

Black Female Adolescents' Sexuality: Pleasure Expectancies, Sexual Guilt, and Age of Sexual Debut

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Abstract:

This study examined individual and familial influences on Black female adolescents' ($N = 1426$) sexual pleasure expectancies, sexual guilt, and age of sexual debut using data from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent to Adult Health. Results indicated significant differences between Black female adolescents that were sexually active and those that were not. Religious importance, having a residential father, and perceived pubertal timing were significantly associated with sexual guilt and pleasure expectancies. Religious importance and perceived pubertal timing were also associated with later ages of sexual debut. These results have implications for sexuality education and future research using sex positive and intimate justice frameworks.

Keywords: Sexual guilt | pleasure | sexual debut | religiosity | black female adolescents

Article:

It shouldn't be this hard for Black women and femmes to exist as sexual beings — who openly revel in their bodies instead of wallow in shame, and pursue pleasure unapologetically instead of shying away from it...When people aren't given the space to authentically express their sexuality, that expression will manifest as shame...And so a vicious cycle exists for Black women and femmes when it comes to seeking their pleasure. (Black Youth Project, 2019 paras. 2, 10)

Introduction

Black women are exposed to stereotypes and hypersexualized across their lifespan (Bowleg, 2012; Stephens & Phillips, 2003). These race-based stereotypes can negatively affect their sexual experiences and development in early adolescence (Crooks et al., 2019), highlighting the need

for intimate justice for Black female adolescents. Intimate justice is a theoretical framework that links experiences of inequity with how individuals imagine and report the quality of their sexual relationships and experiences (McClelland, 2010). Intimate justice encourages researchers to question how social conditions and factors such as racial and gender stereotypes, stigma, and individual characteristics (i.e., emotional, mental, physical, sexual) impact what individuals feel they deserve and what they expect (i.e., pleasure expectancies) in their intimate lives (McClelland, 2010). Intimate justice requires that we examine factors that may create barriers to pleasurable sexual experiences (i.e., sexual guilt). To date, limited research has been conducted on intimate justice in adolescence, especially among Black women. Building off McClelland's work on sexual satisfaction and intimate justice, this study aims to understand the ways in which social conditions play out at the individual level (e.g., depression, self-esteem, pubertal development, etc.) with implications for sexual debut, sexual guilt, and pleasure expectancies.

In adolescence, there are a variety of individual and contextual factors that can inform intimate justice. For example, physical development (i.e., pubertal timing and weight perception), emotional and mental well-being (i.e., depressive symptoms, self-esteem, and religiosity), and family structure (i.e., father's residency) can influence Black female adolescents' sexual experiences, especially as it relates to sexual guilt and pleasure expectations. Thus, the intimate justice framework can be useful for understanding what factors hinder Black female adolescents from having positive sexual experiences free from sexual guilt, with the expectation of sexual pleasure.

Sexual guilt

Black adult women (even those who are not religious) report higher levels of sexual guilt than their White peers (Wyatt & Dunn, 1991). Less is known about this relationship among Black female adolescents. Sexual guilt is an emotional reaction that generates feelings of shame or anxiety when behaviors are inconsistent with someone's moral, ethical, or religious values (Mosher & Cross, 1971; Murray et al., 2007). Sexual guilt has been correlated with sexual shame, low self-esteem (Velotti et al., 2017), low sexual desire (Woo et al., 2011), and fewer positive expectancies of sex (EmmersSommer et al., 2018). There are many factors that can affect feelings of sexual guilt including religiosity, self-esteem, depression, parental influences, age, and pubertal development.

Black people are more religious than the US population as a whole, including levels of affiliation, frequency of attendance, and religious commitment (Pew Research Center, 2018; Sinha, Cnaan, & Gelles, 2007). Religious doctrines that discourage premarital sex create barriers to women exploring and obtaining sexual pleasure without feelings of sexual guilt. The Black church has played a significant role in framing moral order to distinguish "ladies" from "jezebels" and by policing Black femininity through promoting sexual secrecy and submission through respectability politics (Lomax, 2018). Under the guise of respectability politics, Black women are expected to not have sex until they are in committed and loving relationships to reduce the likelihood of them being stereotyped and hypersexualized by society (French, 2013; Higginbotham, 1993; Johnson, 2013). Respectability politics and religiosity influence Black women's sexual expression and expectations throughout their lifespan yet, little is known about the direct correlation of sexual guilt, pleasure expectancies, and religiosity in Black female adolescents. The same is true for the relationship between sexual guilt and mental health.

