

The Social Construction of Sexuality: Personal Meanings,
Perceptions of Sexual Experience,
and Females' Sexuality in Puerto Rico.

by

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(ABSTRACT)

A qualitative study on a sample of 12 Puerto Rican women was conducted in Puerto Rico. The purpose of this study was to explore the various ways in which sexual meanings are created, changed, and modified as the nature of social discourse and personal experience changes.

The two theoretical frameworks that guided the methodology and analysis of the data were social constructionism and feminism. I assumed that sexuality is socially constructed, shaped by social, political, and economic influences, and modified throughout life. Feminist theories assisted in documenting the ways in which females' sexuality in Puerto Rico is shaped by culture and by institutions that disadvantage females and other oppressed groups by silencing their voices. The theories guided the discussion of the contradicting messages about women's sexualities and their experiences, as these women fought, conformed to, and even colluded with their oppression.

Analysis of the participants' written and oral narratives produced the overarching theme of sexual meanings/scripts, along with three interrelated sub-themes: sources and nature of sexual scripts, determining experiences, and social discourses of female sexuality. Participants reported three institutional sources of sexual messages: family, religion-culture, and institutions of education. Their determining experiences follow a common thread that weaves a common story line: the life-long struggle with the incongruencies between the social constructions of female sexuality and the realities of these women's sexual experiences.

Sexuality is defined as being challenged and modified through the participants' lives. Four social discourses of female sexuality emerged from the analysis of the data: source of guilt and shame, vulnerability and sexual victimization, ambivalence, and empowerment. A theory of ambivalence was developed from the data as a means to understand the participants' process of developing the paradigms for their own sexuality.

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DEDICATION

With love, to my parents,
Jesús F. Martínó Trilla and
María I. Villanueva Pérez,
and the twelve women who
unselfishly shared their lives
in order for me to conduct this study.

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Overview and Purpose of the Study

The present study explored the cultural, societal, and personal sexual beliefs of Puerto Rican women, their experiences and expectations, and how these influenced the ways in which Puerto Rican women perceive, feel, and experience their own sexualities. In this study I investigated the social construction of sexuality in the Puerto Rican culture, the various ways in which sexual meanings are created and modified as the nature of social discourse and personal experience varies (Foucault, 1978). Several authors have found that both socialization and sexual experience help shape sexuality and affect the process of developing personal sexual meanings (Daniluk, 1993; Sprecher, Barbee, & Schwartz, 1995; Ward & Wyatt, 1994).

Parents' communication about sex with their children may be an important influence. In a study by Ward and Wyatt (1994), White women who recalled negative verbal messages from childhood engaged in riskier sexual behavior than those who recalled positive/ instructional verbal messages. Risky sexual behavior was not related to the kind of messages received by Black women. Ethnic group differences though were found in the content and prevalence of the messages that were recalled (Ward & Wyatt, 1994). For example, African-American women recalled a greater number of television influences with larger a proportion of non-traditional messages than did White women, suggesting that Black and White women identify themselves with different characters or roles.

Early sexual experience may also affect the ways in which women experience their sexuality. When giving accounts of first sexual intercourse experiences, women reported feeling less pleasure than men and stronger feelings of guilt than of pleasure (Sprecher, Barbee, & Schwartz, 1995). Women also reported a great degree of guilt especially when they had their first sexual experience at a very young age or when they had consumed alcohol beforehand. Some women reported feeling less guilt if they were currently involved with the same partner than if they were not (Sprecher et al., 1995). The fact that some women felt more guilt if alcohol was used before intercourse may explain why women engaged in activities that they may not otherwise have engaged in.

Experiences perceived as negative by women such as unwanted sexual activity, sexual pressure, and coercion seem to be prevalent in the lives of women. In a study by McDermott, Sarvela, and Bancharya (1988), 13.2% of the participants reported engaging in sexual activity against their will, and 6.8% reported engaging in sexual activity against the will of their partner

during the previous month. Over 50% of the women studied wrote about an unwanted sexual activity, mostly involving a man the women knew (Murnen, Perot, & Byrne, 1989).

Lewin (1985) found that unwanted intercourse was experienced by 30% of college women sampled. These women defined unwanted intercourse as a reluctant partner who gives in because of psychological pressure without the use of threat or force. From the data in her study, Lewin (1985) proposed four cultural norms to explain the prevalence of unwanted intercourse in the United States: (a) The ideology of male supremacy; (b) The lack of positive norms about sexual experience for women; (c) The man has the initiative; and (d) The stroking function (putting men's needs before their own). These four norms could also be used to explain how women sometimes feel pressured into unwanted sexual activity.

In a cross-cultural study involving three countries - the United States, Russia, and Japan - American women had the highest rate of consent to unwanted sex among the females compared (Sprecher, Hatfield, Cortese, Potapova, & Levitskaya, 1994). This finding suggests a discrepancy between the perceived sexual customs and activity of a particular country, such as the United States, and the actual wanted behavior that people engage in.

Christopher and Cate (1984) studied the multidimensionality of the sexual decision-making process. They found four basic factors underlying the decision to have intercourse: (a) positive affect/communication, (b) obligation/pressure, (c) arousal/receptivity, and (d) circumstantial. Analysis of variance indicated that females gave more importance to positive affect/communication than males, and that males gave more importance to obligation/pressure (Christopher & Cate, 1984).

Rationale for the Study

Sexuality, being a complex and individual phenomenon influenced by social norms, culture, and personal experience, is said to be socially constructed (Fine, 1993; Laws & Schwartz, 1977). All these affect the way individuals define, feel and perceive their sexuality. Therefore, diverse "sexualities" exist even within the same environment (Baber & Allen, 1992). There seems to be little research regarding the ways in which Puerto Rican women's sexualities are influenced by their socialization, culture, religion, and personal experience. In this research, I explored the different ways in which Puerto Rican women ascribe meanings to their sexuality and develop sexual scripts, the ways sexual scripts and meanings influence their behavior, and how sexual experiences, especially those of a negative value (i.e., sexual coercion, Waterman et al. 1989; and unwanted sexual activity, Murnen, et al, 1989) influence their meanings and behaviors. Through this study, I attempted to understand how

these sexual meanings/scripts are formed, how they are reconstructed through life, and how they influence the way women construct and experience their sexuality throughout their lives.

The problematization of sexuality pervades the academic arena as well as the popular media. Existing research in sexuality has focused on such problems of sexuality as unwanted sexual activity, sexual abuse, and rape, which are important topics, but all carry a socially constructed negative connotation. Research has also been guided by a biological and patriarchal perspective which is not female centered or feminist (Baber & Allen, 1992; Tiefer, 1995). A discourse of desire, one that names desire, pleasure, and sexual entitlement, especially for females, is missing (Fine, 1993, p. 79). In order to shift the discourse of sexuality from one of problems to one of desire, an understanding of the way people perceive, define, and experience their sexuality, and how these variables affect individual's sexuality is needed.

The majority of the research in sexuality has been based on the sexual experiences of what society thinks is the norm: male heterosexuality (Osmond, 1993, p. 616). Women's diverse sexual experiences and their complexity are rarely addressed in contemporary research (Baber, 1994, p. 61), nor is the acknowledgement that even male sexuality could be very diverse and different from the social heterosexual norm. My immediate response to this lack of research was to propose to study women's sexualities by themselves guided by a feminist perspective. Studies could be designed to start the process of deconstructing the sexual scripts that people construct in order to reconstruct them in a way that does not oppress members of any group. After reading several feminist papers on female sexuality and its construction (Baber, 1994; Baber & Allen, 1993; Daniluk, 1993; Fine, 1993; Reinharz, 1992), I realized that in order to be able to examine the depths and complexities of sexuality thoroughly, one has to study one gender at a time, with its own scripts and social constructions, to better understand their realities.

Women's sexuality has to be portrayed as an arena of pleasure and agency in which women are empowered to make decisions on their sexual-relational issues without feeling powerless (Baber, 1994; Baber & Allen, 1992; Fine, 1993). Women's sexual experiences have been characterized as dangerous and victimizing as well as pleasurable (Vance, 1984). Baber (1994) pointed out the lack of information on the construction of the sexual satisfaction of women, and emphasized the necessity of women's choice and control over their sexuality in order to find it gratifying. The tension between pleasure and danger prevalent in the sexual discourse of women needs to be addressed and dealt with (Vance, 1984).

In their study of young women's sexualities, Baber and

Frankel (1994) observed how strong the discourses of danger and victimization were (Fine, 1993, p. 77). One of the goals of Baber and Frankel's (1994) study was to understand the interplay of danger and victimization, pleasure, the possibility of sexual coercion, and female and male cultural scripts, on women's sexualities.

In this study, I attempted to explore the ways in which sexual pressure and coercion have been issues for the participants, and how powerful or in control have women felt in regards to their sexual decisions. Another goal of this study was to explore how the Puerto Rican culture, along with the individual women's sexual experiences, and personal sexual definitions, help shape the way Puerto Rican women define and experience their sexuality.

The study was conducted in Puerto Rico because of several important reasons. Although Puerto Rico has been greatly influenced by the United States culture, the Puerto Rican people maintain to a great extent, their traditional cultural beliefs regarding sexuality. The patriarchal societal system inherited from the Spaniards along with very strong religious beliefs (Judeo-Christian-mostly Catholic), is still alive in the Puerto Rican community. Economic and cultural influences from the United States have also helped maintain this structure. The socialization process in the family reinforces women to be dependent, obedient, responsible, submissive, and virginal. Women should be ingenuous with regards to sex, and candid yet naive. Males, on the other hand, are raised to be strong, independent, and aggressive, with little expression of emotions. Males are expected to have had sex before they are married and to marry sexually inexperienced women (Burgos & Diaz Perez, 1986). Religion and patriarchy, along with the diverse cultural background and modern influences regarding sexuality may uniquely affect women's sexuality in Puerto Rico.

Therefore; (a) Puerto Rican participants may be more honest in their accounts because they do not have to filter their stories through the politically correct ways of addressing sensitive topics which is common in the United States; (b) the socio-cultural and religious beliefs regarding sexuality have been kept constant throughout the years; and (c) traditional family and relationship dynamics, in specific those related to sexuality have also been maintained in the Puerto Rican culture.

Because I had to read and analyze other women's accounts and narratives, and because the reading process is constructive, therefore not neutral, it was important that I located my position as a reader in relation to the text (Gavey, 1989). My positions are: Feminist, coming from a combination of two theoretical perspectives; standpoint and postmodern feminist epistemologies; and female, heterosexual, native Puerto Rican,

from a middle-class family in terms of my personal background.

This research was an empowering and liberating experience for both the participants and for myself, given that being a Puerto Rican, I shared some of the social and cultural influences regarding sexuality issues. This research was innovative in that it explored the ways in which culture and societal norms, along with personal experiences and interpretations, have shaped women's sexual scripts and behaviors, expressed in their own words, in their native language, and in their choice of written narratives, in-depth interviews, or both.

Participants in this study did benefit by being able to re-examine their views about their sexuality and how their life experiences have helped shape them. Participants found that writing and talking about their views and experiences helped them better deal with unresolved feelings. A broader benefit was that the information gathered in this study will help researchers better understand how Puerto Rican women construct, redefine, and experience their sexuality. This should be of help to educators, counselors, and other professionals dealing with topics of human development as well as the participants themselves.

CHAPTER II REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

This chapter begins with a historical account of research on female sexuality through the last century. Following is a discussion of the theoretical frameworks or conceptualizations that guided the development of this study. Then a brief overview of the history of Puerto Rico as it pertains to ethnic and cultural background is presented, with a brief exploration of the Puerto Rican culture following. The chapter ends with a discussion of the operational definitions of the main concepts used in the study.

An Historical Account of Research on Female Sexuality

Some authors point to the scarcity of recent research on sexuality that is female centered and feminist (Baber & Allen, 1993). Historically, research regarding female's sexuality has been based on patriarchal and biological perspectives, and on the experience of Euro-American, class-privileged, heterosexual men (Baber & Allen, 1992; Osmond & Thorne, 1993; Tiefer, 1995). Important research on female sexuality though, exists from as early as the late 1800s (Brecher, 1969).

Elizabeth Blackwell exemplified the Victorian/Judeo-Christian views of sexual repression in her work. In one of her best known works, *Essays in Medical Sociology* (1894, 1902), she proposed that sexual education should consist, for the most part, in enlarging and intensifying an innate sense of shame concerning sexual feelings and acts. For instance, she viewed masturbation, as causing an illness and fornication as the attempt to divorce the moral and physical elements of human nature. She also referred to orgasm as a special act for males although she acknowledged that the ability of women to experience 'spasms' (as she referred to female orgasms) in married sexual intercourse usually came with time. Clearly, Blackwell made a distinction between the orgasm of males and the possibility of women experiencing 'spasms' only after getting used to marital intercourse (Brecher, 1969).

Literature in the late 1800s was not always as much influenced by Victorianism, as Havelock Ellis's work, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1936) demonstrate. Ellis's findings anticipated many of the findings of more recent researchers such as Kinsey and Masters and Johnson. His findings regarding female sexuality included: that women experience sexual desire; that orgasm in females is similar to that experienced by males; that multiple orgasmic capacity is common in women; that frigidity is, in it's majority, psychological in nature; and that the repression of sexuality in girls and adolescents is one of the

major factors in adult frigidity. The most important aspect of Ellis studies, though, is that he emphasized sexuality as a normal as opposed to a deviant phenomenon.

Dickinson (1932) also documented the detrimental effects of a Victorian/Blackwellian upbringing and referred to that upbringing as a debilitating sexual disease for women. In his interviews with patients, Dickinson found that sexual frustration was so common among married women that they had come to divorce sex from the love they felt for their husbands in order to hold the marriage together. He also found that the few that had escaped the consequences of a Victorian upbringing were likely to suffer from that of their husbands. His common phrase was that "it takes two people to make a frigid wife" (As quoted in Brecher, 1969), p.169).

A generation later, Leah Cahan Schaefer (1964) found very similar findings as those reported by Dickinson. Women born in the 30s and 40s had been reared much as Dr. Blackwell would have recommended: All sex was taboo and shameful except in marriage. All the women in Schaefer's study were experiencing guilt, anxiety, and shame towards their sexuality. Their knowledge of sexuality was full of misconceptions and fears of the dangers of pregnancy. Schaefer concluded that while the repression of masturbation and childhood sexuality did not prevent sexual activity, it spoiled enjoyment of future sexual and marital experiences (Schaefer, 1964).

Women also worked on transforming female sexuality from a shameful and immoral experience into a legitimate and pleasurable experience. Helena Wright, a gynecologist, fought to destroy sexual frustration in women by instructing them about their sexuality. Her two books The Sexual Factor in Marriage (1930, 1966) and More on the Sexual Factor in Marriage (1947, 1959), are very explicit in explaining to women how to masturbate and secure orgasm in marriage. In these books, Wright used a pseudo-scientific approach to instruct women in masturbation and the attainment of orgasm during coitus. Many considered it a primer in sexual instruction for women (Brecher, 1969).

Mary Jane Sherfey (1963), on the other hand, studied sexuality with an evolutionary perspective. She wrote one of the best anatomical descriptions of the female sexual anatomy to date including parts such as the clitoris and the crurae ("legs" of the clitoris similar to those of the penis), bringing to light the complexities of the female clitoral system. By doing this, she debunked the myth of an inadequate sexual anatomy proposed by Freud. She attempted to explain sexual repression in terms of history and anthropology (socio-cultural-historical reasons) and predicted the unleashing of female sexual repression due to reasons such as scientific advancement, contraceptive developments, and the then "new" movement towards social

equality. Sherfey also discussed the evolutionary nature of the multiorgasmic capacity in females and presents historical reasons for the introduction of circumcision and the conversion from matriarchy to patriarchy.

Niles Newton (1955), a psychologist, studied female's bodies and sexual capacities which included reproduction, childbirth, and especially sexual pleasure. She was the first to focus a study on the feelings and emotions towards sexuality. In her monograph, entitled Emotions: A study of women's feelings toward menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, infant care, and other aspects of their femininity, she brought into discussion those "other" aspects of femininity, namely sexuality and feelings towards sexual intercourse. Newton and her husband, a gynecology professor, also studied breastfeeding as a physical and psychological process (Newton & Newton, 1967). They reported that breastfeeding was seen by some women as a reminder of nudity and sexuality, and that feelings towards the last two are directly related to feelings towards breastfeeding. They also studied the "let down reflex" (the process that causes breast milk to flow in breastfeeding), and related it to the orgasmic capacity of females. Both the breastfeeding and orgasm reflex, they found, are triggered by oxytocin and can be easily inhibited by psychological factors such as anxiety. This connection to oxytocin helped explain the fact that some women can be brought to orgasm with only breast stimulation and that others become sexually aroused while feeding their babies (Newton & Newton, 1967).

Alfred Kinsey has been regarded as the first to use scientific methods in sexuality research. Being trained in the natural sciences, he applied the rigor of basic sciences to interviewing people about their sexual behaviors. An important predecessor of Kinsey was Katherine Davis (1929), Factors in the Sex Life of 2200 women. She also utilized statistical methods to analyze data on the sexuality of women in the early 20th century. Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard's Sexual Behavior in the Human Female (1953) focuses on the sexual experience of women. Their work documents the rarity of female frigidity, women's capacity for orgasm, the diversity of orgasmic responses, lack of orgasm for many women, more occurrence of orgasm in masturbation than in intercourse, and a re-evaluation of masturbation as legitimate and distinct source of female pleasure. Kinsey renewed the interest in research on female sexuality and is still regarded by many as the most complete and reliable collection of data on the topic ever gathered (Brecher, 1969).

Probably the next most significant of the sex researchers are William Masters and Virginia Johnson. Masters and Johnson (1966) really brought laboratory work into sexuality research by engaging in an observational study of physiological sexual responses. Besides examining the physiological processes in the

human sexual response, they also reported on the psychological aspects of sexual response and how psychological "hang-ups" lead to the three major forms of sexual inadequacy in our culture: female frigidity, impotence, and premature ejaculation in the male. Further, they described ethically sound methods by which other therapists could effectively treat these conditions in the majority of the cases. Masters and Johnson developed a model of human sexual response that is parallel, similar, but distinct for both genders. This model set the base for the physiological understanding of sexual response today.

More recently, Shere Hite (1976) published the results of a nationwide study on female sexuality. In this study she asked women about their experiences and thoughts about several sexual behaviors. These included masturbation, orgasms, intercourse, clitoral stimulation, lesbianism, and sexual slavery, among others. In her book, The Hite Report she stated that women have been told how to feel about sex, but never asked how they felt about it (p.xi). She thus set out to ask women questions about how they felt, liked and thought about sex. Even though this study took into consideration women's feelings and experiences, it still asked them particular questions about specific behaviors. Women had a chance to speak out about what they were asked, but probably remained silent about those topics that the questionnaire did not cover.

With few exceptions, the reviewed research focuses on the biology of sexual behavior rather than on sexual meanings, feelings, and influences. It was also primarily quantitative (even when interviews were performed), with the exception of Schaefer's interviews (1964) and Hite's (1976) study which utilized qualitative methods of analysis and reporting. It is clear that these researches are not women centered or feminist; they are based on a biological approach to sexuality (Tiefer, 1995) guided by a heterosexist definition of sexuality. Nevertheless, these researches can not be overlooked though, because they show how female sexuality has been an investigated and important topic through this century.

Theoretical Frameworks

Given the social nature of sexual scripts, and based on the assumption of the sexual construction of sexuality (Baber, 1994, p.60; Baber & Allen, 1993, pp.68-70; Fine, 1993, pp.75-99; Law's & Schwartz, 1977), a social constructivist/feminist perspective was primarily used to guide the methodology and the interpretation of the research findings.

Feminist Perspectives

Feminist perspectives were used as the main frameworks guiding this study. There is not one, but many feminist perspectives. Among all of them there are common basic

assumptions which follow. Societal institutions disadvantage females and other oppressed groups making them invisible and powerless by denying them a voice (Fine, 1993). The feminist agenda goes beyond documenting inequality and powerlessness, it discusses the contradicting messages about women's roles, the ways in which oppression is hidden, and how women fight, conform, or even collude with their oppression (Thompson, 1992). It challenges the portrayal of women as passively oppressed and victimized and visualizes women as active agents of their own lives, even when not able to control the circumstances surrounding them (Thompson, 1992). Feminist theory provides women with hope for the future. In this same way, nonfeminist-traditional/positivist research distorts or masks the experiences and realities of women (Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993, p. 169).

One of the goals of feminist research is to sensitize people to the different realities of women's lives, including sexism and social injustice (Jayaratne, 1983). All knowledge is assumed to be gendered and classified by class, race, culture, and age among other characteristics (Thompson, 1992). Thompson (1992) pointed out the importance of presenting diversity and a range of patterns to emphasize both differences and similarities within and among groups. Feminist research reexamines existing concepts and generates new ones grounded on women's words and experiences (DuBois, 1983).

One of the views that has guided feminist research is the assumption that all existing knowledge is based on the experiences of Euro-American, class privileged, heterosexual men (Osmond & Thorne, 1993, p. 593). Jayaratne and Stewart (1991) suggested that to maximize the development of "new" knowledge, researchers should always attempt political analysis of the results and to seek active participation in the dissemination of the research findings. It is important to consider how will the findings will empower women. Because knowledge brings power, research results have to be made available to everyone interested in them (Duelli-Klein, 1983; Walsh, 1989). By using feminist research as an empowering tool, we can address feminist interests and direct research towards social change (Osmond & Thorne, 1993, p. 593).

Feminist approaches to research attempt to minimize the imposed hierarchies and exploitative relationships prevalent in traditional positivist methods (Rosenblatt & Fisher, 1993). Research participants could be included as part of the research planning process (Allen & Baber, 1992). For instance, they could collaborate with the development of data collection techniques that would be as unobtrusive as possible, or they could meet with the researcher in feedback sessions and confirm interpretations of their own experience as legitimate (Walsh, 1989). Various authors state that the research process should be interactive, collaborative, and cooperative (DuBois, 1983; Duelli-Klein, 1983,

Walsh, 1989). If the latter is a goal for the study, Walsh (1989) suggested that the researcher should report all other tasks that the participants were involved in besides serving as the source of the data. Walsh also suggested that the research process be described as well as how access and consent were requested of the participants, how feedback was received, and how findings might be used (Walsh, 1989). If research is directed toward emancipating women and enhancing their lives, it is appropriate, in describing their experiences, to be loyal to the words and images the participants themselves used (Thompson, 1992). Finally, feminist approaches to research assume that knowledge about gender is socially constructed and that differences between genders are either exaggerated or trivialized in ways that legitimize and perpetuate the power relations between them. That is why gender relations have to be analyzed in relation to their specific socio-cultural and historical contexts (Osmond & Thorne, 1993, p. 593).

Using feminist perspectives is one of the ways that a discourse is created in which women can express their own experiences and histories (Poovey, 1988). In this particular research, the use of women's own voices and personal accounts of their sexual experience in the form of narratives provided me with their own "reality". These women's sexual realities are constructed around a dominant "discourse" which is, at least in the Western world, a white, middle-class, male one (Baber & Allen, 1993; Osmond & Thorne, 1993). Their own accounts exemplified the ways in which these women interpret this discourse, how it affects them, and the way they think and act on their sexuality. These narratives also provided them and myself, with an understanding of this process in order to reconstruct it in ways that will enhance women's experiences. The feminist perspective, along with a constructionist point of view, tries to debunk the idea of sexuality as "instinctual" or "natural" - that binds genders to specific roles - and replace it with another one in which sexuality is constructed by social-historical-cultural forces and practices (Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Osmond & Thorne, 1993; Weeks, 1985). Tiefer (1987, 1995) suggested, that in order for people to refocus their views about sexuality, they must view sexuality as a construct that emerges in interactions as a result of social and cultural expectations and negotiations, not as something emerging from "inside" of each person.

