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## Teaching Human Sexuality in the Social Studies Classroom

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Teaching Human Sexuality in the Social Studies classroom is not an easy task. I suppose it is not an easy task in any classroom. However, it is something that is certainly a must, with the increase of teen-age pregnancies. Some studies state that there is not an increase in teen-age pregnancy. Well, perhaps we are becoming more aware of it. Whatever the case, there is a need for adolescents to understand the impact of sexual intercourse at an early age.

The argument for teaching Human Sexuality in the Social Studies classroom is that the teen-age mother with the young child has (as I see it) become a social problem. That is to say that they (mother and child) go against what is still the norm. Sex at an early age also has an impact on both male and female whether there is a pregnancy involved or not. This I will go into later. If the female does become pregnant, we have an impact on society and a social problem:

1. There is a breakdown of the family structure, since many young mothers do not marry the fathers of their baby/babies.
2. The mother has to accept welfare funds in order to support herself and her child, thus, putting an additional strain on the economy.
3. Most young mothers are unable to better their status, they are on welfare and are unable to do much else.
4. The child/children do not receive a positive image of males or of relationships, because, many times the mother is “turned off” with men and relationships.

All of this happens in a society where hard-work, marriage and the ideal family (which consists of both mother and father) are the norm. This is not to say that *all* inner-city adolescent girls engage in sexual intercourse and become pregnant before what is considered “of age.” But, there are quite a few who do, and for them life becomes a vicious cycle of regulation.

This unit is designed to aid the Social Studies teacher to teach Human Sexuality to inner-city high school

freshmen. It is important to note that I will speak generally, because within the inner-city culture there are sub-cultures which vary in values and attitudes and it's important for the teacher to realize that.

It is also important for the teacher to realize that his/her own cultural values may differ from those of the students, and to make sure that cultural values are not infringed on others by either teacher or student. But, rather an understanding of the difference. Cultures are indeed, a way of life and the needs of that way of life may vary depending on what is necessary to survive.

This unit does not have to be confined to ninth grade students, perhaps the middle schools may find it useful as well.

## **OBJECTIVES**

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### ***The Adolescent and Sexuality***

The adolescent is an individual who is complex, changing, unsure and frightened. The most important thing to him/her is what others think, say and believe—about them. Both boys and girls are under a tremendous amount of pressure. They do not want to be left out or unpopular. For them it is horrible to be considered, “young,” “slow,” or “corny.” It is far more important to be “in” or “cool.” The result is, then, going along with the crowd, trying to fit into molds that may or may not exist. But, who wants to be different? Being different implies being all that is negative. Both boys and girls who do not get into the swing of things tend to be ostracized sometimes and unpopular. <sup>1</sup>

Therefore it is safe to assume that adolescents become involved in things for which they are not quite ready, this, for the sake of their own social well-being.

For all of their “sophisticated” ways, adolescents are naive about issues pertaining to sex and sexuality, as well as their own bodies. Therefore, two adolescents engaging in sexual intercourse without being aware of their own bodies may end up asking “Is that all?” And, may not grow into healthy functioning adults sexually. This may be so because they believe that first time is the way it's always supposed to be.

There are a myriad of reasons for why adolescents initially engage in sexual encourage and the prime reason is, of course, peer pressure.

The peer pressure is on both boys and girls. For some reason I think that it has always been thought that only girls were under pressure, but, that is not so. Boys are under pressure from their male friends to prove his manhood or else he may be considered “strange.” They are also under the pressure of their fathers who do not want their sons to turn out to be a “sissy.” This may not be done outright, however, there is an understanding that is unspoken that it's all right for boys and not for girls. Some fathers are even the first ones to initiate their sons into sex.

Boys are also pressured by girls. Girls tend to think that the boy will naturally want to have sex and therefore expects it of him, and they think boys know what to do. <sup>2</sup> It becomes a matter of “Well, when is he going to ask me?”

The girl is under pressure from her parents too, but of a different sort—all she hears is, “You’d better not end up getting pregnant” over and over. Would it be too simplistic to perhaps suggest that she may get pregnant to see what would happen? She’s also pressured by her female peers to lose her virginity, thus, become a woman. So, in order to become popular with both males and females, she must give in and accept her fate. Not only is having sexual intercourse a way to prove her womanhood, but, it’s also a way for her to hold on to a boy. Her friends may tell her, “You won’t hold him if you don’t do it,” or “If you don’t, someone will, and you’ll lose him.”

This type of rationale for having sex becomes a means to an end; popularity, saving face and holding on to someone. This could be the beginning of things to come. That is, sex becomes a tool.