Some adolescents use sex as a means to cope with negative emotions and feelings of depression (Shrier, Walls, Lops, & Feldman, 2011). They may expect to feel physical pleasure from the sexual experience and/or validation from partner(s), but later feel sexual guilt and regret. Black female adolescents typically report higher levels of self-esteem compared to their White counterparts (Bachman, O'Malley, Freedman-Doan, Trzesniewski, & Donnellan, 2011), however, if they experience sexual guilt their self-esteem may decrease. Since sexual guilt in adolescence can have lasting effects on Black women's adult sexual experiences, well-being, and mental health (i.e., higher rates of depression, lower self-esteem) (Vasilenko et al., 2014), it is important to investigate the factors that place Black women at elevated risk of experiencing sexual guilt.

Finally, familial structure can also influence sexual guilt. Parents and family members are one of the primary agents of sexual socialization (the process by which sexual attitudes, knowledge, and values are developed) (Shtarkshall et al., 2007). Cryer-Coupet et al. (2020) found that girls' experience of father involvement differs by their father's residency, with greater perception of closeness among resident fathers. Other studies have also found that fathers' residency shapes father-daughter relationships and shapes Black women's heterosexual relationships and their ability to meet the ideals of respectability politics and modesty (Johnson, 2013). Thus, non-resident and non-supportive fathers can have an influence by women reacting against these relationships (Johnson, 2013). Father's residency can also inform the sexual communication between fathers and daughters. Father-daughter communication about sexual health topics leads to more conservative attitudes (Hutchinson & Montgomery, 2007). These conservative attitudes could increase sexual guilt if they decide to participate in premarital sexual intercourse. Black female adolescents have reported that their sexual experiences, relationship patterns, and sexual risk behaviors are based on their communication and attachment with their fathers (Peterson, 2006). They may also be less likely to view sex as pleasurable, but as a behavior that results in unwanted outcomes and risks. Exploring the effects of fathers' residency on Black female adolescents' sexual development is important to provide a more nuanced picture of father-daughter relationships. Addressing the call to explore the role of father's residency on adolescent behaviors (Cryer-Coupet et al., 2020) we aim to understand mechanism through which father's residency impacts Black female adolescents' sexual guilt.

Sexual pleasures

Sexual motivation research indicates that one of the most common reasons for engaging in sexual activity is the expectation of receiving physical pleasure (Meston & Buss, 2007). Expectations determine how sexual experiences are interpreted and evaluated. To date there is no research conducted solely on Black female adolescents' pleasure expectancies. In an ethnically diverse sample of female adolescents, Black female adolescents reported lower expectations of sexual pleasure than their White counterparts (Pearson, 2018). This could be partially explained by Black female adolescents' anticipation of sexual guilt trumping the possibility of having pleasurable sex. Furthermore, Black female adolescents are less likely to receive comprehensive sexuality education than their White peers (Habersham, 2015) and lack access to pleasure inclusive sexuality education (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Koepsel, 2016; Lamb et al., 2013).

Expectations could also be influenced by individual factors, such as religiosity, weight perception, and perceived pubertal timing. Religiosity typically deems premarital sex as a sin and may reduce expectancies of pleasure. Weight perception and perceived pubertal timing may also

influence Black female adolescents' pleasure expectancies. In the United States (US) Black women's sexuality is often influenced by standards of beauty such as physical attractiveness, weight, and curvier bodies opposed to thin ones (Frisby, 2004; Townsend et al., 2010). Black female adolescents have also been shown to go through puberty earlier or "faster" than their White peers (Hesse-Biber et al., 2004). However, Black female adolescents are often perceived as being older than their White counterparts through a practice known as adultification (a racist practice of seeing children of color, particularly Black children as significantly older and more mature than what they are) (Kendall, 2020). Black female adolescents who perceive that they weigh less than their peers and are late bloomers may not feel physically attractive, nor that they are deserving of sexual pleasure because they do not meet Black beauty standards of being curvy. They may also experience more sexual shame because society does not perceive them as being old enough to engage in sexual intercourse because they are not as developed as their peers who are the same age.