A feminist discourse also stresses the diversity and variation that exist in both women and men's sexualities (Baber, 1994; Baber & Allen, 1993; Osmond & Thorne, 1993). Finally, feminist research encourages research inclusive of other kinds of differences that are invisible to mainstream research such as social class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and age (Osmond & Thorne, 1993).

Social Construction Theory

In social construction theory, as in most feminist approaches, the idea of an objectively knowable truth does not exist. Knowledge is constructed through social interpretation and the intersubjective influences of language, family, and culture (Hoffman, 1990). The basic contention of social constructionism is that reality is socially constructed (Berger, 1967), that is, what we perceive as reality has been shaped through a system of social, cultural and interpersonal processes. Four assumptions are made by social constructionists:

(1) The way we go about studying the world is determined by available concepts, categories, and methods. Our concepts often incline us toward or even dictate certain lines of inquiry while precluding others, making our results the products more of our language than of empirical discovery.

(2) The concepts and categories we use vary considerably in their meanings and connotations over time and across cultures. Concepts are assumed to relate to permanent human experiences or functions. (3) The popularity or persistence of a particular concept, category, or method depends more on its usefulness (political usefulness particularity) than on its validity. (4) Descriptions and explanations of the world are themselves forms of social action and have consequences. (Gergen, 1985, pp.266-275).

Social construction theory explores an evolving set of meanings that are continuously created from people's interactions. The development of concepts is a social phenomena, a fluid process that can only evolve within a cradle of communication (Hoffman, 1990). It is only through the interaction of the socio-cultural processes with the intrapersonal self (ideas, beliefs, history) that the construction of knowledge is nurtured. This theory places an emphasis on the individual's active role in constructing reality, while being guided by her/his culture (Tiefer, 1987, 1995). Persons are constructors of knowledge in their lives assisted by the prevalent discourses in their societies and cultures, and their own life experiences.

Through social constructionism, researchers can look for diverse meanings of sexuality within and between social groups (Thompson, 1992). Social construction theorists contend that physically identical sexual acts may have different social and personal meanings depending on how they are defined and understood in their different cultures and historical periods (Vance, 1991). Besides influencing the way individuals define and act on their behaviors, socio-historical constructions also organize and give meaning to collective sexual experience through, for instance, constructions of sexual identities, definitions, ideologies, and regulations (Vance, 1991). It is interesting to argue then, how it is that sexuality has been "repressed" and "liberated" through time if it is only a construction of the expression of a biological potential.

The history of American sexuality...is not one of progress from repression to liberation...we argue that sexuality has been continually reshaped by the changing nature of the economy, the family, and politics...questions of repression and enjoyment are themselves present-minded. They rest on a contemporary belief...that physical sexual pleasure...is critical to human happiness. They often also assume that sexuality is a fixed essence that resides within the individual... This essentialist framework overlooks the ways [sexuality] has been constructed. It also ignores [sexuality's] grounding in economic change and its role in maintaining systems of social inequality (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1988, pp. xi-xiv).

Foucault, in his History of Sexuality: An Introduction (1978), stated that there is no such thing as an internal force or drive, sexuality, that can be manipulated in such ways. He went on to say that what can be manipulated are ideas and definitions, a potential regulator of the ways in which sexuality can be thought of, defined, and expressed. Sexualities, he argued, are constantly produced, changed, modified, and the nature of sexual discourse and experience changes accordingly (Foucault, 1978).

With the above in mind, a brief historical and cultural account of Puerto Rico will be presented in order to provide a better understanding of the complexities of cultural influences on behaviors.

A Brief Historical Account of Puerto Rico: Ethnic and Cultural Backgrounds

A much simplified account of the history of Puerto Rico will help trace the diverse ethnic and cultural heritages that have melted into what is defined as the Puerto Rican culture. Puerto Ricans have incorporated values from their Spanish and Moorish heritage, from the indigenous *taínos*, from the African slaves, from other European migrants to the island, and finally, in the later decades, from the United States (Badillo-Ghali, 1982).

The aboriginal inhabitants of the island were, for the most part, *taínos* (one of the tribes from the Caribbean). They were referred to as "Indians" by the Spanish conquerors. This native culture had a patriarchal government ruled by the *cacique*, the main chief. This position was usually occupied by men, but there is historical evidence that women held it too. The word of the *cacique* was supported by the *bohique*, a type of healer who held an important position in the society (Enamorado Cuesta, 1971). In the *taíno* society, polygamy was practiced by the upper class men who could marry as many women as they could support. The lower class, the *naborias*, who could only support two wives, practiced bigamy. One explanation for these practices is that sex

is forbidden with women that had given birth for up to 4 years, approximately the time that took to wean a child from her mother.

Adultery was not common among the *taíno* society but if it happened, only men were punished. Women's adulterous transgressions were tolerated probably because the cacique's lineage was traced through the women's descent (Enamorado Cuesta, 1977). Historians, though, portray women as very honest and loyal after marriage. The sexual status of women was identified by the length of her skirt. No clothing was worn during childhood and pre-adolescence; very short skirts demonstrated previous sexual experience; and married women wore long skirts (Sued-Badillo, 1979).

During the Spanish colonization and domination period (1493-1898), the Spanish brought into the island their institutions and culture. Spaniards had a patriarchal system of family structure, with the father as the head of the family and the economic provider. Families were extended and many times lived together in the same home (Mellado, 1973). One of the main institutions introduced by the Spaniards was the Catholic religion, which they tried to impose on the natives. Natives were not receptive to all the changes, especially not to working for the Spanish, therefore they either resisted and were eventually killed, or escaped to the mountains where they were likely to die due to diseases brought by the Spaniards. The lack of work force pushed the Spaniards to bring into the island the third major ethnic group influencing the Puerto Rican culture, slaves from Africa (Silén, 1970). The struggle against the Spaniard domination lasted throughout the 19th century. The interaction and intermingling among the Taínos, Spaniards and Africans influenced the formation of the Puerto Rican nationality. Puerto Rico, like all other nations, created its own culture (Burgos & Diaz Perez, 1986).

In 1898 Puerto Rico was occupied by the United States, and another foreign culture was introduced into the island. The first governors under the United States domination were from the U.S., but eventually the president designated Puerto Rican governors to rule the island (Lewis, 1970). By 1917, the Jones Law had granted United States citizenship to Puerto Ricans, and by 1952, the United States Congress approved the constitution of the commonwealth of Puerto Rico. As demonstrated by several referendum attempts, Puerto Ricans are still debating the status of the island. While Puerto Rican culture is very strong and has not changed much, the influence of the American culture is readily seen in the island, especially in urban areas. While maintaining their culture and traditions, Puerto Ricans have slowly incorporated American traditions, holidays, and ways of living.

The Puerto Rican Culture

There is no typical Puerto Rican person or family. Puerto

Ricans' economic status and class vary in the same ways as in other cultures and among segments of the population, particular ethnic remnants vary (Badillo-Ghali, 1982). Since the Puerto Rican culture is heterogenous, the information that will be presented here will only reflect the generalized patterns of culture in the island.

Sexual Customs

The expression of sexuality has varied along with the political history of the island. As seen in the historical account, native women were more open about their bodies and towards sexual activity. This may be related to both the fact that lineage was matriarchal and to women's ability to occupy important positions in the government (Burgos & Diaz Perez, 1986). Later, with the influence of the Spanish culture, sexual expression was limited, although only for women, as men were protected by a *machista* ideology prevalent in the Spanish society. The *machista* ideology allows men to be very open and active sexually, to be socially rewarded for this, and to show power and dominance in their relations to females (Burgos & Diaz Perez, 1986). For women, the natural function of reproduction is seen as their main sexual goal, while its pleasurable aspects are viewed as a necessary incentive for its accomplishment. All other sexual behaviors are generally seen as immature and undesirable (Mock, 1984).

Very much like other Latin societies, Puerto Rican society imposes very strong gender differences from birth on. The predominant ideology of *machismo* sees males as superior and females as sexual objects whose aim is to fulfill men's desires and needs (Burgos & Diaz Perez, 1985). Women are also guided by their own ideology: *marianismo*. *Marianismo* is the ideal of females as obedient and docile. It is based on women's religious requirement to model the Virgin Mary, a prominent religious figure for Catholics who is seen as the ideal for women's lives. Women are supposed to be quiet, passive, and sexually available for their husbands while not placing importance on their own pleasure. Women are supposed to be candid yet naive. They should not demonstrate knowledge or intentions about sex. Puerto Rican males seek for marriage women who are naive and preferably not experienced when it comes to sex (Nieves-Falcón, 1972).

During the process of courtship, intimacy, affection, and touching are publicly displayed. However, females are advised not to "give in" to sexual advances of their boyfriends because they risk not being considered for marriage later (Burgos & Diaz Perez, 1986). Differences regarding sex are observed through the lifespan. Regardless of their age female widows are not expected to remarry or seek a male companionship out of respect for their late husbands. Contrary to men, who are expected to remarry soon to fulfill their "need for women", females should not be seeking sexual fulfillment after a spouse's death (Sánchez, 1984).

Women are expected to sacrifice their own needs for the benefit of their families (Comas-Díaz, 1985). Santos (1985) notes that there is a tendency for the working class the working class to be more traditional in their sexual values and that more educated, economically advantaged females, and to a lesser extent males, tend not to place as much importance on these traditional beliefs.

Sexual Symbols

During the early school years, gender roles are reinforced in Puerto Rican children through the educational system reflecting sex discrimination in the textbooks (Picó, 1989). Picó demonstrated the perpetuation of *machismo* in elementary textbooks depicting drawings of men in very active, working roles and females in their traditional roles of mother and housewife. Traditional roles and information regarding sexuality both for men and for women is most likely to be acquired at home early in childhood. There is no formal sex education curriculum in schools, only an elective course in either "health" or "human development" in the late high school years. Gloria Mock (1984), a professional in the study of sexuality, wrote:

The reality is that by the time a child goes to school, he or she has probably learned that sex is something that can be talked about or not; that his or her body is a source of pleasure or a source of shame; that it is safe to be close to people or that intimacy must be avoided. Perhaps a top priority for educators is the training of parents for this delicate and important task. (p. 20)

As is clear by this excerpt, sexuality education is not common in Puerto Rico's educational system probably because it is expected to be a subject to be dealt with within the family. Note that the alternative proposed by this sexologist is not to implement a formal system of sex education, but to train the parents to do so themselves.

Sexuality is an attractive and stimulating subject for oral discussion among many Puerto Ricans. It is not only dealt with verbally, but in a stronger way nonverbally by means of flirting and sensuous dancing (Burgos & Diaz Perez, 1985). Sex is also a prevalent subject as evidenced in Puerto Rican literature and artistic productions. Music and dance, two favorite entertainment sources for Puerto Ricans, openly deal with sexual topics. The *salsa* dance music specifically, besides representing popular knowledge and a way of life (Torres, 1973), includes themes related to sexuality such as breakup loneliness, a man's need for a woman, and quality of "love" (translated to sex) with someone. Many of these songs reflect the *machista* ideology. Dancing of *salsa* is very sensuous and involves the rhythmic movement of bodies to the already sensual and sexual songs.

Women and Their Sexuality

Internalized sexual prejudices along with cultural and religious beliefs, can retard or inhibit women's sexual responses

such as orgasm (Santos, 1985). In a study about self-perception and sexual satisfaction, Hernández (1982) found that these two are positively correlated; the higher women's self-perceptions are the higher the sexual satisfaction they will experience.

It is hard for women to develop a high self-perception along with all the cultural and religious negative sexual messages. Women seem to be experiencing strong internal conflicts when it comes to their sexuality (Burgos & Diaz Perez, 1986). Mock (1985) indicated that if a woman is ruled by her socialization, she will repress her sexual expression; if she responds to her sexual needs and expresses her sexuality, then she will feel guilty. These seems to be a no-win situation for women. An exploration of how women deal with these mixed messages in this study should shed some light on the subject.

Traditional sexual scripts - those that perpetuate gender and power differences - or those developed through less than positive experiences, may negatively influence the way individuals perceive and act on their sexuality, therefore decreasing their power over sexual situations (Baber, 1994). This power to choose and control one's sexuality (Laws, 1980) is also called sexual agency (Baber, 1994; Laws, 1980). Through the analysis of the individuals' accounts of the meanings they ascribe to their sexualities, and the interpretation of their experiences with sexuality, I attempted to gain an understanding of how individual sexual personal meanings are created and how, in turn these meanings influence the way women experience their sexuality through their lives.

Operational Definitions of Concepts

Sexuality

The most difficult aspect of the study of human sexuality is defining the subject matter (Tiefer, 1991). Sexuality, while being a widely used concept, is almost never defined in research and therefore has many diverse meanings. Researchers in the field of sexuality do not usually provide the reader with a definition of the term, and if they do, they do not subscribe to a particular or predetermined one. Reiss (1986) indicates that a precise definition of sexuality is not available. Naming and defining concepts is crucial in research, especially when using a feminist perspective (Tiefer, 1991). "What is taken to be 'sexuality', what sex means, and what is meant by sex...is the issue" (MacKinnon, 1987, p. 69). Goettsche (1989) defined sexuality as:

the individual capacity to respond to physical experiences which are capable of producing body-centered genital excitation, that only subsequently becomes associated with cognitive constructs (either anticipatory for new experiences or reflective of past experiences), independent of ongoing physical experiences (p. 249).

Individual capacity refers to sexuality as emerging within each person, as opposed to coming from external sources. While

social regulations place the limits on manifestations of sexuality as well as channel sexual behavior, they do not create sexuality. Cultures construct the rules, beliefs, values, and acceptable behaviors, all elements that underlie the discourse and regulation of sexuality (Goettsche, 1989). An experience can be sexual in biological terms while not being experienced as such. The significance of social definitions is that people have to define actions as sexual before being able to engage in "sexual" acts. In that same way, only when acts are pre-defined and enacted with a sexual purpose, will the person experience them as sexual (Goettsche, 1989).

When a behavior is body-oriented it means that it is experienced through the body regardless of its source. Sources for sexual experiences can be environmental, by self-stimulation, by another person, by unconscious muscle contractions, and even by memories of past sexual experiences. Sexuality is almost always defined in terms of genital stimulation and orgasms regardless of cultural variations in sexual definitions. Cultural scripts (Simon & Gagnon, 1984, 1986) also regulate sexuality by restricting sexual activities to reproductive anatomy and processes, specifically intercourse, inhibiting a more diverse sexual experience or a broader diversity of activities.

Societies' and individuals' definitions of sexuality as well as cultural scripts, are inclusive of emotions such as love. Sexuality and emotions can occur simultaneously, but are distinct from each other. Emotions carry a moral weight derived from social conventions and sexuality has no inherent morality, only that which is constructed for the definition and enactment of it (Goettsche, 1989). This definition acknowledges that sexuality is not static and that it has the potential to change through the lifespan.

Sexuality is defined as a capacity or potentiality, not as an inherent force. Using a biological focus on sexuality, that is, defining it as an inherent, uncontrollable force, trivializes and mystifies the social and psychological aspects of sexuality (Tiefer, 1987). Biological research in sexuality usually approaches the topic by maximizing it as an urge impossible to overcome, and by minimizing the social factors underlying sexuality such as sexual socialization, economic and social inequalities, and the social climate of violence against women (Tiefer, 1991). Sociological perspectives in sexuality have also focused on studying what is constructed as deviance - the problematization of sexuality -, much more than conventional patterns and populations, the real diversity and variance among the population.

It is very important to acknowledge the influence of sexual constructions in shaping sexuality. Goettsche (1989) emphasized the importance of culture in defining, shaping, and promoting sexuality, including the maintenance of socially stigmatized patterns. Goettsche did not include in the definition social norms or sexual scripts (Baber, 1994; Laws & Schwartz, 1977), which are specific for each individual's culture and personal

experiences, and how these affect the concept. He acknowledged though, that while sexuality is a potential in all human beings, the ways people feel, think about, express, and experience sexuality are socially constructed and therefore influenced by external and internal processes which together create and change sexual scripts (Goettsche, 1989).

Sexual Scripts. Sexuality is defined as being socially constructed in terms of social, political, and economical influences (Fine, 1993; Laws & Schwartz, 1977; Rust, 1993; Simon & Gagnon, 1984, 1986). Sexual scripts are defined as "the implicit rules that individuals develop for themselves regarding the who, when, what, where, and how of their sexual behaviors and activities" (Baber, 1994, p.60). They are the blueprints of sexuality, the specific guidelines or rules that individuals develop that determine their sexual behaviors and activities (Baber, 1994; Simon & Gagnon, 1984, 1986). Laws and Schwartz (1977) defined them as "repertoire of acts and statuses that are recognized by a social group, together with the rules, expectations, and sanctions governing these acts and sanctions" (p.18). The concept of sexual scripts is very helpful in explaining women's constructions of their sexualities and the process of acquiring a sexual identity. Because sexual scripts arise from the existing social discourse about sexuality, they carry with them messages regarding sexual normalcy, sexual power, and appropriate sexual expression (Baber, 1994). By looking at the metaphor of sexual scripts, we are defining sexuality

(1) as emergent in relationships and situations rather than as universal essence; (2) as needing to be constructed rather than needing to be controlled; (3) as a shader of conduct (as when sex is used to satisfy needs for affection, protection, and gender-validation); (4) as a contingent (dependent on our particular lives) rather than a necessary (mandated by some inevitable internal energy) form of human behavior; and (5) as an aspect of life that is qualitatively different for children and adults (Gagnon & Simon, 1973, pp.27-60).

As will become clear, sexual scripts are derived from a social constructionist approach (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1988; Hoffman, 1990; Miller & Fowlkes, 1980; Thompson, 1992; Tiefer, 1987; Vance, 1991).

Sexual Agency. The concept of sexual agency was defined by Laws (1980) as the power to choose and control one's sexuality. Feminist argue to what extent are women's sexualities shaped by socio-cultural forces; and to what degree are women agents of their own sexualities, redefining existing constructions of female sexuality (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). Baber (1994) suggests that sexual agency can be developed in order to reshape sexual beliefs and behaviors. Sexual agency is not static, it draws from past experiences, and has the potential to modify previous sexual scripts and behaviors.

Sexual Pressure

Sexual pressure seems an effective tool in achieving consent to sexual activity. Over 50% of the participants in a study by Christopher (1988) reported being pressured into kissing, breast and genital manipulation, and oral contact with their partners' genitals. In another study, women described instances of sexual pressures by men which ranged from mild insistence, to reluctant consent, to assault and violent rape (Holland, Ramazonoglu, Sharpe, & Thompson, 1992). These women reported that the main pressures on them come from the men they are involved with and the meaning and importance men's sexual needs have for them. Some women have indicated their willingness to ignore coercive behavior as long as: (a) the man was willing to apologize, (b) the women were not able to express their disinterest in sex, and (c) the women felt that they could be blamed for the experience (Murnen, et al. 1989). Shame and self-blame regarding past sexual activity was one of the themes drawn from Daniluk's (1993) qualitative study on the meaning and experience of female sexuality.

Unwanted Sexual Activity. Unwanted sexual activity has been defined by several authors (Lewin, 1985; Muehlenhard & Cook, 1988; Murnen et al., 1989; Small & Kerns, 1993). Unwanted sexual activity ranges in definitions from unwanted kissing, petting, or intercourse (Muehlenhard & Cook, 1988) to persistent physical touching, sexual coercion, acquaintance rape, and even rape (Small & Kerns, 1993). According to Muehlenhard and Cook, unwanted sexual behavior occurs when incidences of sexual behaviors happen as a result of physical or psychological pressure or because of pressure from social scripts about male sexuality (their sample was entirely male). Small and Kerns study, on the other hand, only includes physical and forceful activities as instances of unwanted sexual activities. In their research about coping with unwanted sexual activity, Murnen et al. do not even directly define the term, but refer to forced sex and rape on several occasions, when referring to the experiences of the participants. Because these latter three definitions of unwanted sexual activity are inclusive of physical force, it is important to make a distinction between non-physical and physical sexual pressures (Holland et al., 1992).

Unwanted intercourse, as defined by Lewin (1985), occurs when a reluctant partner is induced to "give in" to sexual demands against her (his) will by psychological pressure from the would-be lover, but without the use or of the threat of force. Lewin (1985) proposes a theory of unwanted intercourse in which she attributes the high incidence of unwanted intercourse to four societal norms: (a) current remnants of the ideology of male supremacy, the idea that men demonstrate their superiority by persuading women to agree as a way of demonstrating their submissiveness; (b) the norm of male initiative where the one person holding the initiative has more power; (c) the lack of positive sexual experience norms for women; if sex is a male

victory and show of power then sex is for women a proof of defeat and powerlessness, and; (d) the "stroking norm" for females. The stroking function of females has been defined by feminists as the female belief that women should put their men's needs ahead of their own. That could mean participating in sexual intercourse, or any type of sexual behavior for that matter, in order to please men even if the act is not desired or wanted by them. Lewin suggests that the four norms explain why unwanted sexual behavior occurs so frequently without any type of physical force or the threat of force. These four norms could also be used to explain how women sometimes feel pressured into unwanted sexual activity.

Coercive Sexual Activity. Coercive sexual activity has also been defined in different ways in research (Craig, Kalichman, & Follingstad, 1989; Gavey, 1989; Holland et al., 1992; Waterman et al., 1989). Sexual coercion has been defined as "the attainment of sexual intercourse by a male with an unwilling female, using such means as saying things that were not true, making false promises, or talking her into it (Craig et al., 1989, p.423). In this case, the authors only addressed verbal sexual coercion with no use of physical force, which will be congruent with Lewin's (1985) definition of unwanted intercourse, although some participants stated their willingness to use force to obtain sex (Craig et al., 1989, p. 430).

So diverse are the meanings ascribed to sexual coercion that in the study by Waterman and colleagues (1989), the authors briefly defined the term as forced sex, which is totally opposite to the definition proposed by Craig and colleagues (1989). In the latter study, conducted with lesbian and gay male students, participants were directly asked about incidents of "forced sex", therefore limiting their answers of coercive incidents only to those that were characterized by the use of force. In her discourse analysis on women's experiences of sexual coercion, Gavey (1989) acknowledged the variety of conceptualizations for sexual coercion by referring to a "full range of sexual coercion" (p.468). The range includes little discussed phenomena such as social coercion and interpersonal coercion as well as more traditional forms of coercion such as date rape and sexual assault.

Social coercion (engaging in sex only to avoid appearing frigid or old-fashioned) and interpersonal coercion (engaging in sex because it is the only way to stop a man's continuous pleadings) were found to be factors in women's decisions of engaging in sexual activity (Gavey, 1989). One third of the women in the Koss and Oros (1982) study reported submitting to intercourse because of fear they would be unable to stop the man's arousal. In this same study, 20% of the women reported engaging in intercourse when the man promised something that was not true such as loving her or needing sex to form a serious relationship. These findings are similar to those in Christopher's (1988) study where women stated they were willing

to give in to sexual pressures while seriously dating because they did not want the man to end the relationship. The forms of coercion in which the female appears to have fully consented, especially social coercion are rarely discussed in the literature. Gavey (1989) suggests this happens because within the dominant discourses on heterosexuality, these behaviors appear natural.

Sexual coercion was defined as any incidence of sexual pressure that leads to any kind of sexual behavior, that is characterized by the use or the threat of physical force (Holland et al. 1992). In their study about sexual pressure, Holland and associates did not directly use the term sexual coercion, probably to avoid entering the sea of confusion surrounding the term. Instead, sexual coercion is seen as part of a continuum; they characterize the experiences of their participants as dimensions of sexual pressure, either verbal or physical. Sexual coercion is distinct from sexual pressure in that it involves behavior from the victim done out of fear of the consequences (Holland et al., 1992; Waterman et al., 1989). Holland and associates (1992) were able to classify the sexual pressures experienced by the women into three categories: (a) as coming from personal sources, (b) as coming from social sources, (c) and as coming directly from men.

