



Sex Roles, Courting and Marriage Among Puerto Rican Teenagers

Curriculum Unit 81.03.03

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My initial interest in writing a sex education manual for Hispanic teenagers stemmed from a growing preoccupation that perhaps there just wasn't enough sex education material available to them as a special interest group. I thought that because of this lack of ready information, Puerto Rican teenage girls were going out and getting pregnant, engaged or married at a very tender age. This school year I lost three girls to pregnancy. One was barely thirteen years old. Several of my 7th and 8th grade girls are officially (rings) engaged. Now, while pregnancy may at times be considered "accidental," engagements and marriage are very conscious, time-consuming rituals. I then realized that it was not a paucity of information that led these teens to early unions, but rather that a whole set of social, emotional and economic factors were working full force on these adolescents. The most powerful given, their culture, was wielding enormous strength in their developing sexuality and ensuing adolescent life style. I then made the decision to focus my energies on understanding these cultural differences (and similarities) and getting my students to discuss these cultural traditions, think about them and verbalize about what has always been theirs. I want these adolescents to open up to the ever present cultural factors inherent in their lives, and to see just how much they were influencing their sexuality. I wanted them to come to grips with the subtle and not so subtle pressures of their background that made them conform to a narrow sex role type.

Now, while it is very important for these teens to understand themselves and their cultural heritage as pertains to sexuality and adolescence, it is equally as important for the teachers who deal with these teens everyday to be as informed and as sensitive as possible when witnessing such a phenomenon as marriage at the onset of puberty. I have worked with Hispanic youth, largely Puerto Rican, for seven years. I have molded my attitudes and cultural inheritance to at least understand why such things go on. Yet, I am still upset and react negatively when my 7th grade girls show me their engagement rings. Since I bring my own attitudinal baggage with me, I sometimes feel badly that I have reacted naturally, but negatively, to what should have been a happy moment. On the other hand, I am somewhat better equipped, due to experience and readings, to deal with the reality of these youthful marriages. I imagine the horror on other teachers' faces when they face their first very young engagement or marriage. Though I cannot hope to change the attitudes of the other teachers, nor do I wish to, I do try here to provide as much information as possible on the Puerto Ricans and their cultural ways of dealing with dating, courting and marriage. Basic to this discussion will be the very bottom line of this whole topic, male and female roles, the different ways the Puerto Ricans raise their girls and boys, their own feelings about being male and female and their expectations of the other sex. It is of course understood that I am not talking here of all Hispanics or even all Puerto Ricans. I am pulling together information that deals with a very Latin way of looking at male and female and all that surges from these

“definitions.” But more specifically, I am basing a lot of my unit on what I’ve seen and heard in and out of my classroom, from students and parents. I will say here that the majority of my students have been the economically poor of Puerto Rico, though they do represent various modes of living. The books I’ve used to reinforce my research also deal more or less with the lower economic stratum.

Thus, my purpose here is to expose the Puerto Rican student to his/her own cultural ties in dealing with male and female sexuality, dating, courting and marriage. I would hope to enable these adolescents through this unit, to cope better with these trying times. Any positive changes in behavior and attitudes would be welcomed. The other equally important objective of this unit is to provide teachers of Puerto Rican adolescents with some guideposts and pertinent information on their students, in the hopes of sensitizing them to these cross cultural experiences. It is hoped that through informing, discussing and understanding, the myths and the truths can be separated, both for the teens and for their teachers. Perhaps this will then ease the transition and pain of “teenagehood.”

Of growing interest today in many cultures is the question “What is masculine?,” “What is feminine?”. Jerome Kagan, in “The Psychology of Sex Differences” in *Human Sexuality in Four Perspectives* states that, “Even though details of male and female gender roles vary from one society to the next, the ‘symbolic dimensions of masculinity and femininity’ may turn out to be relatively constant.”¹ I would agree with this statement. I have come to the conclusion, and it may well be a personal one, that in almost all cultures, the male is viewed as a superior being, both in strength and in intellectual capacity. Yet, what does seem clear is that some societies are willing to fight this stereotype, while others hold tight to the belief of male superiority as if it were God given. Each culture differs in its intensity of belief regarding male superiority; so that what is “true” for the Puerto Rican teen may not ring so clearly for the German youth. What is important is to understand the familial and environmental factors pertaining to each culture because, “Each child, . . . , unconsciously but continuously looks to his culture—his parents, his siblings, his friends, his teachers and the mass media—to discover the psychological definitions of male and female.”² We must assume here that though sexuality and male and female roles may share a universality, the individual culture is quite responsible for the emerging masculine and feminine self. It is also incumbent upon us as educators, parents and siblings to provide consistent and positive role messages to our youth.

What are some of the psychological traits of the Puerto Rican culture that lead to sex role interpretation? What are the very sex-specific expectations at play in Puerto Rican culture?

In *The Modernization of Puerto Rico*, Henry Wells talks of certain respect and deference values as being very important to the Puerto Rican culture. I feel that a brief discussion of these will enable us to understand more of the sex role conceptions dealt with later on in the unit. Wells speaks of “rectitude” as a respect value in terms of standardizing what is good or bad conduct, norms of right and wrong, and the general morality. This “rectitude” value deals greatly in terms of the “bad and good women” spoken of later. Wells also speaks of “fatalism” as another important factor in the psychological make-up of the Puerto Rican. The idea that life is somehow molded by forces beyond one’s control flows through every aspect of my students’ lives. Their acceptance of bad luck and good luck in their home life or school work is astounding. My student who is presently engaged is being forced to marry earlier than desired due to a mix-up on her future apartment. She readily admits that she doesn’t want to get married yet, but what can she do? Everything is all ready. “Ascription,” the idea that birth basically sets one’s station in life, leading to a general sense of inferiority or superiority relative to the circumstances of one’s birth, one’s sex especially, seems to set the tone for male and female differences in the Puerto Rican culture. The idea of “personalism” as a value in Puerto Rican society differs from the American idea of individuality. Where as in the U.S. one is inculcated with the idea of