Purpose statement and research questions

Understanding how individual and contextual factors affect experiences of sexual guilt and expectations of sexual pleasure can aid in the movement toward intimate justice for Black women. Despite definitions stating that pleasure is part of sexual health (WHO, 2006), very little research addresses pleasure in the context of sexual development (Hargons et al., 2020), especially among Black female adolescents. This absence is notable since pleasure is experienced in diverse ways across the lifespan, and avoidance of research studies focused on sexual pleasure can have negative outcomes on marginalized populations (Gruskin & Kismodi, 2020), such as Black female adolescents.

Using an intimate justice informed approach, the purpose of this study was to examine individual (i.e., self-esteem, depression, age, religious importance, perceived pubertal timing and weight) and familial (i.e., father's non-residency) factors associated with Black female adolescents' pleasure expectancies, sexual guilt, and age of sexual debut. Three research questions guide this study:

1. What is the association between individual and familial factors and Black female adolescents' pleasure expectancies?
2. What is the association between individual and familial factors and Black female adolescents' feelings of sexual guilt?
3. What is the association between pleasure expectancies, sexual guilt, significant factors in adolescence and age of sexual debut?

Methods

Data

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health) is a nationally representative longitudinal study of 7th- to 12th- grade students who were first interviewed during the 1994–1995 school year (Wave I). The Add Health sample of 20,745 students was taken from a random sample of high schools in the United States that was stratified by region,

urbanicity, size, type, racial composition, and grade span. Wave I in-school and in-home surveys were used in the current study. The in-home survey was collected using Computer-Assisted Self-Interviewing (CASI) technology to aid in increasing the privacy and reduce social desirability. Students who completed Wave I were invited to participate in Wave III 7 years later. Wave III data was collected from 2001 to 2002. Participants were 20–28 years old at Wave III when age of sexual debut was measured; the analytic sample for research question 3 includes only participants who were sexually active by Wave III and reported their age of sexual debut. The restricted version of the Add Health data were obtained by a contractual agreement from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and The University of North Carolina Greensboro. This secondary data analysis was deemed exempt by the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina Greensboro.

Sample

This sample was restricted to respondents who identified as female ($n = 10,480$) who also selected that they were Black ($n = 2533$). Only participants who did not select another race were included in the sample ($n = 2251$). This sample was limited to participants who were 15 and over, not married, and received questions related to sex in Wave I ($n = 1603$). Participants who were missing data on the outcome variables were also excluded, which left an overall sample size of $N = 1426$ cross-sectional analyses (research questions 1 and 2) and $n = 982$ for longitudinal analyses (research question 3).

Measures

Independent variables

Age. The age of participants was calculated by subtracting the date of the interview from the participant's birth date.

Religious importance. Participants were instructed to rank how important religion is to them on a 5-point Likert scale of (1) *strongly agree* to (5) *strongly disagree*. Items were reverse coded so that higher scores equate higher religious importance.

Depressive symptoms. Depressive symptoms were measured by using an 18-item version of the CES-D (Radloff, 1977). Response options for the questions were (0) *never or rarely*, (1) *sometimes*, (2) *a lot of the time*, and (3) *most of the time or all of the time*. Four positively worded questions were reverse coded. Scores were summed and the mean was taken for the overall scores. Scores range from 0 to 3; higher scores equated more depressive symptoms $\alpha = .86$.

Self-esteem. Self-esteem was measured by six items (i.e., “you have a lot of good qualities”; “you feel socially accepted”). Participants were asked to respond on a 5-point Likert scale of (1) *strongly agree* to (5) *strongly disagree*. Response options were reverse coded, so higher scores equated higher self-esteem. There was strong reliability of the scale $\alpha = .82$. Since self-esteem and sexual guilt are highly correlated self-esteem was only used to predict pleasure expectancies.

Sexual status. Participants were asked to report whether they had ever had vaginal sexual intercourse. Response options were yes, no, and don't know. Similar to previous work, participants who selected don't know were included in the yes category (Beatty et al., 1998).

Perceived pubertal timing. Participants were asked "how advanced is your physical development compared to other girls your age?" Response options were (1) look younger than most, (2) look younger than some, (3) I look about average, (4) look older than some, and (5) *I look older than most*. Two dummy variables were created: look younger than peers and looks older than peers.

Weight perception. Participants were asked to report on their perceived body weight. Response options were on a 5-point Likert scale of (1) *very underweight* to (5) *very overweight*.

Father's non-residency. A dummy variable was created for participants whose father did not live with them as a proxy measure for father's involvement and influence.