The women participating in the study had few sources of sexual information, and in the absence of personal experience to draw on, they have tried to make sense out of contradictory sources of information regarding what constitutes sexuality, how to manage sexual relationships, and what to expect from sexual intercourse. Young women in the study defined their sexual relationships in terms of men's sexual needs and questioned to what extent they could feel empowered to define sex as pleasurable for themselves. The main pressures on young women come from the men they are involved with and the meanings and importance that they attribute to men's sexual needs and behaviors.

Estrich (1987) reported that many men in the U.S. believe that they can force a woman to have sex against her will, but that if the woman knows them and if the man does not use violence (as defined by themselves), then the actions do not constitute rape. If the women encountered in these situations have come to share, through socialization, the same perceptions, they may not regard themselves as having being raped either if the man concerned was known to them, if they were drunk at the time, or if they failed to avoid the situation or to offer effective resistance (Holland et al., 1992). What women experience as sexual violence or pressure, is therefore not simple to categorize, particularly when they blame themselves for the experience.

Where women experience the more violent and coercive forms of sexual pressure such as child abuse, rape, assault, or threats, the experiences can shape their expectations of men's behavior in subsequent sexual encounters (Holland et al., 1992).

It is important to emphasize that while some physical expressions of violence are very obvious, other social pressures for controlling women's sexualities are harder to identify, as the ways in which gender ideologies are embedded in social and economic processes can be very complex (Stanley & Wise, 1983).

Therefore, researchers should not limit the scope of their definitions regarding sexual pressure only to those forms openly and politically accepted in the present discourse. Even though the experiences of the women in the study by Holland and associates (1992) were not positive, they should not be taken as wholly negative. Experiences of pressured sex contradict young women's expectations of loving, fulfilling, romantic relationships, and could make them determine not to be used, dominated, or controlled in the same way again.

Scripted Refusal/Token Resistance to Sex

Communication about sexual policies has been found to be very difficult for college students (Allegeier, 1986) who seem to be unable to know when sex is appropriate and wanted, and to communicate it effectively. Scripted refusal, or token resistance to sex, means saying no to sexual intercourse when actually desiring it (Muehlenhard & McCoy, 1991). In their study 36% of the scripted refusals resulted in sexual intercourse. In almost 50% of these cases, the women never indicated their consent. Women also reported more negative feelings in the situation where scripted refusal resulted in intercourse than when they did not.

In another study by Muehlenhard and Hollabaugh (1988), 39.3% of the women participating reported having engaged in token resistance to sex. Women in this study indicated thinking that this behavior was common, and that men-women relationships were adversarial and often use physical force which is purported to be enjoyed by women. In a cross-cultural study, both men and women in the U.S., but more men, reported engaging in token resistance to sex; in Russia and Japan women were more likely to say no to sex while desiring it (Sprecher et al. 1994). Although these findings suggest cross cultural differences, they may also suggest that even within the same culture men and women are sometimes unable to communicate effectively about sexual topics.

Sexual Victimization: Child Abuse and Rape

In some instances, unwilling partners are forced into sexual activity from which they are not able to escape. Sexual victimization in the form of childhood sexual abuse and rape has been found to have negative psychological consequences for some women (Gidycz, Coble, Latham, & Layman, 1993; Lebowitz & Roth, 1994). A study with victims of childhood sexual abuse found that the victim's responses to the abuse were related to the severity of the abuse (Long & Jackson, 1993). Immediate responses to sexual abuse were complex with victims identifying feelings such as anger, guilt, negative and positive emotions all at once. Although negative emotions following abuse characterized the majority of victims, a group of women reported positive emotions

occurring at the time of abuse. Moreover, not all experiences labeled as abuse by researchers were identified as such, nor did all label themselves as victims (Long & Jackson, 1993).

In a recent study by Gydyocz and associates (1993), results of a path analysis proposed that a sexual victimization experience early in life is a risk factor for an adult victimization experience. In the nine week interval of this study 18% of the participants reported experiencing some kind of sexual victimization and 7.1% reported experiencing rape or attempted rape. Also, women who were victimized in adulthood were more likely to have been victimized in childhood or adolescence.

Long and Jackson (1993) found that individuals experiencing high levels of guilt or fear after a childhood sexual abuse experience showed poorer social adjustment than those which experienced anger or disgust. Those who experienced anger or disgust behaved more adequately later in life. Lebowitz and Roth (1994) investigated cultural beliefs (constructions) and how these influence female survivors of rape in making sense of their experience. Women in their study reported on ways in which cultural beliefs about women, their sexuality, and rape became important to women in the process of understanding their rape experience.

Religion

In her study about women's sexual meanings and experiences, Daniluk (1993) identified themes influencing the lives of the participating women. Among them are: how women internalize the negative view of female sexuality, and the inconsistencies between their life experiences and the socio-cultural constructions of female sexuality. One of the themes she derived from the data was structural and institutional sources of sexual themes in the lives of women. This topic included medicine, sexual violence, media, and religion. Of these, religion was very influential on the sexual attitudes and behaviors of the women.

In a study exploring sexual attitudes and behaviors of married Christian college alumni, Beach (1994) found that the great majority of women (84%), but not of men (54%) had their first intercourse experience with their fiancée or spouse. In the families of his sample, parent-child conversations regarding sexuality were rare or nonexistent. The respondent's sources of sexual information were: for females, peers 47%, mother 20%, teachers 13%; and for males, peers 58%, father 15%, teacher 15%, and siblings 4%. In terms of virginity, women were expected to have abstained from sexual intercourse before marriage more than men. Religiosity, though, did not prevent participants from engaging in most of the common premarital sexual behaviors (Beach, 1994).

Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, and Gebhart (1953) explored the influence of religion on sexuality. They found that masturbation and premarital intercourse were more common among religiously inactive than among religiously active women. In another study, respondents who participated in church less frequently were found

to engage more than those who participated more frequently in only a few sexual behaviors: oral stimulation of genitals, and intercourse (Davidson, Darling, & Norton, 1995). It is interesting to note that in this study, women who attended church were more likely than those who did not attend to have had sexual intercourse at an early age. They also thought of masturbation as a sin and as an unhealthy practice that more likely produced shame and guilt (Davidson, et al. 1995). The researchers found no significant differences between groups in terms of sexual adjustment or psychological or physiological satisfaction.

Most Christian religions lead women to believe that their primary role in society is at home attending the family and all the family's needs (Caponi, 1992). Caponi discussed how the myths and traditions of the Judeo-Christian religions have a negative effect on women. Judeo-Christian traditions contribute to women's oppression by making women's feelings of inferiority seem rational and inevitable. These beliefs are seen by women as trapping them in the patriarchal structure by justifying and perpetuating it.

Christian religion, specifically Roman-Catholicism, pervades the Puerto Rican culture and traditions. The Catholic religion was an important institution introduced by the Spaniards during the colonization period (Burgos & Diaz Perez, 1986). Christianity in its early days viewed sexuality as a reproductive activity and advocated the suppression of sexual activity occurring only for pleasure (Boswell, 1980; Reiss & Reiss, 1990). Thereafter, and until the present days, a negative religious view towards sexual pleasure has prevailed (Pagels, 1988).

Two ideologies seem to be derived from religion in the Puerto Rican culture: Machismo and Marianismo. Machismo is the quality that exemplifies men's superiority over women (Badillo Ghali, 1982). The Bible makes several references to this fact. In the words of St. Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, we find evidence of this belief, at least for married men and women:

Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church...As the church is subordinate to Christ, so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything (verses 22-24).

Marianismo is the ideal of women as feminine, docile, and obedient (Nieves-Falcon, 1972). It is based on the model of Mary, the virgin mother of God. As Mary accepted God's will, women are expected to accept men's (Caponi, 1992). In Mexico, a primarily Catholic country, Hita Dussel (1989) found that the higher the religious commitment women had, the stronger the interiorization the Church institution was for women. Apart from religion, a patriarchal structure assisted in perpetuating inherited ideologies.

Summary

This chapter reviewed pertinent literature relating to the study of female sexuality. It examined early sexuality research

conducted through the 20th century and discussed the theoretical frameworks used in the development and the analysis of this research study. An historical and cultural overview of Puerto Rico placed the reader in the cultural context the study was conducted. The definition of concepts section discussed the ways in which major concepts used in this study have been defined and investigated in contemporary research and how these research related to the study of female sexuality.

CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY

Overview of the Research Design

The theoretical lenses which guided the development of this research methodology were social constructionism and feminist perspectives. Social constructionism, as Gergen (1992) described, "is principally concerned with elucidating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world in which they live" (p.266). Beliefs about the world are assumed to be constructed and changed by our conversations and experiences with others. Feminist perspectives assume that the "personal is political", life experiences and accounts of women's relationships is a reflection of the society they live in (Walker et al., 1988). This is why it is so important to listen to the participant's own voices in studying women's constructions of their sexualities. Qualitative methods such as narratives and in-depth interviews are better suited than quantitative methods to explore and study meanings, experiences, and processes in people's lives. They provide the participant the opportunity to account for their experiences in their own words, and to account for how society reflects in their own lives. These methods are consistent with both social constructionism and feminist perspectives.

The research design used in this study was a combination of narratives written by the participants with a following interview. Interviews served as an opportunity to further discuss their narratives prompted by questions that emerged from their own accounts. Only the themes already presented in their narratives and the ones that participants chose to discuss in the in-depth interview were used to guide the interview. In this way, the women were able to define their own reality, to define their sexuality as they felt best, and in this way had their true voices heard in the research account (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1983). I suggested that the participants present the narratives in a book format with chapters to facilitate participant's memory, organization, and thoroughness of the material shared.

Three stages were to be presented in the story: Early childhood; Adolescence; and Adulthood. The information included in each section was to cover these three areas: Sexual cultural scripts and sexuality; The incidence and effects of sexual experiences of any type in their sexual histories; and The influence that these scripts, along with past experiences have on the ways women experience their sexuality. Using a chapter format was only a suggestion though, and participants were free to create their stories in any way they chose.

Narratives were selected because they allow the participant to be the creator of the data without being guided by the

researcher's specific questions, or probes, as in the case of open-ended interviews. Narratives are representations; the participant selects what is to be included and excluded, and what are their meanings for them. They re-construct past events and provide an interpretation which is what finally affects their lives (Kholer, 1993, p. 2). A following interview was scheduled to further discuss the accounts on the narratives and to understand the participants' choice of stories and interpretations. In this way, interpretations were confirmed by the narrative authors and in all instances, additional information or explanations were obtained (Allen & Baber, 1992; Mies, 1983; Thompson, 1992).

I attempted to contact the participants 6 months after the last interview and discussed some of the preliminary findings with them. This opportunity provided me with confirmation and feedback from some of the participants, and provided them with an opportunity to be part of the research process and the creation of knowledge (Allen & Baber, 1992; Thompson, 1992; Walsh, 1989). It also provided me with an assessment of participants' feelings and experiences, their feedback regarding the research process, and provided them with an account of the ways in which the process has enlightened and changed me (DuBois, 1983; Walsh, 1989). This feedback is included in the research report for the readers to vicariously experience both the participants' and the researchers' experiences.

Mies (1983) indicated that in order for knowledge to be non-oppressive, it has to emerge through dialogue rather than one-side questioning. By using the proposed methodology, I attempted to make this research process as non-oppressive and non-hierarchical as possible by including participants as collaborators and co-creators of the knowledge creation process (Allen & Baber, 1992; Thompson, 1992; Walsh, 1989).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the data collection and analysis in this study:

Q1 How do social and institutional sources influence the ways in which Puerto Rican women perceive, feel, and act on their sexuality?

Q2 How does sexual experience influence the process of developing sexual meanings?

Q3 How are sexual meanings created, changed, and modified as the nature of social discourse and personal experience changes?

Sample Description and Sample Selection Process

The selection of participants in this study was purposive because of the personal nature of the subject to be studied. I had to allow for some flexibility in terms of the selection process. For instance, my intended sample constituted women born and raised in Puerto Rico who were currently between the ages of 35 to 45. After a month into the participant seeking process, I discussed with my advisor the possibility of broadening the age range in order to increase the chances of interested women participating. The participants' age range was then broadened to be between 25 and 45 years old.

The requirements to participate in the study were: to be a native Puerto Rican woman, born and raised in the island; to be between the ages of 25 and 45; to presently live on the island; and to be willing to participate in this study. Four methods were used for recruiting participants: (a) postings (See Appendix A) were placed in a university, a center for education for women's health, and given to professors and personal friends for them to refer participants, (b) a classified ad (See Appendix B) was submitted to a university newsletter circulating among faculty, (c) classroom announcements (See Appendix C) were given to professors for them to allow me to recruit in their classroom, (d) word-of-mouth.

Women who were either not interested in participating or did not qualify because of age or relationship with me assisted in referring women to participate in the study. Women who were interested were given a packet containing all literature pertinent to the study. Included in the packet was a letter of interest (See Appendix E), a consent form (See Appendix F), guidelines for writing the story (See Appendix G), a background questionnaire (Appendix H), and a copy of local counseling services available in the area (Appendix I). The letter of interest included the research topic, a detailed description of the research process and participants' requirements, and a brief description of myself and my motivations and intentions in doing this study. A local phone number was included in case they had additional questions before they decided to participate. Twenty-five packets were distributed in total.

A total of 12 women agreed to participate in this study. Of these, 3 had responded to postings, 3 to classroom announcements, and 6 to word-of-mouth. The participant's ages ranged from 28 to 44 years with a mean of 33.75 years. All described themselves as heterosexual, 5 were single, 6 were married, and 1 was divorced. All participants had a college degree or were in the process of completing it and all considered themselves to be either middle or upper-middle class.

The study methodology included a narrative and an interview.

Participants were given a choice as to how they wanted to present their stories. Some participants preferred to complete only the narrative, stating that they will be as thorough as would be required and that an interview would not serve as a way of gathering extra information. Also, they mentioned that it was easier to write about certain experiences than to talk about them in front of a stranger. On the other hand, others preferred to have only an outline or the research questions before the interview.

Of the 12 participants, 3 completed only the narratives, seven completed both the narrative and the interview, 1 preferred only to write an outline and the interview, and 1 answered the questions included in her packet in a longer interview. Narratives had diverse formats. While some strictly followed the suggested format, others were very creative in the way they presented their information.

Instrumentation

There was no structured instrument provided to the participants. The study was qualitative in nature and method and the questions open-ended to provide the participants an opportunity to be as detailed as they wished in terms of the information to be included. In a sense, participants created their own instruments. The outlines and narratives that participants provided served as the instrument for the interviews. In those with no outline or narrative, the questions to guide the narrative were used as the instrument and longer interviews resulted.

Participants had the procedures and topics of the study explained to them and were assured confidentiality in the letter of interest. All 12 participants read and signed the informed consent form (See Appendix F) conforming to the human subjects committee guidelines. In actuality, their complete names only appear on the consent form. For the narrative and the interview only code names were used.

Pilot Study

A pilot study consisting of 2 participants was carried out in San Juan, P.R. in December 1995. Postings were placed in an university with no positive recruiting results. This may have been because classes were almost over and the university was administering finals. Thus, the two pilot study participants were recruited by word-of-mouth through some friends.

The results of this pilot study suggested the following changes. Feedback on the guidelines to write the story was received and used in their modification. The time allotted for the participants to write the narratives was increased from one

to three weeks. Also, more flexibility in terms of the choice of the format in which they were going to present their stories was allowed.

Validity

In order for a qualitative research to be valid, it should accurately depict the participant's experiences without trying to predict anything further (Acker et al. 1983; Du Bois, 1983). Also, it should portray a picture of the socio-cultural context around the experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I personally transcribed all narratives and interviews verbatim. This gave me the certainty that all transcripts were true to their original sources, and started giving me a feel for the data.

The anthropological approach to research points out that in order for a researcher to understand a phenomenon in a given culture, the culture needs to be understood first; and that in order for a researcher to understand people, their language needs to be understood also (Rosenblatt & Fisher, 1993). In the case of this study, I being a native Puerto Rican, with only 5 years of having been away from the culture, had the ability to understand the culture, its possible influences on the participants, and the culturally rich phrases that have a different meaning than their surface ones. I acted both as an "insider" (Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993) and as an "outsider" to the culture. Since data for the study were collected in Spanish, the participants had an opportunity to express themselves without the possibility of being misunderstood, or without the danger of not finding the appropriate words in English to express their feelings and meanings about their sexualities.

In several occasions participants mentioned how much easier they thought it was to discuss these matters with someone of the same background who "really knows and understands what I am talking about" ("que de verdad sabe y entiende a lo que me refiero"). I truly believe that coming from the same background and speaking the same language was instrumental in achieving the confidence and rapport this study required. All participants wished me the best of luck in my research endeavors. Some indicated the need of the opportunity for women to contribute in research that addresses these kind of topics. And most of them requested me to keep them informed of the interpretations and results of the study. I produced a copy of the results and discussion chapters to present to the participants which showed interest in the results.

Any research study should be replicable, therefore in this study, all the procedures are described in detail in the research report (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). All the results and discussion were analyzed through the theoretical lenses of social constructionism, feminist perspectives, the participant's

narratives, and my own life and experiences.

Data Collection Procedures

Participants were contacted and a time was set to meet in person for the discussion of the study requirements. The procedures involved were explained to the participants and they were asked to turn in their narratives, along with the signed consent form at a mutually convenient time. All participants read and signed the informed consent form and turned them in with their narratives, outline, or at the time of the interview, accordingly. The interview date and time was selected usually within one to two weeks after collection of the narratives.

Data were collected through the use of written and oral narratives. Narratives are accounts or stories, created by the participants, of their life experience, and their interpretations of them. Participants were invited to write a narrative and were suggested to divide it into three development stages: childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. They were instructed to write about their sexuality in terms of three major areas: (a) the sources of sexual messages, (b) the incidence and effect of any type of sexual experience in their sexual definitions, and (c) the influence that these messages along with their past experiences, have had on the ways in which they experience their sexuality.

After the narratives were collected, a preliminary assessment of the individual topics and information discussed was used to guide the interviews that followed. The probes used to elicit more information from the participant were based only on the information already presented in the narratives. Open-ended questions such as "Is there anything else you would like to share?", and "Anything you would like to add or discuss?" allowed the participant to expand or add information without feeling pressured to talk about a particular topic.

The interviews were held in the participant's site of preference allowing them to have choice and privacy (Kimmel & Moody, 1990; Strain & Chappell, 1982). Most of the time, the interviews took place at the participant's site of work or at their respective universities. A local private office was available to them as a choice although no participant requested it. I requested the consent of participants to audiotape the interviews for further analysis. As the last step, I attempted to contact all participants 6 months later for an individual meeting or phone conversation. In this conversation I presented the individuals with preliminary findings and interpretations of their narratives and interviews. The main purpose of this interview was to seek confirmation and feedback regarding the interpretations of the data provided. While I was not able to contact all participants, the feedback from those contacted is presented as part of the discussion. By including this step,

participants had an opportunity to contribute and be part of the research process (Allen & Baber, 1992; Thompson, 1992; Walsh, 89).

Data Analysis Process

The content of the narratives, in-depth interviews, feedback on interpretations, and personal notes were considered as data in the analysis. The qualitative data analysis techniques used in this study involved a combination of those described by Allen (1989), Bogdan and Biklin (1982), Strauss and Corbin (1990), and Taylor and Bodgan (1984). The analysis was guided by the theoretical perspectives guiding the study (social construction and two feminist perspectives: standpoint and postmodern epistemologies), the participants' own accounts and discussions regarding their constructions of sexuality, and my own understandings and life experiences. Whereas Strauss and Corbin (1990) advocate a parallel and ongoing collection and analysis of the data, Bogdan and Biklin (1982) suggest that only experienced researchers in qualitative studies are able to accomplish this effectively and efficiently. Although it was inevitable that some reflection on the content of the narratives and the interviews occurred during the data gathering process (Bogdan & Biklin, 1982), the formal analysis of the data started after all data were collected (Allen, 1989).

Taylor and Bogdan (1984) divide the analysis process in three stages: (a) "Identifying themes and developing concepts", (b) "Coding the data and refining one's understanding of the subject matter", and (c) "Understanding the data in the context in which they were collected" (p.130). My analysis of the data addressed these as follows. I personally transcribed the written narratives and audiotaped interviews. This step provided an early exposure to the data and helped familiarize me with the narratives. First, the transcripts were read five times. On first three times, I tried my best to read without attempting to make any interpretations or analysis. A few notes were recorded on a notebook for further use in the analysis. After the third reading, a list was made which included common themes and ideas recurring in the data. All transcripts were re-typed in double-space allowing for comments, themes, and questions to be written down. The transcripts were read twice more allowing for side notes in terms of emerging themes and ideas. Again, emerging themes were written down and compared with the existing ones.

Through repeated careful readings of the data, emerging themes, concepts and theoretical propositions were obtained (Taylor & Bodgan, 1984,p.130-133). Coding of emerging themes was guided by the systematic outline described by Bogden and Biklin and an adaptation of Strauss and Corbin (1990) open and axial coding. Open coding is "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and

categorizing data" (p. 61). Axial coding refers to a set of procedures used to put data back together in different ways after open coding by making connections between categories (p.96). Preliminary categories were "boxed" in a cardboard box which had separations forming little cubicles. Because the list of emerging themes was immense, axial coding began before open coding of all data was completed. I attempted to re-arrange, combine, and redefine categories to fit the data.

Taylor and Bodgan (1984) point out that the goal of coding is to make the codes fit the data and not the data fit the codes, therefore coding included refining the coding scheme, adding categories, collapsing them, and redefining the categories (p.137). Analysis of negative cases - those that seemed to contradict a pattern - as well as those which were common through the data were included in order to gain a better understanding of the women's perceptions and experiences in the study (p.139). The context in which the interviews were collected, my own recorded comments, assumptions and theoretical memos were also considered in the analysis (p.142).

As much as it was possible, preliminary interpretations of findings were shared with several participants either by phone or in person for them to review and react to. An accurate portrayal and interpretation of participants' lives contributes to validity in qualitative research (Acker et al. 1993). I decided to present the data in a case study/narrative format so that the essence of my data, the participants' voices, was not to be lost in the process. By using this method of data presentation, I was able to more accurately portray the participants' stories while remaining true to their voices. Consistent with a phenomenological approach, the themes identified in this study illustrate the shared experience of the participants. These themes should guide future research endeavors and the development of theory in the area of women's sexuality.

CHAPTER IV RESULTS

Overview

This study was the first to utilize a qualitative methodology to investigate the social construction of female's sexuality in Puerto Rico. Twelve women voluntarily shared their lives and personal interpretations of their sexualities in order for me to complete this study. While each one presented their individual and distinct stories, they were all guided by common threads that helped weave the journeys into their sexualities.

Feminist deconstructionists urge the development of a "feminine discourse" in which women are able to express their own experiences and histories (Poovey, 1988). I wanted the participant's voices to guide the presentation of the results, but I was aware of the fact that I was bringing to the study my beliefs and experiences also. I had to struggle constantly to make sure that it was the participant's voices that was represented in the stories (Acker et al., 1983; Thompson, 1992).

This is something I had to be especially cautious since all interviews and essays were originally produced in Spanish and translated by myself to English. Obtaining the data in Spanish offered the participants the opportunity to express themselves freely, in their own language; and to include culturally rich phrases and meaningful words. It also proved to be a challenge for me when trying to translate and express the attached feelings and cultural meanings that are almost impossible to translate. Inevitably, in any translation, some of the language essence is lost.