individual rights and personal initiative, the Puerto Rican's idea of personalism has to do with the "inner individuality," the intrinsic value of each person—her or his uniqueness. The other widely held belief basic to the Puerto Rican culture is that of male superiority—that men are inherently superior to women. As mentioned before, this is not unique to Puerto Rico, nor even to only Latin cultures. What is unique is its pervasiveness and tenacity in the modern world. At play here is the basic idea of what constitutes a man and male behavior. A man is aggressive and forceful to a women's submissiveness and debility. These characteristics lead us to two more highly esteemed values, "power" and "affection." Seen as "deference" values rather than "respect" values, one can almost without thinking ascribe "power" to the men and "affection" to the women. What is curious is that, in fact, this often means docility and submissiveness on the part of both genders in the face of grander forces. In the context of male to female, the man is undoubtedly the powerful partner and the female the docile one.

All of these values help us understand the meaning of male and female within the context of the Puerto Rican culture, if only by understanding each human a bit more. It is wise to remember here, before going on, that the Puerto Rican culture is a combination of three influential societies; the Spanish, the African, and the Indian. The main outside culture contributing to the Puerto Rican identity is the American-U.S. culture. What is interesting is that of all the realms touched by the American way of life, the least influenced or changed is the sector of male/female, courting and marriage.

At birth, girls and boys are treated quite differently in Puerto Rican culture. For one thing, parents often express a preference for male children. This appears true for several reasons. The father may feel that his virility is extended by the birth of a male child. However, the most generally cited reason for wanting male offspring is that it is easier to raise boys. Boys know how to take care of themselves. Boys don't need their virtue protected. Boys are free agents. From birth, boys are praised for their genitals. They are generally left exposed, naked for up to six years old. They are often teased about their genitals and are told that their penis is for "la muchacha," the girl. The girls, on the other hand, are covered up and never teased about their genitals. This adoration of the male genitalia and general lack of acknowledgement of the female genitalia leads to a feeling, from birth, that the male genitals are miraculous and beautiful while the girls' genitalia are seen as ugly and in need of being hidden. The message is also clear from the start that a man is good for sex and sex is necessary for a man. The girl's sexuality is denied. Girls are taught from the time they are toddlers not to let boys/men touch them, and parental caressing ends early for them. Boys are early on expected to develop a sense of "maleness"—which may mean aggression towards equals but always includes submission to parents and authority figures. One of the most important roles developed at this time in the male is the role of protector of his mother and his sisters. Because they are girls/women, they are considered weak and vulnerable. Perhaps because the boys/men are seen as seducers, the women are seen to be in need of protection from this male animal. This vigil intensifies during adolescence. Her brother not only protects her from physical abuse, but any talk of her or her mother is quickly nipped in the bud, sometimes with a fist.

Strong in Spanish and Latin American cultures is the practice of segregation of the sexes—in schools, at play, and in the home. This is not so obvious in the Puerto Rican society today, perhaps due in part to economic factors. There still seems to be some vestige of the segregation patterns in that there's a general feeling that boys and girls really shouldn't play together too much. I do see a positive sign in the teens of today, in that they are beginning to develop a sense of non-sexual friendship between the sexes. But, at a young age, girls are encouraged to play with dolls and to help out with very baby oriented tasks. They are most often the ones who cook and clean for their family. Boys are, in fact, discouraged from even learning about childcare and cooking. While women may seem unaccustomed to driving or fixing mechanical objects, boys actually show a distaste for "female" chores. Masculine activities are praised by both men and women alike. While the boys

are busy protecting their sisters' virginity and reputation, the young girls are occupied with waiting on them. She acts like a little mother to the male offspring, regardless of their ages. Since her chores are notably feminine and mother-like, her role as mother to her siblings and her own early motherhood blend together in a blur. Is she ever not a mother? It is not unusual for her to do her brother's schoolwork, as school is seen as a feminine activity. I have a sister and a brother in my 7th grade class. He is always on time, and she is always late. Recently she arrived late and was visibly upset by her tardiness. As we talked, it came out that she was late because she was in charge of waking, feeding, dressing and delivering their younger brother to school. I suggested that her schoolmate brother help with the task, easing her tardiness. She shook her head and said that he couldn't and wouldn't do any of these chores because they constituted "trabajo de mujer," women's work. She also refused to let me talk to her brother or mother about the problem.

As these children reach adolescence, their beliefs intensify. As they approach man and womanhood, the race is on to see which will be lost first, honor or adolescence. Now begins the real anxiety, not only for the teens but for their parents. The wait is terrible. Because the boys are seen as aggressors and the girls as unconsciously tempting, all measures of security must be used to keep the two from meeting in any way but a formal, traditional way. No mention is made of the changing body or sex at this time. Though this differs little from my generation and our parents' inability to discuss sex, it varies in the intensity with which the whole body of sexual knowledge is ignored. There seems to be little transitional period allowed between childhood and adulthood. The whole, seemingly natural blooming period of adolescence is either shortened or obliterated. Though girls are generally modest and fearful of doctors, they show only a normal reluctance towards the process of menstruation or the discussion of it with another female. Perhaps it, too, is seen as one step removed from sex and childbirth. Sex is often left as a surprise to young women—one of the many surprises thrown to them at 14 or 15 when they might marry. It seems that if one is knowledgeable about sex, it might indicate a previous experience as we shall see later would not be acceptable for a "good girl." Since both sex and marriage are rarely spoken of, it is difficult to gauge the expectations in realistic terms. In Stycos' study *Family and Fertility in Puerto Rico*, it was evident that most young women were not very happy with the surprises dealt them at the beginning of their sexual experiences/marriage. In fact, the total taboo against pre-marital sex and the combination of protection and denial led many of the women in Stycos' study to unfulfilling sex lives within marriage. It wasn't so easy to forget the warnings they had heard so often as they grew. During this denial period for the girls, the boys are expected to go out and gather as much sexual experience as possible. They are rarely discouraged, for it's a man's duty to be knowledgeable and experienced in the sexual arena. If he doesn't express an interest in sex, he may be mocked or become a cause for worry. Thus, there is a clear double standard for behavior in adolescence. Girls are expected to be ignorant and innocent of the physiological processes connected with sex and childbirth. They are expected to be feminine in a coquettish way, yet they're not to use their wiles to tempt men. Boys, on the other hand, are expected to know about sex and experiment.