Outcome variables

Pleasure expectancies

Participants were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale from (1) *strongly agree* to (5) *strongly disagree* with "If you had sexual intercourse it would give you a great deal of physical pleasure." Items were reverse coded so higher scores equated higher expectations of physical pleasure. Participants could also select "don't know" as a response option. Participants who selected don't know were combined with the neither agree or disagree (3) response option.

Sexual guilt

Participants were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale from (1) *strongly agree* to (5) *strongly disagree* with "If you had sexual intercourse you would feel guilt." Items were reverse coded so higher scores meant higher sexual guilt. Participants could also select don't know as a response option. Participants that selected don't know were combined with the neither agree or disagree (3) response option. Add Health did not provide a definition of sexual intercourse for this question.

Age of sexual debut

At Wave III, participants were asked "how old were you the first time you had vaginal intercourse?"

Analysis

For the following analyses, grand sample weights and subpopulation survey weights were used per the Add Health guidelines data analysis (Chen, 2014). To address research questions 1 and 2, linear regressions were conducted to examine relationships between individual and contextual factors and pleasure expectancies and sexual guilt by sexual status, respectively. Previous research using Add Health data has shown differences in sexual guilt and pleasure expectancies by students who were sexually active versus those who were not (Pearson, 2018). To account for these differences analyses were run two ways: (a) by sexual status, and (b) as one combined

sample. Differences in the independent and outcome variables frequencies were examined by sexual status, and significance was measured using chi-square analyses and t-tests. Finally, to address research question 3, a linear regression was conducted to examine if pleasure expectancies and sexual guilt predicted their age of sexual debut when controlling for significant characteristics from research questions 1 and 2. Analyses for research question 1 and 2 are both cross-sectional and research question 3 is longitudinal. Data were analyzed using STATA version 16.

Results

Descriptive results

Demographic characteristics and frequencies on outcome variables by sexual status are summarized in Table 1. The mean age of the participants at Wave 1 was 16.4 years (range: 15–21). Overall, participants reported low depressive symptoms and high self-esteem. Over 50% of participants reported not having a residential father and only 4.2% of participants reported not having a residential mother. Participants were more likely to perceive that they looked older than their peers more than younger (42.3% of those who were sexually active; 32.2% who are not sexually active). Approximately 58.2% of participants had engaged in sexual intercourse at Wave I. Participants who were sexually active had lower feelings of sexual guilt ($p < .001$) and higher expectations of pleasurable sex ($p < .001$), compared to participants who were not sexually active. Sexually active participants were also more likely to perceive themselves as being overweight ($p = .007$), be less religious ($p = .015$), and have more depressive symptoms ($p = .002$); however, their overall depressive symptoms were still low ($M = .77$; $SD = .02$).

Multivariate results

Pleasure expectancies

For participants who were sexually active, there was only one significant association between individual and contextual factors and pleasure expectancies when controlling for other factors in the model (see Table 2). Participants who were sexually active were significantly less likely to perceive sex to be pleasurable if they did not have a residential father ($p = .02$).

A sensitivity analysis was conducted which combined the entire sample in one model with sexual status as a predictor variable. The results of the full model showed that age ($b = .06$, $p = .023$), religious importance ($b = .04$, $p = .045$), and not having a residential father ($b = .13$, $p = .049$) were significant predictors of pleasure expectancies. Older participants, those that were less religious, and those who had a residential father were more likely to have higher pleasure expectancies.

Table 1. Weighted descriptive statistics and outcome frequencies by sexual status ($N = 1426$).

	Sexually active ($N = 831$) Proportion or $M \pm SD$	Not sexually active ($N = 595$) Proportion or $M \pm SD$	Chi-square/ t -test p -Value
Depression	.77 \pm .02	64 \pm .02	.002*
Self-esteem	4.10 \pm .03	4.15 \pm .04	.252
Religious Importance			.015*
Not important	.0897	.134	
Fairly unimportant	.0089	.0099	
Fairly important	.2266	.1487	
Very important	.6749	.7074	
Weight Perception			.007*
Underweight	.1447	.1380	
About the right weight	.4468	.4789	
Overweight	.4084	.3832	
Pubertal Timing			
Looks older than peers	.4234	.3212	.058
Looks younger than peers	.2475	.3078	.07
No Residential Dad	.5969	.517	.090
<i>Dependent Variables</i>			
Sexual Guilt			<.001*
Strongly disagree	.1268	.0543	
Disagree	.3547	.1384	
Neutral	.2676	.2469	
Agree	.1795	.2793	
Strongly agree	.0714	.2811	
Expected Sex to be Pleasurable			<.001*
Strongly disagree	.0686	.1437	
Disagree	.1816	.1841	
Neutral	.4251	.4449	
Agree	.245	.1861	
Strongly agree	.0796	.0412	

Table 2. Weighted linear regression of individual characteristics predicting pleasure expectancies by sexual status.

