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# “An umbrella for all things”: Black daughter’s sexual decisions and paternal engagement

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## Abstract

**Objective:** The purpose of this article is to highlight the value of Black fathers to the sexual decision-making processes among Black adolescent and young adult daughters.

**Background:** Various contextual factors, such as fewer sexual health resources in poorer communities and federal funding cuts to family planning service agencies, ultimately contribute to the sexual health decision-making of adolescent young women and may be linked to sexual health disparities among Black adolescent women. Recent studies have reported the protective nature of a Black father’s engagement to be beneficial to the behavioral outcomes of adolescent daughters.

**Method:** Findings from 17 semistructured interviews conducted with Black adolescent and young adult women are used to discuss the impact of Black fathers’ engagement in their lives on their decision-making processes.

**Results:** Findings from grounded theory and thematic analysis techniques highlight the impact of paternal advice and expectations on the respondents’ sexual decisions through two primary themes: “teaches me about the game” and “umbrella-like protection.”

**Conclusion:** Future research should consider interventions that consider the intersectional experiences of Black adolescent women and the implications of gender and power dynamics on how Black fathers’ engagement may be important to a daughter’s sexual health decision-making processes.

**Implications:** Practitioners working with Black families may consider including Black fathers in sexual health communication efforts to support Black daughters’ healthy sexual decision-making.

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Several studies have established the value of paternal engagement—specifically, Black paternal engagement (Cryer-Coupet et al., 2020; Doyle et al., 2015; Jackson et al., 2015; Lemmons & Johnson, 2019; Johnson & Young, 2016). Recently, more studies have explored contributions of Black fathers to the sexual health decisions made by their Black daughters, particularly considering disparate rates of STI contraction, unplanned pregnancies and births, and risky sexual behavior (Carter et al., 2011; Kost et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2019; Martinez, et al., 2011). Black adolescent and young adult women disproportionately account for a range of sexually transmitted infection (STI) contractions and risky sexual behavior (i.e., low condom use; Sewell & Blankenship, 2019) and unplanned pregnancies (Kogan et al., 2013). Since the 1990s, few studies have examined immediate, culturally appropriate strategies for addressing these disparities. Some scholars have asserted the value of Black families to the developmental processes of Black children and youth. Perhaps the Black family may be a site for effective sexual health knowledge, which would buffer the disparities that currently exist for Black adolescent women.

Although some scholars have found associations between a nonresident and resident father's involvement and various dimensions of a daughter's well-being (Coley, 2003; Daspe et al., 2019; Ellerbe et al., 2018), the value of Black fathers to a daughter's sexual well-being and healthy decision-making requires more qualitative and theoretical attention—specifically, how Black girls navigate intersectional, contextual barriers to healthy sexual decisions. For daughters who live in resource-deficit communities (i.e., communities lacking adequate sexual and reproductive health resources), protective factors, such as those immediately available through the family, may benefit Black women who often navigate various systemic intersections (i.e., limited access to sexual health services and health care biases) when making sexual decisions. The current study considers how Black fathers function as a cultural asset, social capital, and sexual health intervention for Black daughters through communication and information sharing during adolescent and young adult years.

Contextual barriers that prevent Black adolescent women who live in poorer communities from accessing sexual health resources—specifically, access to free or low-cost contraception (Ranji et al., 2019), alongside reductions in federal family planning funding (Napili, 2018), warrant attention. The intersectional experiences of poverty; limited access to sexual health resources such as free condoms, preferred birth control methods, and up-to-date sexual health education; and racial biases experienced within the health care and school systems (Dorsey, 2020) force Black adolescent and young adult women to navigate social barriers that may ultimately thwart healthy sexual choices and hamper optimal health outcomes. Immediate protective mechanisms, such as parental sexual health communication and racial socialization, from within the Black family, are needed to buffer such broad, environmental conditions. Sexual health communication resources gained through family-based interventions may support daughters in making healthy sexual choices, particularly for groups of girls who disproportionately account for various sexual health disparities during their developmental years (i.e., ages 12–19) where experiencing an unplanned pregnancy or an STI may interfere with goals of upward mobility. Receiving sexual health communication from a Black parent may offer information related to lived experiences for how to navigate racial and systemic barriers to family planning services (Prather et al., 2018).

## THE ROLE OF FATHERS

Fatherhood scholarship, examining the role of fathers, originally emerged from an era that did not consider the father as a vital commodity to a child's development (Caldwell et al., 2011; Lee & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2017). In recent years, fatherhood inquiry has asserted the father's role in a child's life as important and necessary to a child's social and cognitive development (Gryczkowski et al., 2010). Additionally, fathers are no longer seen as just the “breadwinner” but also someone whose presence and involvement matters to a child's academic performance,

social behavior, and self-esteem (Allgood et al., 2012; Barrett & Morman, 2010; Gillette & Gudmunson, 2013; Hango, 2007). Much of this literature, while informative regarding the well-being of their children, lacks attention to the developmental needs of daughters, specifically Black daughters who grow up in homes where there is a lack of paternal presence and involvement. In one study exploring the relationship between risky adolescent behaviors and the protective effect of parental involvement, specifically parental warmth, Daspe et al. (2019) found that for a sample of 214 girls, fathers' warmth buffered risky behaviors.

While studies highlight the value of Black fathers to a child's development, studies with evolving foci on the role of Black fathers in a Black daughter's sexual health development have remained scant. In recent decades, more attention has been placed on the nonresident father-son relationship and important implications for a son's development (Ellner, 1973; Lamb, 2000; Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 1997; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). Although this line of inquiry is essential, to what extent a father's involvement is needed in the life of a daughter warrants equal, if not more, attention in the current context of sexual health disparities that continue to have a disproportionate impact on the lives and development of Black women.

