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## Paternal Presence as a Protective Factor for a Black Daughter's Teen Births

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## Paternal Presence as a Protective Factor for a Black Daughter's Teen Births

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Although father involvement literature emphasizes the value of a father's engagement, responsibility and accessibility to a child's development (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov and Levine, 1985; Pleck, 2012), the protective nature of paternal presence to child outcomes remains relevant (Craig, Thompson, Slykerman, et al., 2018; Langley, 2016; Lee & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2017), particularly as it relates to adolescent sexual behaviors (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Ellis, et al., 2003; Hinton-Dampf, 2013). In this context, protective associates the active role of a father with positive outcomes regarding healthy development of a daughter amidst various contextual risks (Jordahl & Lohman, 2009). Despite recent declines in overall United States teen birth rates, compared with other groups, sexual health related disparities across racial groups are disproportionately represented by Black girls ages 15-19, whereby the smallest change in teen birth rates occurred between 2017 and 2018 (Martin et al., 2019). In light of teen birth disparities and a particular urgency posed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for researchers to explore within group differences, understanding how father presence might be protective of adolescent sexual behaviors that lead to a teen birth warrants greater attention (Ellerbe, Jones & Carlson, 2018). The prevalence of Black children growing up in homes where the father is nonresident may create greater vulnerabilities for Black adolescent females, the adolescent population with the second largest US teen birthrate (Martin et al., 2019). As defined by Lamb and colleagues, the father's potential availability for interaction with his child by being present or accessible is essential to the foundation of paternal involvement (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov and Levine, 1985). While this definition is widely accepted, considering the prevalent structure of Black families, where Black fathers perhaps live outside of the home more often than in the home, a current examination of the value of "presence" is worth considering, particularly as it relates to Black families. The current study examines the impact of a "present" Black father to a Black daughter's chances of experiencing a teen birth, since previous research points to associations between delayed sexual debut and growing up in a home with a father (Campa & Ecdenrode, 2006).

Historically, the role of nonresident Black fathers has been viewed as absent or nonresponsive and disregarded as valuable to his children's lives (CDC, 2014; Charles, Spielfogel, Gorman-Smith, Schoeny, Henry & Tolan, 2018; Ellerbe, Jones & Carlson, 2014). With even fewer studies focusing on the role fathers play in their daughter's sexual behaviors, much of the former literature positing the association of paternal presence to delayed sexual activity was conducted primarily with white, middle-class populations (Deptula, Henry & Schoeny, 2010; Ellis, Scholmer, Tilley &

Butler, 2012). Therefore, it is worth exploring whether residential status of fathers demonstrates the same associations for teen births beyond early sexual activity and pregnancy rates. Since early sexual activity and pregnancy does not exclusively lead to a teen birth, the value of examining cultural determinants such as paternal presence of Black fathers as predictors of a daughter's delayed childbearing has the potential to inform father involvement interventions (whether resident or nonresident); family health interventions; and policies that may diminish the capacity of a Black father's involvement (public welfare and child support systems). To the author's knowledge there is not a study examining Black-paternal resident status as it relates to a Black daughter's teen birth experience. While the scope of this study does not solely concentrate on nonresident Black fathers, subsequent implications of this study, discussed in the latter portion of this paper, may contextualize the value of paternal presence beyond physical presence, and perhaps allude to more inclusive definitions of paternal presence in the lives of Black adolescent females.

Noteworthy, the role mothers play in buffering the effects of a father not living in the home has persisted as an important protective factor to delays in early childbearing among daughters, specifically a mother's higher levels of education (Hendrick & Maslowsky, 2019). However, it is well established in the literature that a daughter faces an increased likelihood of experiencing a teen birth if their single mother experienced a teen birth (Meade, Kershaw & Ickovics, 2008). For this study, it is hypothesized that a father's presence in the home will be associated with a daughter's delay of a teen birth, with consideration for maternal factors such as mother's education and timing of her first birth. The following sections precede with a literature review of teen births in the United States, biological father presence, and biological mother's influences on a daughter's sexual behavior. After describing theoretical applications for this study, the paper will conclude with results and implications of the relationship between teen births among Black adolescent females and the protective nature of Black parental presence in their lives.