	Sexually active (<i>N</i> = 819)			Not sexually active (<i>N</i> = 580)		
	Coefficient	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i> -Value	Coefficient	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i> -Value
Age	.05	.08	.56	.07	.10	.51
Depression	-.18	.44	.71	-.09	.19	.67
Self-esteem	-.16	.15	.35	-.14	.16	.47
Religious importance	.004	.05	.93	-.09	.11	.47
Weight perception	.06	.04	.28	-.09	.08	.34
Looks younger	-.07	.15	.65	-.19	.32	.60
Looks older	.18	.14	.30	.01	.02	.56
Father's non-residency	-.11*	.02	.02*	.18-	.09	.15
<i>R</i> ²	.03			.03		

** *p* < .01; * *p* < .05; *SE*: standard error.

Table 3. Weighted linear regression of individual characteristics predicting sexual guilt by sexual status.

	Sexually active (<i>N</i> = 820)			Not sexually active (<i>N</i> = 582)		
	Coefficient	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i> -Value	Coefficient	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i> -Value
Age	-.08	.03	.08	-.07	.03	.12
Depression	.09	.23	.73	.15	.53	.80
Self-esteem	-.12	.20	.58	.12	.32	.72
Religious importance	.10	.02	.03*	.06	.08	.50
Weight perception	.19	.06	.049*	.04	.31	.90
Looks younger	.18	.19	.40	-.02	.14	.91
Looks older	-.09	.06	.24	-.02	.12	.88
Father's non-residency	-.35	.09	.02*	-.14	.04	.05
<i>R</i> ²	.06			.02		

** *p* < .01; * *p* < .05; *SE*: standard error.

Sexual guilt

There were significant associations between individual and contextual factors and sexual guilt (see Table 3). Among participants who were sexually active, higher levels of religious importance were associated with more feelings of sexual guilt ($p = .03$). Sexually active participants who reported looking younger ($p = .049$) or having a residential dad ($p = .02$) also reported more feelings of sexual guilt.

Among participants who were not sexually active, those who reported having a residential father reported more feelings of sexual guilt (marginally significant, $p = .05$).

Sensitivity analyses were conducted with all participants in one model and with sexual status as a predictor variable. The results of this model showed that religious importance ($\beta = .04, p = .007$), not having a residential dad ($\beta = .26, p = .007$), and sexual status ($\beta = .85, p = .02$) were significantly associated with sexual guilt. Participants who were more religious, had a residential father, and were not sexually active were more likely to report more feelings of sexual guilt.

Table 4. Weighted linear regression of sexual guilt and pleasure expectancies in adolescence predicting age of sexual debut ($N = 982$).

	Coefficient	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i> -Value
Sexual guilt	.29	.27	.36
Pleasure expectancies	-.25	.10	.08
Religious importance	.19	.09	.006**
Looks younger	.14	.11	.31
Looks older	-.64	.06	.003**
Father's non-residency	-.10	.19	.65
R ²	.09		

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; *SE*: standard error.

Age of sexual debut

Finally, results of the linear regression predicting age of sexual debut (as reported in Wave III) showed that sexual guilt and pleasure expectancies in adolescence was not significantly correlated with age of sexual debut when controlling for significant individual characteristics found in research questions 1 and 2. However, participants who reported looking older had sex at significantly younger ages ($p = .003$) and those who were more religious had sex at later ages ($p = .006$; see Table 4).

Discussion

This study examined pleasure expectancies, sexual guilt, and sexual debut among Black female adolescents. The results highlight that sexual status, religious importance, perceived pubertal timing, and father's residency are associated with Black female adolescents' pleasure expectancies and feeling of sexual guilt.