After all of the pressure, what if the girl gets pregnant? This is additional pressure. The girl has the baby and the boy who is the father (biologically) has no active role in the raising and caring of the child, because the two may not stay together. Both of them losing something that would be special, had they waited.

The reasons why teen-age girls get pregnant are as varied as the reasons why they have intercourse. Thus, this is not the issue for this unit, but, rather giving information to them before they get started.

What does it mean to be a sexual being? This is one of the questions that the teacher may ask the students. Puberty is a stage where certain physical and emotional changes that may not be understood by the adolescent, but is necessary to the growth process and becoming an adult. Some of the changes may be frightening and confusing for the adolescent, however, as long as they understand that they are not alone, it may very well help them to cope. The teacher may in fact have to play the role of confidante.

As sexual beings they may find themselves attracted to the opposite sex, that too is a part of growing and everyone grows at a different pace. So, if they are not yet feeling attracted to the opposite sex, that is fine too.

### ***Masturbation and Homosexuality***

While the adolescent may find themselves leaning towards the opposite sex, others may find that they are attracted to members of their own sex. This may pass and it may not. It may also cause some feelings of anxiety for the adolescent. One of the biggest fears that the adolescent has is the fear of being homosexual, especially for the boys. So, while they may not feel attracted yet to the opposite sex, they may try to force themselves into sex to prove to themselves that they aren’t homosexual.

The students may even have lots of questions pertaining to homosexuality, for, while they are repulsed by it they also find it fascinating. However, they do not want anyone else to know that they are interested. They want to know if they have the “symptoms.” Homosexuality means to them something that is, “strange,” “different,” and “queer.” I think it is important for adolescents to know that firstly homosexuals are people, human beings, who have a preference for members of their own sex. I have heard some students say that they are afraid of them and some even call them names.

It’s necessary for students to know that people should not be persecuted because of their sexual preferences, just as they shouldn’t be persecuted because of skin color or religion.

Along with the fear of being homosexual, there is also a fear of masturbation. Both of these fears stem from myths which are particularly troubling to adolescents. They are myths (based on attitudes, not facts)—and should be dispelled.

Children discover themselves sexually at a very early age, although they are unaware of what they are doing. It is not until they are older that they learn there is something forbidden about touching themselves. It is not until someone screams, "Don't do that!" that they learn they should never ever touch themselves, if they do, a whole host of ill fate will fall upon them from "blindness" to "insanity."

Except, they do remember the comforting feeling and may start to do it again, only this time there is an accompaniment of guilt and shame and disgust. <sup>3</sup> The problem is not with the masturbating but with the anxieties. The adolescent feels as if he/she may be the only one in the world who masturbates and that something is wrong with them. While in some cultures boys may masturbate together in fun, in others it just isn't done; in some cultures, masturbating is considered an activity for those who "can't get anything else" and have to masturbate as a last resort. Many teen-age girls do not examine their vaginas, because to touch themselves is considered "nasty."

While the inner-city boy or girl may masturbate he/she will never admit it (not even to themselves, if that's possible). If the adolescent does not know his/her own body, how do they know what they like or dislike during sexual intercourse?

Students should know that first of all; people do masturbate, they may range from infants to senior citizens in age, and, that they may be single or married couples. They should also understand that people masturbate for various reasons. Masturbation may be another form of sex or even in the place of sexual intercourse.

The myths surrounding masturbation need to be dispelled because of the fact that the adolescent goes through so much turmoil. The teacher may find that students are not too willing to discuss masturbation in the classroom, someone may think they are too interested in it. Kelman and Saxon suggest in their textbook, *Modern Human Sexuality* that the teacher keep a Question Box somewhere in the room so that students may ask questions anonymously. The teacher can then read the question and answer it in front of the entire class.

It's necessary to point out here that the teacher must be objective in his/her approach to topics concerning sexuality. The teacher is not in the position to tell students whether or not to have sexual intercourse, masturbate or become homosexual, but, to give an *objective* lesson of the subject. Therefore, personal values and attitudes must not interfere.

### ***Masculine/Feminine Behavior***

Adolescents in the inner-city have strong feelings about what is masculine and what is feminine. Anything that goes against their set norms are automatically labeled and looked down upon.

I think it is important to include this objective because adolescents who try to fit into molds may end up feeling frustrated. The question again becomes, "What's wrong with me?" Suppose an adolescent male somehow becomes really interested in dance. He may not feel that he can pursue a career in dance because it is not masculine. What will his parents say? Especially his father. Girls who are aggressive and ambitious are considered "domineering," "immasculating" and they "never marry." Mothers, fathers and adolescents themselves promote this kind of thinking and give in to it.

It has only been very recently that girls were able to play competitive sports and win scholarships. Sports are fine, somehow, but, after that the girls must fall in place, back in line. Boys should play basketball and football. Girls cannot become doctors or do anything that is not seemingly female, same for boys.