At 13 courting may begin for the girl. Dating as we know it, meeting lots of people, is not cultivated in the Latin cultures—especially not in the Puerto Rican society. Girls are taught to be circumspect about trying to get a boy, so the courting process is always initiated by the male. In years back, in the small towns, girls and boys would meet at the town's plaza. What I see today is the church serving as the meeting place for young boys and girls. It appeals to the parents' sense of propriety, and since courtship is very parent oriented, this seems appropriate. Also, it insures the boy of meeting a "good girl" or a "maiden." A proper courtship takes place in the home of the girl. The visits begin informally. Most often there is someone in the room where courting takes place. This seems to be an extension of the chaperone system that originated in Spain. Between the initial visitations and the formal engagement, the boy will probably inform the parents, but not necessarily the girl, of his intentions. This is not official, but it gives the family a sense of security. Once he

decides that they should be “novios” (sweethearts, steadies, etc.), he must ask for her hand in marriage. My 7th grade student who became engaged recently said that she hid in her room when he asked for her hand in marriage. From the beginning of the visits, it is understood that no other suitors will be allowed to call. Though he may test her “goodness,” it is also understood that intimacies will be limited. He must respect her and protect her reputation. How long they will be engaged before marrying varies. What I do see is the trend of a 7 to 10 year age difference. My sixteen-year-old student is engaged to a man twenty-six. My fourteen-year-old’s “novio” is twenty-three. To explain a bit the reasons for the disparity in ages, one must see what the boys are doing at this time.

Right about now the boys are beginning to experiment sexually. The boy who doesn’t experiment may find his sexuality cast in a doubtful light. Even during the engagement, and subsequently during marriage, the boy/man who is unfaithful is not seen with such negativity as is the girl/woman who strays. Now, if the girls are getting engaged at fourteen, and staying pure, who are the teen boys experimenting with? This question leads to an important issue. Boys are boys and men are men. But, girls and women can be further classified into bad girls/women and good girls/women. “Good girls” are those who are chaste, and even more so, ignorant of sex. “Bad girls” are those girls who have had sex, or who are thought to have had sex. Sometimes this is a result of a short-lived marriage. Sometimes it may be due to a brief affair. Once a girl has experimented with sex, it is understood that she is free to continue experimenting. It is also unlikely that she will be asked for in marriage in a formal sense. In the 1970’s, in Spain, I remember hearing of a couple who had gone out together in a small village. When he left her, she was literally run from the village, shamed though no sexual indiscretions had taken place. Thus, the good girls are the ones the boys marry, those whom they must protect, those who are supposedly innocent and pure. This cult of virginity is all pervasive in the Puerto Rican students I deal with. If you are a good, i.e., pure, chaste, moral girl, you will not have sex before marriage. If you do, you are branded—morally lacking. If one is to partake of a sexual life, one must be married—thrusting very young girls into marriage. On the other hand, if the boys are free and encouraged to participate in early sex, they may feel no urgency to marry until quite late. They will choose, at a later date, “good girls” to marry. Thus, the disparity in ages.

One sad tale that shows the extremes to which the “good girl”/“bad girl” theory can go, deals with an ex-student of mine. At fifteen she was dating, in a very modern sense, an eighteen-year-old boy. She felt so guilty having experimented sexually with him that she told her parents. Her father literally took out a gun and made them marry. They were both in school and lived with his parents. They were divorced about a year later. What is curious is that she soon married another fellow and has a child. She is about to graduate from high school now, but has been married twice, divorced once and had a child, all before the age of eighteen.

What is also discouraging about traditional courtship is that it mitigates the whole reason behind courting—that of getting to know one another and becoming gradually more intimate. The fear of loss of honor, the need for protection is so strong that the couple is rarely alone. When they are, the good girl-bad girl admonitions are so strong that even kissing may provoke guilt. So, instead of building a solid base for commitment and communication, the fantasies and false expectations are left intact.

One question that I repeatedly ask myself is how parents could allow their daughters to marry so young—and why these girls chose to follow the societal patterns so closely. As mentioned above, one reason for early marriages was to become a woman, to enter the sexual arena, since sex is totally denied to an unmarried “good” girl. So, a “good” girl opts for marriage. Just as virginity is seen as insured through the withholding of sexual information, it is also assured through engagement. The parents are quite happy, relieved in fact, to transfer the anxiety to a man. He will now be the new protector. The parents can relax because they know

that he, and the social role of engagement, will keep her chaste. Also, since unmarrieds are seen as undesirable, the problems of “spinsterhood” and “virginity” are resolved at the same time. It is easy to understand why the parents encourage early marriages, because to have their daughter free and studying or working on her own increases her exposure to the temptations of the opposite sex and the probability that she will lose her virginity.