Another struggle I had was in terms of my relationship to the participants. Feminist research deals with the issues regarding the nature of the relationship of the interviewer towards the interviewee. The researcher struggles with her position towards the interviewee - friend, stranger, both, neither -, being trusted and believed by the interviewee, and the possibility of self disclosure (Reinharz, 1992). After I received the essays, and started the interviewing process, I realized that, in order to be trusted by the participants, a degree of self disclosure from my part was also expected. The participants were very cautious not to seem too eager to know personal information about me, but indirectly communicated that they were expecting me to show some degree of disclosure too.

I found that the participants were more interested in me acknowledging the validity of their experiences than in myself actually telling my story. Every once in a while, the participants asked me questions such as: "You know what I mean; Don't you?"; "You probably know what I am talking about, right?";

"I probably don't have to explain this so much to you, after all you were raised here, you know what I mean", and "You probably had to go through this too, right?". By acknowledging their realities and by sharing my own experiences with the participants, equating the power of non-disclosure, I located myself in the same critical plane as the participants (Allen & Baber, 1992; Daniluk, 1993; Thompson, 1992). Usually after the first few minutes of the interview, trust and confidence was established, and a good rapport began to take place.

A feminist and qualitative approach to this study acknowledges and values the influence of the researcher's personal experience in the research process, the connection that is created between researcher and participants, and facilitates the reader's understanding and connection with the experiences and lives of those studied by allowing the participant's to "use their own voice" and "speak for themselves" (Reinharz, 1988).

Sexual Scripts: The Meanings of Sexuality

One major theme, with three interrelated sub-themes emerged in the analysis of the participant's stories. Sexual meanings/scripts emerged as the main theme along with the following sub-themes: (a) Determining Experiences, (b) Sources and Nature of Sexual Messages, and (c) Discourses of Female Sexuality. These three reinforce each other as they continually nurture each other.

The presentation of the results will begin with twelve narratives depicting the themes and experiences of the participants. These incorporate the three sub-themes utilizing narratives guided by the participant's stories, but specifically stress determining experiences as defined by the participants. Individual stories were used to provide a sense of continuity to the narratives and to illustrate the individual processes involved in the creation, application and modification of sexual meanings. The narratives of the stories includes references to relevant literature in order to assist in the validation of my interpretations of the participant's experiences. A discussion of the sources and nature of sexual messages and the discourses of female sexuality will follow the stories.

Although sexual meanings and sexual scripts are not necessarily defined identically by the literature, for the purposes of this research they will be used interchangeably given that both words appeared to represent an overarching theme. Sexual scripts emerge from societies' prevalent discourses. This is why culture is so important in defining, shaping, and promoting female's sexuality. The following stories illustrate determining experiences in the sexual lives of the participants.

Determining Experiences: The Stories

Yeidi. Yeidi was raised in what she describes a traditional home where:

Social and religious messages that I was taught were clear cut, precise, and very strict: Decent girls do not allow themselves to be touched except for their hands, do not dress provocatively, and do not talk about sex because naturally, they know nothing about it.

She states that these messages influenced her in the ways she learned, lived, and defined her sexuality for most of her life. Culture defines the acceptable beliefs, values, and behaviors regarding sexuality. By doing this, it creates the social discourses that regulate sexuality (Goettsche, 1989). Sexuality has the potential to be modified through life experiences that challenge our beliefs and values. One of these experiences is education. Yeidi attended college. The experience of attending college caused her to question almost everything she had believed in before regarding her sexuality up to that point.

As a young girl, Yeidi remembers being interested in boys as possible boyfriends. When she was around 7 or 8 years old, an older boy gave her a kiss on her mouth stating that he liked her. She remembers that incident sparked her interest in boys. Still, she lived according to the standards she was taught. Her first intimate sexual experience she describes as platonic:

By platonic, I mean, that I really had no idea of what was supposed to happen in a couple relationship, much less in a sexual one. So, I did not decide anything, or knew what to expect, or that I should like it, much less how to enjoy it.

Not even to mention orgasms.

She describes the relationship as one causing her mental dilemmas and pain. It had been her first sexual experience, something she was not even supposed to experience before marriage. Having no previous knowledge about intercourse, to discover that she had unknowingly "crossed the line" left her feeling powerless and guilty. Her pain derived from the fact that she was not even enjoying the relationship, so she felt used. Women have reported feeling less pleasure than men and stronger feelings of guilt than of pleasure, especially when they had their first sexual experience at a very young age (Sprecher et al., 1995).

A very positive relationship that Yeidi refers to as "friends-lovers" helped her put sexuality into a new perspective. This was an important experience that allowed her to learn about relationships, debunk previously learned myths, and discover a positive side to her sexuality. After this "extraordinary relationship", she experienced an instance of attempted date rape which resulted in humiliation and fear:

We started drinking, I got drunk, he offered to take me home but, instead of taking me home, he took me to a business he had and he tried to rape me. I was in such a bad shape, so drunk, that he had to desist from the idea and

bring me home. Thanks to the Lord! I remember barely sleeping that night thinking about what could have happened to me, and how it was the most humiliating experience of my life. This fear lasted for a several weeks and, obviously, I am much more careful now, I don't even drink alcoholic beverages anymore.

There is an element of guilt and self-blame in Yeidi's story. She believes that she was not careful enough, and too drunk, therefore partly responsible for the attempted rape. Taking responsibility for violent sexual incidents is common among women, especially if they had some power in determining the conditions surrounding the incident. Sprecher and associates (1995) also found that the women in her study experienced a greater degree of guilt from the sexual experience when they had consumed alcohol. In another study, women victims of rape reported feeling responsible for putting themselves in the condition of being vulnerable. Feelings of inferiority and victimization because of being a woman were also reported by these women (Lebowitz & Roth, 1994).

After this experience, Yeidi decided to modify her behavior and the ways in which she manages her sexuality. The concept of sexual agency as defined by Laws (1980), is the power to choose and control all aspects of our sexual experiences. Sexual agency develops through the evaluation and interpretation of this experiences over time. Experiences evaluated as negative by participants may end up promoting sexual agency and change in the ways they define their sexualities:

Since this experience, I have assumed control over my sexual life opting to decide what to do and with who... My work has served as a positive reinforcement to the ways I see and express my sexuality responsibly, in the ways I desire.

Nydia. Nydia's story follows the expected traditional path for Puerto Rican women. Puerto Rican women are traditionally expected to "save themselves" [meaning to remain virgins] for their husbands, get married, become mothers and housewives. These are understood to be the primary responsibility of women (Cintrón & Quintero, 1988). She also had a very traditional upbringing in which sexual topics were not common and actually avoided.

My sexuality, in childhood...well, I do not remember a lot about it, the only thing, in my home, when I was a little girl, there was not a lot of talking about it.

The few messages she received regarding sexuality were negative and provided without any further explanation:

I always wondered where myself and the other children came from. I would always play with my dolls, put a bulge inside of their dresses, to make them look pregnant - and when my mother would realize what I was doing, she would reprimand me and would say to me that I should never play with my dolls in that way again.

Her first sexually related experience as she recalls

happened in the school bathroom. She was only 10, and she was kissed for the first time by a male classmate. To her misfortune, her mother witnessed the kiss and punished her for it. The message was conveyed that anything related to sex was wrong, and she was not supposed to forget it. Early in childhood, Puerto Rican women internalize, through clear messages a negative view towards female's sexuality. One of the prevalent themes found by Daniluk (1993), in her study about female's sexuality was the internalized culture's negative view of women and their sexuality. Nydia, as these women, has struggled with the internalized beliefs of inferiority and the negation of their sexualities.

School was an opportunity for Nydia to learn about sex from her friends. Based on previous responses to sexual issues, she knew she could not go to her mother to answer her questions. She then trusted in her brother to answer them:

When I was around 12 years old, I asked my brother if it was true that mom and dad went to bed and had a baby, because a girlfriend at school had told me so. He went to my father and told him everything. It was only then that they decided to address the subject with me.

Education about sex was limited to the expected behaviors set by the culture and by religion: marital intercourse with the purpose of procreation (Caponi, 1992; Hita-Dussel, 1989). In this case, it was precipitated by information she was not even supposed to have received from her friend.

During adolescence, Nydia had several boyfriends of which some proposed to experiment sexually. She always rejected their advances because she considered them out of time and place. Of course, appropriate time and place only meant one thing: Marriage, the only circumstance "sanctioned" by society and religion to engage in sexual relationships. Hita-Dussel (1989) found that religious women who show a high level of internalization of religious beliefs, will believe that sexuality is determined by divine nature to be a heterosexual act with the sole purpose of reproduction in the context of holy matrimony. Nydia had her first intimate experience on her wedding night. She recalls:

I was only 19 when I got married. On my wedding night, I lied down and went to sleep because I was a little afraid of what was going to happen...at about three in the morning the sexual act was finally consummated and I could prove to myself that it could be something good and beautiful when done with someone you love.

The fact that she had to "prove" to herself sex could be positive suggests previous doubts. Even in the context of marriage, Nydia had trouble foregoing her negative beliefs about female sexuality. Even though she "proves" sex can be positive, she does not describe it as pleasurable or enjoyable, but as "good and beautiful" only when love is present. Love is seen as the

"purifier" of sex (Reiss, 1981).

Nydia has been married to the same person ever since and explains how early preparation and self-instruction has helped her enjoy her sexuality.

Today and always I have enjoyed my sexuality given that between my partner and I there is a lot of communication. As a resource for enrichment we read educational materials. It is important to note that, since the day I knew I was going to get married, and started preparing for it, I started reading books that have been very helpful.

The social messages that Nydia has received through her life have, in this case, "successfully" guided the moral guidelines for her actions and beliefs. Her life follows the ideal path for Puerto Rican women. There has been room for some change in the way she perceives sexuality though. She states that:

I was raised among very moralistic and above all, very religious people...many things [of sexual nature] that they would consider wrong or bad, I have come to prove to myself are not wrong, because given there is mutual enjoyment and the behaviors come naturally, they are normal.

Wanda. Wanda's childhood was very restricted in terms of sexual information:

I was totally unaware to anything regarding sexuality... mainly because I had very adult parents and there was no talking about that particular subject. The subject was taboo. We were 8 siblings but we did not have the confidence to talk about the subject amongst us.

In her childhood, she was very protected, always playing with girlfriends. She said she never played with boys, not even with her brothers, not even in her home, they were never to be allowed in her games. Religion was very important, she was taught to be afraid of offending God. This proved very effective in terms of restricting her sexually. Beach (1984) found that in a sample of alumni from a church-affiliated university, 84% of women and 54% of males had their first intercourse experience with either their fiancée or spouse. Religion states that women should remain sexually pure for marriage. She was certain to enter marriage with no sexual experience whatsoever.

The first relationship Wanda experienced with the opposite sex ended in a big deception. It was her first experience relating to men and it had been very negative. She developed a great distrust in men. She entered in another relationship with a man and decided to get married. She was younger than him and she recalls how he believed in myths and prejudices regarding woman's sexuality.

At 21 years old, I got married without any previous sexual experience. The man I chose as a husband was older than me, but also very ignorant when it came to sexual issues... because he told me in our honeymoon; "you are not a virgin

because when we made love you did not bleed a lot, like I have heard; that you know a woman is "señorita" (a sexually mature woman who is a virgin) because of that". The way he was brought up had a lot to do with it. As my own, his parents were advanced in age with little academic preparation. The myths dominated him.

After 2 years of marriage, they got divorced. After a year; I came back and give him another opportunity to try to save the impossible. I realized then that I really didn't love him for all the abuse he perpetuated on me, all types of abuse.

Wanda has and is still suffering from these deceptions which have prevented her from engaging in further relationships with men.

She states:

From then on I have not been able to trust in any men. Sometimes I feel I hate them and I believe that all of them are the same in one way or the other. Like the saying goes: All of them are cut by the same pattern.

Women that have experienced violent and coercive forms of sexual pressure will shape their expectations of future men's behaviors in subsequent sexual encounters (Holland, 1992).

Wanda mentions that something good did come out of that marriage:

I have two beautiful daughters, 14 and 10 years old. I have raised them all by myself, my parents died many years ago and each of my brothers have their own particular family problems.

A positive change in her life has been to return to school. Wanda believes that education and academic preparation have helped her work out some of the feelings she has towards men. She also mentions friends in her life that have served as emotional and professional support while in school. Education may have helped her deal with these issues in her life but the hurt is still present as it becomes clear:

Being a [her profession] has helped me in many ways to look at the world from another perspective, but I still believe that the majority of men are bad, opportunists, they always see us as the weaker sex and this makes me act harshly towards them. I still have not been able to get over the crisis of uniting myself to another man and thinking that I have to trust him...I do not hate all men in general; only those who are interested in me because I do not trust them. I wish I could give myself the opportunity to again unite myself to another being with good intentions towards myself and my girls.

Wanda fears sexual intimacy and lives with an internal contradiction in terms of her sexual desires.

Today I do not think as much in making love, but in my dreams I desire it with all the passion that I have always dreamed, and with a man that fulfills all my fantasies. I

feel that, even though I desire it, being once again nude in front of a man is scary, because I will once again feel used and not loved as I wish. My desire is so strong, that it produces confusion and shame about wanting to give myself once again after all this time... Even though I do not let it show...my unconsciousness worries about couple's love. As Vance (1984) would describe it, Wanda's sexuality is both an arena of pleasure and danger which she avoids, not to get hurt, but desires at the same time. In her case, negative experiences have resulted in a complete avoidance and fright of any possibility of sexual encounters.

Ebel. Ebel also describes her parents as very traditional and conservative. What she recalls the most about her childhood years are her mother's "frequent and repetitive" reminders of the proper ways in which girls should behave. She has one brother and it was very clear that messages regarding restrictions in behavior were directed only to her. Among these reminders were: Sitting correctly, like a "señorita" (young woman)...your legs had to be together or crossed, it was very important. And also, when I talk about covering my body...clothes were very conservative...there was an established difference between a woman and a girl...When you grow up to be a woman, you can wear that, meanwhile it is not permitted. My bathing suit was a one piece. A two piece suit, no, because you are showing your body and your body is sacred...Sitting on a man's lap, not even in my father's lap was I allowed to sit, never, never. Once, when I was about 8 or 9, I was taken out of a party because I had sat down on my cousin's lap. Independent of the fact that it was family...he was a man and it was wrong. Things were a certain way and there were no more explanations, you could not ask why. Those why's were never given to you. These were, were things that were, a very repetitive pattern...you end up internalizing it. Girls are treated in a different way from boys in relationship to their bodies and allowed behaviors. Through these kind of messages, women understand that their bodies are shameful, that they are sexual objects, and that men are dangerous. The girls have to cover their bodies so that men do not respond to them sexually (Resneck-Sannes, 1991). All messages she received about women's sexuality were negative.

Her brother was treated very differently... Because well, he is a man. He was not seen as a boy. He was a man and men can do all sorts of things. He was asked about his many girlfriends, about fighting, setting his own limits, and many privileges that he had. Ebel reports feeling that these differences in treatment were unfair. In Lebowitz and Roth's (1994) study, women reported how they were not raised to be independent, how they felt denied of opportunities for achievement and self-actualization, and how they felt devalued as a result of being female.

Gender socialization was the order of the day in Ebel's home. She always wanted to be different, always choosing non-traditional games and toys for girls. She wanted to engage in 'boys' games to what her mother always responded saying that she did not have a girl and a boy anymore, that she had two 'machos' (vulgar word for males). Ebel started realizing that she had to start establishing her own limits. She stood out in her home for her personality. Trying to break out of the cycle she became rebellious.

Sexuality was not a topic discussed in Ebel's home. She learned about sexuality through people around her outside the house, but inside of her family nucleus, it was never discussed. She did not even receive any information regarding menstruation. She remembers:

One morning I wake up and I had cut myself, according to my theory, you know, when I woke up my sheets were stained, what was I supposed to think, that I cut myself while sleeping, it was the only association that I could make. I called her and told her; mom look, I cut myself. At first she did not understand...Then she sits down and tells me that this is going to happen every month as part of my development into a woman. But it was something very general, very vague and I ended up finding out in school with the other girls and in a health class where development was covered and then I understood what was happening.

Ebel grew up avoiding boyfriends because she saw them as another obstacle for her independence. She did not want to lose her space or miss a party because of a man. If she liked a young man, she would keep it a secret, she was not going to lose her liberty because she had a boyfriend.

I didn't like commitments and the fact that someone would decide what I could do, what I could wear. It was enough with mom and dad telling me what to do for another person to try to indicate what I should do in my life No, no, no. It was not my priority anyway. I wanted to go to school, my dream was to go to school.

Through socialization, Ebel understood that a boyfriend would be a substitute for her parents in terms of dominance and regulations. These beliefs are rooted in both religion and culture. Cintrón and Quintero (1988) illustrate how the family and religious institutions play a role in defining the ideal of women as obedient, subordinate, and dependent on men.

The consequences of having a boyfriend were very clear to Ebel. She was not ready to commit, much less willing to sacrifice her education. Her family was conservative, but not when it came to education:

Yes, I had to go to college. If I wanted to be someone in my life, I had to go to school and if I fell in love, I would fall back. After falling in love came marriage and children

and that is it, that's the end. Everything that my parents have planned for my future is gone, I fall in love, I get married, I have kids and there is no time for anything else. That was repeated in my home every day since my brother got married at 15 years old and had a child. In him, I had my example. He had to leave school, go to work, and take care of his baby while I was out partying.

Ebel attended college and got a taste of her independence. College provided the opportunity to be physically separated from her parents. The education she received also brought her intellectual and economic independence from her parents.

Already a grown woman, she got involved with a man who supported her independence. She decided to move in together with him, something totally against the religious and cultural teachings she was raised with. Religious women believe that sexual relationships out of wedlock are immoral and condemned by the catholic religion; that women are supposed to retain their virginity until marriage (Hita-Dussel, 1989).

And there was when all my Christian values and morals came into play. I knew a woman had to keep her virginity until marriage, protect her body and all of that. Still, she had decided to be different and went ahead with her plans. But life played a trick on her. As it turned out, in order to co-own a home a couple had to be married. The decision and the plans to move together were already made, so she ended up having a civil ceremony and getting married after all. Today, still together, Ebel and her husband have made a commitment to each other and their children to provide them with an open, informed environment conducive to dialogue and open discussions about any topic they would like to address.

Hilda. Hilda is the oldest of 2 sisters. In her home, like in many other Puerto Rican homes, her parents desired to have a son as their first born. It is a source of pleasure for men to have their last name 'passed on' to the next generation and there is some degree of mocking directed to men who's only progeny is female. Hilda states that when she was a little girl she did not feel her father wanted to be close to her. She decided to ask her mother about it:

Then my mother told me that when she was pregnant she thought that I was a boy and that when my father knew I was a girl, he got drunk, he did not wanted to see me and all of that...she just said that to me, I understand now that at that moment she should not have explained that to me in those terms because that hurt me a lot and affected me forever.

From early on she discovered that being a girl was not as good as being a boy, at least in her family. In patriarchal societies, gender organizes society. Gender differences are exaggerated and these differences are used to legitimize and perpetuate power relations between men and women (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). She knew

she was not a boy, but through her childhood, Hilda tried to gain her father's acceptance by doing 'boys' things with her father:

I would try to help him do yard work, if we found a mouse,
He would put it in my hand so I could play with it, we would
play with lizards, and things like that.

Her mother though, was very wary of these behaviors that were not feminine and believed a girl should only play girl games. She was allowed to play mom and dad with boys, but to play with cars, or rough boys' games was not condoned by her mother. Being feminine and playing with girls was very important for Hilda's mother who wanted her daughters to grow up to be "señoritas" one day.

"Señorita" is a term used to describe women with several characteristics: a young woman who had already experienced menarche, a woman who has not had sexual relations, or an unmarried woman (assumed to be a virgin). Becoming a "señorita" does not only entail being sexually mature, but also to behave according to the female ideal. Women should be quiet, docile, and submissive. They should engage in activities that will ensure their proficiency as a housewife and a mother (Badillo-Ghali, 1982, Cintrón & Quintero, 1988).

Not all the female models Hilda had in her childhood were as positive as her mother would have liked them to. When she was very young, Hilda was sexually molested:

This is something I've had hidden in my mind. When I started thinking about it, I remembered being in a house with someone, receiving some sort of pleasure...I became more and more concerned about it. The more I thought about it, the more I tried to remember who that person was until, unfortunately, I discovered it had been an older cousin of mine. Since then, I have not forgiven her.

Remembering positive feelings or feelings of pleasure is not rare on victims of sexual abuse. Immediate responses to childhood sexual abuse can be complex. Victims have reported feeling guilt, anger, and positive emotions all occurring at the time of the abuse, although negative emotions did characterize the majority of the victims (Long & Jackson, 1993).

Around the same time in childhood, Hilda became interested in sexual exploration. One time she and her sister were watching a movie in which a couple was kissing. She was curious and tried to do the same with her younger sister but she was caught by her mother:

She told me not to do it again, and that she will not tell anyone. The incident has stayed in my mind...She told me, that is not right...we will talk about it later. And she told me: I am your mother and I will not tell anyone if you never do it again.

This particular incident has been a source of guilt for her because she is afraid that her sister will remember - as Hilda remembered the incident with her cousin - and hate her as Hilda hates her cousin:

My sister asks my mother why don't I demonstrate to her that I love her. What happens is that sometimes I think that in the same way in which I recalled that [cousin's incident] and I realized that it was not normal, you know, that it was not right, I am afraid to get close to her...and if some day she remembers about that incident with me? I am ashamed about it. She was too little to remember, but I was little too when my incident happened, and I remembered...but I think a lot about it and try not to get too close to her.

Victimization experiences have been linked with negative psychological consequences for some victims (Gidycz et al., 1993). While Hilda states that the molestation did not affect her in her sexuality greatly, she talks about it extensively and understands that she might have been affected otherwise. For instance, she distrusts people in general, and questions if this distrust has anything to do with her experience. Also, she admits being more friendly and expressive with her male friends than with her female friends, completely rejecting any physical contact with females. She also questions if the interest she had in exploring sexuality in her early childhood was triggered by the molestation experience. She recalls:

The first house in which we lived in, I remember hiding behind the sofa...the only thing I wanted was not to be disturbed. There I had my female and male dolls together, and I would feeling something in my own body while I was making them kiss and touch. When I was done, I would feel satisfied too. I would be very upset if I was interrupted. I would hide because I knew that what I was feeling was not right.

While sexual exploration is a part of normal development, for Hilda it may as well mean a reminder of her negative experience and a source of guilt and shame. Also, the Catholic church, as well as many other, still sees masturbation as a sinful act. Women who frequent church have been found to be more likely to perceive masturbation as a sin and an unhealthy practice (Davidson et al. 1995).

Hilda's mother was always wary of Hilda's relationships with men. A message Hilda received from her mother was that men could not be trusted:

My mom will tell me that I should not trust men, my mom would also tell me that there were things that happened to men, that they could not control their emotions. Sexuality is seen as a very powerful force and one to be feared especially by females who are seen as the ones who have something to lose (virginity, purity) if succumbed by its forces (Reiss, 1981).

Hilda's parents are practicing Catholics and they placed a great deal of importance in virginity. As a way of deterring

sexual activity in their daughter, they instilled distrust in men in her. It worked for the most part, until Hilda fell in love with the man who is her husband today. Hilda describes the relationship:

From the start it was very different from the others: I was very attracted to him physically and desired intimate involvement with him. This was against all my beliefs, my social and religious values, given that I had wanted to remain a virgin until marriage. My mother and father had always instilled purity and the importance of maintaining myself in my place all the time.