Some scholars have identified the specific impact a Black father has on the sexual behaviors and decision-making among Black adolescent and young adult women. Cryer-Coupet et al. (2020) found that among a national, cross-sectional sample of 287 adolescent women aged 13 to 17 years, closeness and engagement with a Black father influence whether a daughter decides to engage in risky behaviors. Ransaw (2014) conducted qualitative interviews with nine African American fathers and found that using conspicuous communication and continuing the fathering role into young adult years were important. Similarly, in a study examining the relationship between sexual risk messages by Black fathers and sexual practices among 171 Black women (mean age 39 years), scholars found associations between sexual risk messaging from fathers and safer sex practices among Black women across different ages, social classes, and educational backgrounds. Of course, Black paternal involvement is not an exhaustive solution to a daughter's sexual health decisions, and, further, the range of factors related to the sexual health disparities disproportionately experienced by Black adolescent and young adult women. Yet, based on previous studies that emphasize the importance of a Black father's role in buffering risky behavior, further exploration on how fathers matter in the context of a daughter's sexual decision-making is warranted to build upon this body of literature.

## CONTEXT OF GENDER ROLES AND FEMALE DEVELOPMENT

Because earlier research associates gender identity with role-modeling by the same-sex parent (Huttenen, 1992; Lamb, 2000; Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 1997; Millen & Roll, 1997), it is no wonder that so little focus is placed on the father-daughter relationship and how father involvement matters equally to girls as it does to boys. According to Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda (1997), "Boys seemed to conform to the sex-role standards of their culture when their fathers were warm, regardless of how masculine the fathers were" (p. 5). This quote represents an era of fatherhood research that lends important credence to the involvement of a father in the life of his son. Healthy physical and social development of sons are posited as outcomes of the relational bonds and connectedness with the father (Lamb, 2000; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). There is a dearth of scholarship exploring a father's influence on the physical and social development of a daughter, largely because earlier studies on the father-daughter relationship focused on internal traits such as self-esteem and femininity (Allgood et al., 2012; Biller & Weiss, 1970). Allgood et al. (2012) conducted a retrospective study among a sample of 99 single women aged 18 to 21 years and found a statistically significant relationship between father involvement, including both engagement and accessibility, and a daughter's self-esteem and life satisfaction. Although these individual-level traits are essential to healthy adolescent

development, reproductive behavior and feeling safe within the world have important implications for how girls excel in life (Dill & Ozer, 2016), which are factors that have been far less investigated for Black women.

There is extensive literature that links fathers' presence (i.e., a father living in the same household) to a daughter's delay in sexual debut (Coley et al., 2009; Ellis et al., 2003; Hutchinson & Cederbaum, 2011), yet whether these associations between a father's presence and delayed sexual debut also apply to early pregnancy or birth continues to be only modestly unexplored. Among a sample of 1,913 Black female respondents, Dorsey (2020) established a link between the lack of Black paternal presence in the home and experiencing a teen birth, which suggests the importance of paternal presence not only to delayed sexual debut but also to teen births. It is noteworthy that Black adolescent women persistently make up the largest group of women who experience pregnancies and abortions before age 18 (Martinez et al., 2011). This is important for understanding the breadth of family planning services needed among Black adolescent women.

Although Black fathers more often live outside of the same household as their children compared with fathers of other racial groups, several studies indicate that the nonresident status of a Black father is not an accurate indicator of involvement. In fact, some scholars have found that nonresident Black fathers were more likely to be involved in their children's lives than nonresident White and Latino fathers (Ellerbe, 2018; Jones & Mosher, 2013). Considering systematic racial biases that often interfere with employability and thus financial contribution to childrearing, Black fathers' experience with structural and systemic racial biases may be translated as racial socialization for Black adolescent women's systemic navigation. In a study examining the quality of father–daughter relationships on the development of Black women's racial identity among a sample of 40 college-educated young women aged 18 to 22 years, Johnson (2013) found that racialized gender ideals about personal respectability and strength were influenced by a relationship with their father. Johnson (2013) also found distinctions between father type, such as being supportive, distant, and or uninvolved fathers. Although this study does not exclusively focus on sexual behaviors and decision-making, several respondents linked their relationship experiences (i.e., having a supportive father) to concepts of respectability transmitted through paternal ideals (i.e., “He’d take us out on dates and, like, show us how guys are supposed to treat girls” and “He has this thing about you’re supposed to follow the man. I’m not married. He thinks of Brian as my husband”). Respondents in this study also highlighted lessons learned from father's expectations and father's experiences with women. These results echo the impact Black fathers may have on a daughter's ideas of themselves and, further, on their decision-making capacity. As fatherhood research evolves to consider the role of social conditions and systemic factors that affect the quality of Black fatherhood (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019), understanding which paternal factors matter specifically to a Black adolescent female's sexual decision-making and sense of safety is critical to supporting the sexual health development of Black adolescent and young adult women.

## THEORETICAL RELEVANCE

To examine the experiences of Black adolescent women who may live among a range of adverse contextual factors, concepts derived from three theories—the theory of gender and power, paternal investment, and intersectionality—are considered. These theories are used as a lens to understand the perspectives and experiences of the participants in the current study. Pertinent gaps in the following theories restrict a thorough understanding of the respondent's perspective; however, the highlighted paradigms are used to describe the relationship dynamics at play between the sexual health decision-making of a Black adolescent female and engagement with a Black father.