Why the young girls choose to marry so young relates to some of the parents’ fears—perhaps more internalized. There are other reasons. As she grows up, her role at home increases, while her male siblings’ role at home decreases. She is to spend more time at home—he, in the street. She may marry early as a rebellion against the increased pressures at home. Most of us have witnessed marriages that occur as an escape from the parental home. This phenomenon crosses cultural and economic lines. Since the rules of courtship are so strict, especially for the girl, the bringing together of the sexes so difficult, many couples opt for a short courtship and an early marriage, just to avoid courtship. She may, as do most adolescents, have a romanticized notion of marriage and sex, since neither is discussed, thus leading her to an early union. “Early age at marriage, particularly for women, is a pattern fairly typical of the lower class in Puerto Rico. Chief among the motivations for women are such nonrational factors as parental rebellion, romantic love, and erroneous conceptions of marriage.”³

In any discussion of early marriage in the Puerto Rican culture, it is important to differentiate the two marital arrangements popular and acceptable. There is, of course, the legal marriage. However, there also exists an often misunderstood consensual union. In Puerto Rico, the consensual union is viewed pretty much as an equal to the legal marriage. Once the couple comes to the mainland, however, they are often made to feel immoral because of their non-legal marital status. This unfortunate behavior stems from our ignorance of the place of the consensual union in the Puerto Rican culture. What is regarded as moral and stable on the island, may be viewed as unhealthy in New York. “A consensual marriage that meets the standards of a good marriage gains as much social approval as a legal one, and those involved in such a relationship are not considered ‘living in sin.’”⁴ What is curious is that there is pressure for a girl to marry legally, but if she loses her virginity, it is considered good enough if she can settle for a permanent, consensual union. Often I hear of students who have run off—“se fue.” This amounts to a consensual marriage, however short-lived it may be. It is not viewed as an affair. It is a marriage. What is interesting to note are the reasons that couples give for running off, rather than courting and marrying. Why did some girls choose to adhere to the traditional rituals while others held themselves up for scrutiny? There seems to be a general temptation to categorize those who run off as “bad girls.” Those who court and marry, albeit at fourteen years of age, are considered good girls. The couple may run off if the family disapproves of the boy, thus proving his power and virility to the girl. The couple may choose to run off just to be together, to avoid the long drawn out process of courting. When a couple runs off, the girl’s family may call the police in so as to be able to say it was a seduction, thus clearing her name. However, after much sorrow, the family usually resigns itself to the marriage, married being safer than free. The couple may run off as a general rebellion. Other reasons for running off may include her very young age, his or her previous marriage or lack of money. Though a formal marriage puts greater demands on the man, he may suffer a general lack of rights within the consensual union. A number of couples spoke of the anxiety of commitment and the fear of failure as reasons for a consensual union. They see it as a trial marriage. What we think the “free to be you and me” generation invented, living together, has existed for a long time in a very traditional society.

One point never really verbalized in the discussions or readings that I feel is fundamental to the following: What are the alternatives for these students? What if they don’t marry at fourteen? What can we offer them as a substitute? The drop out and failure rate in school for our Puerto Rican students is very high, and until their

success at school and or careers is elevated, it is doubtful that they will turn to any other sector of their lives for satisfaction. If one doesn't do well in school or just doesn't enjoy school, why not find someone to love? It is very necessary for us as educators to be aware of our role in their lives. We are very important to them. Also, until they are able to overcome the cultural roadblocks and can date and enjoy each other, transcending the taboo of pre-marital sex or even the rumor of it, there will be little change in their attitude towards early marriage.

After all this, what can these couples expect from marriage? Are their expectations at all met in the reality of marriage? As mentioned before, the element of surprise surrounding sex and childbirth often leads to an ominous beginning. Often the women view sex as their duty, befitting their role as women. Once again, this is not a particularly Puerto Rican phenomenon. According to Stycos' study, ". . . the ideal wife is seen as submissive (obedient, respectful, compliant, and helpful) and faithful, and as a good housekeeper and mother." ⁵ This seems quite in accordance with the traits ascribed to her as a female—as being pure, submissive, weak, faithful and at the service of her man. In Stycos' study, many women wanted their man to be loving of them, to be kind, considerate and a good provider. This did not always match the image of the all powerful, sometimes aggressive male, but it was what women wanted. Stycos goes on to describe three types of marriage; the *traditional* in which the woman does virtually nothing without the husband's knowledge or approval—where his needs always come first, *less traditional* marriages in which the woman shares in some of the decision making, and *least traditional* marriages in which the wife might work or be consulted on important matters. Often times, the wife becomes the backbone of the family by default. These are the family structures that I most often see. Another important factor is that often the wife is desexualized in marriage. Owing to her previous role as a "good" girl, she may find it difficult, as may be, to see herself in the new role of sexual partner. One earlier view of married women is very curious. Other than the obvious role of housekeeper and cook, a woman was not supposed to be on the street, unless on a home oriented task. What one could learn on the street was viewed as worldly and wicked. Often women feigned knowing less English than they really did because English was associated with the street.

With the arrival of the next step, the birth of children, the female and male roles are perpetuated. A Puerto Rican household revolves around the children and a barren woman is pitied. Large families are often equated with machismo and virility even though the woman might express a desire for a small family. This is one of the reasons that birth control often fails within the family. Often the lack of communication is visible—a result of segregation, strict courtship and narrow sex roles. "The housewife who conforms to the role of a good wife is a 'busy woman.'" ⁶ She is weak, he is strong, he is smart, she is emotional. He must be masterful and sexually aggressive, she should be innocent and protected. She is tied to the home, he, to the street. "The total picture would lead one to conclude that married couples of the lower class are living in a fragile or bitter relationship which has a high potential for disintegration." ⁷ Thus, when the new generation is born, once more the adoration of the male genitalia will begin and the roles play on and the cycle of early marriages and failed marriages continues.

What can we do as teachers to help break this cycle, without destroying the positive social and cultural facets of our students' lives? Exposure seems to be the key. Positive role models may appear trite, but they do much for the vulnerable student. A woman who has successfully combined career and family, men who cook and clean and who are obviously happy as family men all bring positive images to the adolescent. Men whose masculinity is intact while being emotional and loving are alternatives. Sexuality must be allowed to develop and flourish without fear or need of 24-hour a day protection. If students can operate fearlessly with regard to their sexuality, can this new found freedom with respect be passed on to their parents? It is apparent that there are girls who are forced to marry because their parents cannot deal with their budding sexuality. We

must be sensitive to the culture at all times. Though we see pre-marital sex as less of a travesty than a married fourteen-year-old, we must understand that certain parents will not agree.