It was an internal struggle because although she wanted to remain true to her beliefs, she understood she was ready to involve herself sexually with this man. Contradictions between the realities in women's lives and the sexual scripts they have internalized are also common in Daniluk's (1993) analysis of women's meanings of their sexualities. These contradictions bring about guilt because of the feeling of having done something wrong or having acted against their own value system (Resneck-Sannes, 1991):

I felt some guilt and remorse in a way because I was always one of those practicing Catholics...I even became the president of the church youth group, and you know what that means. And, well, I knew it was wrong for me to want him in a sexual way without being married to him, but I was not going to lose sleep over that. Then, I decided to separate myself to some degree from the church, and I resigned to my position.

Social and religious values are so enmeshed in the Puerto Rican culture that you cannot really separate one from the other. This similarity comes through in Hilda's comment about her internal conflict regarding her virginity:

I think that my major source of conflict was religion. Because all the time I said to myself I shouldn't, I shouldn't, and I would say that I had to remain a virgin until marriage. I learned it in the same way I learned the ABC's; when the conflict arose, I had to examine it and realize it might not be that way after all. Both my religious and cultural beliefs influenced this... There is not a lot of difference between the two; at least in [a town in the countryside] where I grew up. The priest might tell you that you had to be a virgin until marriage, not in those words of course, and then, in my neighborhood, if you were spotted with a young man, if they saw you together in a dark place, they will put you down. Then, the social structure also forced you to maintain your place.

On the other hand, responsibility for her actions and decisions was also instilled by her mother. Hita-Dussel (1989) found that some church-attendants do not condemn sexual behavior as much as they fear the consequences it can bring.

My mother always told me that I was the sole owner of my

acts and in that same way, if something happened to me because of them, I was going to be responsible for it. In a way, I took her word. At the moment when I finally decided to be [intimate] with the man who is today my husband, I told my mother: I am going to be with him, I hope you respect my decision, and I am going to use this particular method [contraception] and she did cry a lot... I told her: You are going to find out through me before you find out through someone else. Of course, my mother kept it a secret the whole time.

Virginity and purity is symbolized at weddings by the white dress, the veil and the crown. When Hilda decided to get married, she was concerned about the symbolism of the white color:

I went to the altar and all of that... I told my mother, Don't worry, I am not pregnant or anything like that. If you want to I will not use the crown or anything, but she said that I should use it and that she wanted me to... I didn't even want a white dress...because I am so honest that I couldn't understand why should I. But when I went to buy the wedding dress, my father saw that I wanted it a pearl beige, and it was a pretty deep color...he left the store and said: No, the dress is going to be white; and that was the way it was.

Hilda asserts to have had an enjoyable and active sexual life with her husband until recently. Sex to many women is equated with love, fidelity and trust. It was love itself that allowed her to ignore her beliefs and values and give into sex. Again, love is seen as the great justifier and purifier of sex (Reiss, 1981). When love and trust are betrayed, sex loses its reason and meaning. In the past years, Hilda's husband has been unfaithful to her three times and since then, she has not been able to enjoy or feel comfortable in her sexuality.

I used to consider that our sexual life was great, today, I honestly have to say that I don't...it has to be because of...I mean it really can't be that I am as... not as tired as I sometimes tell him or that I don't have time because I am doing the laundry or doing something else, but you know the situation... We used to talk a lot before, you know, we would share everything that happened. Now, I don't even want to tell him what is wrong because after these deceptions, I really don't believe in him anymore. He is the only man that has been with me [intimately] and in my mind there has been no room for another. All through my life, but especially now, more than ever my feelings go hand in hand with the disponibility to share my intimacy with my husband.

Sandra. Sandra is the last of 10 children. She has 7 sisters and three brothers. She describes her mother and father as well educated people who decided early in their relationship to be open and communicative about any topic to their children. Sandra remembers:

In the house there were no secrets or taboos. Any question you had was a question that was answered to you. There was no malice about sex. If my parents were taking a shower and you needed to use the bathroom or ask them a question, you could open the curtain and ask them. There was no hiding of nude bodies.

This behavior was not common among the participants of this study. Only 2 out of the 12 women report that nudity was treated casually and naturally in their homes. Only Sandra reports that in her home the topic of sexuality was treated without secrecy or taboos.

There was one secret though that Sandra discovered late in her teenage years; the woman that she regarded as her mother was really her grandmother, and her real mother was her big sister. Sandra was the result of an illicit romance between a her sister and a married man. Within the culture, and especially 40 years ago, this was unspeakable.

My sister felt shame and she used corsets for the whole pregnancy to hide her belly. I was born...my grandmother (whom I regard as my mother) talked to my grandfather and he said that they were going to give me his last name. It was assumed by everyone that I was the product of my father's (grandfather) affair and that my father took me away from the woman and brought me into his family to raise me. That would be the arrangement; in fact, married men's affairs were more socially accepted than an out-of-wedlock pregnancy from a married man. Since the births were still attended by midwives at the time, there were no other witnesses and everything ended up fine.

The "machista" ideology allows for men to act on their sexuality in a very open manner, to receive social reward for it, and to be dominant in his relationships to females (Burgos, Diaz-Perez, 1986).

Daily life at Sandra's home was very structured and full of chores, but of course, only for the females. Sandra was in a position to observe how the different genders were treated. She recalls:

My father always said that the males belonged to the street. Oh yes, and they were always in the street. All the time. My brothers did not have any chores in the house, did not have any responsibility, they were not expected to return home early, but my sisters were. In the house there were chores for the females, and no matter what, you had to finish them. My sister stayed up the night before her wedding because it was her turn to do the dishes...my sisters don't even want to talk about it because these were obligations for the girls and the boys were not doing anything.

The sister closer in age to Sandra is 11 years older than her. Sandra was raised in an atmosphere of adults who took care in preparing her for her development:

Among my siblings there are science teachers, nurses, physicians, a gynecologist, and all of them prepared me... my mother, who died a year ago at her 87 years, would say: the rooster is going to sing to you one day (a common phrase used to refer to the first menstruation). And my siblings would say to her: no, no, that about a rooster is not true, let's explain to her what really happens... And then they explained what menstruation was to me, they brought home that Kotex promotion titled: When you become a señorita... When I got my first period, I went to my oldest sister and said I had something red on my underwear, that the rooster had sung. It didn't matter how well they informed me, I repeated the phrase. Then they explained again everything...they did prepare me for it.

She learned about sexuality at home through reading. There were plenty of sources available to her in her home and any question she had was answered by her siblings. Her mother's messages were very clear:

My mother always said that I should not do anything that I could be ashamed of. That I should behave correctly; that the day a boy would kiss me and I would get involved in the kiss...that I should not let go of the peanut between my knees [common expression]...because that day I would get in problems that I was not going to like. That was all she said, to behave correctly and not to do anything I could later regret.

Again, it is clear that sex was not only seen as morally wrong, but as an act that could bring negative consequences such as a pregnancy (Hita-Dussel, 1989).

At one point in her adolescence, Sandra started doubting the value of virginity. She had innocent relationships before in which she behaved according to her family's expectations. She expected young men to behave with love and respect for her, the same way her father respected her mother.

That was what I saw at my home, and I wanted to have the same pattern of behavior at mine. I believe that because I waited so much for it, I never got it. Really, I never found it.

Instead, a relationship lead her to discover her family big secret and experienced the biggest deception in her life:

When I was 15 I met this young man, and we liked each other a lot. He was not from my school, he was older than I was, he must have had 18 or 19 years. We liked each other so much that we fell in love. I was really in love with him...I lost my virginity with him. I gave myself to that young man and I did not see it as wrong, I saw it like this: I am giving myself to this young man because he is going to be my husband, see, that is where my fantasy was and the framework inside my mind. I was afraid of my mother's reaction but I thought, if I did it, then I will face whatever happens. That is what I thought because I believed I was going to

marry him anyway...But as things turned out, this man was my half-brother on my father's side. It was at this time that my family had to reveal the secret of my identity to me in order to deter the relationship. I confronted him about us, I told him: Did you know that my father is your father? And he said: Yes, I know. He knew what he was doing. I had never talked to him again. He did it to get back at me, he was mean.

Sandra believed this man loved her and was going to marry her. This was the main reason she "gave herself" to him. Of course this proved to be untrue. It seems that men are willing to lie in order to get women to have sexual intercourse with them. Koss and Oros (1982) found that 20% of their sample consented to intercourse after the man said things that in the end proved to be untrue; that the man loved her or would form a serious relationship after they had sexual intercourse. Sandra had suffered from two deceptions: her boyfriend scheme and her family secret. She was hurt and upset with both her ex-boyfriend and her biological mother. She believed that having a child was a big deal and that her biological mother should have faced her responsibility when she had her.

After this incident, Sandra left for college to another town. At college, she fell in love with an older man, her english teacher and engaged in a relationship with him:

I felt secure with him. I had this fantasy... he had experience, that he was going to take care of me, just as my father did.

Sandra had a hidden purpose with this relationship though:

I got pregnant...I got pregnant on purpose...When I found out about my origins, I decided that I was going to have a child married or not when I had 24-25 years of age. I decided I wanted a child and I was not going to hide him the truth, I would to say everything to him...This was my plan, he did not wanted a child.

She finally got pregnant and thought about sharing the news with her family. It was only then that she realized that she had acted against everything she had been taught at home. She started to feel shame. She feared that her family would be upset about her behavior and reject her (Resneck-Sannes, 1991). Scared about her mother's reaction, she called her older sister (her biological mother) for advice. Her sister tried to convince her into getting an abortion. She made Sandra think about her future plans to go to graduate school and travel, but it was not enough, she decided to have her baby. Sandra remembers her mother's (real grandmother) reaction as a positive and supportive one:

There were my sisters, my brothers-in-law, my father, everyone waiting for me in the balcony. And everyone already knew about it because my sister had called them. I told my mother that I had to talk to her, and she responded: I already know, now, go to bed, get some rest, tomorrow is another day and we are going shopping for the baby. She

asked me what I wanted to do, and I responded: I am going to have my child, I am going to live here, I am going to finish college, finish a master's degree, start a doctoral program, I will work, and I will raise my child alone, with any help you are willing to give me. She said they would support anything I wanted to do. That was all they said...nothing more until today, my son is 14 years old. And I liked it, the trust my mother gave to me did not fall through. She did finish her studies and has been able to raise her son. Sandra considers her son a miracle given that she always had problems with her reproductive organs and after her pregnancy she had to be sterilized:

It was my only opportunity to be a mother. And María, I have no regrets, I have never considered myself frustrated because of it...I always said that if something like this happened to me I was going to face it...I have never seen it as something negative, all of the contrary, I see it as something very positive...My son knows that I was not married, that I was single when I had him. I am his mother and his friend, and he trusts me with his things.

At the time of the interview, Sandra had been sharing her life with a man for 6 years. There used to be some tension in regards to their sexuality at first:

My partner seemed to have a great sexual appetite. He thought that if I kissed him or touched him, it had to end up in a sexual relationship. We talked and I told him it did not have to be like that. The fact that I reach out for a kiss or a hug does not mean that it is going to end up in a sexual act. He didn't know that. He learned how to say no to sexual advances when I have suggested sex and he is tired. Before, he used to comply or leave the bedroom. Now, he is able to accept that he can be tired and that he is not expected to perform at all times. We can take a bath together, lie down to watch TV or to read with my son in between. We have matured together...we have been together for six years and I believe we have more stability than many who are married. We communicate about everything, including sex... That is a crucial part of being a couple...He knows that I am really busy with my work, I teach at night, take care of my son, of the house...When my mother was sick, I was the one taking care of her, even though she lives in another town. He helped me out with everything and we barely had time to be intimate with each other. But he was there supporting me, helping me out. He never demanded anything from me, if I mentioned I wanted to have some time out with him he would say: There's a time for everything, the day will come. I never felt insecure about him...this comes with maturity.

Virginia. The environment in which Virginia grew up in was a very strict, very tense one:

I am the oldest of 4 children, of very Catholic parents that showed great devotion to their traditional religion. They were very devoted to their traditions, their beliefs, and even worst, to the teachings of their own progenitors. They believed in that children speak when...[hens pee]...and you know the rest [hens do not urinate!], also in that no girl leaves her home unless she is married with veil and crown...[I remember]...to be punished under the strong hands of my father so I would not get lost when I grew up, or to spend the whole afternoon in the living room or bedroom corner kneeling on top of a grater or something similar that will remind me how badly I had behaved. Oh God! That's how it was...I felt as if I was a lab rat in experiments on how to educate bad girls like me.

As she states, it felt like her parents were trying out all sorts of punishments on their badly behaved daughter. At the same time, her mother was always too busy, she did not have a lot of time left to play with her children.

There was a lot of curiosity on Virginia's part towards boys, especially since she had no brothers and there were plenty of male neighbors. Her mother was a catechism (Catholic classes) teacher so boys came to her house often.

I remember always having a curiosity towards boys that I believe all girls have. We were always playing mom and dad or hide and seek, never wasting a moment to explore our bodies. I would never know if that early curiosity promoted my behavior later in life.

Her father had built a two story doll house for his daughters to play in. What he did not know was that the five older male neighbors, were able to jump from the roof of their house and enter the dolls house through the balcony:

That place became our refuge. Nobody came in there, not even my mother, she did not have time to play with us. As always the curiosity was so big that we went from playing with dolls to playing with the boy's bodies and then playing with ours. It was always superficial although in that house I learned everything related to oral acts, masturbation, and orgasms.

These early experiences exposed Virginia to experiences and knowledge that she would not have been exposed otherwise. She was between the ages of 8 and 10 when these experiences happened. It was through these experiences that she learned what it meant to be a señorita. Girls become "señoritas" at menarche. They remain señoritas until they marry or engage in sexual intercourse. Shortly after that, she had her first menstruation:

I was 11 years of age when I had my first period. My mother said to me happily: Congratulations, you are now a señorita and a big girl; she did not say anything further typical of all her educational rituals -her taboos-.

It seems to be the rule in religious homes not to have

conversations regarding sexuality. Beach (1991) found, in a sample of married christian college alumni, that conversations about sexuality with either parent occurred seldom or never. Already in middle school, Virginia describes herself as very "pícara" (similar to a flirt, but with less negative connotation) with the boys, always getting into trouble (sexual expectations from the boys). These situations lead to her first sexual intercourse:

I met this guy from my class. Everything started as usual, the teasing and the joking around. Then it turned serious and it became a dare [to have sex]. I could not stand a dare, so I gave my word, only to regret it for life. He kept persuading me to act up on my dare so I had to comply. I met him in the agreed place. It was a recently vacated house, there were still things around. He was already there when I arrived. Everything was very different from what I had experienced. There was no kissing, nothing, only the sexual act and a damned expression at the end: Oh shit! You were a señorita (virgin)...He became very nervous and he kept repeating: If you get pregnant, it is not mine, it is not mine! Say that some guys took you and raped you. If you say the truth, I'll deny it. He kept repeating the same things and left without even finishing dressing up. I just went home, hearing him over and over in my mind, his memory harassing me further.

This experience was devastating to Virginia who felt used and humiliated. This experience had not been what she expected and she planned to keep it in the past. Research has found that negative emotions usually characterize victims of abuse. Gidycz et al. (1993) found that victimized adult women were likely to have been victimized in childhood and adolescence. These results support that a history of sexual victimization is a risk factor for subsequent victimization. Virginia's early sexual experiences in the doll's house were not explicitly reported as negative and victimizing, but she mentioned several times if the fact that she was so curious and had those experiences may have negatively influenced her subsequent experiences. It is also interesting to note that a group of women have reported primarily positive emotions occurring at the time of the early abuse. Also, that not all the experiences that the researchers label as abusive were characterized as such by participating women (Long & Jackson, 1993).

Virginia started seeing a young man with whom she spend a lot of time. She liked him a lot and was content with the fact that they had long conversations, and shared together without "anything that would ruin the relationship" (meaning anything sexual):

I liked him a lot. But he was very firm about the fact that he wanted "a girlfriend and a wife that was pure and that had not been had by anyone"...that is how he expressed

himself. Even though I suffered a lot with his confessions, I liked him even more.

Virginia knew she was not the ideal he expected, but she tried her best to be liked by him. While males are expected to have had sex before they marry, they are expecting to marry sexually inexperienced women (Burgos & Diaz-Perez, 1986). She became his girlfriend and for the first six months, everything was going well. Then the famous "proof of love" came up:

[This was]the reason many girls "fell down" with their boyfriends, the real proof. I was so ignorant as to think that virginity will come back to you, with time, if you do not continue to be active...at least that was my dream. He started doubting if I was a virgin or not because I refused so much to do it...while at the same time I wanted to please him, even if that meant consequences. When I finally gave in, I had an experience as sour as the first one, another rejection, another loss. He treated me like garbage, he ignored me, asked me to leave his house, and said that he did not want anything to do with me. I swore that I would never believe in anyone or in any relationship with a man again.

Virginia had already experienced a deception and a rejection. Even though she knew that her boyfriend wanted to marry a sexually inexperienced woman, she felt she wanted to "give in" to his sexual advances in order to "please him". Lewin (1985) identified four cultural norms to account for the prevalence of unwanted intercourse. One of these is called the stroking function of women. It refers to the fact that women in patriarchal societies have been raised to believe that they should be able to put men's needs ahead of their own. This may be why Virginia felt so compelled to please her boyfriend.

After the fact, Virginia had to experience rejection and disrespect not only from the young man, but from his friends. Public knowledge that a young woman is not a virgin is one of the worst things that can happen to an adolescent. Social rejection is imminent because no young man wants to be with a girl that everybody knows has "been had".

After she graduated from high school, she started seeing this young man again who asked her for forgiveness and wanted to repair his error. She believed him and they reestablished the relationship until he decided to move with his brother to the United States. She decided to move to a nearby city where she stayed with a friend of her mother. They communicated frequently on the phone. Virginia found a job and moved to her own place. There was an older man at her job who was also interested in her. She was not interested in him, she still loved her boyfriend. But one rainy day, this older man gave her a ride home and a series of events lead into her accepting to marry her co-worker:

When we got home, I received a call from my boyfriend. He was drunk, and told me he had to get married with another

woman because he had gotten her pregnant and he was forced to do so...[It felt like] another cold shower, even though I was already getting used to them. I held my anger and lied: Good, because I have someone here too, and I am also getting married, as a matter of fact he is here...He [her boyfriend] laughed and demanded to speak with him. He said to him that he was my boyfriend and that we would get married in December, that he should leave me alone. Blinded with anger, I called my mother and announced my decision.

Virginia got married seeking revenge. The relationship was not working out. She did get pregnant though, which brought back memories of her first sexual experience. She entered a delusional state. All she could hear was the voice of that young man which she had her first sexual experience with:

I kept hearing him say that if I got pregnant, it was not going to be his child...I do not know if that experience traumatized me, but in that occasion, thinking I was pregnant, I would hit myself hard in my abdomen, throw myself to the floor, lift heavy things at work...as if I had an object I had to get rid of, I don't know... until I had a miscarriage that put me in the hospital.

This incident put a big strain in her already weak marital relationship. To make things worse, Virginia invited her best friend to stay with them until her husband relocated from Puerto Rico (PR). One day, Virginia surprised her husband in bed with her best friend:

When I found out, my heart stopped and I was short of having a respiratory shock. My husband ignored me and it was my friend who took me to the hospital and left me by myself.

They stayed alone, like honeymooners in my house.

Virginia's mother arrived from PR and stayed with her at the hospital. She divorced her husband and returned to PR. It has been 4 years since Virginia returned home. She enrolled in college and is close to finishing her degree. She is also engaged to be married to an old friend from school who has turned her to his church and has offered her a relationship based on love and respect:

Thanks to the Lord for him because regardless of my past, He guarded me from death and allowed me to be happy...with my partner...I have now a healthy relationship, a good job, and I am finishing college...He talked about formal matrimony from the start and even though I had told to myself I would never again get married again, he has changed all negative thoughts in me.

Although Virginia seems to have been able to break the pattern of abusive/victimizing relationships in her life, she does not take much credit for it. She refers to her boyfriend as the man who "has changed all negative thoughts in me", who brought her into his church, and "offered" her a respectful and loving relationship. Happiness and love are things that Virginia defines as being given by her present boyfriend not actively sought and

deserved by her. Virginia is still struggling to accept her entitlement to a loving relationship and to stop defining her life in terms of men's desires.

Lydia. Lydia grew up in a family of 9, with 6 brothers and 1 sister. She recalls how in her home, girls and boys played separately:

Girls are not allowed to mingle with the boys. My mother used to say that girls that played with boys were "machúas" (boy-like) and therefore our brothers would not allow us to play with them...I never learned to ride a bicycle, skate, or play basketball because those were boys' games and I was not a boy. I was not allowed to be around boys, my regular contacts in childhood were with girls.

Female and male roles are distinct and clearly defined. Any interference between them is seen as negative by the Puerto Rican society. It is understood, for instance, that "men do not cook, nor clean the home, women do not practice active sports, do not know anything about mechanical work or fixing a car problem" [translated] (Cintrón & Quintero, p.240).

Therefore early sexual exploration went on among Lydia and her female friends:

I would get together with my neighbors to touch and explore our intimate parts. We would hide to do it, we would go to my bedroom and close the door...I guess we knew we were doing something that we were not supposed to do.

At an early age, Lydia and her friends had already internalized a negative view towards female bodies and female sexuality. This was one of the prevalent themes in a study exploring the meanings of female sexualities (Daniluk, 1993). The devaluation of female sexuality illustrates one of the ways that patriarchal societies control and suppress women by controlling their sexualities: by defining desire in terms of the specific experiences of heterosexual men (Osmond & Thorne, 1993).

Lydia's father was a minister and he traveled most of the time. Fathers are assumed to have the power and control in the house. In Lydia's home, her brothers were given the power that belonged to her absent father:

[My brothers] were given too much power, they were the ones deciding and ordering all the time...now I have realized that was wrong. My mother used to tell me to remember that my father was not around, and that she had to rely on her oldest brother to substitute for him.

Lydia was taught to be dependent on men for love and protection. These dependence promotes subordination based on gender differences and may also help legitimize and perpetuate power relations between women and men (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). Of course, being a woman had its limitations. For instance, girls belonged to the house while boys could spend as much time outside as they pleased. Girls were taught how to behave like good women. Lydia was constantly cautioned against anything related to her

sexuality:

From the time I was 9 years old on, my mother would constantly lecture me on how I should not allow anyone to touch me or to see my private parts. That touching or showing my intimate parts was bad. In general, I was taught that everything related to sex was bad...treated as a taboo. The fact that her father was a minister brought a lot of restrictions regarding the way in which Lydia had to behave in public:

It was as if everyone saw in our family the model of what was correct. The reason my mother gave me for not allowing any man to touch me was because of other people. What would people think of you? If you let things like that happen, you know, you have to worry about what people will say (el que dirán).

The pressures imposed on female's sexuality are not always as obvious as physical or verbal violence. Social pressures that control women's sexualities are embedded in very complex social and economic processes; something that makes them harder to identify (Stanley & Wise, 1983).

Lydia made sure that nothing happened. Between her mother's influence and the strict religious upbringing, she remembers losing all curiosity or interest towards sexuality. She never had a boyfriend through school. Only friends from the church will visit her at home in the presence of all her siblings. Then, when she was 17 years old she "fell in love":

He was 7 years older than I was and with a lot of experience. He did not belong to the group of people that I was raised in. He was completely different from anyone I knew, I knew him from work, he had different customs, and he did not talk about the church. The love I felt for that person awakened in me a sexual desire.