Absence of pleasure

Overall, participants reported high sexual guilt and had low expectations of pleasure. These findings could be linked to the dominant narrative in the current society of sex being focused on male pleasure (Brown et al., 2018; Fahs, 2014). In this sample, more Black female adolescents selected the neutral category for pleasure expectancies compared to sexual guilt, which could mean that they are not able to conceptualize sexual pleasure in a way that is meaningful during adolescence. There has been one qualitative study exploring definitions of sexual pleasure among Black emerging adults (ages 18–24) (Hargons et al., 2018); however, the same has not been explored among adolescent samples. Hargons and colleagues (2018) found Black emerging adult women attributed their experiences of sexual pleasure during sexual intercourse to male performance and sexual knowledge. Women did not mention that they were able to be in charge of their own pleasure; however, they noted that their comfort with their partner and their body enhanced their sexual experiences. Black women also noted that while Black men expected pleasure during sexual intercourse it was only a “hope” for them, but as their relationship length increased their expectations of pleasure also increased (Hargons et al., 2018). Additional qualitative work is needed around Black female adolescents’ pleasure expectancies to understand how they define sexual pleasure, type of messages they receive around sexual pleasure and which socializing agents (i.e., parents, peers, media, society) have the largest influence on their expectations of sexual pleasure.

During the time of Wave I data collection, funding streams increased to support federal funding for abstinence-only education (Fine & McClelland, 2006). As a result, Black female adolescents in this study may have received abstinence only sexuality education rooted in sexual shame, that neglected to highlight the positive aspects of sex including pleasure, desire, and intimacy (Koepsel, 2016; Lamb et al., 2013). Over the last 25 years, there have been advances in sexuality education from strictly abstinence-only to comprehensive and abstinence plus, however pleasure-informed sexuality education is still missing. In 2019, The World Association of Sexual Health declared that “sexual pleasure [should] be integrated into education, health promotion, and service delivery ... ” (para. 7). Thus, sexuality education curricula should focus on advancing Black female adolescents’ expectations of sexual pleasure to promote healthy sexual development using an intimate justice framework which includes addressing psychological, environmental, and social barriers to pleasure (Threadcraft, 2016).

Religious influences on sexual development

Black female adolescents who reported higher religious importance were significantly more likely to feel sexual guilt, have low expectations of sexual pleasure, and less likely to be sexually active. This suggests that religiosity may teach Black female adolescents to feel shame if they have sexual intercourse; thus, religious importance may delay sexual debut. However, religious importance was not significantly associated with sexual guilt for women who were not sexually active, despite reporting higher levels of religious importance than those who were sexually active. Although the delay in sexual debut may be seen as a positive, we cannot ignore how Black female adolescents may be more likely to feel guilt, while being less likely to have pleasurable experiences and advocate for their pleasure once they decide to have sex. Sexual guilt can result in negative emotional, mental, and physical health outcomes throughout their lifetime. It is critical to explore other avenues of delaying sexual debut while reducing Black

female adolescents' feelings of sexual guilt and increasing their self-confidence to advocate for their pleasure.

Often Black women who are religious face barriers (e.g., guilt, shame, fear of judgment) to exploring and obtaining sexual pleasure (e.g., Christianity has linked premarital sex to sin and as morally wrong) (Harris-Perry, 2011; Moultrie, 2017). Religiosity has been linked to respectability politics, which were created to challenge stereotypes of Black women as immoral and sexually deviant by promoting expectations to behave “respectably” in order to preserve their self-image and dignity, along with racial pride in Black women (French, 2013). Some religions teach that women should stick to their values and demonstrate self-respect by not having sex (Higginbotham, 1993). Intimate justice requires that no one's intimate capacities be unduly constrained and that Black women live within an environment that supports them to exercise their intimate capacities (Threadcraft, 2016). Although Black women may be religious this environment could also hinder their ability to express their deepest intimacies, desires, and lower their expectations of pleasure, creating a “culture of silence” for Black female adolescents due to feelings of uncomfortableness and shame with discussing sex and sexual desires (Crooks et al., 2019). Black churches are slowly becoming open and supportive of sexual health programming, yet often still focus on abstinence-only sexual health promotion (Powell et al., 2017). Churches present an unique setting for adolescent sexual health promotion if the teachings are comprehensive and nonjudgmental. Black women sexuality educators should be hired to teach church-based sexuality education in order to dismantle harmful stereotypes that religious doctrines can insinuate about sexuality as well as combat harmful stereotypes that are reinforced in evidenced-based curricula and interventions (Flowers, 2018).