What do I offer here? I present this information and personal study as a way of heightening our awareness of the culture of a good portion of our students. From this unit it is hoped that teachers can now begin to understand their students' complicated lives. What I provide hereafter are a series of resources and suggestions to increase the student's awareness of her/himself. I suggest beginning with the first part of my questionnaire, to be administered at intervals. To delve into what I call the essence of being, I have prepared questions based on what may be appropriate behavior for the male/female of the Puerto Rican culture. The next section, to be administered later, deals with sex, the withholding of information, the need for sex and the differences between men/women in regard to sex. The next section, following closely to the organization of this unit, deals with courting and prenuptials. This will give teachers a way of gauging just how closely the students adhere to the traditional patterns. The next part deals with marriage, children, expectations and fulfillment, and the basic idea of sex roles within a marriage. A lot of what happens between the questionnaire and the end is up to the teacher. I suggest anonymity and posting the results on the board followed by small group discussions. When the questions or statements are obviously geared towards getting at a very traditional belief, role playing exercises are helpful in seeing the validity of a belief. If the class agrees, for example, that women cry more than men, or that men are inclined to act without thinking, play the husband-wife game-changing roles. The argument begins with her crying and his winning. In the next scene, she's violent and he's in tears. How does the class view each scene? What image comes through to the students when he cries? How do they feel? Have a tragic scene where both parents are crying. Is this appropriate conduct for a man/woman? Have students portray a domestic scene where the woman is studying and the husband is cooking dinner. What is the students' reaction? Discuss the scenes and their reactions.

Another part of this unit offers as resources for students an annotated reading list especially prepared for use in an English classroom, with emphasis on the role models and adolescent situations. Some of the books show stereotypical reactions to certain situations. Given the circumstances, what would the students do? Other books present more positive options. Selections can be offered and then acted out. Some of the books are recommended in their entirety. I am also providing a list of role-free reading provided by the library services.

The idea of this unit is basic: I want teachers to understand their teenage Puerto Rican students. I want these same students to understand themselves better. I want them, through discussion, readings and role play exercises to learn to cope better with their traditional background that is often in direct conflict with our own modern society. I am not suggesting here that teenagers go out and have sex at fourteen instead of marrying. What I hope is that teens will begin to see that they don't have to feel restrained within either behavior. I offer information, ideas, and resources. But you, the teacher, must provide the sensitivity necessary to bring any of this to our students.

Notes

1. Kagan, Jerome, "Psychology of Sex Differences" in *Human Sexuality in Four Perspectives*, Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, Baltimore 1976, p. 87.
2. Ibid., p. 88.

3. Stycos, J. Mayone, *Family and Fertility in Puerto Rico* , Columbia Univ. Press, N.Y. 1955, p. 120.
4. Padilla, Elena, *Up From Puerto Rico* , Columbia Univ. Press, N.Y. 1958, pp. 101-102.
5. Stycos, op. cit., p. 124.
6. Padilla, op. cit., p. 153.
7. Stycos, op. cit., p. 156.

Questionnaire

Part One—Essence of Being—Male/Female

1. What does it mean to be a girl?
2. What does it mean to be a boy?
3. What does womanhood mean to you?
4. What does manhood mean to you?
5. How does the word “Macho” make you feel?
6. Who is more important in the world, a man or a women?
7. Who are better students, girls or boys?
8. Who works harder, men or women?
9. Who are more violent? Who cry more?
10. Are you happy being a ___? Would you like to be the opposite sex?
11. What do you consider masculine behavior? What do you consider feminine behavior?
12. Mark the following items either masculine or feminine:
school children television
shopping doctors hairdressers
math plumbers factory
poetry flowers cars
jewelry photography money
music books food

Part Two—Sex

1. Is sex before marriage bad for a boy? Why/Why not?
2. Is sex before marriage bad for a girl? Why/Why not?
3. At what age should a boy begin to have sexual experiences?
4. When should a girl's sexual experiences begin?
5. What should one do instead of sex?
6. Is sex for having children, pleasure, to get close to someone, or all three?
7. Is sex more important for the man? the woman? neither?
8. Are there times when one shouldn't have sex? When?
9. What should parents tell their daughters about sex? When?
10. What should boys be taught about sex, and from whom?

Part Three—Courting—Pre-nuptials

1. At what age should a girl become engaged?
2. What age difference should exist between a boy and a girl who are engaged? Who should be older?
3. How long should a couple date before becoming engaged?
4. Should an unengaged couple be allowed to go out alone together?
5. Should an engaged couple be allowed to be alone? Why not?
6. How long should the engagement be?
7. If the engagement is broken off, how soon should he begin dating someone new? She?
8. Does it look bad to go out with more than one girl? Boy?
9. Should the engaged couple do a lot of kissing? Petting? Have sexual relations?
10. What does "bad girl" mean to you? "Good girl?"

Questionnaire—Marriage Expectations/Children

1. A good husband should ____.
2. A good wife should ____.
3. I expect my husband to ____.
4. I expect my wife to ____.
5. (F) If I want to work outside the home my husband probably will
6. I want children? Lots Yes/No.
7. How many children would you like? ____.
8. How will we prevent ourselves from having too many?
9. Whose responsibility is the birth control? Why?
10. Children are solely the women's responsibility. Yes/No
11. Men who do dishes and cook are ____.
12. A woman's jobs include ____.
13. A man's jobs include ____.
14. I most want a boy/girl child if I can only have one. Why?