## **Literature Review**

### **Teen Births and Black Adolescent Females**

In 2018, there were 17 births for every 1,000 females ages 15-19 in the US (Martin, Hamilton & Osterman, 2019), with 26 out of 1000 births for Black adolescents (Martin et al., 2019). As previously mentioned, parental factors have been linked to childbearing among adolescents, including having a mother who gave birth as a teenager and a mother with only a high school education (Ellis et al., 2003; Forehand, Armistead, Long, Wycoff,

Kotchick, & Whitaker, 2007; Gillmore, Lee, Morrison, & Lindhorst, 2008). Yet, little is known about whether growing up in a home with a father matters to the delay of a Black daughter giving birth during adolescence. This is particularly important because Black adolescents are more likely than others to live in a family headed by a single mother where the biological father is not present in the home (Jones & Mosher, 2013). These families often experience extraordinarily high rates of poverty (Shattuck & Kreider, 2013), and often children born to adolescent mothers are at greater risk of becoming adolescent parents themselves (Lochner, 2008; Meade, Kershaw & Ickovics, 2008). It is also understood that teen childbearing is associated with higher rates of high school dropout, unemployment, and poor mental health outcomes (Ellis, Bates, Dodge, Fergusson, et al., 2003).

### **Father Presence**

Low levels of paternal presence are found to have significant consequences for youth (Ellis et al., 2003). Harris, Furstenberg and Marmer (1998) found a significant relationship between father absence from the household and problematic externalizing behaviors among youth, which can include early sexual activity for females. Building on this work, Sobolewski and King (2005) and Manlove, Mariner and Romano (2000) found associations between positive adolescent outcomes and residing in two-parent households, as well as cooperative co-parenting when the father did not reside in the home. Manlove and colleagues also found that low socioeconomic status and living in a single-mother household were risk factors for bearing more than one child during adolescence (Manlove et al. 2000). These studies imply that the absence of a biological father is predictive of early sexual activity and possibly early births among adolescent females.

More recent studies affirm the need to continue exploring the importance of paternal presence. Craig et al (2018) examined the relationship between paternal presence and children's behavior and found that children whose fathers were minimally present were more likely to report behavioral challenges than of those whose fathers were present throughout childhood. While their study did not specifically report risky sexual behaviors as a behavioral challenge, other scholars posit that risky adolescent behaviors are likely for those who live in a home without a father's physical presence or active involvement (Coley, Votruba-Drzal & Schindler, 2009; Langley, 2016). For example, Langley (2016) examined whether the presence of a father figure mattered to sexual behaviors of socially and economically disadvantaged **Black** adolescents. Adolescents who reported having a present father figure also indicated lower rates of

sexual debut than adolescents who reported not having a father figure. Langley also found that establishing family rules and curfews accounted for some of the effects of having a father figure present (Langley, 2016). Peterson (2006) explored sexual risk-taking within the context of the father-daughter relationship among a sample of 100 Black adolescent females who ranged in socioeconomic status. The findings suggested the importance of communication between fathers and daughters regarding sexual risk-taking and that the father's education may serve as a proxy for family structure (i.e. whether the father lived in the home or not). These findings highlight some contextual value for having a father present in the home, particularly as it relates to sexual debut.

Building upon recent studies of paternal presence, Black fathers' presence may be especially protective to a Black daughter who are at greater odds of experiencing a teen birth. Johnson & Young (2016) advances this point by suggesting a new paradigm for how we should view Black fatherhood. Considering the range of structural and cultural barriers experienced by Black fathers, the growing body of fatherhood research supports paternal presence as an asset to child development (Johnson, 2013; Cryer-Coupet, et al., 2019; Lemmons & Johnson, 2020). Such advancements in fatherhood research also suggest a closer investigation for how such presence may be defined differently for Black fathers based on the social context surrounding a Black father's presence in his children's lives (Goodman, 2018; Johnson & Young, 2018).

### **Mother's Age at First Birth and Education Level**

When considering the association between paternal presence and early births for Black adolescent females, maternal factors, such as education and timing of first birth are also important (Mandara, Murray, & Bangi, 2003; Braveman, Sadegh-Nobari, & Egerter, 2011). The timing of the mother's first birth (Wu & Thomson, 2001) and being raised in a home headed by a single mother (Wu & Martinson, 1993) are both understood as risks to a daughter becoming an adolescent mother (McLanahan & Sandefer, 1994; Taylor-Seehafer & Rew, 2000; Wu, 2001). However, several scholars report that increases in a mother's education can act as a protective factor to early childbearing among adolescent daughters (Hendrick & Maslowsky, 2019; Sullivan, Childs & O'Connell, 2010). Other scholars suggest associations between a mother's education and an increased likelihood of sexual communication by the mother (Forehand, et al., 2007; Mandara, Murray, & Bangi, 2003). Mothers with more education may have greater access to information regarding pregnancy prevention to share with their daughters, which may in turn reduce early pregnancy