According to Connell's (1987) theory of gender and power, three structures delineate the relationship development between men and women, including the sexual division of labor, the sexual division of power, and the structure of cathexis (see also Wingood & DiClemente, 2000). Together, these structures explain how gendered relationships occur within the broader society and at institutional levels. In their extension of Connell's model, Wingood and DiClemente (2000) elaborated on the risk factors associated with women's exposures to HIV, with particular attention to the experiences of Black women. Such gender and power dynamics may offer some context for how sexual decisions are made, particularly related to the feedback, advice, and support received from a Black father who may also contend with his unique share of disparate power dynamics negotiated among his own life experiences as a Black American male (Johnson & Young, 2016).

Draper and Harpending (1988) suggested that once girls internalize the experience of their father during early childhood years, they establish a developmental track that results in a particular reproductive behavior toward maturity. This perspective assumes that the evolving nature of human beings becomes sensitive and responsive to childhood experiences with a father, or the lack thereof, and as a consequence, certain behavioral patterns develop that subsequently guide their reproductive behaviors (Draper & Harpending, 1988). Besides the proclivity of Black fathers not to live in the same home with their children, this theory may discount the possibility of quality, nonresidential paternal involvement to the reproductive strategy of a developing daughter early in life. Considering how fathers' engagement matters to the sexual and reproductive development of daughters, Black fathers, despite resident status, may inform how Black women engage in sexual decision-making differently from other racial groups of women due to racial and social positioning and various contextual factors (i.e., how to address racial biases when navigating access to low-cost health resources).

Coined *intersectionality* by legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw (1991), the concept of intersecting social structures in our lives creates unique challenges for women of color to survive, thrive, and exist within the larger society. Intersectionality is often understood as experiencing various systemic forces within a single experience. Collins and Bilge (2016) describe intersectionality in this way:

When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. (p. 2)

In the case of Black young adult women's sexual decision-making, various social inequalities (i.e., poor access to sexual health resources) may "intersect" with various power structures (i.e., health care biases, religious beliefs) and thereby reduce the likelihood of making a healthy decision. Social context as a core component of intersectionality suggests that researchers and advocates must contextualize historical, intellectual, and political experiences by recognizing that each of them shape what researchers and citizens think and do (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Although intersectionality is posited as a framework that gives concentrated attention to the lived experiences of women of color, examining how developmental processes (i.e., sexual health autonomy) intersect with contextual factors such as health care biases and societal oppressions (e.g., experiences with poverty) related to structural racism embedded within the broader social context is helpful for developing culturally responsive sexual health interventions. Such factors may matter more for Black adolescent and young adult women who may have to navigate social and class biases at a younger age than their White female counterparts.

To further highlight the role of intersectionality to experiences of Black young adult women, Dorsey et al. (2022) examined narratives shared by Black adolescent women through podcast interviews. The young female respondents talked about how navigating sexual violence was a

prominent, regular occurrence in their lives and how dominant contextual forces were causes. These scholars discussed how the matrix of domination, within the context of intersectionality (as discussed by Collins, 2000), aids the continued oppressions they feel daily, whether that is within school environments, family abuse, or through sexual violence or threats while walking home from school. These respondents point to a need to access immediate protective factors that will help buffer these experiences, if these exist at all. Fathers may be a viable source because many studies examine the positive impact of how fathers matter in the lives of their sons (Johnson et al., 2016, 2020). Perhaps understanding how such guidance and interactions matter solely to Black daughters will benefit paternal parenting strategies for preparing daughters to handle increasingly risky circumstances, limited sexual health resources, and sexual relationships.

Taken together, Black father–daughter power dynamics, whether traditional or more progressive (Johnson, 2013), may be nuanced due to father type (i.e., resident vs. nonresident) that, in turn, may influence developmental processes (i.e., reproductive strategy). These processes may be compounded by the intersectional experiences of Black women during adolescent and young adult years, such as decisions made based on information gained from fathers, coupled with poor access to sexual health resources and negative social scripts often ascribed to Black women (i.e., hypersexual or Jezebels; French, 2013; Mowatt et al., 2013). The current study adds to how paternal relationships matter to Black women's developmental processes within broader contextual experiences.

## METHODS

As a means of exploring the role of Black fathers on the sexual decision-making of daughters, grounded theory and thematic content analysis techniques were used to examine themes across qualitative interview data. Although grounded theory techniques were used primarily for the coding procedures, thematic analysis guided the examination of the data through the theoretical lenses.

### Description of the sample

The current study sample of Black adolescent women ( $n = 17$ ) was derived from a pilot study that aimed to understand pertinent factors related to the sexual health of Black adolescent women. Semistructured interviews and focus groups were conducted with 27 Black adolescent and young adult women between the ages of 15 and 24 years who lived or grew up in lower income, urban communities in the Pacific Southwest and Midwest regions of the United States. The social collective process was considered when using focus groups, and dyad interview sessions were conducted for participants who asked to be interviewed with their friend or sibling sister. Of the 27 participants, respondents had the option to participate in the individual interview, a focus group, or both. Ten respondents participated in focus groups and not the individual interviews, and one respondent participated in an interview and not a focus group. Table 1 provides descriptive information for respondents who participated in an individual interview and shared their paternal experiences ( $n = 17$ ). Although focus groups are not included in the current study analysis, two focus groups, with five participants in each, were conducted as a part of the larger study aims. The findings in the current study were derived from the individual interviews only. Each participant received a \$25 gift card for participating in an interview and an additional \$20 gift card for participating in the focus group. Semistructured guides for individual interviews and focus group guides, along with all other study protocols (i.e., recruitment materials and sites), were approved by the Loyola University Chicago institutional review

