and reoccurring thoughts that will develop in all of our children sooner or later, depending upon each individual's maturation process. There is no need for any parent to worry about or try to stimulate these

thoughts early, fearing that their son might otherwise become a homosexual.

If you closely monitor their personal development and maturation processes without applying pressure, believe me, nature will take its course in due time.

On the other hand, the womanizing trait in very young Black boys must not be taken lightly. If you notice that your son is extremely sexually over-aggressive, you should talk to a professional counselor about getting him some needed therapy.

It is now true that our young sons, starting at around age six, can understand sexual urges; but very few of them truly understand the real adult consequences that often accompany sexual intercourse.

No matter how mature they might seem, none of the sexually active teenagers that I have talked to were mature enough to appropriately handle the roller-coaster adult emotions that accompany sexual intercourse. Many adults cannot do this, so how can we expect teens to do so?

This is why sexually active teens exhibit such profound changes in their behavior, attitudes towards their guardians and other adults, and images of themselves after losing their virginity. The younger they are, usually the more profound the changes.

No matter how young they are, young Black males believe that losing their virginity or frequently engaging in sexual intercourse automatically makes them a man. Since we have failed to give them a structured rites-of-passage into real manhood, they are instead using sex as their rights of passage.

Junior high school teachers are struggling to control sexually active 11 year-old boys who honestly believe and openly proclaim that, *“I’m a man now.”* Some of them will tell you to your face without smiling, *“I’m the man of my house.”*

Along the same lines, they are not emotionally, physically, or financially prepared to battle AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases, raise a child, or pay child support. Most of our underage ‘Mack daddies’ have no idea how much it costs just to deliver a baby, let alone the fact that they might wind up owing \$20–30 thousand dollars in back child support before they reach age 20.

Therefore, let’s talk to our sons in real penetrating ways about these issues early and repeatedly both at home and in school, in our efforts to prevent them from destroying their personal futures with sex before they ever get to live them. You may contact your local health department to pick up brochures or to schedule free group presentations by professionals on the prevention of AIDS, STDs, and teen pregnancy.

§ 5 ~ Substance Abuse

Substance abuse is another trait that is having a tremendous negative impact on our sons in school. Young Black males are often socialized in home and community cultures that support and encourage substance abuse.

By this I mean that many Black adults depend on cigarettes, hard drugs, or alcohol as daily coping mechanisms to help them deal with the combined pressures and challenges of poverty, racial oppression, single parenthood, and low self-esteem. They channel much of their general frustrations with the ruling system of white su-

premacy, debt, relationships, jobs, and children through the substances that they become addicted to.

As Malcolm X once explained it, the drugs are used as a form of Novocain in one's system to provide temporary numbness or pain relief that is guaranteed to soon wear off. Some guardians try hard to keep their substance abuse hidden away from the eyes and ears of their children, while others are very up-front with it. Either way, their children eventually find out the truth.

Regardless of their intellectual thoughts and feelings about substance abuse, young Black males learn first hand from observing the adults around them; that many adults use drugs to cover up feelings of depression or internal rage regarding personal problems. Let us not forget that many of our sons are carrying to school with them a tremendous amount of stress, personal/family problems, and internal rage towards the system, which are all compounded by academic challenges.

In their minds, and in many cases where substance abuse runs rampant through entire families in their genes, dwells a strong leaning towards the possibility of using drugs to help them cope with their own personal problems. This holds especially true for those who are not taught more effective alternative methods of problem-solving and stress reduction.

The Black community's culture of tolerance for substance abuse also heavily influences our sons. It's not just the adults at home or in the family. It's also the adults on the block and throughout the neighborhood that exhibit the symptoms of addiction. And how could that be a surprise? For the past two and a half decades, urban America has been saturated with and its inhabitants decimated by crack

cocaine, heroin, and 'raw', a cheap yet more potent derivative of heroin.