occurrences (Mandara, Murray, & Bangi, 2003). Understanding individual differences in sexual behavior among Black adolescent females who grew up with nonresident Black fathers, while considering maternal factors, may suggest cultural relevance for the impact of Black parents on the sexual behaviors of Black adolescent females.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

Since this study hypothesizes a relationship between father presence and early childbearing, the theory of father investment and female reproductive strategy (Draper and Harpending, 1982) provides an applicable theoretical framework as a guide. Draper and Harpending (1982) posit that the early stages of life are important to girls' understanding of their father's investment in the family. Once girls internalize this understanding, they establish a developmental track which results in a reproductive behavior towards maturity. This perspective assumes that the evolving nature of human beings becomes sensitive and responsive to their childhood experiences with a father or the lack thereof, and consequently develop certain behavioral patterns that guide their reproductive functioning (Draper & Harpending, 1982). In other words, girls that identify with early family experiences of low paternal investment (i.e., presence or involvement) are perceived to develop an accelerated onset of sexual activity and reproduction because they have not internalized the value paternal investment (Brummen-Girigori, 2015; Ellis et al. 1999; Draper & Harpending, 1982). In contrast, girls whose early family experiences reflect high paternal investment tend to perceive male parental investment as important to reproduction and therefore become more selective of intimate relationships. During this process, girls who internalize high paternal investment put off early sexual debut. It is expected that these girls develop in a manner that reflects slow onset of reproduction strategies and thus increased restraint to forming sexual relationships (Draper & Harpending, 1988).

Further, while Draper and Harpending's (1982) theory of paternal investment is supported by studies including adolescent girls in father-absent homes, these studies suggest that some girls who do not live with their fathers tend to show precocious sexual interest in boys, express negative attitudes toward males and masculinity, and show relatively little interest in maintaining sexual and emotional ties to one male (Belsky, et. al 1991; Bereczkei & Csanaky, 1996; Draper & Harpending, 1982; Flinn, 1988; Hetherington, 1972). Guided by the life history theory, scholars validate the process of reproductive strategies where a physiological response to environmental conditions occurs when lower quality environments, that

include low paternal investment and father absence, ignite certain biological responses such as early menarche and thus the speed of sexual debut (Brummen-Girigori, 2015; Ellis, 2004). Since early sexual debut precedes a teen birth, the current study aims to determine the cultural relevance of this framework among Black families as it relates to the experience of teen births among Black daughters.

Despite the lack of attention to cultural differences and the broader context of nonresident fathering among Black families (i.e. systemic factors and barriers to nonresident fathering), this theory offers a foundation, albeit narrow, for discussing associations between a biological father's absence from the home during critical developmental years and early teen births that may occur among Black adolescent daughters. Using data from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), the current study addresses two questions: (1) Is there a relationship between the presence of a biological father in the household during childhood and a Black female giving birth during adolescence?; and (2) What other parental factors account for differences in early childbirth among Black adolescent females?

## **Methods**

### **Sample Data Source**

Respondents in this study were selected from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics, through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The NSFG survey gathered data on U.S. family life, marriage, divorce, pregnancy, and births among women and their partners (Lepkowski et al. 2010).

This study employed data from the 2006-2010 panel of the NSFG dataset. This nationally representative dataset involved a cross sectional data sampling procedure comprised of 110 primary sampling units (PSUs). PSUs were based on counties or groups of adjacent counties. Although Black and Hispanic females were oversampled in the overall data (Lepkowski et al. 2010), a subsample of 1,913 Black female respondents, including those who did and did not have children during adolescence, was derived from the larger dataset for the current study. NSFG data collection included face-to-face interviews conducted by professionally trained female interviewers. Interviews and questionnaires were used to gather nationally-represented data from females and males ages 15-44 regarding pregnancy, childbearing, health, and parenting. Interviewers recorded responses using laptop computers equipped with a Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) system. The interviews were approximately 71 minutes long and were conducted in English and Spanish. Institutional consultation



confirmed that an IRB approval was not needed for this study since it involved the use of secondary, publicly available, unrestricted data, which did not contain identifying information.