**TABLE 1** Sample descriptive ( $n = 17$ ): father type, individual paternal relationship, and their definitions of the role of a father

Participant	Age	Father type	Paternal relationship	Defined role of father
Rose	20	Bio, not present, not involved	"My father wasn't in the picture."	"Being there. That would be my big thing, you have to be there."
Linda	18	Bio, resident father, involved	"Pretty same as my mom."	"Father involvement would be, just being there for your child, supporting them in every aspect possible that a parent should support their child."
Brianna	19	Bio, nonresident father, involved	"My dad's like, everything to me. I just feel like he treats me like the best person ever."	"I feel like the father is the person that's showing the girl how she should be treated."
Michelle	19	Bio, resident father, involved	"I always ask for his input of like ... because his opinion is very important to me."	"... it's like I have a dad that's there to tell me and guide me. ... You learn the game from your dad."
Brenda	19	Bio, resident single father, involved	"My daddy was like my best friend and I took comfort in him and he taught me to be tough."	"I think a daddy is really important. ... And then communication. Women are okay, but a father can communicate with you on a whole different level, than the woman in your life."
Giselle	20	Bio, not present—not involved, no father figure	"I feel like I didn't have that [father in my corner] growing up."	"... be there for her not only physically but emotionally and mentally and spiritually, have that connection with her."
Mia	20	Nonresident, not involved consistently	"My father, he was incarcerated most of my life, most of my life. He was in and out of my life a lot, so not a big role."	"A father is supposed to protect his daughter. That's the biggest thing. Emotionally provide protection. Physically provide protection."
Chloe	15	Bio, not present, not involved; father figure present	"My dad is not in my life."	"I guess he would be my superhero. Telling me how I should date boys, which ones not to date."
Karen	22	Bio, resident father, involved inconsistently	"In and out. He's around sometimes. He's sometimes not."	"To check on you and see what's going on in your life. Making sure everything's okay, how can they help you, if they can, give the advice if they can."
London	21	Bio, not present, deceased; adopted father figure present, involved	"... grandfather that used to spoil me to death. And where I went, he went. And wherever he went, I went."	"Like a protector. Someone to just talk to, sit there, talk to."

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Participant	Age	Father type	Paternal relationship	Defined role of father
Amanda	20	Bio, resident father, inconsistently involved; father figure present involved	"My dad ... He always makes sure that I'm taken care of, especially when it comes to gas money or something."	"... a father's somebody that's always there to protect and that's always there to provide and, in my case, that's been heavily, for me and also, someone who's just there to listen from a man's perspective."
Amber	19	Bio, nonresident, inconsistently involved, deceased at 14 years old; father figure, involved	"He was present, but he wasn't present. He was in the household, but he wasn't, we wasn't close."	"The role's like a bond. ... Father involvement would be like having, I guess, these [sexual communication] conversations that should start at a young age."
Becky [dyad with sister, Brianna 2]	18	Bio, resident father, inconsistently involved	"... he's hard to talk to ... he gets mad fast. He don't like that. He don't want us doing nothing [sexually]. Because he don't like talking about it because we're his daughters."	
Brianna 2 [dyad with sister, Becky]	21	Bio, resident father, inconsistently involved	"Yeah, communication and spending time. ... Like we're going places, going to the movies sometimes."	"I think that if dads were in their daughter's life way more better and to treat them like their daughter then females would be better. Because they would know how a guy's supposed to treat them."
Ashley (dyad with friend, Monica)	19	Bio, not present, not involved	"Yeah, me either" [after Monica's answer that she didn't really know her dad].	"I feel like the world would be better if everybody had a father figure in their life."
Monica (dyad with friend, Ashley)	19	Bio, not present, not involved	"I don't really know my dad."	"I think a father should be there to help their daughter figure out what man is good for me."
Kayla	17	Bio, resident father, involved	"He came and signed the paper when I need him to sign it. Mostly I talk with him about, to him when I tell him I need shoes or when I need my hair done, stuff like that. ... Yeah, he comes in there and starts trying to talk and I'll be like, 'I'm watching TV,' but he really likes to talk for hours."	"The dads part is like. ... The dads know when they were younger, what they were up to. So, it's for him to tell their daughter like, 'I know, I was a boy at one point in time. I know what I was looking for and what I wanted.'"

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Participant	Age	Father type	Paternal relationship	Defined role of father
Kelly	22	Bio, not present, deceased when respondent was 5 years old; father figure present, involved	“... died when I was 5 years old. ... I have my brothers. ... I know plenty of people who didn’t have a father in their life and they’re doing just fine.”	“It’s not enough for a father just to be there, but are you accepting me for who I am? Are you affirming me? How are you shaping my identity and my confidence? So yeah, I don’t think it’s just about the father being there. I mean you can be there all you want, but are you really, really there, and how are you there?”
Ashley 2	21	Bio, not involved, no father figures	“No. I wish that my dad was around to scare the boys off or just tell me, ‘I don’t want you to end up pregnant at a young age and throwing your life away over a guy.’ I honestly do wish that I had. ... My mom worked a lot, so just having that extra parent in the home probably would have helped.”	“Probably just having talks with her and letting them know that ‘I’m proud of you. I want you to stay on the right track.’ There’s only so much a father can do because if you push too hard, of course, kids are going to pull away. But just being active and just letting them know that ‘I’m here if you need anything. If you need to talk, if you ever get into trouble you can come to me.’”