The young Black males who sell these drugs in order to put some money into their pockets or hang out on the streets frequently witness everyone from local adults, to family members, to suburbanites, to middle-class businessmen, politicians, and teachers purchasing drugs on a daily basis. Drug dealers from every possible age, sex, and racial group distributing these chemical poisons on street corners, from houses, and from legitimate businesses have sadly become an accepted part of our overall community culture.

Additionally, many urban Black communities average at least one liquor store on every other block. Giant billboards and liquor advertisements are present everywhere throughout the stores, and throughout Black communities. Along with all of that liquor, many of the stores also sell all of the latest drug paraphernalia, and sometimes the hard drugs to go with it too. Selling liquor and drugs to minors is an illegal retail pastime that no urban government or police department in America is seriously attempting to address.

Customer after customer goes into these stores to buy cigars in order to cut them in half. They remove the tobacco out and refill it with marijuana (weed), and re-roll the new more potent cigar into what is called a 'blunt'. To escape the pressures of oppressed Black life in America, many adults and teenage Black males strive to get their minds 'blunted' off of weed at least once a day. Our sons consequently look around their communities and perceptively observe that drug distribution and addiction in 'the hood' is not only tolerated, it is expected.

It is a sad but true reality that overall conditions are so bad in Black communities that many adults are always looking for an opportunity to relieve stress by getting high. Under tremendous stress and receiving little if any support or counseling, our sons are following closely in our footsteps. These facts were highlighted by the smash hit rap song that played over and over again throughout the summer of 2003, *'I Get High'* by Styles P.

Many Black adults and teens took its chorus to heart as they repeated *"I get high, high, high, everyday, high, high, high, every night, high, high, high, all the time I get high!"*

Why stay so high? Styles imply that it's the stress factor as he replies, *"cause if I'm sober dog, I just might flip, grab my guns and hold something up."*

This brings us to the drug culture that exists in school and other reasons that our sons engage in substance abuse. Because so many young Black males are bored to death or totally frustrated in class, skipping class is somewhat of a national pastime among them. While skipping, they are completely unsupervised, and their minds search for what appears to be both fun as well as forbidden things to do. As does engaging in sexual intercourse, getting high off drugs satisfies their need to engage in both fun and forbidden activities. Experimentation with drugs also quenches their curiosity about why so many of their peers, teachers, adult family members, and public role models just can't seem to go without.

Our sons often party or chill-out by smoking cigarettes and weed in the boys' bathrooms, or drinking alcohol outside on school property. As if these drugs are not harmful enough to their young, still developing bodies and

minds, prolonged usage leads to life-long habits, and opens them up for addiction to even harder drugs.

With so many of them skipping and experimenting with drugs, a strong culture of group skipping, partying, substance abuse, and academic mediocrity begins to rival the academic culture that schools attempt to promote. Resulting peer pressure draws in countless other students who possibly would not skip or try drugs if such a strong school culture of youth anarchy was not luring them.

The impact of substance abuse on young Black males in class is devastating. Those who skip all the time obviously fail all of their classes and important tests. Many of them get high in the morning before coming to school, and then boldly enter the classroom reeking of weed or alcohol. Generally, when under the influence of drugs, they are sillier, more nervous, less attentive, more immature, and more disruptive in class.

All of this leads to more failing grades, more suspensions, and more fights among them. Last but not least, substance abuse detracts from their overall general health causing increased rates of cancer, catastrophic liver, kidney, and lung damage, heart attacks and strokes, teenage suicide, and premature death among them – just to name a few. Anyone can contact their local health department to obtain factual brochures, videos, or to schedule live classroom presentations on substance abuse prevention.

As we work to reduce drug usage among our sons, let us remember an extremely important point stressed by author Kenny Anderson:

“Although it is the terminology that is popularly used today, there truly is no such thing as substance abuse. Drugs are non-living

chemical substances that can be altered, but they cannot be hurt or abused. The people who use drugs never hurt the drugs, they only hurt and abuse themselves. They destroy their own personal health, and sometimes the health of their loved ones.”

Our great challenge is to get our sons to see this, work with them at solving the root causes of drug addiction and experimentation, and prevent them from ever again using drugs to abuse themselves.