## **Measures**

### ***Teen births-Number of Live Births Before the age of 20***

Respondents were asked to report the outcome of each pregnancy, with options including live birth, induced abortion, stillbirth, miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, or currently pregnant (NCHS, 2006). If respondents chose the live birth option, they were then asked to state the number of births they experienced by the time of the interview. Responses were coded (1) for no live births, (2) for one live birth and (3) for two or more live births before the age of 20. These responses were recoded as (0) for no births before age 20 and (1) for at least one birth before age 20.

### ***Biological Father In home/ Out of home***

Respondents reported whether they grew up in a household with a biological father from birth to age 18. If yes, this response was coded (1) and if no, the response was coded (0).

### ***Biological Mother's Age at First Birth***

Respondents reported their mother's age when she had her first child. Responses were coded (1) for less than 18 years of age, (2) for 18-19 years, (3) for 20-24 years, (4) for 25-29 years, and (5) for 30 or older.

### ***Biological Mother's Level of Education***

Respondents reported their mother's highest level of education. Responses were coded (0) for less than high school, (1) for high school diploma or GED, (2) for some college, and (3) for bachelor's degree and higher.

## **Data Analysis**

Logistic regression analysis was used to explore the associations between early adolescent births among Black females and biological father presence or absence from the household along with selected biological mother characteristics during the respondent's childhood years. Considering the interest in the odds of a daughter experiencing a teen birth if a father lives inside or outside of the home, analysis that yields likelihood estimates seemed most appropriate for the current study. Logistic regression analysis examines the association between a categorical outcome variable and a set of predictor variables (Sperandei, 2013). By obtaining an odds ratio for an outcome variable in a model that includes more than one predictor variable, the odds ratio indicates the greater or

lesser chance of an event happening among the comparison group, in this case, daughters who grow up in homes with fathers compared to those who do not. Different from linear regression, the outcome variable must be binomial, and the data does not have to be linear (Demaris, 1995). Significant odds ratio with a value below 1 indicates lower odds of the dependent variable experiencing the outcome (birth under the age of 20), and an odds ratio greater than 1 indicates increased odds of the dependent variable occurring (Crosnoe et al. 2002). Because the measure of early adolescent births is categorical (i.e. no births, one birth, or two or more births before age 20), and recoded into a binary outcome, the analysis was conducted including all variables entered simultaneously into the model to test whether certain parent factors could predict the likelihood of an early birth occurrence among Black females. Sperandei (2013) suggests that the main advantage to utilizing logistic regression is to avoid confounding effects by analyzing the relationships of all the variables simultaneously. The saturated model included live births of the respondent during adolescence, biological father presence or absence during the respondent's childhood, and the respondent's biological mother's educational attainment and age at first birth. The model for the analysis has a cutoff for significance at  $p < .05$ . STATA statistical software version 14 was used for the analysis. In the sections that follow, the descriptive and multivariate results are presented.

## Results

### Descriptive Analyses

Of the 1,913 respondents, 65% did not give birth before age 20 ( $n=1,255$ ); 26% gave birth to one child before age 20 ( $n=500$ ); and 8% gave birth to two or more children before age 20 ( $n=158$ ) (see Table 1). Over half of the respondents who experienced a birth before age 20 grew up in a home without a biological father (57%). Among respondents who reported no childbirths before age 20, 63% grew up in a household with the presence of a biological father; over 56% and 58% of those who reported one and two or more childbirths before age 20, respectively, grew up in households with the biological father absent. Regarding the educational attainment and age at first birth of the respondent's biological mother, 84% of those who gave birth to one or more children before the age of 20 reported having a biological mother with education less than a high school diploma. The biological mother's educational attainment was used to determine economic disadvantage. Additionally, 61% of respondents had a mother who was younger than 20 years old when she gave birth to her first child.