Note: Participants are indicated by self-selected pseudonyms. Age was at time of the interview. Father type (during childhood and adolescence): bio = biological; resident/nonresident = living in the home or not; involved/not involved = interactions and activities or not; consistently/inconsistently = respondent suggested regular interactions or not; father figures = male other than biological father. Paternal relationship: responses to the question “How would you describe your father’s role in your life?” Defined role of father: Responses to the questions “How do you define the role of a father?” or “How would you describe a father’s role in his daughter’s life?”

board. The individual interviews were conducted between May 2019 and February 2020 by two interviewers, both Black women, including the researcher and a graduate research assistant. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. The average time for individual interviews was 47 minutes. Self-selected pseudonyms were used during the interviews and in the current study to protect the identity of each respondent.

### Data collection technique

Guided by the overarching research question “How do the assets of Black fathers offer protective qualities to a Black adolescent female’s sexual health decision-making?,” Black feminist theory, as a qualitative inquiry technique, was used to guide various aspects of the data collection, procedures, analysis, and interpretation of the findings (Evans-Winters, 2019). Evans-Winters (2019) encouraged qualitative inquiry when similar experiences, particularly between Black women, are used to explicate the lived experience of the respondent who is aware of what it means to be Black and female in the United States. Often, the looming pressure to produce objective research, even in qualitative studies, has thwarted the value of shared experiences between the respondent and the researcher, thereby discarding essential elements of the

lived experience necessary for rich investigation of lives lived at the intersection of layered oppressions.

Like Evans-Winters (2019), I, too, believe it is plausible to engage Black female respondents qualitatively through the process of shared interpretations of the social world, which informs systemic experiences of both the respondent and the researcher. For example, through head nodding in agreement and the shared use of slang terms at times during the interviews, we attempted to replace the hierarchy present between two Black women (i.e., respondent and researcher) with a precedence of sisterly warmth, affirmation, and encouragement. This approach seemed most appropriate when participants shared disappointing experiences with their fathers. As a very relatable point, an “I understand” or a head nod with warm eyes was used to emphasize compassion. Since participants continued to share in response, it was most appropriate to allow them to continue sharing and finish their thoughts before moving on. Although these details were not identified as key findings, in that most participants did not share the same degree of disappointment or excitement about their father’s engagement, acknowledging those disappointing instances was important for connecting with the participants and ensuring their stories were being handled with care and tremendous empathy.

## Analytic techniques

Grounded theory methods, including constant comparatives, were used to code data into categories. Focused coding procedures (Charmaz, 2014) were conducted by three coders, all of whom identify as adult, Black women. The exploration and meaning derived from the Black female research team was used and viewed as an asset to the current study because it explored the perspectives of Black adolescent and young adult women. Evans-Winters (2019) advocated for centering Black feminist epistemologies in qualitative inquiry and described the use of a Black feminist lens as a vital asset to the qualitative process. For the current study, a Black feminist frame was used (i.e., including the voice and reflexivity of the research team) to challenge dominant norms related to what is considered knowledge; consider how the researcher engages with the participants; offer heavy consideration for context (the familiarity with the physical and antimetalogical context of being Black and female); and, especially, interpret and analyze the data (Evans-Winters, 2019, pp. 15, 85).

Under the guidance of the researcher, the code book was developed based on the focused coding conducted for each transcript. The researcher used the codes to determine categories to engage in constant comparison of the data. For example, codes titled “Father influence—lessons” and “Father influence—communication” went into the category titled “Father sexual advice/communication.” Another coding scheme included codes titled “Father awareness of sexual activity” and “Father influence—lessons” and responses from “Father influence on sexual behavior,” which went into a category titled “Father engagement.” Specific sections of the data, according to particular contextual factors (i.e., father engagement and sexual health awareness), were placed into a spreadsheet to create a matrix of excerpts for developing axial codes. These codes were then converted into concepts for determining necessary subcategories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For example, subcategories of “Father engagement” included “Father’s impact on sexual activity/behavior.” Next, from each subcategory, deductive analysis was used to determine study themes according to the respondent’s perspectives (i.e., excerpts) about the role of Black fathers in the sexual health decision-making of Black daughters, both personally and broadly.

To establish trustworthiness of the data, the research team engaged in peer debriefing and individual and collective reflexivity. Each coder provided short phrases as a description for each code, and the researcher, as the third coder, confirmed the final code name, description, and theme.

## Culturally relevant reflexivity

As is traditional in qualitative inquiry, acknowledging the role of our use of self is critical to the process (Creswell, 2013, p. 216) as well as how our positionality could have an impact on the methods and the results presented. In this case, my use of self was a grounding force for engaging Black adolescent and young adult women and could have influenced the results of the study. As a former Black adolescent female, I couldn't help but think about my own paternal and sexual health experiences as I conducted the interviews. In addition, experiences were shared by the research team throughout analysis. Although those experiences occurred several years ago, the sexual health context in the United States, particularly access to sexual health resources, has changed very little, if at all, for certain women. Participants in this study lived in two separate states with some of the most progressive and comprehensive sexual health legislation in the United States. Probing questions were triggered by shared behaviors with the participants, decisions, and testimonies that presented concerns about how and where they gathered their sexual health knowledge. Although those concerns were not voiced, probing questions may have suggested additional interest and possibly concern.

## RESULTS

Preliminary findings derived from the thematic analysis indicated value of having a father engaged in the lives of Black women early in life, specifically as it relates to their sexual health decisions. Two primary themes represent the role ascribed to Black fathers, whether these fathers were resident or nonresident, or currently or formerly involved: "teaches me about the game"—strategies gained through sexual communication and "umbrella-like protection"—value in verbal expectations of fathers.