What this does, I feel, is restrict personality development and leaves less choices for the adolescent because they have set lines which they cannot cross.

The students should know that many women and men are doing things they enjoy in their leisure time and on their job (an example would be Rosey Grier who does needlepoint for a hobby) rather than those things which have been set up for them based on their gender. Many women are doing jobs that were previously considered masculine and vice versa.

The point to get across is that roles are for men and women can be interchangeable, so that we can all develop into happy, healthy adults who know what we want to do. It might be pointed out to students that in other cultures the sex roles may differ and in fact may be reversed.

Male students once told me that they thought there would be too much pressure on a female surgeon. However, they were hard put to tell me what kind of pressure. Many female students felt they could never let their daughters play football, because they could get hurt. What about their sons? "Well," they replied, "they're supposed to be rough."

Sex roles are not limited to careers or leisure time activity, but to sex as well. An example of this is that traditionally women were not supposed to enjoy sex. If a woman did enjoy sex then certainly she was not the woman to marry. For the woman's part if she enjoyed it she usually felt guilty. <sup>4</sup> And, she has lowered herself in the eyes of the man. Marilyn French, in her book, *The Women's Room* showed an example of this when a newly married woman, having sex for the first time enjoyed it. Her husband discovering this never touches her again. Sex for the woman is for procreation, not recreation.

Many female students look down on their female counterparts who like sex, thus, calling them names such as "nasty" or a "whore."

## ***PROCEDURES***

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### ***Lesson I***

The following words should be placed on the blackboard:

adolescence sexual intercourse

puberty      masturbation

sexuality      homosexual

After the students have looked at the words, the question should then be asked:

What do these words mean?

Responses should be placed on the board, the teacher should then put the correct definition on the blackboard.

Questions that should be asked:

1. How old should two people be before engaging in sexual intercourse? Why?
2. Who should be responsible for birth control, should two people decide to have intercourse? Why?
3. Is it possible for a girl to become pregnant the first time that she has sexual intercourse?
4. What are some myths about masturbation?
5. What are some problems adolescents face?
6. What happens during puberty?
7. What is a homosexual?
8. What changes happen during puberty?
9. Should a person be in love before engaging in sexual intercourse? Why? Why not?
10. What do you think it means to be sexual?

Students should answer these questions on paper so that the teacher can find out what they do and do not know and what their attitudes are.

Discussion of the question should follow in class so that myths are cleared.

If students cannot answer a question they should leave it blank.

## ***Lesson II***

The teacher should bring in some articles from the newspaper from the "Ask Beth" column. The answers should not be given to the students.

Have students write answers to the adolescents as if they were Beth. After they have finished, discussion and sharing of the answers should take place.

Next the students should write questions of their own of "make-believe" or real problems and then answer them. This will allow students to look at the problems they may have through another point of view, and come up with some answers.

This next activity may be assigned as homework if there is not enough time left in class.

## ***Writing Case Studies***

Have students write a case study in which two adolescents (male and female) began involved with one another. Students should make the decision of whether or not the two become intimate sexually. If they do,

then the students should include what happens to the two. Who raises the child? (If the girl becomes pregnant and has it.) What alternatives are there to having the baby once the girl discovers she is pregnant? How will the boy feel? How does the girl feel? How did they come to the decisions that they did?

This is just an example of what kind can be included. The object is to try to have students understand the decisions that have to be made in regard to dating and the consequences once those decisions are made.

### **Activity :**

#### *Play Writing*

Have students develop their case studies into a play. Divide the parts among the students. (This lesson may take up to three days depending upon how long the teacher may want it to last.) In the play, the girl should become pregnant so that the students can see what happens to two young people who have been thrust into a situation they have given no thought too.

The teacher may want to put the play on for other Social Studies classes.

### **Lesson III**

The teacher should put the following on the board:

*Behaviors Masculine      Feminine*

Have students name as many behaviors as they can that they think are masculine or feminine.

Questions should be:

1. Why are these behaviors masculine or feminine?
2. How do we know?
3. What would happen if we stepped outside the roles that are set up for us?
4. What is role?

Discussion should follow. The teacher should then give an example of men or women who may not follow the set patterns, i.e., female bus and truck drivers, male ballet dancers, male cooks and hair stylists, women lawyers and doctors, etc.

Have students research other cultures where the sex roles may differ from those in our country and share it with the class.

This is to help give them a different viewpoint of life in America as well as other cultures, whether sex roles are different, and in America, where they are changing.

### **Activity :**

Students may want to make a collage of pictures from magazines that show men and women doing other types of jobs than we would normally think of them doing (not just jobs, but leisure time activity as well).