Lydia had no previous experience with young men and recalls how she started discovering pleasurable sensations and feelings when she spent time alone with her boyfriend:

When I started this relationship I didn't even knew how to kiss. It was exciting to discover how many new sensations a kiss can awaken in you. With kisses and caresses I allowed myself to get carried away. I allowed him to touch me because I liked how it felt...I knew I should not have allowed him, but I did. I did things that if I would have thought about I would not have done them, you know, based of what I was taught...I enjoyed the moments and even though sometimes I rejected his caresses, I wanted him to continue...This is why, even though sometimes I said no to some things, he did not pay attention...because with words I said no but with my body I said yes.

What Lydia is describing here, has been defined as token resistance to sex (Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988), and more recently as scripted refusal (Muehlenhard & McCoy, 1991).

Scripted refusal is indicating to a partner that a person does not want to engage in sexual activities when in fact she does want to. Traditional roles for women dictate that women should be naive and innocent about their sexuality (Burgos & Diaz-Perez, 1986; Nieves-Falcon, 1972) and social restrictions on females sexualities are very strict in Puerto Rico. Given these social conditions, scripted refusal may just be a reflection of the internal conflicts women experience regarding the contradictions between the roles and social regulations learned and the realities of their sexualities.

Ambivalence pervaded every encounter Lydia had with her boyfriend. She was afraid of "letting go" because all her life she was taught that what she was experiencing was wrong. She would reject his advances even though she wanted to continue:

It is something that...when you are in that situation, you don't want to continue but you get more and more involved and another part of you tells you: What the hell? and then you continue ...after that I would feel bad for what I had done, regretful, because maybe what I was doing was not right.

Her boyfriend was starting to get desperate. He wanted to have sexual intercourse with Lydia but she always resisted at the last minute. He kept reminding her that they were going to get married soon, but she was afraid he would not want her after they had sex. And her fear was legitimate. As Hita-Dussel (1989) reported, in the religious-cultural context that Lydia was raised, virginity is a requirement men expect in order to marry women.

Lydia was not even sure what sex entailed. She had learned about conception and pregnancy at school, but she had not been instructed on the details of sexual intercourse. She recalls her first sexual intercourse vividly:

The day that it finally happened, it was even worse for me. I loved him and I wanted to please him, but I couldn't do it, I was too afraid. I remember that he was very upset...I told him that I would allow him [to have intercourse] this time, to try again. Even though I had told him that I was going to allow him, I started resisting as in previous occasions, but this time he did not pay any attention to me, he continued. I remember scratching his back, crying like a little girl so he would let me go, but he did not, he continued until the end. Then he hugged me, and he reminded me of how much he loved me, that it all was going to go away.

A forced and violent unwilling sexual event immediately reminds us of one thing: Date Rape. But even though this incident may have been violent and forced, Lydia explains why she did not feel raped:

No, no I did not feel like that [raped], because even though this happened without me wanting it to, and he, he had to, to force what happened, I did not see it like that because I

loved him, he loved me, he wanted to do this, so I allowed him. If he had not insisted, it would never had happened. If he does not get strong and does it, it would not have happened...I was never angry at him. Because, at least, he behaved himself, he was patient, because all previous times I would become hysterical. I would always say yes, and then no. What happened that day was that he figured he might have to help me because otherwise it was never going to happen.

Long and Jackson (1993) found that not all the women in their study, whose experiences were defined by the researchers as abusive identified their experiences as abuse. It is very important to understand that females are not taught how to be assertive or supposed to be knowledgeable about sex. Women are supposed to be candid, yet naive (Nieves-Falcon, 1972). There is no opportunity for women to express their sexual desires. Where desire does not exist for women, sex can only be defined as something men do to them without them desiring it (Wilton, 1991). Men are the experienced ones and women usually succumb to their sexual advances, they are not supposed to fully consent. Lydia's first experience was not enjoyable, much less any pleasurable:

After this (first intercourse) I felt empty. I started a process of acceptance. I accepted to have a sexual relationship, but I did not feel a thing. For the next six months, it was like an imposition, something I had to do to please him, not because I wanted it. He never knew how I felt in this respect, when he asked me if I enjoyed it, I would say yes without knowing what he meant. I did not know how to say things to him that would make him feel bad, I could not do it.

Lydia felt that what she was doing with her boyfriend was wrong, she felt guilt and was ashamed of her behavior. For a long time, Lydia also felt ashamed of being nude in front of him. She was taught that the body was a source of shame and that everything related to a naked body was bad. She never even saw her own brothers naked. As a young girl, she was told to cover her body from men. The clear message women receive is that if they do not cover their bodies, men could become sexually aroused and lose control (Resneck-Sannes, 1991). Lydia was never instructed about sexual intercourse so she was not even sure what to expect from the experience. She blames her mother's lack of education. Her mother tried to address the subject only after her wedding night:

I was so angry with my mother...I was angry towards her after I got married because...she called me to the hotel room...Never before had she told me anything about what was supposed to happen, nothing. And that day she called me to find out how I was...I was so upset, I said: Why do you call me now, there is no point to it anymore. I would have preferred for her to sit with me beforehand than to call me to find out how I was...I have tried to educate my children

- what nobody did with me - I talk to them and allow them to talk and ask questions too...teach them to see it [sexuality] as something natural ...something so simple, something that will happen.

Negative experiences may turn into empowering ones as long as they promote changes in beliefs and behaviors. All of Lydia's experiences have promoted changes in the ways in which she defines and experiences her sexuality.

Today Lydia feels grateful that the man she fell in love with "loved her well" (meaning with good intentions "me quiera bien"), was older and more experienced, and was able to understand everything she went through. She also admits that if she would have "given herself to him" and he would have cancelled the wedding, she would have been devastated because she felt nobody would have respected her ever again.

Gelisa. Gelisa grew up in an environment where sexuality appeared to be nonexistent. Her parents were very traditional and very strict:

My parents were persons that...or were because they are not married anymore...were very reserved. They never talked about any of those things [sexuality] or referred to... sexual organs under any circumstance, nothing like that. Everything was very closed. If I have seen my father twice in his underwear it was a lot. My mother, now that I am an adult, allows me to see her, but never when I was growing up. Anything related to sex was not a topic open to discussion at home.

The lack of information nurtured myths in Gelisa's head. For instance, she knew very little about menstruation when she got her first period:

Up to the point that when I got my period for the first time, my mother didn't even explained to me I could still bathe myself and I would not bleed to death, you know...When I got my first period, I did not take a bath for like two days...oh, I was picturing myself with the sanitary napkin in the bathtub and wondering, how do you hold it? You see, something as basic as that was not discussed.

When she was older, her mother would talk about girls getting pregnant as punishment for their transgressions. Sexual desire and pleasure are not to be experienced as deriving from women's bodies. Women receive the message that their body is a source of shame and they should reject their sexuality altogether (Fine, 1993; Resneck-Sannes, 1991). Gelisa's mother would never actually talk about the sexual relation, she took for granted that Gelisa would find out. Still today, her mother has nothing positive to say about sex:

I have never had positive feedback regarding sexuality from her. That it is a beautiful experience, that it is a way to demonstrate love...nothing. In her own words: Men are only

interested in sex, it is the woman who always has to be there for them, always...Everything she has to say is negative.

Gelisa wonders if this negativity may be affecting her in terms of her sexuality. She would not like to have such a negative perception of her sexuality at such an early age.

In her childhood Gelisa was forced to live through a sexual experience she will never forget:

I had a very negative experience when I was a child. When I was about 8 years of age...someone tried to rape me. It happened because a friend of mine and myself went to a store far away from my house without permission. A young man that approached us to talk about the Bible - I was raised in the church - and mentioned having seen us at church. He lead us into a very solitary place. My friend ran away, and he held me...not violently, but he made me sit down, and while he talked about the Bible, he started touching my genitals, my breasts, and I was alone there with him. My reaction...was to talk myself out of the situation...He finally let me go and I returned to my house crying and my mother never knew why...this happened in a place I was not supposed to be anyway...I did not want to be punished for going with my friend so far. I do not know up to what point this experience has influenced my present perception of sexuality, but it must have.

Gelisa had a six year long relationship with a young man for most of her adolescence. It was in this relationship where she discovered and experimented with her sexuality. She had decided to wait until marriage for intercourse, even though she engaged in what she refers to as "pre-intercourse sex", which basically included any behavior except for intercourse. What was important was that she remained a virgin, and as long as she had not had intercourse, she still was. Puerto Rican men prefer sexually inexperienced over experienced women for marriage. Even though courtship intimacy and physical affection are expected, the woman is advised not to "give in" to her boyfriend for she risks being considered for marriage later (Burgos & Diaz-Perez, 1986; Nieves-Falcon, 1972).

Gelisa graduated from high school and came to the United States for college. She had lost interest in her boyfriend, and even though she thought she was not in love with him anymore still, she had doubts:

He...would call and write often. He would invite me over to [where he lived] and I was confused. I don't know if I thought this [sex] could prove that I still loved him, or I was afraid that the relationship had weakened because we were not having sexual relations,...even though he had proposed to many times and well...given the way I was raised, my beliefs and my culture...I would ignore him or

plainly reject him.
Gelisa may have thought about having sexual relations with her boyfriend in an attempt to "save" the relationship. Christopher (1988) found that the women in her study were at times willing to give in to sexual pressures in their serious relationships fearing that if they did not, the relationship would be terminated by the man.

Her boyfriend kept on insisting Gelisa to visit, and finally, she agreed:

I went there, visited him, and we had [sexual] relations. It was an experience...a very negative experience because right there I confirmed that I did not love him anymore. Having sex was not going to change anything, the relationship was going to end anyway. In the middle of things, I realized that I didn't want to go through with this, and he forced me...well, he didn't rape me but you know he just made me go through with it. I got out of bed, went into the bathroom ...there were a lot of roommates outside and I am walking out of the bedroom!. I went to the bathroom and cried for a long time.

Gelisa, as Lydia and the women in Long and Jackson's (1993) study, were not able to identify a relationship as abusive even though it is clear there were components of psychological and physical coercion.

Giving yourself to a man is seen as a very special act. It is the most precious "gift" you can give the person you love. This is why women are supposed to wait until marriage to engage in sexual relations. Gelisa had given herself to her boyfriend and realized she did not love him:

I felt deceived of having wasted such a special moment as it is your first time with someone that I realized...I mean...I had kept myself until I was 17, not that long according to Puerto Rican standards, but still, I lost my virginity to that [offensive word] only to break up afterwards... Instead of that I could have waited to do it with the man that was going to become my husband.

Gelisa dated several young men, but she didn't have intercourse with any of them. She was not going to have sex with every man she dated. Besides she was not in love with them, and she believed that next step required it. Throughout the stories love is portrayed as a justifier and purifier for sexual activity. (Reiss, 1981). The women have internalized that if there is love present, sexual activity may be condoned.

Gelisa started dating the man who is today her husband:
He was a lot older than I was, very street wise, a lady's man. This relationship demanded me to give in sexually because of his age. Otherwise I knew he was going to leave me. And it was what I felt to do too, it wasn't that gave in not to lose him, I felt good with him and at the same time

knew that at his age it was not holding hands and kissing anymore. The first time we had sex it was traumatic, I was afraid. He tells me I was very shy, that after I had consented and had agreed to go to bed with him, I backed up. He said he saw it in my face that I wanted to do it, whatever analysis they make. He also says that I was a little tense, that he had to force me a little...I knew I was not supposed to have multiple sexual partners...and I had dared to have sexual intercourse with a second man. Gelisa makes her sexual decisions in terms of men's sexual needs. Interviews with women have defined sex as a commodity, with its value defined in terms of male usage. Other women interpret sexual pressures imposed to them as defining their sexuality in terms of men's sexual needs (Holland et al., 1992; Lebowitz & Roth, 1994).

There was a component of danger in her relationship with this man. She had to lie to her mother all the time about her dates and overnight stays. She also had to hide her contraceptive pills from her mother:

I had to hide all the time, I had to lie to my mother all the time. I would tell her I was staying at a girlfriend's house, when I was really staying with him. He wanted it to be an all night thing. Wake up together in the morning, go to the beach...a relationship that encompassed more than a sexual act. It was a serious relationship with regular sexual intercourse...that's when I got on the pill. And I, still a 17 year old teen living at my house (during vacations) had an episode where my mother found a contraceptive pill I had lost...I had to pick it up, tell my mother it was a children's Bayer aspirin, and flush it down the toilet. It was very stressful.

And the lies continued...but she was able to please him and continue the relationship. In her analysis of women's experiences of sexual coercion, one of the two discourses Gavey (1989) identified was one in which women take responsibility for men's sexual needs. Gelisa is willing to engage in sexual activities to please her boyfriend, which undermines her power to decide and experience her sexuality.

Gelisa's boyfriend moved to the United States to be with her. They moved in together, but she never told her family. Cohabitation, understood as premarital sexual activity, was a source of guilt and shame for Gelisa. Shame produces fear that the behavior will elicit rejection from loved ones. Because of this, the person experiencing shame hides and covers herself to prevent feeling more inadequate (Resneck-Sannes, 1991). Every time Gelisa's parents came to visit, they had to move him out and move a female friend in:

We had to move him out completely, and not just move him out, but move my girlfriend in, because my parents thought I had a roommate...it was very strainful in the

relationship... the first time he didn't mind, but, from the second time on he was upset...It is funny, because this situation brought about marriage probably a lot sooner than we had...just plainly because he got sick of having to move out.

All through, Gelisa recalls feeling bad about what she was doing. She knew that it was wrong from a social, Christian and moral point of view.

All the messages Gelisa received, and her mother's influence have affected the way she sees and acts upon her sexuality today: [My husband] is very good and very loving with me, but maybe because it [sex] was not taught to me like something beautiful and good, today I am not the that sexual...I think it was because of the way my parents raised me...in the back of my mind I think sex main purpose is to procreate...or like my mother says, to please your man. Nobody ever taught me that I was supposed to enjoy it too.

Gelisa still struggles to incorporate desire and pleasure as a determinant to her sexual encounters. Holland (1993) found that women in her study also questioned up to what extent they could define sex as pleasurable for themselves as opposed to their male partners given that they had always defined sexual relationships in terms of men's sexual needs.

Monica. Monica is the fourth of 5 children. The fact that she has 3 older brothers influenced the messages she received about her sexuality:

Since I was very little I was taught that I should always cover my body (especially if my brothers were around), that because I had three older brothers I had to sit down with my legs together, that if I went to the bathroom I had to make sure the door was locked, and that I should not let anybody look at or touch any part of my body.

She received the message that her body had to be protected from men, that her body is seen only as a sexual object.

Monica's parents were very traditional. Her mother was the typical housewife, taking care of the home, attentive to her husband's needs, and very loyal to her first and only love: her husband. Marriage and motherhood are the traditional roles for women in the Puerto Rican society. Gender roles are clearly defined and independent of each other. Role segregation is taught in both the home and the educational system. Women are exposed to household chores since early childhood while men are allowed more freedom and liberty with less responsibility (Cintrón & Quintero, 1988). Monica recalls several differences in the way the boys and the girls were treated:

My oldest brother was to take care of me at school, he was supposed to keep an eye on me, and always walk with me from school. I never remember mom telling the boys they had to take care of each other...they were allowed to play outside

much more than I was...I had to learn from early on the household chores...the woman's role. My mother would put a step on the sink so I could help her with the dishes...I had to learn how to do housework because when I became a woman those would be my chores.

She was raised with traditional values which exalted virginity and negated sexuality. To be a "good woman" one had to keep herself pure for her husband, and never allow a man to touch her unless he was her husband. Lebowitz and Roth (1994) reported how women learn the sexual value of women as a dichotomy of good women/bad women; based on their sexual status as virgins/non-virgins.

There was no talk about sex in Monica's home:

It was at school where I learned about sexual development, male and female differences, and menstruation...When I learned about it [menstruation], I questioned my mother and she addressed the subject in a different way: When this happens you let me know, but keep it in silence, I will buy you sanitary napkins...[which] you have to wrap with toilet paper so that your brothers don't see them...nobody should notice. It was not explained to me this way at school.

Monica's sexual development was portrayed as something she had to maintain a secret, something she had to be ashamed of.

She had her first boyfriend when she was 19 years old. She had no previous experience with sexual feelings. Lack of information and positive female sexual models, and an internalized negative image of female sexuality created an internal conflict with regards to how she was supposed to act upon her sexuality. Mock (1985) indicated two ways in which a Puerto Rican woman can respond to her sexuality: her socialization and her sexual needs. Responding to her socialization will cause her to repress her sexuality while responding to her sexual needs will cause her guilt and shame. Monica remembers her struggle:

I had never even been kissed before...it was my first boyfriend...he wanted to kiss me, touch me, and it was a continuous struggle, I could control myself, but he did not want to control himself, he was more aggressive. He was older...he was 23...and more experienced. I could not understand why he became "nervous" when he kissed me. Then he told me...he gets excited and everything that happens...I did not know that could happen. I told him we could not do that unless we were married. I had that so internalized in my mind that I would not allow him to go further than kissing and hugging me. I really wanted to do more though, I liked him and I would get excited too, but I had an internal struggle, I knew I was not supposed to do anything further...After six months we broke up...he met a nurse where he worked at and...he could have sexual relations with her and he forgot about me.

Education was an important goal for Monica. Her father wanted her to go to college and become a professional. Moving to the capital to finish college was a symbol of independence for Monica. She was free to determine when and with whom to go out. But even though she had several boyfriends, Monica remained true to her beliefs and values. Then she had a relationship that made her doubt everything she had believed in until then:

[Her boyfriend]...had a very strong character. He would not believe me...I told him I was still a "señorita" (a virgin), that I had not had sexual relations and that I was going to wait until marriage for that. He did not believe me, he wanted me to "prove my love" to him by having relations with him. I insisted we should get married first. He started doubting about my virginity, it was a constant struggle, sometimes he would become a little aggressive and would doubt my love for him. I started doubting myself...what value does virginity have, that you have to wait until marriage ...If I loved him and wanted to, why should I contain myself? Then one night he entered a motel. He said he wanted to talk and be alone with me, but I knew I should not enter this place, I was a "señorita" and a motel was no place for me. He talked me into it...we started kissing as usual and then he started to undress me by force...He wanted to...I understood he wanted to rape me...It was against my will, or maybe against my principles because I really wanted to do it but then an internal voice will tell me I should not...I started letting go, he seduced me, until he convinced me.

Confusion is clear in Monica's account. An internal struggle between what she desires, what she "knows" she should do, the pressures of her partner's desires imposed on her, and the lack of agency to take a stand on her sexual needs, places her in a vulnerable position to negotiate her sexuality. The concept of scripted refusal involves a person indicating to a partner that she does not want to engage in sexual intercourse when in fact she does. Muehlenhard and McCoy (1989) found that 36% of the scripted refusals by the women in their study resulted in sexual intercourse. Half of these women never indicated their consent; and although they all stated the desire to have sexual intercourse they also report having negative feelings when the situation resulted in intercourse.

Female sexuality is valued in terms of male sexual needs and usage (Lebowitz & Roth, 1994; Holland, 1992). In the Puerto Rican culture, virginity is overvalued and pre-marital sexuality is condemned by both the culture and the religion. Men expect their women to be inexperienced sexually (Burgos & Diaz-Perez, 1986; Caponi; 1992; Hita-Dussel, 1989).

After that, we broke up because he said that I had tried to trick him, that I was not a "señorita"...I would assure him he was my first...he would not believe me because the sheets

were clean, there was no blood, and I really did not feel a lot of pain.

Monica did not know what to think. On one hand, she realized that her first experience:

Was not as bad as I had thought. I expected to feel a lot of pain and to bleed a lot. My opinion towards virginity changed.

She believes that if it had been a physically painful experience, she would have been more affected by the breakup. But on the other hand, she kept thinking what was going to happen with her now:

Wow, I know that I was not supposed to do this...what will happen now, was this a correct choice? Will another man accept me now? If my parents would find out they will think I had deceived them. I cried a lot for the loss, but I don't think the experience caused any traumas.

After this experience, she became receptive to all sorts of information regarding sexuality. She has developed a healthy and positive sexuality over the years, and enjoys her sexuality with her present partner. The process of developing sexual agency (Laws, 1980) - the power to choose and control one's sexuality - is evidenced at different levels in all the participants.

Monica has discovered that the way women act on their sexualities is very diverse and in many cases different from the religious and cultural expectations she believed in. Still, there are two cultural expectations she is struggling with, marriage and motherhood:

People that I know tell me: Why haven't you gotten married, you are an attractive woman, you have a nice body, are intelligent, a good woman, how come you have not found someone? Don't you worry about your age...if you plan to have children...it's getting too late. When you grow old you are going to be alone. Well, I say, I'll go to a nursing home. Until today, I have not married and I don't think I am interested in doing so...getting married will affect my liberty...the concept of matrimony does not fit into my mind yet. I am not alone. I have my partner, but I need my space, I derive a lot of satisfaction from my work and the fact that I realized my dream of becoming a professional. I do not need to get married to be fulfilled.

Carmita. Carmita grew up in a family where religion was very important. Consequently, verbal communication about sexuality was virtually nonexistent:

Sex was not a topic of conversation in my home. My mother never sat down with me to explain any of the changes that were taking place in my body.... I always asked myself why mom and dad never talked to us about sex. I thought it was better to learn it at home than in the streets...Still, it was in the street where I learned it.

Similarly, Beach (1991) found, in a sample of married Christian

college alumni, that individuals received sexual information from their parents seldom or never. It seems that religion precludes conversations about sexuality in the home. It is interesting though, that the physical changes she witnessed both in her body and in her siblings' seemed natural to her. She grew up in a house too small for a family of ten. Attitudes towards nudity were relaxed given that there was only one bathroom which was shared often.

School was her other source of information. Catholic school provided her with a health class in which only woman's sexual development and menstruation were discussed. Catholic religion sees sexual intercourse as primarily targeted for procreation (Hita-Dussel, 1989).

Whenever Carmita and her friends were curious about the changes they were experiencing in their bodies, they would gather together to read:

[We would read]...pamphlets that a pharmaceutical company distributed which explained, in very simple language, woman's sexual development and how to prepare for your first menstruation... Some will mention old folk tales and beliefs that we considered incredible: When you get your first period you can't take a cold water shower, you can't wash your hair, or you can't drink lemon juice. Meanwhile we waited for that great moment in which we would become grown women.

Attending Catholic school reinforced the silence experienced at home regarding sexuality. Carmita reflects on the influence that religion can have on an individual's sexuality:

I was raised in a Catholic school...I believe that one of the things that have been instilled in me is how sinful sex was... how important it was to confess all committed sins (of thought, action, and omission). When I watched a movie on television in which a couple was kissing, I would assume they were going to bed later, believe that I had sinned and therefore think I had to confess it. Everything [related to sex] was bad, and religious teachings are so narrow minded that if all people would follow religious teachings, I swear to you we would become very sick.

During Carmita's high school years, her parents made sure all her activities were related to religion. Her parents were pleased because "their girl was not doing anything bad". She always wondered what doing something bad was.

In late high school, Carmita met a young man that she felt attracted to immediately. He had joined her church youth group. She started experiencing sexual feelings:

I could not understand why, when he held me, I would start sweating and blushing. My whole body was reacting to him. It was as if all the hormones in my body would go wild...I was so worried that I went to the priest who was our counselor in the youth group...He said that all I was feeling was

normal, and not to worry as long as I didn't go to bed with him. I left his office feeling relieved but a little confused, I had never even thought about going to bed with him. That was reserved for marriage some day...but first I had to study.

It was very important for Carmita's father that his children attend college. In fact, he would say to the females that first came their profession and then marriage. She lived up to his expectations. When only 20 years of age, she had finished college and was ready to start a master's degree. She found a job and went to school at night. Soon after she entered college, she decided to stop attending church, and still today only attends sporadically. Church became a symbol for restrictions, sinful behavior, and impotence. She was not willing to limit her dreams to pursue the religious ideal of women.