### **"Teaches me about the game"—strategies gained through sexual health communication**

Sexual health communication between a father and his daughter was not taboo for the daughters in the current study. Some respondents referred to sexual health communication as "game." In other words, respondents described their father's sexual health communication as a form of education about "games" or manipulative strategies that young men may employ to get the respondents to have sex with them. For respondents who talked about having an active relationship with their fathers (whether resident or nonresident), "Teaches me about the game" reflects daughters' perspective on developing a keen awareness of sexual risks and insight about dating or relationships with young men from the advice and direction provided by their fathers and father figures. Michelle described "the game" this way:

it's like I have a dad that's there to tell me and guide me. He was once a young man himself, so he knows the game, he knows when guys are playing games.... You think these guys are good and you're trusting them, but really they're just trying to get sex, and then they're just going to abandon you. You learn the game from your dad.

Respondents shared details from sex-related conversations initiated by their fathers without any mention of discomfort from either the father or the daughter. In fact, the respondents viewed those conversations as valuable and applicable to their subsequent decisions to engage in sexual activity. For example, when asked if her father ever mentioned anything to her about sexual activity, Kayla stated:

Yeah, he mentioned it. He just said like, “Boys, they only want one thing.” He said I can’t go to the movies with a boy. Because in the movies they be, them kids, they be getting down in the movies. Like oral or like just touching or ... I never heard of nobody actually like doing it in the movie theater, but like other little small things. Because he’s like, yeah, because he went to [high school], too. So he knows what other kids, a boy’s mindset. He knows what he wanted ... after prom, he knows what he wanted to do and what he did so he kind of tells me, he knows what’s up. ... And then he said, “Yeah, these boys don’t want nothing but one thing.” He was like, “Trust me. I know. I was a boy once.” And then he said they’re not for me. He said, “Just go to college and don’t worry about boys.”

When asked how she felt about this advice, Kayla responded, “I understood because it was the same thing my mom was saying.”

After the death of her father when she was a child, London shares her perspective of her father’s life and how his life has indirectly informed her decisions about sexual activity. When asked if her father influences or impacts her decision to engage in sexual activity, London responded:

Yes. ... Because my father had ... I’m his 13th child. So, I’m not trying to be that person. I understand, I love[d] him so much. But I don’t want 13 kids. How many baby mamas? Five baby mamas. Yeah, that’s a lot.

Conversations including contraception use and sexual health advice, such as clinic visits with their partners before engaging in any form of sexual activity, were pertinent to their sexual health decision-making. Other examples include nonresident fathers initiating candid discussions about contraception and expectations in relationships with men. Brianna shared specific instruction from her dad that she related to long-term goals:

I’ll tell him like, me and my dad have a good relationship like I’ll tell him, “Oh I’m on birth control” you know, and he’s just like, “Don’t get pregnant. Do what you’re supposed to do. Finish school” all that. ... So he’s like really big on being strong, working hard, and being able to actually provide.

Although some respondents shared their gains from sexual health communication with their fathers, it is important to give voice to the many responses related to the hopes and expectations of fathers who were sometimes engaged in their lives but not at other times due to death, incarceration, or simply not being present. Mia described what she hoped and expected to receive from her father, particularly in times where he was “in and out” of her life:

A father is supposed to protect his daughter. That’s the biggest thing. Emotionally provide protection. Physically provide protection. I should be able to know if a guy says something insulting to me that my dad would be right there to make them respect me. Not necessarily putting their hands, exchanging that, but just me knowing that he’s there, that I can go talk to him if something like that was to happen, just to get his input, because he is a male, to tell me about how other males act ... just being able to talk to him and say, “Well, hey, dad, this is going on, do you agree with this? Is that all males’ perspective? Is that normal, or is it not normal for him to feel like that? How should I handle it? How would you want to have that conversation?” ... Just his presence, just him being there. I wouldn’t have felt like I needed the attention from a boy.

Mia's description of what she hoped or expected to receive from a father is indirectly related to what she received from her father. Mia voices the value of communication she ascribes to the relationship between a father and daughter, particularly as it relates to her relationships with men. She affirms her expectations of paternal investment by stating the difference she believes his involvement or investment in her would have made regarding her interactions with boys.

### **"Umbrella-like protection"—value in verbal expectations of fathers**

"Umbrella-like protection" reflects the value daughters feel from their fathers who, through their conversations and empowerment, aim to protect them from sexual risks and unhealthy relationships. Brenda described her father as an "umbrella against everything." She shared the value in her relationship with her father and how that made her feel:

So I always consider my daddy my umbrella against all of that weather. So like if I was crying, that's the only person that stopped me from crying. If I felt bad, that's the only person that can me feel good. My daddy was like my best friend and, I took comfort to him and he taught me to be tough.

Brenda highlighted how her father's protection made her feel and contributed to who she grew to become (i.e., "taught me to be tough"). Much like Brenda, London shared her expectations of a father's role and what she believes is essential for a father–daughter relationship: "Like a protector. Someone to just talk to, sit there, talk to. Then they're more understanding, so you of course you will tell them more."

Although London's biological father was deceased, she continued to ascribe the value of paternal investment to her experiences with her father figure. Whether describing a biological father or a father figure, participants who discussed the value of their father's advice shared their intentions to follow that advice and interpreted the rationale for their father's advice as a safety measure. Amanda and Gisselle shared direct responses to their fathers' advice about making safe, sexual decisions. Amanda noted, "My daddy just always told us to keep boys out of our face. He told me that starting from age 12, so I always took it as, 'Okay, I'm going to keep them out of my face.'" Giselle said, "In my case, [my father taught me] who *not* to pick."