### **Other Activities**

1. Another activity may include having students cut magazine pictures, watching commercials on television. This should be done to show how television and the rest of the media influences us by using sex. (An example would be the daytime Soap Operas, fashion magazines, etc.)
2. *Book Reports* —Students may do book reports on books about adolescents who may have problems. They may want to include what they would have done if they were in the place of the boy or girl they read about.

### **Other Resources**

Newspapers

Magazines

Planned Parenthood has a list of films that can be viewed and used for the classroom.

## **Notes**

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1. Luella Cole, *Psychology of Adolescence* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1965), p. 75.
2. Robert Sorenson, *Adolescent Sexuality in Contemporary America* (New York: World Publishing, 1973), p. 156.
3. *Psychology of Adolescents*
4. Helena Wright, *Sex and Society* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), p. 71.



## Student Bibliography

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Burgess-Kohn, Jane. *Straight Talk About Love and Sex* . Beacon Press, Boston, 1979.

A book for adolescents that help answer some of their questions.

Comfort, Alex and Jane. *The Facts of Love* . Crown Publishers, Inc., N.Y., 1979.

A good book for teen-agers that covers sexuality, dating, decisions and other problems.

Gilbert, Sara. *Feeling Good* . Four Winds Press, N.Y., 1978.

A book for teens which deals with sexuality.

Johnson, Corinne, Benson and Eric, W. *Love and Sex and Growing Up* . J. B. Lippincott Co., Philadelphia, 1970.

Describes the process of human reproduction as well as sexuality.

Johnson, Eric, W. *Love and Sex in Plain Language* . J. B. Lippincott, N.Y., 1967.

A guide to sex education.

Johnson, Eric, W. *Sex-Telling It Straight* . J. B. Lippincott Co., Philadelphia, 1970.

For boys and girls a simple book about sex.

The following books are all fiction and they deal with the problems of being an adolescent and trying to grow up. Students may want to do book reports on them.

Arundel, Honor. *A Family Failing* . Thomas Nelson, Inc., N.Y., 1972.

Ferris, Helen, ed. *Girls, Girls, Girls* . Franklin Watts, Inc., N.Y., 1956.

Graber, Richard. *Pay Your Respects* . Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., N.Y., 1979.

Holland, Isabelle. *The Man Without a Face* . J. B. Lippincott Co., Philadelphia, 1972.

O'Neal, Zibby. *The Language of Goldfish* . Viking Press, N.Y., 1980.

## Bibliography for the Teacher

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Clark, Kenneth B. *Dark Ghetto* . New York: Harper and Row Publishers. 1965. A book which discusses the inner-city and its inhabitants.

Brown. Claude. *Manchild in the Promised Land* . New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1965.

An autobiographical depiction of a boy becoming a man in Harlem.

Brown, Thomas. E. Sex Education and Life in the Negro Ghetto. *Pastorl Psychology* . Vol. 19. 1968.

Discusses how sex education and is learned in the inner-city family.

Cole, Luella. *Psychology of Adolescence* . New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston. Inc., 1965.

Gives a good account of adolescent sexuality from peer pressures to masturbation.

Kesterbaum, Clarice. Current Sexual Attitudes, Societal Pressure and the Middle Class Adolescent Girl. *Adolescent Psychiatry* . Vol. III, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

For comparison to the inner-city, poor adolescent girl, this can be used to show the differences.

Liebow, Elliot. *Tally's Corner* . Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1966.

Discusses those men who hang out on street corners and why they are there.

Mead, Margaret. *Coming of Age in Samoa* . William Morrow and Co., 1928.

Discusses adolescent sexuality in another society and culture.

Raab, Earl, ed. *Major Social Problems* . New York: Harper and Row, 1973.

Includes a discussion of the problem of non-communication between adolescents and their parents as well as how sex roles are learned.

Rainwater, Lee, ed. *Inequality of Justice* . Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1974.

Includes a discussion of the adolescent and the cultural differences that are found in the inner-city pertaining to sex and the family.

Skolnick, Arlene. *The Intimate Environment* . California: Little, Brown and Co., 1973.

Discusses of how children learn sexual behaviors, sexuality of adolescents and the family.

Sorensen, Robert, C. *Adolescent Sexuality in Contemporary America* . New York: World Publishing, 1973.

Gives an account of adolescent sexuality and growth of the adolescent.

Winch, Robert, F. and Spanier, Graham, B. *Selected Studies in Marriage and the Family* . New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1974.

Discusses the family, marriage and selecting partners.

Wright, Helena. *Sex and Society* . Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968.

Discusses the new attitudes about sex in today's society, also discusses the adolescent's attitudes.

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