African American Boys:
Moving Beyond Stereotypes, Harnessing their Potential

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“Young Black Male”

- A prominent American stereotype
- A product of American racism
- Pervasive in American cultural landscape
- What are they?
  - Criminal, Dangerous, Gang member
  - Womanizer

These stereotypes are *poisonous*

- They shape identity development of Black boys
- They constrain a boys’ sense of possibilities for the future
- They threaten Black boys’ personal safety
Who Are African-American Boys?
Successful Navigation of the Middle School Years

• Negotiating the American cultural landscape
• Providing Black boys with effective psychological armor
• Anticipating the challenges
  - Where and when will Black boys in middle school run into roadblocks
Talking to Boys about Racial Issues

• Black Male Code
• While we are teaching Black boys about the dangers they will face...

We must point out all of the things that are wonderful about being Black

- Black History & the Civil Rights Movement
  - Lessons: Courage, Persistence, Bravery, Living with a Higher Purpose
- A spirit of resilience
- A culture of innovation and creativity that continues to influence and shape American culture

**Message:** You come from a history of people who have overcome tremendous odds. You can succeed despite how others may try to define you or your possibilities.
Schools & Education

• A quality education is clearly critical
• Adults in schools (teachers, administrators, parents)
  - Key to developing young boys –
    o Fosters resilience in face of adversity
  - Help them maintain a positive attitude toward school
  - Every young person has potential to be cultivated
    o You may not be there to see that young person blossom
    o Remember, your impact is no less powerful
Anticipating the Challenges

• Managing Screen Time
  - Allure of video games as the only source of fun
  - They need to engage the offline world
  - Protecting time for reading and other academic activities
  - Involvement in physical activity

• Social Networking & Peer Relationships
  - Can be a largely unregulated space when it comes to adult influence
  - We do not yet know the impact of online experiences on children’s development

• Development of Early Romantic Relationships
  - Managing emerging sexuality effectively
  - Teaching about healthy relationships
Reality:

There is a dearth of studies on Black boys in middle school and Black boys in general
A Research Agenda

More studies are needed on:

• **Positive Development in Black Boys**
  - What fosters success?
    - Qualitative studies from young successful Black boys
    - We need to hear their voices

• **Vulnerability of the Early Adolescent Years for Black Boys**
  - **Question:** What is it about the years from 9-12 where we see “the light go out” for some of our boys?
    - Previously academically engaged Black boys losing their way
    - What forces converge to undermine their positive development?
    - This issue is of **critical** importance
A Research Agenda

More studies are needed on:

- **Longitudinal Studies that Track Development**
  - Early school years through middle school and beyond
  - Assess all key factors that shape child development generally
  - They also need to assess the culturally relevant factors that matter to healthy development in African-American youth
    - Racial identity
    - Racial socialization – parenting strategies that teach children about race and racial issues
Research & Practice: Addressing the Gap

• **Community Concerns**
  - Exploitation by researchers on the part of agencies and community members

• **Academic Concerns**
  - The proverbial tenure clock
  - Time needed to develop relationships with community stakeholders works against it

• Fit between a culture of service and the need for precise research design and measurement/professional accomplishment in academia
Research & Practice: Addressing the Gap

How to vet a potential researcher who wants to work with you

Ask tough questions about the researcher’s values

1. How do you see your work benefitting Black boys?
2. What do you do on your campuses and in your classrooms to foster the success of Black college students and other students of color?
3. Do ask the question, “What’s in it for us?”
4. Finally, how will our agency be credited for the work you are doing when it is published?
Policy Solutions

• Grant funding policies that allow researchers to partner with schools and community agencies working with Black boys
  - Community agencies with access to research samples have real needs related to their mission
  - Incompatible with the budgetary practices of funding agencies
• More collaborations with community agencies and researchers before the research question is settled upon
• Streams of funding are needed to focus on positive development in Black boys
Thank You!!