Knowing what not to do and what to expect in relationships with men was equally important to Michelle, who shared the value she gained from her father's engagement and what that means to her personal expectations in a potential mate. When asked to describe how she views her father's engagement overall, she stated: "Oh, okay cool. When I eventually get a partner or whatever, that's some of [the] qualities that I want to look for. I want to have a partner that's very respectful towards me, obviously."

Like Michelle, Brianna shared what fathers are supposed do in their daughters' lives. While she shared her expectations of a father's role, Brianna also shares how her father's treatment translates into personal empowerment and her expectations from other men:

I think it's like, strength and power. Your father's supposed to give you a strength. Your father's supposed to boost you. He's supposed to tell you that you're important and stuff like that. So I just feel like, the father's there like support, for you. I feel like ... father involvement ... would be like you and your dad actually bonding, I guess. ... My dad's like, everything to me. I just feel like he treats me like the best person ever. I'm like, I don't expect nothing else from any other guy. ... So it's just like, he'd teach me like, if you're with a guy he's supposed to give you anything and everything no matter what it is.

Brianna described her feelings of paternal protection from her father's education and training of what she should expect in relationships with men. Within the context of describing how her father matters, she placed emphasis on how she felt about her father, saying "My dad's like everything to me." While Brianna's expectations are specific to her father's advice and investment, Brenda also connected the advice she received from her father to her self-confidence and value:

[He would say] "The position you take, is the position you keep." And I was just like, I was young but I was always more advanced because my daddy was old and when he said that, oh, man ... pretty much to know your worth. People are only going to do to you what you allow them to. So that I think that's why I walk with a certain level of confidence.

Most participants, much like Brenda, highlight how they have experienced or expected a father to provide a sense of protection. Participants relate paternal protection to how they feel about themselves, and how they feel about themselves is represented in how they show up in relationships with men.

Scared to tell (subtheme).

In some instances where respondents discussed the protective nature of their fathers or father figures, respondents discussed how their interactions with their fathers were often scary but effective for understanding how to engage with boys. When asked about how she would describe her father's role as it related to sexual health communication, Brenda stated:

Scare tactics. "You better not bring no baby home, he'd better not be this, he'd better not be that. You know these [boys are] young, so you know they can't take care of no baby." It was just like wisdom. I guess it's the scare tactic, but it's really wisdom.

Although Brenda translated "scare tactics" as wisdom, other respondents talked about being "scared" to tell their fathers about their sexual activity because of his potential response. This fright seemed to matter in both the decision to engage in sexual health communication with their father or father figure as well as their actual decision to engage in risky sexual behavior. London shared how she received certain threats from her grandfather as a means of protecting her, and, subsequently, she became more aware in relationships with boys:

Then he used to always get on me about boys. He said, "If you get a boy, I'm going to break your neck, then I'm going to break his." So I was like kind of frightened, and then I understand because boys are this type of way and this type of way.

"And then I understand" highlights London's trust in the protective efforts of her father figure, beyond being fearful of her grandfather. Coupled with her knowing what not to do because of her biological father's multiple births, London made a conscious decision not to engage in risky sexual behavior during her adolescent years. When asked in what ways a father can influence sexual activity or behaviors, Mia also described her candid experience with her stepdad and how the fear of his intervention played a role in her early decisions and perceptions about risky sexual activity as if her biological father were present.

I do feel like it [stepdad's involvement] had a role in my choices in the people who I would get in a relationship with. I actually remember this one time ... this boy called me.... My [step]dad picked up that phone and I was really scared. I was scared, I was crying. He didn't do anything, he just said something, he didn't yell

or anything, and I just felt really, really, really bad. So I know if he [biological father] was there during that time, I wouldn't have gotten pregnant.

Again, whether her biological father or father figure, Mia's expression of fear related to how her stepdad emphasized her ideas of the power dynamic between a father and a daughter, particularly a biological father's role.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Although these findings are qualitative in nature and are not intended for generalizing the experiences of Black adolescent and young adult females broadly, it is apparent that these Black adolescent females believe that their own fathers, and fathers in general, matter in unique ways to their sexual health choices and awareness. It is expected that this study will provide the foundation for quantitative measures and interventions that specifically relate to Black paternal engagement in the lives of Black daughters. To date, several scholars associate the value of Black father involvement to a range of child outcomes (Alleyne-Green et al., 2015; Cooper et al., 2019; Cryer-Coupet et al., 2020). Respondents in the current study emphasize how fathers provide specific advice about "the game" and function as a source of protection (both physical and emotional). Such points may offer immediate support to the sexual decision-making capacity of Black adolescent and young adult females within the current sexual health environment.

### Teaches me about the game

"Teaches me about the game" highlights an important role of Black fathers, one that involves shared wisdom and experiences. It is noteworthy that respondents shared candidly and with enthusiasm how their father's advice about the "games" young men may play was helpful in their navigation of dating experiences. Cooper et al. (2019) examined the role of Black residential fathers' parenting practices in early- to mid-adolescent substance use behaviors. In that study, findings corroborated previous studies that found gender differences between paternal parenting practices and substance use behaviors. Especially important here is that these scholars found some nuanced differences between girls and boys (i.e., higher levels of substance use, demographic differences such as biological vs. stepfathers) in relation to paternal parenting practices and substance use. While the current study's focus is not substance use, the emphasis on the value of Black father engagement to behavioral outcomes may be key to future sexual health prevention and intervention efforts. Because previous studies have highlighted the value of parental knowledge and monitoring to adolescent female behavioral outcomes, particularly risky behaviors (Alleyne-Green et al., 2015; Coley et al., 2009), further research on how the advice, communication, and engagement of Black fathers, whether resident or nonresident, matter specifically to a Black daughter's sexual decision-making is warranted.