The following adolescent novels have been read and “dissected” according to their usefulness to class discussions of sex role identity, family life, sexuality and adolescent issues in general. Bibliographic information is provided at the end of this part of the unit.

A House for Jonnie O. by Blossom Effman was picked initially for its provocative cover (a very pregnant teen sitting alone in an empty room looking out the window). I soon found it on a list of role free readings. It deals with a school for pregnant girls, where the girls care a lot for each other. Jonnie's set of problems seem to stem from an absent father and a very strained relationship with her mother. The father of the child is pictured as a lonely wanderer who also needs someone to love. The girls from the school are searching for a home to raise their children in and to get away from their parents. What I found negative, but perhaps truthful, was the girls' attitude towards their teachers and school. The teachers, who were caring in nature, seemed to be mocked by the girls for their lack of understanding. But, within the general context of teenage

rebellion, it all fit together. Many fatherless homes were depicted. Also, the book offers girls of all ethnic backgrounds. *Jonnie O.* could very easily be used to foster, most particularly, a discussion of options; abortion, keeping a child or giving it up for adoption. Abortion was not really gone into deeply, but the other two options were heavily discussed.

What Do You Do in Quicksand? by Lois Ruby provides a curious twist to the teenage pregnancy problem. The father has decided to raise the child. He is shown as a real and caring father who doesn't neglect to let us know what hard work is required to raise a child. His family is very supportive as he manages to juggle school, baby and home. What causes all the intrigue is a neighbor girl with many emotional problems who becomes fixated with his baby and with the idea that she should raise the child. In the end, the teenage father goes off to raise the child himself. Some parts of the book are unrealistic, but it does provide a great opportunity to discuss the job of the teenage father.

Lauren, by Harriett Luger, is a sad tale of a white middle-class girl who gets pregnant and runs off and attempts to live on her own. What evolves is an unsavory situation where she shares a place with two other teenage mothers, all done to show her how difficult it would be to live on her own. In the middle of all this she meets a childless couple who befriend her, and she makes the discovery that they should rightly have her baby. A bit dramatic and contrived to once again discuss options where giving up the child seems the goal.

Jeanette Eyerly has two books, *A Girl Like Me* and *He's My Baby Now* which can easily be used in the classroom. *A Girl Like Me* paints a healthy relationship between an adopted daughter and her very educated parents and how this relationship with her adoptive parents eases her friendship with a teenage pregnant girl. The protagonist deals with her own search for her biological mother, and the implications it has on her pregnant friend's decision to keep or give up her child. *He's My Baby Now* shows a teenage boy's reactions to learning that he has been the biological father to a newborn. He schemes his way into the hospital and into the baby's life. What I felt was stereotypical and unrealistic was his fantasy of having the baby for "his own" while his newly re-married mother or grandmother actually cared for the baby. He never considered himself a likely candidate for the nurturing role. Also, his escapades, including kidnapping the child, were unhealthy and unrealistic. I do think that the action, and his foolhardy antics, would provide real material for discussing the role of the father. He doesn't want the child given up for adoption, but he wants everyone else to care for the child.

A couple of cute adolescent books that deal with the inner feelings of pre-pubertal kids are *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit* by Paula Danziger and *Are You There God? It's Me Margaret* by Judy Blume. Neither deals with pregnancy, but both deal with those insecurities so prevalent in the pre-teen groups. *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit* explores the feelings of a fat girl and her insecurities relative to her body. It also deals with a group of students who fight for their liberal teacher. It shows very positive relationships between boys and girls of junior high age. Judy Blume's book deals with a young girl who moves into a suburban setting and among other things a) waits for her period, and b) tries to decide on a religion. A lot of kookiness is portrayed in her grandmother's role, but it is a welcome reading. The confusion she feels about her religion parallels the confusion most adolescents feel about themselves.

I Know You, Al by Constance Greene is another book in this mode. A young girl whose mother is contemplating re-marriage (a very prevalent theme in adolescent novels), also anxiously awaits her period as a sign that she is growing up and normal. All of these books offer easy reading that deals with very important issues facing our adolescents: periods, acne, bras, and a general heightened sense of sex and self.

A very different book from all of these white middle class teenage books is Julius Horowitz's *The Diary of A.N.*

This is an extremely sensitive and moving account of a black girl's life in the ghetto of poverty. Everyone around her is doing drugs or getting pregnant to get their own welfare case. She is into school, reading and going to college, but very realistically, always within the framework of her life in one room. A very adult book in some ways, it offers one of the few books designed at saying, there is an alternative to getting pregnant. This book should be read and re-read and used to advocate reading and writing of these very private thoughts. The style is painfully beautiful and could serve as a model for the students who might wish to keep a diary. A diary would in turn give the teacher a chance to see what really goes on in some of our students' homes and heads.

Rubyfruit Jungle by Rita Mae Brown is a brilliant description of a young girl's homosexual beginnings. This book could be used if the teacher goes into homosexuality, but might also prove interesting as role free reading. It deals with the loneliness and isolation that the young woman suffered at times, but it also shows her very normal (and heterosexual) high school years.

For other role free reading, I have provided here a booklist prepared by library services of Chicago. As one will note, some of the books are described above. For a complete annotated list write to: Young Adult Services Division, American Library Association, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, Ill. 60611, or contact me.