Moving “fast” to sexual debut without feelings of guilt

In this study, perceived pubertal development was significantly associated with sexual debut. Black female adolescents who perceived that they looked older than their peers were more likely to have sex at earlier ages than those who did not. Black female adolescents who are “early bloomers” are typically labeled as “fast” and promiscuous by society which in turn increases their likelihood of being hypersexualized (Crooks et al., 2019; Stevenson, 2012). Additionally, research has shown that some older Black women may label younger Black women as “fast” to protect them from engaging in sexual risk behaviors and avoid stereotypes from others (Crooks et al., 2019). However, for some Black female adolescents being labeled “fast” only encouraged them to participate in sexual intercourse (Crooks et al., 2019). Early bloomers may receive unwanted sexual attention or pressure from older male partners to engage in sexual intercourse at earlier ages (Crooks et al., 2019) and may be prone to being sexually stereotyped, experiencing premature sexualization and objectification. Girls may internalize sexual stereotypes such as being “fast” and participate in more sexual risk behaviors as a result (Townsend et al., 2010; Stephens & Phillips, 2003).

Black female adolescents often struggle with expressing their sexual desire and face judgment from their peers when they act on their desire, especially those who are more developed than their peers (Lamb et al., 2016). However, in this study, Black women who looked younger were more likely to anticipate feelings of sexual guilt than those who looked older. Black female adolescents have often embraced looking older or developing faster than their counterparts, including embracing their curves (Frisby, 2004; Hesse-Biber et al., 2004), but also feel anxious about how society might read their bodies and unwanted sexual attention (Lamb et

al., 2016). Thus, Black female adolescents who perceive that they look younger than their peers (“late bloomers”) possibly feel more guilt because they may acknowledge how their “early bloomer” peers are treated by society for engaging in sexual behaviors. More research is needed to understand the influence of perceived pubertal development in the sexual socialization process for Black female adolescents (Stevenson, 2012) as well as how to protect adolescent women from the deleterious effects of sexualization and objectification (American Psychological Association, 2008).

The role of Black fathers in sexual development

Finally, father’s residency was significantly associated with expectations of both pleasure and sexual guilt. Having a residential father resulted in higher expectations of pleasure and sexual guilt. This study aligns with previous research which shows that Black fathers are just as important as Black mothers and female caregivers in the sexual socialization process for Black female adolescents (Leath et al., 2020). Black female adolescents who have residential fathers report being closer to their fathers and have increased communication compared to those with nonresidential father (Booth et al., 2010; Cryer-Coupet et al., 2020; King, 2006). Having a residential father potentially increases the likelihood of father-daughter sexual communication in which they may learn that they should wait until marriage to have sex, “avoid boys,” “cover up” (Leath et al., 2020), thus developing an anticipation of sexual guilt if they engage in sexual intercourse. When Black fathers convey their attitudes and beliefs regarding sexual behaviors to their daughters these messages influence their sexual beliefs and experiences (Dittus et al., 1997; Stephens & Few, 2007) and the conversation tends to focus on the father’s attitudes and thoughts toward teenagers who have sex, the benefits of abstinence, and promoting societal and cultural values (Kapungu et al., 2010; Leath et al., 2020; Sneed et al., 2013). Expectations of modesty, adhering to respectability politics do not foster sexual exploration or support the development of body positive beliefs (Leath et al., 2020), which is evident in results on the relationship between father’s residency and pleasure expectancies.

Black female adolescents who had residential fathers had significantly higher pleasure expectancies. Not having a residential father may also shift the type of messages that Black female adolescents receive from their mothers, focusing less on pleasure and using fear tactics to keep them from engaging in sexual intercourse to prevent unintended pregnancy. Sexual health programs should include fathers to foster conversations with their daughters about sexual health. Currently most sexual health programs target Black mothers and daughters, which insinuates that solely mothers are responsible for their daughter’s sexual health (Peterson, 2006). To date limited attention has been given to fathers, particular in research focused on Black female adolescents, which hinders the development of empirically-based prevention and interventions (Peterson, 2006). Curricula could focus on making parents of all genders more comfortable with discussing the positive aspects of sexuality, validating their daughter’s sexual thoughts and feelings, and emphasizing sexual pleasure as natural and healthy (Harden, 2014; Robinson et al., 2002; Saliars et al., 2017). Research has shown that communicating the positive aspects of sexuality is associated with positive attitudes (e.g., less sexual guilt) toward sex initiation, higher self-efficacy for communication about sex, open communication, and heightened condom-use self-efficacy (Ritchwood et al., 2017). Time should be devoted to teaching parents and other caregivers how to communicate accurate information to help better support the healthy sexual development of Black female adolescents.