### Umbrella-like protection

Paternal engagement in the form of protection, as described by the respondents, is received and felt directly and indirectly in various ways. Although some respondents highlight the value of their father's role and advice, respondents who reflected on their desired experiences with their disengaged father may be important for future fatherhood interventions, specifically regarding the developmental processes of Black daughters. Safety and assurance in their sexual choices and decisions seemed to stem from receiving a father's advice, largely because the advice was

coming from a credible source—another man who understood young men. Johnson (2013) found similar results in a qualitative study examining Black women's retrospective responses about engagement with their engaged or less-than-engaged fathers. Specifically, Johnson concluded that protection was an important takeaway from engaged fathers, and those who did not experience consistent engagement from their fathers did not express that same degree of protection. In fact, respondents with disengaged fathers expressed some deprivation in “knowing” about men.

## Scared to tell

Understanding how gender and power dynamics influence the ways in which Black women view themselves in the context of being prepared to make sexual decisions may be a direct implication of a Black father's engagement and sexual communication, especially given that some of the respondents expressed fear of what their fathers would think about their sexual engagement or decisions. In other words, it is critical to have practitioners who are aware of the gender and power dynamics that are sometimes implicit in how Black adolescent females receive messages and strategies from their fathers (i.e., around engaging in relationships with men) when developing interventions that aim to support their sexual decision-making. If Black fathers are to be considered a reliable source for educating Black adolescent females about “the game” or how to best navigate the dearth of sexual health resources, interventions should engage fathers and father figures. Furthermore, they should be engaged singularly to raise awareness of the potential power dynamic and dyadically to allow the voices of both the father and the daughter to be heard and interpreted (Cooper et al., 2019).

Throughout the interviews, respondents discuss their experiences and interpretations of their father's advice, communication, and expectations. The primary goal of the current study is to understand the value of Black fathers to their daughter's sexual decision-making. Although relationships and sexual experiences are diverse, respondents highlight points that may be valuable for innovative sexual health interventions involving Black fathers and daughters. Stevens (2002) highlighted the use of a collaborative intervention whereby intersubjectivity of mutual recognition, assertion, and empathic caring is essential to interventions that aim to serve Black adolescent and young adult females. Considering systemic barriers that often stifle or disrupt the process of optimal health outcomes of Black adolescent women, it is important to consider the collaborative intervention context model when developing sexual health interventions for populations of girls whose context may function as a risk factor to their overall well-being (Stevens, 2002). Even more important, considering the role of Black fathers within the broad systemic context of racial tension; endemic conditions, including COVID-19; vulnerabilities to STIs and community violence; and hegemonic order that oppresses women and sexual minorities and has a disproportionate impact on the healthy development of many Black women, Black fathers' shared wisdom and experiences gained through similar racial and social oppressions may function as a protective factor to the development of Black daughters.

Critical to future research is the need for deliberate discussion with daughters alongside their fathers about what benefits are derived from his engagement. Often, research indirectly promotes the hyperinvisibility of Black women when their voice and needs do not take center stage (Collins, 2000; Evans-Winter, 2019), particularly when we gather feedback from fathers about their involvement with their daughters and exclude feedback from the daughters. Interventions that consider the father–daughter power dynamic, according to the theory of gender and power as posited by Wingood and DiClemente (2000), may present important implications for how daughters assert their voices and their needs in various contexts, whether in a relationship or health care system context. Because Black women are disproportionately represented among those who experience sexual health disparities and because they contend with systemic, racially

based biases that often interfere with adequate access to health and sexual health care resources, supportive engagement from Black fathers, who also experience racially based systemic biases, may arm Black women with the social capital needed to navigate oppressive experiences, including relational and social experiences that interfere with sexual health needs.

Sexual health disparities that consistently and disproportionately impact the experiences of Black adolescent and young adult women, cuts in federal funding, and state-to-state variation in sexual health education and access (Naptali, 2018) should dispel antiquated ideologies that suggest that Black adolescent women are somehow psychologically deficit and therefore choose paths that lead to poor health outcomes. Instead, the conviction to understand both risks and protective, contextual factors related to their sexual health experiences must be prioritized in future qualitative studies involving Black adolescent and young adult women. The translation of these findings into culturally sensitive interventions that promote Black paternal engagement in sexual health communication may be a solid starting place for tackling sexual health disparities. A theoretical framework that considers the Black adolescent developmental pathways with intersections between paternal investment and systemic gender and power dynamics may offer guidance for culturally relevant interventions specific to the sexual health experiences among Black adolescent and young adult women.

## Conclusion

The current study highlights disparities experienced adversely and disproportionately by Black adolescent and young adult women and the value of Black fathers' engagement in the sexual decision-making processes of their daughters. It is my hope that such exposure may promote future research that further explores how fathers matter to their daughter's sexual health outcomes—specifically, their capacity to navigate various social structures toward healthy sexual choices. Future research may seek to examine the role of Black paternal engagement in female adolescent sexual decision-making across time. Such study will help us better understand the role that a father plays in their daughter's life as they approach and navigate adolescence, especially for girls who live in poorer neighborhoods with fewer sexual health resources.

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