**Table 1.**

Descriptive Statistics: Percentages for Number of Births Before Age 20 for Black Women (N = 1,913)

Variables	No births n=1,255	1 birth n=500	2 or more n=158
Father Present <sup>a</sup>	63.11	43.13	41.31
Father Absent <sup>a</sup>	36.89	56.87	58.69
Mother's Education < HS <sup>b</sup>	18.85	36.25	48.64
Mother's Education = HS/GED <sup>b</sup>	32.71	35.97	30.34
Mother's Education = Some College <sup>b</sup>	25.09	18.94	16.74
Mother's Education >= Bachelors <sup>b</sup>	23.35	8.85	4.28
Respondent's age < 18/first birth <sup>c</sup>	12.68	28.39	38.53
Respondent's age 18-19/first birth <sup>c</sup>	17.86	27.12	23.73
Respondent's age 20-24/first birth <sup>c</sup>	39.70	32.52	28.74
Respondent's age 25-29/first birth <sup>c</sup>	21.36	9.06	7.06
Respondent's age >= 30/first birth <sup>c</sup>	8.40	2.90	1.95

**Note:**

<sup>a</sup>Father = respondent's biological father lives in the home or does not live in the home. Father present/absent: 1 = *presence*, 0 = *absence*.

<sup>b</sup>Mother = respondent's biological mother. Mother's education = education dummy codes for level of education obtained: 1 = *less than high school*, 2 = *high school or GED*, 3 = *some college*, 4 = *Bachelors degree or greater*.

<sup>c</sup>First birth = first-born child.

**Table 2.**

Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Births Before Age 20 for Black Women (n = 1,913) ; p=.03

Predictor	SE	OR	CI
Bio-Father			
Presence/Absence	0.20**	1.55**	(1.20-2.02)
Bio-Mother			
< Age 18 first birth <sup>a</sup>	0.38**	1.81**	(1.19- 2.75)
Age 18-19 first birth <sup>a</sup>	0.20	1.04	(.70- 1.54)
Age 25-29 first birth <sup>a</sup>	0.22	1.08	(.72- 1.63)
Age >=30 first birth <sup>a</sup>	0.32	.79	(.34- 1.80)
Less than HS <sup>b</sup>	0.50***	2.28***	(1.47- 3.55)
HS/GED <sup>b</sup>	0.60***	2.53***	(1.57- 4.06)
Some college <sup>b</sup>	0.29	1.25	(.78- 2.01)
<i>df</i>		96	

**Note:** SE = Linearized standard errors. OR = Odds Ratio. CI = Confidence Interval in parenthesis.

Father = respondent's biological father. Mother = respondent's biological mother.

<sup>a</sup>Compared to mother age 20-24 at first birth.

<sup>b</sup>Compared to mother's level of education of bachelor's and greater.

\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Odds ratios derived from logistic regression analyses (see Table 2) revealed statistically significant results.

### **Biological Father Presence/Absence and Teen Births**

To answer research question one, “Is there a relationship between the presence of a biological father in the household during childhood and a Black female giving birth during adolescence?”, biological father presence/absence is included in the model as a predictor of births before age 20. The births that occurred before the age of 20 were regressed onto the biological father presence/absence variable. As reported in Table 2, the odds ratio for biological father presence/absence suggests a 1.55 ( $p < .01$ ) greater chance of respondents giving birth before age 20 when growing up in home without a father, compared to those who grew up in a household with a biological father present. In cases where daughters may face greater odds of experiencing a teen birth, if a father does not live in the home, it is helpful then to explore alternative factors related to such chances, for example, maternal factors that may buffer the likelihood of a daughter experiencing a birth before age 20.

### **Biological Maternal Factors and Teen Births**

To answer research question two, “What other parental factors account for differences in early childbirth among Black adolescent females?”, mother’s age at her first birth and the mother’s level of education were included in the model as predictors of a teen birth before the age of 20. Compared to respondents who grew up in a household with a mother who had obtained a bachelor’s degree or higher, the odds of experiencing a teen birth for respondents whose mothers were educated at the high school level or less were 2.5 ( $p < .01$ ) times greater. The significant odds ratio here indicates increased risks for Black females who grew up with a mother who achieved a high school diploma or less than a high school diploma. This is important because higher educational achievement of the mother may function as a protective factor to her daughter’s potential early childbearing for young women who grow up in homes where the father is not present in the home or in their lives. Similarly, respondents whose mothers had a first child before age 18, compared to those whose mothers had a first child after age 20 were 1.8 times more likely to have children before age 20. The increased odds that Black females will have a teen birth if their mother experienced a teen birth confirms previous findings.