Carmita could go dancing with friends from school but she was always careful not to "precipitate" any sexual behaviors. Women are seen as gatekeepers of their bodies from the men's sexual advances. Men's sexuality is seen a strong force in need to be controlled (Reiss, 1981). According to her beliefs:

You are responsible if you provoke a sexual situation. It is part of the way I was taught to behave. I always learned that each person is responsible for her actions. If something happens to me, I have to assume responsibilities for what I do and say, I have to be certain about my position in an issue. For instance, if I was dancing and I allowed a young man to get too close, he was going to keep going forward. It is my responsibility to set the limit and say "enough and stop". If I allowed that moment to pass, and so not set the limit, that's the first step for him to continue...and then you might also have to follow through.

When Carmita was 27 years old, she started dating a man that would change the way she thought from then on:

He played the guitar and sang beautifully. He invited me to spend a weekend at a friend's house in another town. Then, we decided to spend the night in a hotel instead. I knew something was going to happen that night. When it finally happened, I expected it to be just like I had seen in the movies. I did not feel that wonder, hear the music, or enjoy it. Nothing I had expected happened, I was confused and upset. What made me feel sad was that it happened with that person. At that time I believed I was so in love that everything could be justified. It was not the right person or the right place.

The prevalence of love as sexual justification and purification is pervasive throughout the stories. It is love that comes to these women's live to redeem sex of its sinfulness and converts it in an expression of pure love (Reiss, 1981).

Then Carmita started a relationship that would last for many years. It was in this relationship that she realized that

enjoyable sex and happiness do not always go together:

I understand now that a sexual relation is one thing, you can have sexual compatibility with a person, great, but with this man I had a relationship in which I suffered a lot, for a long time, and I was very passionate, too sentimental and not rational enough. It was all passion and I gave my body and soul to the person. I have changed a lot...I thought I adored him...with all he did to me. Many things happened, he hurt me profoundly, so much that I said, "This has to have an end and I am going to be the one to end it". I did not want the suffering to continue for the rest of my life.

The development of sexual agency is a continuous and regenerating process. Sexual agency develops as beliefs and experiences collide creating a conflict to be resolved. Carmita is struggling with one of these conflicts at present. She presently lives with her partner out of marriage. She states that at first she did not mind, but that as time passes and the pressure from her family grows, the situation has become very difficult. Cohabiting is not approved by the society and that adds pressure to the relationship. The culture puts a lot of pressure on a single woman whose destiny is understood to be marriage and motherhood:

At 44 years of age, [family] expects to have an emotional and family stability, it is expected of you to have your husband, your home... You have to remember that I am the only single one in the family. Everybody is asking. "Are you going to get married? When are you going to get married?" And not all of my family knows that I live with my partner because I know they would not understand it. Also, I am supposed to have a child. I mean, I am a woman, I am prepared, I am independent, but everyone seems to think that I will not be complete until I marry and have a child. Religion and culture blend to expect from you similar things. I have changed, I have different expectations. My experiences have modified and changed me and have made me the person I am today.

Aura. Aura never considered her home to be traditional or conservative. After all it was all she knew. All her friends' homes were similar to hers and it all was consistent with the way things were taught at school. Everything seemed appropriate. She remembers though, many instances in which her mother or father dictated the ways in which girls behaved:

My mother would keep reminding me how girls were supposed to sit, eat, speak, even walk. I had to behave like a girl because one day I would become a "señorita" and it was important that I learned to behave like one. I was not supposed to speak up in any adult conversation and I remember my father saying: Girls talk when hens pee (of course they never do), and being upset because I questioned everything he had to say. He did not like that.

Girls are praised for their docility and submissiveness (Badillo-Ghali, 1986). They are not expected to be assertive, independent, or to question authority.

Religion was an important part of Aura's education both at home and at school. Religion and culture are so enmeshed together that they are basically indivisible in the Puerto Rican culture: I went to classes for my First Communion, took religion at school, and in general internalized everything religion has to say about women and sexuality: Nothing...well that sex is bad and dangerous. Curiously, I received the same message from the culture. With one exception: You have to be "coqueta" [similar to flirty but with a more positive connotation]. Female sexuality, if I recall correctly, was to be insinuated, but not enacted on. Women needed to be pure and virginal in order to be worthy of marriage. A woman who was not a virgin risked being rejected by her boyfriend. Virginitly was of utmost importance. The rule was: Allow men only to do so much, but keep yourself from being "spoiled" for marriage.

Aura is the oldest child in her family. She did not have a lot of exposure to children until she went to school. Later, she was always very wary of young men's intentions. She was not very trusting and was always afraid of sexual contact. She was very conscious of the great tension between pleasure and danger (Vance, 1984), especially the dangerous part. She believes the memory of an experience she had in childhood may have influenced this fear. It is this memory she had struggled to forget ever since she remembered...

There was this neighbor that was very friendly and helpful. If you had any problems in your home, you could call him and he would help you. Everyone trusted him. I did too until one day I remembered... I don't even recall how I got to his garage, but I know I was sitting on top of my bicycle waiting for him to fix the chain that had fallen out. All of a sudden while he was talking to me about something else, I feel his hand on the inside of my thighs. I wondered what was he doing but I stayed still waiting to see what was going to happen. I remember him telling me there was something in my thigh and then moving his hand toward my genitals. I was paralyzed, I did not know what to do, I wondered why he was doing this, how could I get out of the situation. I was actually afraid of telling him I had to leave. It was only when I felt his fingers inside my underwear, touching my genitals that I decided I had to do something. I don't even remember how long I was there, the next thing I knew I moved my leg towards the bicycle and said I had to leave or something. Once I remembered, I have never spoken to him again. Still today, I see him and I turn my face away, I was never able to tell my mother or anyone until I became an adult. Still, I have not shared this with

my mother. I have been reprimanded for not being polite to him, even as an adult, but I can't get the courage to explain why... Still today, I can't look him in the eye and do not know if it is hate or fear that I feel when I avoid his eyes.

Holland et al. (1992) found that in instances of very violent or coercive forms of sexual pressure such as child sexual abuse, rape, or physical threats, women can formulate future expectations of men's behavior in sexual situations based on these experiences.

Aura was always a good student and kept herself busy with school so she did not have to think much about boys. Once she started high school, she started to realize how young men were actually paying attention to her and she started to like it. She didn't date much. She had set herself very strict standards to date young men. There was no way she would kiss a man unless she was sure that she loved him. That will help her keep herself in the right place. When she was 15, she had her first boyfriend:

I met him and there was something about him that made me shiver inside. I believe it was mutual because he immediately started calling me and visiting me at home. We were not allowed to go out because I was too young, but he would visit me at home. The few times that we were alone, I was both excited and scared. We would kiss goodbye, and that was fine with me, but he wanted to do more. It was a constant struggle to keep his hands only in my back. I thought it was a terrible thing for him to try to touch my body, but at the same time I wanted to find out how it felt. I never allowed him though, and soon the relationship ended.

Aura preferred to go out in groups. It was safer. If she liked someone, and they were at a party, she could dance with him, maybe kiss him, but with all the people around, she was safe, nothing else would happen. Even in college she continued to feel this way. She had dated young men, but never letting them go past kissing and hugging. She knew some of her friends were sexually active, but her plan to remain a virgin still remained a priority. It probably was not because of the sexual behavior per se, but in an attempt to avoid the possible "dangers" of sexual intercourse: pregnancy, abandonment, social rejection among others (Hita-Dussel, 1989).

Then, at 19, she met a young man that very intelligently made her change her mind. He was experienced, already had a child, and very charming, a lady's man:

I don't know how I fell for him...if I had been on my right mind I would not have pursued the relationship. I guess he charmed me in...I found out about his past, and that made it even more challenging. I thought I was going to be the one to make him happy! I envisioned myself taking care of his daughter on weekends, having my own family, and growing old

together. I had internalized that stupid perfect family ideal. I had no idea how things were going to turn out. He was 23 years old. Aura knew he was going to demand more than kissing. His sexual needs took precedence over Aura's. She modified her behavior to fit his needs:

At first, he seemed content with what I could offer him. He knew about my family, my background, and he seemed to accept it. Then he began demanding more. I allowed some things to happen because it felt good and because I understood he was older and more experienced. I had never been in front of a man naked in my life. Slowly, but surely, as the relationship continued, he made sure I was willing to shed one more piece of clothing. Still, there was no insinuation of sexual intercourse. Everything was allowed but that. I had gone too far already...but I had made up my mind: I went this far because this is the man that is going to marry me. He had even said so many times. The only reason we did not get married immediately, he would say, is because you need to finish school and get a job first. I believed him, and therefore I let go. He was going to be my husband anyway.

He started to pressure Aura into having sexual relations. He had gotten tired of dealing with a "good girl". Women have reported that the main pressures in terms of their sexualities originate from their partners, the meaning that a sexual relation has for them, and the importance that men place on their sexual needs (Holland et al., 1992). Aura was so involved with him that she had forgotten how strong she used to be when it came to defending her beliefs:

He kept pressuring me...he would say to me that I was not a girl anymore, that it was about time I experienced sex. He kept pushing it every time we would go out. I had started to doubt everything I had believed in before. I started thinking like him. It was the only way I could consent to this. Still, he had tried to have intercourse with me, and I would not be able to go through with it. Until one day he drove into a motel. This was not the way I had thought it would happen. I told him there was no way I would go inside, but he convinced me. Nothing happened that day, but it was a constant struggle to keep it from happening. He was making me feel very bad about myself, explaining how I was acting like a tease, that I should just do it, especially since it was with someone who loved me. I agreed, but I had my doubts. It was as if I was fighting an internal war inside. I knew what I was supposed to do, but suddenly it was not that important anymore.

From then on, he became persistent. Aura got tired of his pleas, especially since the issue of sex did not sound that wrong anymore. She was convincing herself in order to please him. There seems to be a cultural norm for females - the stroking norm - which expects women to put men's needs in front of theirs (Lewin, 1985). Aura had decided to do exactly that. In the midst of her

internal struggle, she agreed:

He had tried to go into a motel again. I hated the idea. Motels are for illicit affairs, I did not want to go there. Then he parked his car in an empty parking lot and said: Fine, you don't want the motel, here we are. Between struggles, discussions, and convincing, I think I agreed (I don't even remember), but in the back of my mind I did not want to go through with it. After it happened, I felt numb, it was not what I expected. It did not feel good at all, even though it did not hurt. But that made it worse. All this time and trouble avoiding the situation and this was it. Well, I was not a virgin anymore. He never knew I did not enjoy sex with him, but he did enjoy himself, and at that time, that was enough for me. He was happy and satisfied.

Gavey (1989) has explored those types of sexual coercion in which the female appears to have consented: social coercion, where the female agrees to conform to social or peer pressures; and, interpersonal coercion, where the female agrees in order to stop a man's continuous pleadings. She suggests that these forms of coercion are promoted and legitimized by the dominant discourses that are based on male sexuality and minimize and obscure female's sexualities. Embedded in traditional social discourses, social and interpersonal coercion may appear as being a normal way in which men and women relate sexually.

Happiness in this relationship lasted only several months. Aura learned how to lie effectively in order to get away with spending nights and even weekends with her boyfriend. She stated that the relationship was good while it lasted. Then the relationship turned sour for Aura. Her boyfriend started drinking too much and without her. He would forget to call her, that they had dates, be drunk when he came to pick her up, or just disappear. Aura became paranoid. She even started to follow him home to make sure he was going to be there. She called to check up on him because she did not trust him anymore:

I lost all trust in him, I started to check on him, because I was sure there was another woman. He even started refusing my sexual advances. I was lost, I could not lose him, I had given all I had to him, and now he wanted out? But things got worse and I was becoming a lunatic. I suffered day and night, I would not go out with my friends waiting for his calls, I felt like a slut because even in this situation, if he wanted to have sex with me, there I was for him. I discovered what that song "Stop using sex as a weapon" meant. But, it was him who had created the person that I was, how come he did not want me now? He even dared to say that I had tricked him because he had been with many virgins before and he knew I was not a virgin when he had sex with me that first time. Everything he had to say was to hurt me.

He even became physical at times when I cried for him to pay attention to me. It had gone too far. I did not recognize the woman in the mirror. I decided it had to end, and it did.

After this relationship, Aura spent 3 years running away from men. She would go out in groups, but never date a man. At times he would come back to torture her, he would say he still loved her, but she knew he had another girlfriend. She finally let go of him and engaged in all sorts of activities that kept her occupied. It is interesting to note that in almost all the stories it took an abusive relationship or situation to determine these women to start becoming active agents of their sexuality.

After this time passed, Aura discovered that she was in love with another person, a man that had been her friend for years. She decided to date him. Today she is still in that relationship and plans to get married next year:

I am happy. I love a man that loves and more importantly respects me, he is my friend and lover, he supports me and trusts me completely. I also trust him, something that I thought was hard for me to do again. I decided to become sexual with him. It was my decision and we had been discussing it for a long time. He knew everything that had happened to me so he was very understanding. I never felt pressured into anything. It was a scary but good experience. It was like I would have wanted my first time to be, but it is OK, I got a chance to experience it. I have changed in ways I am not even aware of. I learned a lot from my past experience and decided not to feel abused in that way ever again. I have discovered that there is a positive side to my sexuality, that I am able to, and that it is OK to enjoy my sexuality in a relationship based on love and respect.

Aura, as most of the participants, has made a decision towards choosing and controlling her sexuality. This power is called sexual agency (Baber, 1994; Law's, 1980). It is through the development of sexual agency that women have the potential to change the meanings they ascribe, the way they act, and how they feel about their sexualities.

Summary

As exemplified by the previous stories, the women studied reported disagreeing with the ways in which they, as females, were raised and treated with respect to sexuality. Female sexuality is negated and devalued in patriarchal societies where male dominance guides the prevalent social discourses. The women in the study talked about their struggle with the contradictions between their beliefs and values and their desires and needs. The majority of participants had experienced instances of sexual victimization to varying degrees and were determined to change the ways in which they relate to men sexually.

It was empowering for me to examine how the participants in this study face these tensions in their lives and the diverse ways in which these women struggle to re-construct the paradigms guiding their sexualities.

CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Research Questions

The three research questions guiding the study were:

Q1 How do social and institutional sources influence the ways in which Puerto Rican women perceive, feel, and act on their sexualities?

Q2 How does sexual experience influence the process of developing sexual meanings?

Q3 How are sexual meanings created and modified as the nature of social discourse and personal experience changes?

Following is a discussion of how these questions were answered in the study. The discussion presents a meta-story line showing the main themes revealed in the analysis of the women's lives.

Sources and Nature of Sexual Messages

Three social and institutional sources of sexual messages identified by the participants of the study were: (a) family, (b) religion-culture, and (c) institutions of education. Following is a description of how these sources influenced participants' sexualities.

Family. The family was the first source of sexual messages for all the women. Explicit and implicit messages built the basis for the development of sexual scripts in the lives of the participants. The majority of the messages received were categorized by the participants as negative influences in the development of their sexualities.

The women were instructed by their parents, mainly by their mothers, to behave in a "proper" way. Mothers place a lot of importance in bringing up their daughters to be "señoritas", the ideal way a young woman should behave. Señoritas are unmarried sexually mature women. Implicit in this definition is the fact that they are sexually inexperienced and that they will remain like that until marriage. This is why an unmarried woman is referred to a señorita; the term includes the assumption that this woman is still a virgin. Being a señorita covers an array of behaviors and restrictions among which is a heightened sense of body consciousness. Women are instructed to cover their bodies especially from men's eyes, to sit and behave in a way that does not promote any sexual responses, and to be cautious about men's intentions. The female body then, is something to hide and protect from the uncontrollable sexual appetite of men. It is clear that the female body is a source of pleasure for men, but

there is no clear indication that the body should be a source of pleasure for women.

Nudity was nonexistent in most of the families. Only in 2 out of 12 families was nudity treated casually as natural. Women internalized the idea that their bodies were shameful, and therefore hidden from view. It proved to be a challenge for women to allow themselves to share their naked bodies with a partner. Silence was pervasive when it came to information about sexuality. Information was usually restricted to menstruation and sexual development and introduced after the fact happened. Some participants experienced their first menstruation without knowing what was happening to their bodies. Others relied on outside sources in order to learn about their sexual development.

Families also served to restrict the liberties of women. It was common for young women to experience different treatment from that given to their brothers. Women were usually restricted to play gender appropriate games inside the home with other girls, and with little contact with boys. They were also taught traditional female chores and duties in preparation for marriage. As young women, their relationships with men were carefully monitored to prevent any undesired behaviors. Women were taught that sexual transgressions, besides being morally wrong, brought negative consequences and possible responsibilities that the women were to avoid. Negative consequences such as unwanted pregnancies, abandonment, and social rejection were seen as punishments for immoral behaviors.

Religion and culture as one. Participants referred to religion and culture indistinctively. Participant's reported that the Puerto Rican culture is so embedded with religion that the two are inseparable when it comes to sexual messages. Religion and culture are responsible for the myth of the "good woman". The ideal woman behaves in accordance to the model of the Virgin Mary Mother of God present in the Catholic religion. Women are supposed to be quiet, submissive, obedient, and naive when it comes to sexual issues. The ideology guiding these principles is called Marianismo. The characteristics defining the ideal woman promote dependence on and subordination to men. There is only one different cultural requirement for women that is not present in religion. Women are supposed to be "coquetas" (candid) and attractive to men while remaining naive, especially in terms of sexuality. This posed a problem for participants who competed to be attractive and candid while being cautious not to appear too knowledgeable about sex, or to let things "go out of hand" by precipitating sexual advances from men.

Virginity was defined by participants as the main requirement to being a good woman. Women were expected to be sexually inexperienced at marriage while men were not. The ideologies of Machismo and Marianismo were prevalent in the

sexual scripts of participants. Machismo allows a man to be open and active about his sexuality with little social condemnation. Some of the participant's partners expressed their desire of marrying a virgin and even rejected the woman after she "fell" or "succumbed" to the man's sexual advances. This is evidence of the real threat Puerto Rican women face of risking consideration for marriage if they decide to engage in sexual activities with the man they love. In general, participants perceived sexuality as sinful and wrong, except in the context of marriage.

Love seems to be a determining factor in deciding to engage in sexual activity. Some of the participants who decided to engage in, or were pressured into, sexual activity reported they finally agreed to it because the love they felt for their partners allowed them to please them. Love cleansed and purified the negative images of sex for these women whose main purpose was to fulfill their partner's sexual needs. Contrary to women, men are believed to have an insatiable sexual appetite that women have to be cautious about. On many occasions, participants in the study "gave in" to the sexual advances of their significant others in order to please them, or satisfy their sexual "needs". Female sexual needs are not included in traditional Puerto Rican sexual scripts. Therefore, participants who desired sexual intimacy may have stated their reasons to engage in sexual behaviors in terms of men's needs and desires.

The traditional ideal of women is marriage and motherhood. Six of the 12 participants were married at the time of the study and 1 was divorced. Of the 6 women who were single, 5 were involved in relationships which included sexual intimacy. Participants struggled with family and culture expectations of marriage and motherhood, especially when some of them had actively decided to avoid them. For some women, singlehood has provided the opportunity to be independent and fulfill higher educational and professional goals that might have been difficult to achieve in a traditional marriage relationship. One participant even decided to fulfill her desire to be a mother outside of a marriage relationship and has successfully achieved her dream.

But modifying sexual and cultural scripts and acting against cultural expectations is a constant struggle, as illustrated in each participant's story. Participants are actively invalidating the scripts that had previously guided their behaviors and incorporating their new experiences and beliefs in the reconstruction of their sexual scripts.

Educational institutions. Educational institutions were both a symbol of continuity and support of traditional scripts, and a source of independence and change for participants. Early educational institutions served to reinforce gender roles and female behaviors. Girls were reminded to behave like señoritas

and were expected not to engage in physical games or sports. It is still usual in Puerto Rican schools to separate boys and girls into two different groups for physical education classes. Also, textbooks used in elementary school reflect traditional gender roles in their stories and pictures (Yordán, 1974).

In terms of sexual messages, the women reported receiving similar messages in school as those received from their families. This was especially true for the women who attended Catholic schools in which religious beliefs were stressed. Information regarding female sexual development and, in a few cases reproduction, was offered to the participants in a particular class in middle school. Many of the women in the study learned about puberty and menstruation at school given that these topics had not been discussed at their homes. Informal discussions with peers was reported as very informative by some of the women.

On the other hand, higher education became a symbol for independence and change in the lives of participants. Many of the participants physically moved out of their parents' homes in order to be able to attend college. This physical separation allowed women to be more independent and to have more freedom in terms of their dating conduct. They also reported having the opportunity to meet people with different beliefs and interests and discover that different people's lives are guided by very diverse beliefs and principles. What was more salient to the participants was the realization of the fact that many peers were engaging in diverse sexual activities, outside of the context of marriage, without "suffering" any negative consequences.

College provided an opportunity to challenge their sexual and cultural scripts in terms of female sexuality. For those who continued their educational journeys, the educational process has also challenged the notion that, in order to be fulfilled, a woman has to get married and become a mother. Three women were involved in partial cohabitating relationships, and one of them is raising her son from a previous relationship, by herself, with the emotional and loving support of her partner. None of these three women foresee marriage in their near futures. They have successfully challenged the traditional norm for females established by the culture.

Determining Experiences

The process of developing and modifying sexual meanings is presented through the 12 participant's stories. I selected the storyline approach as the way of presenting the data. This format allowed me to tell the participant's stories, using their own words, accentuating determining experiences and how these, in turn, influenced in the development and modification of sexual meanings.

Discourses of Female Sexuality

Source of shame and self-blame. Participants in the study received a negative message about their bodies, their femaleness, and their sexuality. The feminine is devalued in patriarchal cultures. Religion reinforces these feelings and contributes to women's oppression by allowing women to understand their feelings of inferiority as natural and inevitable. Traditional religious beliefs justify and perpetuate the patriarchal structure (Caponi, 1992).

The women in the study were reminded all their lives about their powerlessness. If their bodies need to be covered, protected from men, and if their bodies are a possible source of danger, the women internalize the message that the female body is a source of shame. Once this message is internalized, it is very difficult to modify and it leads women to feel shame when they live experiences that require their bodies to be exposed or shared with a male.

Traditional constructions of female sexuality were imposed on participants since early childhood. The women in this study felt inadequate when they experienced feelings or encountered situations that digressed from the appropriate sexual norm. They reported feeling self-blame after they had engaged in behaviors that were not included in the traditional constructions of their sexualities. Feelings of self-blame were experienced by the women even if the behaviors were described as being desired and wanted by them.

Vulnerability and sexual victimization. The women reported feeling vulnerable when encountering a sexual situation regardless of whether or not this situation was expected or desired. The studied women were socialized to avoid sexual topics and be naive in sexual situations. Participants may have not felt entitled to be assertive about their sexual feelings and desires and may have relied on the men in their lives to make sexual decisions for them. Given their lack of power over sexual situations, these women felt vulnerable.

Feelings of vulnerability can lead to sexual victimization. Instances of sexual pressure and violence were prevalent in the lives of the participants. When they occurred early in life, they were especially influential. It has been found that sexual victimization early in life is a risk factor for an adult victimization experience. And when women experience the most violent or coercive of sexual victimizations such as child abuse, these experiences can shape their expectations of men's behaviors in subsequent sexual encounters (Gidycz et al., 1993; Holland et al., 1992). Instances of child abuse in the present study were extremely disempowering for the four participants who experienced them.