Role Free Booklist

Allegra Maud Goldman by Edith Konecky

The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman Ernest J. Gaines

Beginnings Susanna Juliusburger

C. C. Poindexter Carolyn Meyer

Cold River William Judson

Daddy was a Number Runner Louise Merriweather

Dragon Singer Anne McCaffrey

Dreamsnake Vonda McIntyre

Father Figure Richard Peck

Father's Arcane Daughter E. L. Konigsburg

Forgotten Beasts of ELD Patricia McKillip

Happy Endings are All Alike Sandra Scoppettone

Home Before Dark Sue Ellen Bridgers

A House for Jonnie O. Blossom Elfman

House of Stairs Williams Sleater

It's OK if You Don't Love Me Norma Klein
Jeremy John Minahan
The Left Hand of Darkness Ursula LeGuin
Listen for the Fig Tree Sharon Bell Mathias
One Fat Summer Robert Lipsyte
Rubyfruit Jungle Rita Mae Brown
Snowbound Bill Pronzini
Something for Joey Richard E. Peck
Son of Someone Famous M. E. Kerr
The Testing of Charlie Hammelman Jerome Brooks
Tunes for a Small Harmonica Barbara Wersba
Very Far Away From Anywhere Else Ursula LeGuin
Walks Far Women Colin Stuart
What Kind of Guy Do You Think I Am? Sidney Offit
Women of Wonder: Science Fiction Stories by Women about Women Pamela Sargent, ed.
Z for Zachariah Robert C. O'Brien

I also obtained a number of resources that deal with sex equity and Hispanic women. This material is from the Los Angeles Unified School District and deals more with Chicano women. However, I feel that the unifying factors between the Puerto Rican culture and the Chicano culture are more relevant than are the differences between them. The Commission for Sex Equity of the L.A. School District is in the process of setting up a library of sex equity resources. The following sources pertinent to this unit are included:

1. *Las Mujeres: Conversations from a Hispanic community* . Nan Elsasser, Kyle Mackenzie and Yvonne Tixler y Vigil. The feminist Press, 192 pgs. (from the series Women's Lives, Women's Work).
 2. *Cross Cultural Study of Women* . Mary I. Edwards and Margot Morrow. The Feminist Press.
 3. *Bless Me Ultima* . Rudolfo Anaya. Tonatiuh International, 1972, 248 pgs.
 4. *Racist and Sexist Images in Children's Books* . Children's Rights Workshops Papers on Children's Literature No. 1. Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative.
 5. *The Chicana Feminist* . Martha Cotera. Information Systems Development, 1977.
 6. *Diosa Y Hembra* . Martha Cotera. Information Systems Development, 1976.
 7. *Many Sisters' Women in Cross-Cultural Perspective* . Carolyn Mattiasso Mattiasson. Macmillan Publishing Co., 1974.
 - *8. *Hispanic Women in Education* Women's Educational Equity Communications Network, 1978.
- *This book is an annotated selected reference work that might be most helpful . It may be ordered from the Women's Educational Equity Act Program within the U.S. Department of Education.

Films

Planned Parenthood League of Connecticut, Inc.
129 Whitney Avenue
New Haven, Ct. 06510 865-0595

Planned Parenthood has many suitable films available dealing with teenage sexuality, birth control, abortion, puberty, etc. The following titles, among others, may be borrowed from them at the above address.

Teenage Sexuality Titles:

About Sex
Are You Ready for Sex?
Too Soon Blues
I'm 17, I'm Pregnant. . . and I Don't Know What To Do
*Engagement Ring (Spanish with English Subtitles)
Then One Year
Adolescent Sexual Conflict—Are We Still Going to the Movies?
Teen Sexuality, What's Right For You
Four Young Women
A Woman Who is Me
Teenage Father

Games People Play

Any of the following activities can serve to facilitate discussion of topics that may be uncomfortable for the students. Some can be used as the basis for discussion.

1. *The Myth Box* —(This box may be used at various times either as the Fear Box or Desire Box). Each student puts in certain beliefs that s/he may have concerning sexuality or sex roles. No names are necessary. Everyone picks one out and the group tries to “determine” if it is fact or fallacy. Ex.: Girls need sex less than boys.
2. *The Fear Box* —Same procedure as above, but each child writes a fear, doubt or inadequacy that s/he may feel concerning his/her body or sexuality. Ex.: All boys like big breasts on girls.
3. *The Desire/Fantasy Box* —Same procedure, but now each child describes a want or wish that s/he is feeling—sexual or non-sexual. Ex.: I wish I wouldn't feel pressure to marry so young.
4. *The Secret Box* —This is somewhat of a conglomeration of all the boxes, but it may be an important one in alleviating, anonymously, a student's fear that s/he has done something or felt something abnormal. Everyone drops a secret, sexual or non-sexual, but important, into the box. Ex.: I have masturbated.
*especially appropriate for this unit.
5. *The Woman/Man Collage* —Have students make two collages (sharing one paper) depicting; What is a woman?, What is a man? pictorially. It is hoped that because the collages will be on one side of the same paper, the images will overlap and thus the students will see the male/female

roles as sharing a good deal.

6. *The Me Others See* —Have students describe themselves as if their mother were seeing them or their father, their girl/boyfriend, their best friend and a casual friend. What are the differences? Have each student analyze the differences and similarities in how s/he is viewed by others. How far from his own interpretation are the others?

7. *The End of the World Game* —This game enables students to become aware of their values and to discuss the possible conflicting values of others. It goes by many names, and may be varied to suit the subject at hand. Basically the students are told that the world as we know it is about to end. There is a possibility of saving six people through immunization. Have each person save six people from the following list. Each participant will be asked to justify his/her decision. The final decision will be made through group discussion. Here is the list of possible survivors:

1. A pregnant 14 year old who has dropped out of school.
2. A 23 year old housewife with no outside-the-home skills.
3. A male doctor—35 years old.
4. A female doctor—35 years old.
5. A 43 year old homosexual teacher.
6. A 36 year old prostitute
7. A priest—52 years old.
8. A male mechanic—31 years old—unable to have children.
9. An 8 year old boy.
10. A 10 year old girl.

8. *Too Hot To Handle* —Just a simple exercise aimed at finding alternatives and answers. The basic question is, “How would you handle the following situations?”