## **Discussion**

This study sought to examine associations between biological father presence in the lives of Black adolescent females and a delay in adolescent births, extending the former literature which suggests associations between paternal presence and early sexual activity solely. There is a wealth of evidence (conducted with White, middle class families) supporting the association between biological father absence from the home and early sexual activity onset during adolescence (see Belsky, Steinberg & Draper, 1991; Belsky et al., 2007; Draper & Harpending, 1982). However, the lack of literature exploring associations between Black father absence and early births, particularly for Black adolescent females, justifies the need for the current study.

### **The Value of a Father's Presence**

Exploring the extent to whether paternal presence matters to teen births, and not just sexual activity and pregnancies, is considerably important for Black adolescent females. First, the United States teen birth rate represents disproportionate numbers among Black adolescent females (Martin et al., 2019). Exploring alternative factors that may lead to within-group exploration is essential for understanding systemic, cultural, and perhaps environmental determinants that potentially contribute to such health disparities. The current study aimed to revisit literature that considers the role and value of “present” fathers to determine whether the concept of “presence” for Black fathers who may likely live outside the home matters in the same way to Black adolescent females’ sexual behaviors. This exploration begins with an empirical justification for Black paternal presence as a protective mechanism to sexual behaviors that lead to a teen birth among Black daughters. Since sexual activity and pregnancy may result in a range of outcomes, for example, abortion or miscarriages, it is important to focus on the teen birth outcome since it is often coupled with various deleterious life outcomes such as poverty, limited educational achievement, and lower socioeconomic statuses. It is important to explore potential factors, such as paternal presence, that may offer some attributes to reducing racial disparities among teen birth rates.

More than three decades ago, Lamb, Pleck, Charnov and Levine (1985) expanded the value of paternal presence by emphasizing the value of involvement, with important emphasis on a father’s accessibility, responsibility, and engagement with his child. The range of factors that may interfere or bolster a Black father’s involvement based on this definition, however, hugely relies on the type of presence or accessibility he has available to offer his child. For example, responsibility demonstrated by a

father, as defined by Lamb and colleagues, may be limited due to various systemic barriers (i.e. low employment, criminal justice system, child support), which may disrupt his capacity to demonstrate responsible actions beneficial to the Black family unit (Johnson & Young, 2016). Engagement, defined as a father's direct contact with shared, caretaking activities (Lamb et al., 1986) may appear differently for formerly incarcerated fathers (McLeod & Tirmaki, 2017), or for military or overworked fathers, and thus requires a new perspective of "presence" and involvement as it uniquely relates to Black fathers, but often discounted efforts towards engagement (Johnson & Young, 2019). Accessibility or presence of a nonresident father who may call his daughter each night before bedtime may contribute to a daughter's internalizing of her father's care and concern for her life. While there is a growing body of literature that explores paternal involvement among these unique circumstances, it is dearth at best and perhaps revisiting long held definitions of father presence and involvement as it relates to Black fathering is timely (Goodman, 2017; Johnson & Young, 2019). Langley (2016) highlights specific implications of the protective nature of paternal presence among adolescents living in impoverished neighborhoods and suggests future research that aims to understand the relationship between certain sexual health outcomes and paternal presence. Therefore, first understanding the boundaries that define Black paternal presence, and secondly, identifying assets within those boundaries that matter specifically to the sexual decision-making of Black adolescent females is paramount to future research (McLeod & Tirmaki, 2017).

### **Maternal factors and Teen Births**

Intergenerational transmission is often used to explain how young women internalize social patterns from previous generations (Barber, 2001; East, Reyes & Horn, 2007; Meade, Kershaw & Ickovics, 2008; Tang, Davis-Kean, Chen & Sexton, 2016). However, there are several ecological factors to consider when examining sexual behaviors among Black adolescents. Among the body of research that argues whether environmental factors precede or proceed the outcome of a teen birth in fact relate to ecological factors involved in the lives of young women (Hardy, J.B., Astone, N.M., Brooks-Gunn, J., Shapiro, S. & Miller, T. L., 1997; Manlove et al. 2002). For example, when a mother has obtained education beyond a high school diploma, the chances of her daughter experiencing a teen birth are lowered, while educational attainment may result from access to resources, maternal education ultimately suggest generational implications. Hendrick and Maslowsky (2019) not only confirmed these findings but also found that the relationship between higher levels of maternal education and lower risk for

teen childbearing exist for both groups of adolescents, those who had a teen mother, and those who did not. More interesting, they also found that children's perceptions of parental monitoring and academic attunement were also associated with delayed sexual debut. Since the paternal investment theory suggest that are daughters likely to internalize the investment of a father, and intergenerational transmission ideology posits the internalization of early childbearing for children of teen mothers (Meade, Kershaw & Ickovics, 2008), it is therefore plausible that a daughter may too internalize behaviors and attitudes of the mother who places value on pursuing higher education over early childbearing.