Limitations

These results should be contextualized within the specifics of the study design. First, despite the measure of pleasure expectancies being included in a large national survey for adolescents, the measure prompted participants to only think about pleasure within the context of intercourse defined by Add Health as heterosexual vaginal sex. There are many sexual behaviors that could be pleasurable for participants other than vaginal sex (especially women) (Herbenick et al., 2018). This heteronormative focus makes generalization to sexual minority women impossible. This also limits our understanding of sexual guilt to only vaginal sex. Future research needs to explore sexual guilt as it relates to a more comprehensive set of sexual behaviors (Scroggs et al., 2019). This study was also limited to cisgender female adolescents, thus more research is needed to focus on the sexual experiences of transgender adolescents as well as non-binary femmes. Second, only participants ages 15 and older received sex-related questions, so the results of this study are limited to this age group.

Third, the Add Health study includes a question about father closeness; however, this question was not asked of participants who did not have residential fathers. Although father's residency is not an indicator of father's involvement, residency is still important based on the complex relationship between residency and sexual development. Focusing on father's involvement assumed that participants have heterosexual parents. Black female adolescents' closeness with their fathers as well as father involvement and sexual communication, regardless of residential status, should be measured in future research to provide a clearer picture of the specific father-daughter processes that influence pleasure expectancies and sexual guilt. During data collection back in 1994 participants were not asked about their family structure (i.e., two mothers, two fathers, etc.). It is likely that many adolescents, even back then, grew up with non-heterosexual parents. It is important to take a look at more diverse family structures to understand how parental closeness affects Black adolescents' expectations of pleasure and feelings of sexual guilt. Because this study was limited to parents, the role of extended family, community members, and fictive kin should be explored in future studies because they have a large influence of Black adolescent development and socialization (Taylor et al., 2013).

Fourth, some of the linear regression models, specifically those predicting pleasure expectancies, had small effect sizes ($R^2 = .02-.06$), which means there are other factors influencing their expectancies. We did not control for factors such as peers' pleasure expectancies and sexual guilt nor did we control for sexual violence due to the way it was measured. In this Wave of data collection only participants who reported having vaginal intercourse were asked if they had been sexually abused. It's likely that more participants had experienced sexual violence but did not receive the question because they did not count it as vaginal sex. Finally, Wave I was collected 25 years ago however, this is still, to our knowledge, the only study to solely focus on Black female adolescents' pleasure expectancies. The participants in our study are currently an average age of 40 years old, thus examining the development trajectory of pleasure expectancies and guilt is needed to see how feelings in early adolescence affect their experiences in adulthood.

Future directions

This work has implications for future research and sexuality education. More qualitative research is needed to explore pleasure expectancies and the definitions of pleasure among Black female adolescents. To move the field of sexuality education forward we need a more comprehensive approach to adolescent sexual health research and programming especially among marginalized groups such as Black female adolescents (Harden, 2014; Hargons et al., 2018; Morgan, 2015; Townes et al., 2021). This includes moving beyond deficit-based approaches to those that are sex positive and bring attention to pleasure and the ways Black female adolescents expect sexual pleasure or feel sexual guilt in the face of economic, social, cultural, political, and structural issues (Gruskin & Kismodi, 2020). We also need sexuality education curricula that is taught by sexuality educators representative of the population that is being served to remove all harmful stereotypes and make the programs more relevant and intersectional (Flowers, 2018). Having sexuality educators who are Black women will help ensure that Black female adolescents receive sexuality education that is cultural relevant, and takes into account historical factors that shape Black women's sexual socialization throughout their lifespan. Finally, we need to expand the current curricula by creating programs that are inclusive of fathers as well as programs that are taught in nontraditional settings such as churches.

Conclusion

By using an intimate justice framework this study found that perceived pubertal timing, fathers' residency, and religious importance influence sexual guilt, pleasure expectancies, and age of sexual debut for Black female adolescents. This study provides implications for sexuality educators and curricula developers to create culturally-relevant, family-oriented programming for Black female adolescents. Utilizing an intimate justice framework is necessary to move Black adolescent sexology from a deficit-based, risk reduction approach to one that is pleasure-inclusive and sex positive.

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