- (a) Your best friend (same sex) thinks s/he is gay and shares this with you.
- (b) Your younger sister (13) thinks she may be pregnant and she tells you not to tell your parents.
- (c) Your best friend is pregnant and everyone is telling her to keep the baby, or to have an abortion. Your advice to her is
- (d) Your 13 year old sister has been seeing a 23 year old man. You, (her brother), think he may ask to marry her. You feel . . .
- (e) You’re a young girl who wants to study engineering. Your family thinks that engineering is for boys and that you will ruin your chances of finding a nice boy.
- (f) You’re a young girl (15) who has had sex once with your boyfriend. You’re about to break up—and he’s about to tell all. How will you handle the talk?

Student Reading and Resource Bibliography (Biographical Data from described books)

I. Fiction

Blume, Judy. *Are You There God? It's Me Margaret* . Scarsdale, New York: Bradbury Press, 1977.

Brown, Rita Mae. *Rubyfruit Jungle* . Daughler, Bantam, 1973.

Danziger, Paula. *The Cat Ate my Gymsuit* . New York: Delacorte, 1974.

Elfman, Blossom. *A House for Jonnie O*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1977.

Eyerly, Jeanette. *A Girl Like Me* . Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, Co. 1966.

———. *He's My Baby Now* . Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, Co.

Greene, Constance. *I Know You, Al* . New York: Viking Press, 1975.

Horowitz, Julius. *The Diary of A.N.* New York: Dell Publishing, 1970.

Luger, Harriett. *Lauren* . New York: Viking Press, 1979.

Ruby, Lois. *What Do You Do In Quicksand?* New York: Viking Press, 1979.

II. Student Resources on Sexuality, etc.

Bell, Ruth. *Changing Bodies, Changing Lives* . New York: Random House, 1980.

As stated, a book for teens on sex and relationships, it covers such topics as exploring sex with your self, emotional health care and sex against your will. Can be obtained at discount price if 12 or more are ordered.

Carlson, Dale. *Loving Sex for Both Sexes* . New York/London/Toronto: Franklin Watts, 1979.

Talks about girls' and boys' feelings concerning bodies and sex. Very geared towards the idea that "now that you are having sex . . ."—Includes homosexuality, masturbation, etc.

Caveney, Sylvia. *Inside Mom* . New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977.

Conception, pregnancy and childbirth geared to younger child's curiosity. Many illustrations.

Comfort, Alex and Jane. *The Faces of Love* . New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1979.

The adolescent's version of *The Joy of Sex* , deals with sex as a given for all teens. Verbally graphic.

Kelly, Gary. *Learning About Sex* (the Contemporary Guide for Young Adults). New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc. 1977.

Offers sensitive and intelligent insight into teens and sex, including the possibility of not having sex. Includes further bibliography on sexuality.

Our Bodies, Ourselves, also available in Spanish, *Nuestros Cuerpos Nuestras Vidas* by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective is almost a classic. Though advertised as a book by and for women, I think it would be very interesting to have the boys read it and react. Perhaps a boy's/men's version is in the works.

Bibliography: Books used to Prepare this Unit

The following books have been divided into two broad categories; those that deal with Puerto Rico and its people, and those that deal with sexuality and its ramifications. Some books do overlap in their content area. The books that will be used in the classroom, both fictional sources and non-fiction resources are described within the unit or at the end.

I. Puerto Rico and its Culture

Cooper, Paulette, ed. *Growing Up Puerto Rican*. New York and Scarborough, Ontario: The New American Library, Inc., 1973.

Valuable for the teacher as an informative natural resource. Handy also in the classroom for stimulating discussions. Frank and vivid.

Bourne, Dorothy and James. *Thirty Years of Change in Puerto Rico*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966.

Chapter 9 is most useful as it addresses marital satisfaction. Deals heavily with Puerto Rico's status somewhere between a traditional and a modern society.

Lopez, Adalberto and James Petras, eds. *Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans: (Studies in History and Society)*. New York: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1974.

More of a political resource.

Mendez, E. Fernandez. *Portrait of a Society*. Puerto Rico: University of Puerto Rico Press, 1972.

Less useful than the other books here in that it deals with factual findings rather than cultural and social issues.

Mills, C. Wright, Clarence Sencer and Rose Goldson. *The Puerto Rican Journey*. New York: Harper & Row, 1950.

Earlier view of Puerto Rican family and relationship patterns. Chapter 6 especially interesting.

Padilla, Elena. *Up From Puerto Rico*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1958.

Very helpful and sensitive study of the migration of the Puerto Rican to the U.S. mainland (New York) and the societal and cultural changes inherent in that move.

Stycos J. Mayone. *Family and Fertility in Puerto Rico*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1955.

Can be read as background to Padilla's study in that it shares the life of the Puerto Rican before migration. Deals heavily with machismo, virginity, courting, marital satisfaction and birth control problems. Extremely helpful.

Tumin, Melvin and Arnold Feldman. *Social Class and Social Change in Puerto Rico* . Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1961.

Less useful but does talk of consensual unions and their relationship to the lower class.

Wells, Henry. *The Modernization of Puerto Rico* . Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969.

Aptly described as a political study of changing values and institutions.

II. Sexuality and other related topics.

Beach, Frank, ed. *Human Sexuality in Four Perspectives* . Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

Assigned reading that proved very helpful in defining sex role standards and sex role identity. Fascinating chapter, (5), by William Davenport on "Sex in Cross Cultural Perspective."

Lorimer, Frank. *Culture and Human Fertility* . Zurich: Unesco, 1954.

Intriguing study of the connection between culture and fertility. Factual at times and not much vital information on Puerto Rico.

Mead, Margaret. *Coming of Age in Samoa* . New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1928.

It may seem dated and alien to our work, but it proves ever fascinating as a cross cultural comparison. Can be used with the students as a valuable resource for discussing traditions, changes and differences.

Rainwater, Lee. "Sex in the Culture of Poverty," in *The Individual Sex and Society* . Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969.

Excellent article that can be used to discuss myths and truths dealing with sex and class.

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