The research is mixed as to whether mother-child sexual health communication is beneficial to sexual behavior outcomes. It is suggested that mothers with higher education are more likely to engage in sexual health communication with adolescents (Mandara, J., Murray, C., & Bangi, A., 2003). Parents with higher levels of education may feel more comfortable dealing with personal discomfort related to sexual communication with teenage daughters. When fathers do not live with their daughters, it perhaps become more important for mothers to engage in sexual communication with daughters, since the risks associated with experiencing a teen birth is more impactful for the lives of daughters and may be mitigated by some form of sexual communication by a mother (Dennis & Wood, 2012). Interestingly, Smetana, Abernethy and Harris (2000) determined that mother-daughter communication was more contentious when fathers were actually present, which may imply the absence of a father might promote more impactful sexual communication between mothers and daughters. While some scholars posit the value of sexual communication between mothers and daughters, pointing to the mother's self-efficacy and comfort with sexuality communication, (Dilorio et al., 1999), other scholars highlight inhibitors, such as discomfort and hesitance (Dennis & Wood, 2012; Meneses et al., 2006). Perhaps a mother's discomfort or hesitance with sexual health communication stems from not wanting to add fuel to the flame based on personal observations or experiences with early sexual activity.

### **Theoretical Application**

Theoretically, Draper and Harpending (1982, 1988) describe the importance of fathers in the home by emphasizing the physiological development of reproductive strategies gained through higher levels of paternal investment. Although the present study does not investigate specific experiences that occur within the home environment between biological fathers and daughters, this perspective draws attention to the

possibility that the process of delaying childbirth may be a result of internalized experiences with a father during early stages of development (Draper & Harpending, 1988), a process worth testing in Black families where nonresident fatherhood may be more prevalent compared to other racial groups (Ellerbe, Jones, Carlson, 2018) . Considering the proximity that typical occurs between parents and children that live together, a daughter's internalization processes of a father's role are likely to inform her sexual behavior and decision making. Such internalization of the father's role may include paternal expectations of safe sex practices that ultimately contribute to the decision whether to use contraception. As established by Langley (2016), paternal effect on delayed sexual debut was mediated by specific tasks such as curfews and rules. Such guidelines may communicate paternal investment and expectations to a Black daughter. Consistent with the literature that advances a relationship between parental monitoring and risky behaviors (Cryer-Coupet, Dorsey, Lemmons & Hope, 2019), a Black father's presence may unveil specific qualities, such as certain types of monitoring, that matter to a Black adolescent female's decision to reject or disengage in risky sexual behaviors that may lead to a teen birth.

## **Study Implications**

### **Practice Implications**

Although the current study focuses on paternal presence in the home, the results point to the important role Black father's presence plays in the reproductive behavior of Black females. Social work practitioners and social service providers may consider deliberate efforts to engage fathers in interventions specifically with daughters, to promote sexual communication and healthy sexual behaviors. Black daughters may internalize this experience as positive paternal investment when fathers are present for various activities, whether physical, virtual or by phone. Enhancing the communication between fathers and daughters may contribute to developing reproductive strategies of younger Black girls and contribute to their decision-making processes (Hutchinson & Cederbaum, 2010), which may further inform comprehensive sexual health programming that considers fathers as an asset. The growing body of literature related to the assets of fathers in their daughter's lives may offer guidance to fatherhood and teen pregnancy interventions (Allgood, Beckert & Peterson, 2012; Hutchinson & Cederbaum, 2010). Ultimately, the presence of fathers contributes to the well-being of Black daughters in a unique way. Practitioners may also consider engaging single mothers in interventions where education is the focus for both the mother and the daughter. Since



previous findings link higher maternal education to lower sexual behavioral risks, such an intervention may strengthen the communication between mother and daughter and thus dismantle any discomfort that arises when discussing sexual behaviors, thereby buffering the likelihood of a teen birth.

### **Research Implications**

As previously suggested, future research may examine distinct factors that define nonresident Black father “presence” as it relates to Black female reproductive development. Considering key father involvement measures such as accessibility, responsibility and engagement (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov and Levine, 1985), nonresident Black fathers contending with lower socioeconomic status and a range of systemic barriers (McLeod & Tirmazi, 2017), culturally-relevant measures of Black paternal presence and involvement may be warranted. Also, understanding how paternal involvement is operationalized among Black families may help to determine which paternal factors buffer the teen birth experience of Black adolescent females. If the presence of a father matters to a daughter not experiencing a teen birth, as established with the current study, research regarding the determinants for how a father’s presence may be protective may specifically benefit Black adolescent females from single-mother households.

Longitudinal analysis may offer additional value to our understanding of pregnancy prevention among Black families, particularly as it relates to girls that grow up in homes with single Black mothers who were also teen mothers. As previously mentioned, the prevalence of teen birth rates is often associated with pathways of intergenerational transmission, where broad assertions are acceptable explanations for generational patterns (Barber, 2001; Meade, Kershaw & Ickovics, 2008). Less often are contextual factors, that impede parenting processes, considered viable explanations for the familial fragmentation that often precede teen births. Future research that seeks to understand the impact of systemic and ecological factors on the paternal role as it relates to a daughter’s development processes may adequately inform interventions and relevant policies that seek to reduce birth rate disparities.

### **Policy Implications**

The results of the current study may advance advocacy efforts towards reproductive health and family planning related to paternal presence in the lives of Black adolescent females. Often, child support legislation penalizes fathers for a lack of parental custody, and thus creates insurmountable barriers between a father’s capacity to be present and a child’s experience with paternal investment (Armah, 2015; Goodman, 2018;

Johnson & Young, 2016; Natalier & Hewitt, 2010). Advocates may consider engaging fathers in the push for more equitable laws that do not adversely prevent paternal involvement, such as penalties for child support payments in arrears (Johnson & Young, 2016), which often reflect or create periods of unemployment or incarceration. Assuming Black fathers are in fact interested and willing to be involved in their children's lives (Edin, Tech & Mincy, 2009; Ellerbe, Jones & Carlson, 2018), advocates should highlight the value of paternal presence by promoting involvement with current and subsequent generations of daughters.

Far too often Black fathers are dismissed as being crucial partners to the developmental processes of children, and thus systematically ignored as an asset to Black families. While there may be great historical support for this ideology, advocates may consider highlighting the value of paternal presence in the life of a daughter as a vital family planning strategy. Each year, the United States attributes funds to family planning efforts that aim to reduce unintended pregnancies among at-risk populations (Napili, 2018). Among these efforts includes sexual health education and resources for pregnancy prevention. Innovative programs that combine national family planning efforts with father involvement efforts may reduce teen birth disparities and accelerate declines in teen birth rates for Black adolescent females. Such a shift in focus regarding family planning funding might concurrently address systematic barriers to father involvement and increase access to family planning services that aim to support Black families who experience economic disadvantage.

### **Limitations**

The data used for this study are unique in that they were collected from a nationally representative sample that included a subsample of 1,913 Black female respondents where few investigations examine individual differences within this population with respect to childbirths before the age of 20. Yet, while the present study examines specific differences among a subsample of Black females, it is also limited in several ways. First, the data are cross sectional and largely retrospective. Thus, causal inferences about the observed relations among the variables with respect to the fertility outcomes examined would be inappropriate. Second, the measures used in the present analyses relied on the mother's reports which may introduce a social desirability bias into the data. Third, the measure of father presence/absence was nonspecific regarding a particular period of time over the course of the respondent's childhood. Since there are important developmental milestones that occur from childhood to adolescence, the inability to pinpoint when father presence occurred presents limitations to

understanding the fullness of his impact in the respondents' lives. Yet, this study's contribution to the literature highlights the value of Black fathers during childhood to the delayed teen birth experience of a Black adolescent female, which may imply the protective nature of a close relationship between a Black father and a Black daughter.

### **Conclusion**

Beyond the literature focusing on the relationship between paternal presence and female reproductive behavior and the prevailing reality of nonresident fathering, it is necessary to examine the father-daughter relationship and its role in buffering the impact of teen births among Black adolescent females. Considering the value of single mothers should be highlighted when working with mothers and daughters, particularly as it relates to mothers who were formerly teen mothers themselves. The growing body of literature that emphasizes the importance of paternal involvement would benefit from future research that aims to understand the unique qualities of paternal presence among Black families.

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