Women also experienced sexual pressure and coercion in their adolescent and adulthood relationships. Differences between genders in terms of sexual entitlements and privileges contribute to the creation a power differential that results in adversarial relationships. These types of relationships decrease the power women have over sexual situations. The participants, who in many instances had no previous experience in negotiating sexual boundaries, were in a very vulnerable position in relation to their partners. The tension women feel between the potential pleasure and danger (Vance, 1984) of the situation, the inability to feel entitled to sexual pleasure, and the fear of demonstrating sexual knowledge or intentions, may have lead them to succumb to men's desires and sexual needs in order to please them. Sexual pressures that men imposed on the studied women forced them to define their sexuality in terms of men's needs.

Ambivalence. Ambivalence in terms of their sexual decisions was encountered by all participants in the study. The narratives were characterized by a tension, an ambivalence between what is right and what is wrong, what the men wanted and what they desired, what they should do and what they wanted to do, what they wanted to do and the possible consequences of doing so. Internalized sexual beliefs can produce ambivalence and even inhibition in women's sexual responses (Santos, 1985).

Very powerful internal conflicts were reported by participants in terms of their sexual decisions. When participants were true to their socialization, sexuality was repressed and there was no consequence; but when they responded to their sexual needs and engaged in the sexual behaviors desired, guilt feelings arose. Women studied engaged in an internal debate in the process of determining their entitlement and right to experience sexual pleasure.

The participants were advised not to "give in" to their boyfriends' sexual advances, in fear of the consequences. One of these consequences is abandonment. Two of the participants in the study experienced abandonment after giving in to sexual advances by their boyfriends. This is a real threat women encounter when they are in the position of making decisions about their sexuality. The women in the study felt curiosity and desire in terms of their sexuality but in many instances either refrained from following their desires, or avoided sexual situations altogether in order to avoid feeling these internal conflicts.

When women feel so much ambivalence in the process of sexual decision making, when they do not want to feel the responsibility that these decisions entail, or when they fear adverse consequences deriving from these type of decisions, they may feel it is best to place the decision responsibility on the man. This could include making the decision to engage in the activity only to "please him", "because he is more experienced and he needs

it", or "because I love him and I want to keep him".

Empowerment. A discourse of desire, pleasure, and sexual entitlement is missing from the cultural context of the participants (Fine, 1993). I found though, that this kind of discourse is not missing, but alive and developing in the lives of participants as illustrated by their stories. When these women stress their struggle in reconciling the sexual conflicts in their lives, they are actively working towards transforming the construction of their sexualities from one that is shameful and immoral to one that is legitimate and pleasurable.

Unknowingly, the participants are becoming active agents of their sexual lives. The concept of sexual agency is defined as the power to choose and control over one's sexuality (Laws, 1980). It develops through time and is influenced by the individuals experiences and the interpretations given to them (Baber, 1994). Throughout their stories, participants stressed and gave importance to assuming an active role in the construction of their own sexualities.

Summary

The social construction of female sexuality in Puerto Rico is guided and nurtured mainly by religion and culture. These two powerful institutions were described by participants as inseparable, influencing their sexuality the most. The family is the first influence in the lives of these women. It serves as a gatekeeper for the messages derived from religion-culture, and as the women's first source of gendered dichotomies. Women learn at home the sexual realities of being female (usually negative) along with the advantages of being male.

Experiences determined by the participants, as illustrated in the participant's stories follow a common thread, namely the life-long struggle with the incongruencies between social constructions of female sexuality and the realities of these women's sexual experiences. Four discourses of female sexuality emerged through the analysis of the data: source of guilt and shame, vulnerability and sexual victimization, ambivalence, and empowerment. These help illustrate the basis for the ongoing internal struggle participants experienced and the obstacles or aids encountered in the construction of new, personal paradigms to define and guide their sexuality.

An Everpresent "Vaivén": A Theory of Ambivalence

The findings of this study follow a storyline that guides women's development of sexual scripts/meanings from oppression to empowerment. The common storyline is the life-long struggle of Puerto Rican women with the incongruencies between the social constructions of female sexuality and the realities of these women's experiences. A theory of ambivalence is developed from

the data in an attempt to understand the women's struggle in developing the paradigms for their own sexuality. Ambivalence is defined as the simultaneous existence of two conflicting feelings (de Mello Vianna, 1981). It is the everpresent vaivén (loosely defined as the coming and going, the ebbing and flowing) or tension that characterized the sexuality of the women that participated in this study.

Double Messages: The Contradictions

From a very young age, the women in this study received contradictory messages regarding their sexuality and their womanhood. The confusion created by these type of messages translated into the ambivalence women felt towards their sexualities.

On being a "señorita". Women were taught to behave like "señoritas" from an early age. Being a "señorita" is both a source of pride and a source of oppression. It signifies sexual maturity, a girl becoming a woman, but it also reminds women of the disadvantages of being a woman and their inferiority when compared with men. Traditionally, women are believed to belong to the home, learn the house chores, and be taken care of by the men in the family. Men, on the other hand, are believed to belong to the streets, and are expected to learn to defend themselves outside the home environment. As one participant stated:

My oldest brother was to take care of me...always walk with me from school. I never remember mom telling the boys they had to take care of each other...they were allowed to play outside much more...I had to learn how to do housework because when I became a woman those would be my chores. From very early in their lives, women learn that being a girl is not as good as being a boy. In patriarchal societies, gender differences are exaggerated and these differences legitimize and perpetuate power relations between men and women (Osmond & Thorne, 1993)

Menstruation, the onset of sexual maturity, is celebrated among the women and hidden from the males of the family in many homes. It is both a source of pride and shame for the young woman:

[My mother] addressed the subject in a very different way [as compared to the school]. When this happens you let me know, but keep it in silence, I will buy you sanitary napkins...[which] you have to wrap with toilet paper so that your brothers don't see them...nobody should notice. It was not explained to me this way in school. If the source of womanhood, what finally redefined girls as women, was to be hidden and a source of shame, the message women received was that their bodies were a source of shame.

Whose sexuality? Women receive contradictory messages about men's nature and intention when it comes to their sexuality:

My mom would tell me that I should not trust men, my mom would also tell me that there were things that happened to men, that they could not control their emotions. This double message leaves women confused in regards to how to feel and act towards men. The first message gave the women the impression that men would intentionally act on their sexuality and that women should not trust a man's intentions. On the other hand, the second message relieves them of any bad intention and defines the men's sexual responses as something they could not control, something that was unintentional and could be excused. Women reported being both afraid and nontrusting of men's sexual behavior, and excusing and forgiving of their sexual advances and needs.

Women were taught to protect their bodies from men and to be "coquetas" (candid, flirty) at the same time. As one participant stated:

Sexuality...was to be insinuated, but not enacted on...Virginity was of utmost importance. The rule was: Allow men only to do so much, but keep yourself from being "spoiled" for marriage.

The value of a woman is measured by her sexual status. Women's sexuality, and therefore their value is seen as a dichotomy between virgin and whore. Women are good women as long as they remain pure for their future husbands. But if women are supposed to insinuate their sexuality to men, they are forced to deal with the tension of negotiating sexual terms in their encounters with men.

Two cultural expectations for women in the Puerto Rican culture are: purity and virginity, and marriage and motherhood. One set of expectations contradicts the other in terms of women's sexual status. Throughout their lives women are advised to guard and keep their bodies from men. Then, by virtue of marriage, women are supposed to freely share and enjoy their bodies with men in a sexual way.

When women are encountered with sexual feelings outside of the context of marriage they experience a struggle between their body's sensations and curiosity for the new experiences and the cultural and religious norms regarding the way women should behave in terms of their sexuality.

Women's Sexual Decisions?

Women are praised in the Puerto Rican culture for their docility and submissiveness. They are not expected to be assertive, independent, or to question authority. Culturally, these are good qualities for women to have. At the same time, women are expected to be able to resist men's sexual advances in order to maintain their purity. Men's sexual advances are expected, their sexual behavior is scripted to be explicit. Women find it to be very difficult to be submissive towards men and

assertive in their sexual decisions at the same time. The culture sets women and men against each other in terms of what is expected of them sexually, yet expects men and women to get along in their relationships.

Women's desire. Women encountered ambivalence when they experienced sexual desire. Women were divided against their own self:

[He] awakened my sexual desire...I allowed him to touch me because I liked how it felt...I knew I should not...even though sometimes I rejected his caresses, I wanted him to continue.

I thought it was a terrible thing for him to try to touch my body, but at the same time I wanted to find out how it felt. I would not allow him to go further than kissing and hugging me. I really wanted to do more though, I liked him and I would get excited too, but I had an internal struggle, I knew I was not supposed to do anything further.

Women's struggle among what they desired, what they knew they should do, their partner's desires, and the lack of agency needed to take a stand on their sexualities placed them in a vulnerable position to negotiate their sexualities. These women were fighting a battle between their socialization and their sexual desires but regardless of the decision taken, the conflict was never resolved. If women responded to their socialization, they felt repressed; if they responded to their desires, they would feel guilt and shame.

Sexual desire and pleasure were not to be experienced as deriving from women's bodies. Women were socialized to reject their sexuality altogether. This was compounded by lack of information, positive female sexual models, and an internalized negative view of female sexuality. Altogether these contradicted the little sexual desire women allowed themselves to feel and created an internal conflict with regards to how they were supposed to feel and act towards their sexuality.

Men's desires and needs. Women are assumed to be responsible for men's desires. As young girls, women are told to cover their bodies from men. The clear message is that if they do not over their bodies, men would become sexually aroused and lose control. Women's bodies are seen as the sexual objects for men's sexual pleasure. Men's desires revolve around women's bodies, and men are entitled to sexual pleasure. Therefore, some of the participants defined sex as something they did for the men they were involved with:

He was a lot older than I was, very street wise, a lady's man. This relationship demanded me to give in sexually because of his age...it was not holding hands and kissing anymore.

It finally happened [because] I loved him and I wanted to please him.

I knew he was going to demand more than kissing. I allowed some things to happen because I understood he was older and more experienced...He never knew I did not enjoy sex with him, but he did enjoy himself, and at that time, that was enough for me. He was happy and satisfied.

Men's sexual needs take precedence over the women's because the patriarchal structure raises women to be nurturant, to please those she loves, and to put her loved ones (including men) needs over her own. While women's sexual desires and needs are nonexistent in this type of culture, men's sexual desires and needs exist and their sexual behavior is promoted and celebrated in the culture. By defining their sexual experiences as means to please the men, the studied women may be allowing themselves to act on their sexual desires and needs in a more socially acceptable way given that if they put their needs first, their behaviors would not be acceptable.

Forced choices. Sexual pressure occurred in the lives of participants in many different ways ranging from child sexual abuse to social or interpersonal coercion. In all cases, the forced choices created ambivalence in the participants' lives as to what to make out of these experiences.

The participants that encountered child sexual abuse experienced mixed feelings including pleasure, guilt, and hate about the incidents. In all cases, the incident occurred with a person which they trusted and admired. The women described their feelings:

I remembered...receiving some sort of pleasure...I discovered it had been an older cousin of mine. Since then, I had not forgiven her.

He finally let me go and I returned to my house crying and my mother never knew why...this happened in a place I was not supposed to be anyway...I did not want to be punished for going with my friend so far. I do not know up to what point this experience has influenced my present perception of sexuality, but it must have.

Once I remembered [the incident] I have never spoken to him again. Still today, I see him and I turn my face away, I was never able to tell my mother or anyone until I became an adult...Still, I can't look him in the eye and I don't know if it is hate or fear that I feel when I avoid his eyes.

Sexual pressure also occurred in the participant's relationships with men in their adolescent and young adult years. it is interesting to note that in some cases, the women in the study were not able to characterize a relationship as abusive even though it was clear that there were components of physical and psychological coercion. Mixed feelings are clear in these accounts:

I started resisting...but this time he did not pay attention

to me, he continued. I remember scratching his back, crying like a little girl so he would let me go, but he did not...No, no, I did not feel like that [raped]...this happened without me wanting to...he had to force what happened...I was never angry at him...he figured he had to help me because otherwise it was never going to happen. He talked me into it...we started kissing as usual and then he started to undress me by force...I understood he wanted to rape me...It was against my will, or maybe against me principles because I really wanted to do it...he seduced me until he convinced me...I was not supposed to do this...what will happen now...I cried a lot for the loss, but I don't think the experience caused any traumas.

Social and interpersonal coercion, as defined earlier, are very common in the lives of the women studied. These types of coercion are representative of the vaivén and ambivalence the participants experience regarding their sexuality. In patriarchal societies, social and interpersonal coercion are promoted and legitimized by the dominant discourses that are based on male sexuality and minimize and obscure female sexuality. In this cultural and social context, what we understand as coercion, may seem as a normal process of sexual discovery for these women.

Deception. Deception was experienced by the participants in the study in many different contexts. The use of deception also reflects the tension between social norms and lived realities of the participants. It is another of the contradictions present in the lives of women; deception resulted in both negative and positive consequences for the participants.

When deception resulted in negative consequences, the studied women experienced frustration, pain, and anger. Some of the men involved with the women in the study lied about their intentions with the participants in order to convince the women to have sexual intercourse with them. In the participants' words:

I went this far because this is the man that is going to marry me. He had even said so many times...I believed him, and therefore I let go. He was going to be my husband anyway.

I saw it like this: I am giving myself to this young man because he is going to be my husband...That is what I thought because I believed I was going to marry him anyway.

But deception was also used by the women to achieve positive goals. Because one of the culturally sought goals for women is to be virgins at the time of marriage, some of the participants were willing to deceive their boyfriends, allowing them to believe they were virgins. As one participant recalls:

He [boyfriend] wanted "a girlfriend and a wife that was pure and that had not been had by anyone"...I suffered a lot with his confessions, [but] I liked him even more.

Using a white dress in weddings is a symbol of purity and chastity. Some of the women that participated in the study, although they were not virgins anymore, still wore white dresses to their weddings in order to deceive their relatives and friends. One of the participants wanted to wear a beige dress, as she did not feel worthy of a white dress, but was pressured into wearing a white dress and crown by her mother (who was aware of her non-virgin status), and her father who believed in the purity of his daughter:

I went to the altar and all that...I told my mother [who knew she was not a virgin] "If you want to, I will not use the crown or anything", but she said that I should use it and that she wanted me to...I didn't want a white dress...because I am so honest that I couldn't understand why I should. But when I went to buy the...dress, my father saw that I wanted it pearl beige...he left the store and said: "No, the dress is going to be white", and that's the way it was.

Deception was used by women to hide from their parents the fact that they were sexually active with their partners. Women went to great lengths to prevent their parents from finding out about their sexual relations. One participant recalls how she had to lie to her mother in order to maintain her relationship:

I had to hide all the time, I had to lie to my mother all the time. I would tell her I was staying at a girlfriend's house when I was really staying with him. He wanted it to be an all night thing.

In order to hide the fact that she was cohabitating with her boyfriend while away at college, a participant recalls:

We had to move him out [of the apartment] completely, and not just move him out, but move my friend in, because my parents thought I had a roommate...it was very strainful.

One participant shares how her mother sacrificed herself in order to preserve her daughter's reputation and avoid negative consequences. This mother went beyond her own shame and preferred self-blame and humiliation rather than to humiliate and shame her daughter - Annihilation for the service of preservation -

My sister felt shame [because she was pregnant out-of-wedlock] and she used corsets through the whole pregnancy to hide her belly. I was born...my grandmother talked to my grandfather and he said that they were going to give me his last name. It was assumed by everyone that I was the product of my father's (grandfather) affair and that my father took me away from the woman and brought me into his family to raise me. That would be the arrangement; in fact, married men's affairs were more socially accepted than an out-of-wedlock pregnancy from a married man.

This participant went on to deceive a man into getting her pregnant:

I got pregnant, I got pregnant on purpose...When I found out about my origins, I decided that I was going to have a child

married or not when I had 24-25 years of age. I decided I wanted a child and I was not going to hide him the truth, I would say everything to him...This was my plan, he did not want a child.

While she idealized an entirely honest relationship with a son or daughter, she used deception as means to get herself pregnant.

The ways in which deception is used through the stories is very diverse. Deception had negative consequences when the men the women were involved with used it to achieve a purpose that otherwise would have been impossible such as convincing them to have sexual relations with them. These instances left women feeling pain and anger toward the men that had deceived them.

But deception was also used by the women in the study and their families to achieve positive goals. Therefore, deception is another source of ambivalence for these women. While it can be used against them and be experienced as devastating, deception is also an useful tool women and their families have that helps them to achieve positive goals. It reconciles the contradictions between the cultural goals and the women's lived experiences. When women use deception, they deny their lived experiences and appear to conform to the established cultural norms.

Women's Invisibleness. Women are invisible in terms of their sexualities. Another contradiction contributed to the ambivalence of the studied women's sexualities. The social structure is set up to care and protect women while oppressing and silencing them at the same time. By keeping women ignorant in terms of their sexualities, the social structure allows men to have sexual control over women.

Women are not supposed to know about sex, let alone act upon it. Therefore, in making sexual decisions, these feel ambivalent, with no control over their sexualities, and in many instances they make decisions based on their partners needs or desires. A lack of positive sexual role models for women prevents them from developing the assertiveness the women need to act on their sexual feelings in the ways they want to as opposed to the ways they are pressured into. Their desires, needs, and decisions are silenced and made invisible by the social forces that restrict and oppress women.

How Women Make Sense of Their Experiences

Throughout their lives the women in this study have tried to reconcile the contradictions embedded in the messages they have received from their families and culture-religion. These women have struggled when trying to make sense of the contradictions between the traditional sexual scripts and the realities of their lives. They have fought with their sexual feelings and desires, against those of the men they have encountered, they have given into or coerced into unwanted sexual behaviors, and attempted to

make sense of their sexual experiences.

Reconciling the contradictions: Is there a way out? The women in this study state that they love the men in their lives - partners, husbands, sons, fathers - but they want their space, their professional satisfaction, they want to be independent thinkers. If women are trapped by patriarchy in a world designed by men to benefit men, is there a way out? How do women get away from their bodies? How do women develop what it takes to take control of their sexual decisions?

The development of sexual agency. For the women in this study, education was both a source of oppression and empowerment. Early in their lives education served to perpetuate the established social structure and the traditional sexual scripts. Later in life, when these women entered college, education served as a source of knowledge and empowerment. Education offered an opportunity to modify the beliefs women had about their sexualities and the appropriate sexual behavior for women. Education was reported to be of utmost importance in the process of modifying the traditional sexual scripts that guided the lives of these women.

What women experienced in terms of their sexualities, and the ways in which women interpreted these experiences also contributed to the participants' attempt to reconcile the contradictions in their sexual lives. Abusive situations experienced by the women seemed to promote sexual agency. In almost all cases, it took an abusive relationship to determine these women to start becoming active agents of their sexualities. In a very ironic way, abusive relationships and negative experiences served as both a source of oppression and a source of empowerment towards the development of sexual agency (Laws, 1980; Laws & Schwartz, 1977; Baber & Allen, 1992). Negative experiences may have had such an impact as to make women determine not to be abused in the same way again:

Since this experience, I have assumed control over my sexual life opting to decide what to do and with who... My work has served as a positive reinforcement to the ways I see and express my sexuality responsibly, in the ways I desire.

Sexual agency, then, develops through the evaluation and interpretation of past experiences over time. It is through the development of this sexual agency that women have the potential to change the meanings that they ascribe, the way they act, and how they feel about their sexualities.

Summary

A theory of ambivalence was derived from the data in this study. The vaivén or tension the participants experienced was constant throughout their lives and present in the messages these women received, the experiences they encountered, and the ways in

which they made sense of their experiences. Women reported being at different stages in the development of their sexual agencies, but acknowledged the need for this agency in order to be able to change the ways that they feel, think, and act upon their sexualities to a more positive, enjoyable, and assertive one.

Links to Family Theories

Although social constructionism and feminist theories were very appropriate in the analysis and interpretations of the participants' accounts of their sexualities, there is a myriad of other theories that may be used to understand their experiences. Three major family theories - symbolic interactionism, exchange and resource theories, and life course perspectives - and Kohlberg's moral development stages are discussed as alternatives to interpret the collected data.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic Interactionism is similar to social constructionism in that they both propose how meanings are created through social interaction, and how these meanings help shape behavior. Individuals negotiate their individual meanings from shared interpretations created by social interaction (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Self-concept is the person's sense of who she is. It is developed through social contact and it includes values and beliefs that will be used to guide the person's behavior. The women in this study learned, from very early in childhood, that females are treated very differently than boys in terms of their bodies and acceptable behaviors. This differential treatment appeared to be correlated with women developing a self-concept that was far from positive in terms of their sexuality. Women understood that their bodies were shameful and sexual objects to be guarded from men.

Four important concepts of SI theory are identities, roles, interactions, and contexts (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Identities are the individual meanings that are created regarding a particular role. The salience or importance that the individual gives to the role, along with the commitment (cost of giving up the relationship) the individual has towards that particular relationship will motivate behavior. When the women in the study engaged in relationships that were very salient to them, and when they felt their commitment was very high to the relationship, women made sexual decisions on the basis of their partners' desires and needs. The three major reasons to involve themselves sexually with a partner were: (a) out of fear of losing him; (b) because the man was older and more experienced, and he demanded sexual intimacy from the relationship; and (c) pleasing and satisfying the man.

These women, after being pressured to engage into more intimate forms of sexual contact, reevaluated the salience of the

relationship along with the level of commitment and re-defined their identities in the role of partners as one inclusive of the sexual component. Not all the sexual encounters were voluntary or determined to happen by the women. For most women, there was a discrepancy between the extent of sexual intimacy included in their role identities and in their partners'. Lack of communication regarding role identities may have accounted for instances of unwanted or coercive sexual activity.

Roles are shared meanings regarding the behavior of a particular social position (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Within predetermined roles, individuals create their own identities, which may not resemble the prescribed ones, and they are able to modify them as time goes by. When examining sexual intimacy in the pre-marital relationships of the women studied, it would appear that a social role has been transgressed. In Puerto Rico, sexuality is defined as occurring only in the context of marriage. Therefore when partners engage in pre-marital sexual contact, their identities have to be modified to include the sexual aspect. In the case of the women studied, their partners put pressure on them to become sexually active. If the salience and commitment of the relationships were high, women redefined their roles through negotiations with the partner and the self.

The negotiation of an identity is influenced by the immediate context (partner, identity, role, commitment) and by the larger society context (values, customs, rules and norms). For the women studied, there was conflict between the immediate and larger context. Partner pressure to have sexual intercourse, their commitment to the relationship, the attraction the women experienced, and the love they felt for their partners contrasted with the social, cultural, and religious norms guiding the behavior of unmarried women in Puerto Rico.

Symbolic interaction contends that to be able to disregard the social context partners have to make the relationship their reality (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). They create reality by the development of shared meanings. Shared meanings are created by the partners and are only to be understood within the context of that particular relationship. The relationship becomes their own reality and then they are able to disregard societal pressures. For a few of the women this process of creating shared meanings seemed like a possible explanation for the discrepancy between their beliefs and behaviors, although the majority of the women experienced much ambivalence when encountering sexual situations.

Sexual pressure was a key element in the women's decisions to engage in sexual relations. They may have complied with their partner's pleas in an effort to maintain the relationship but they did so without going through the process of developing shared meanings. In those instances, sexual pressure from male partners overcame societal pressures. The dynamic between sexual

pressure and women's compliance will be discussed using exchange and resource theories.

Exchange and Resource Theories

Exchange theory sees social interaction in marketplaces where individuals, guided by self-interest, engage in relationships and maintain them as long as is profitable in terms of reward and cost balance (Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993). While in symbolic interaction behavior is seen as motivated by shared symbols and individual meanings, in exchange theory behavior is dependent on the amount of profit the individual can realize from the relationship.

Rewards, costs, and resources are concepts that have to do with the actual exchange in social interaction. They can be abstract (love, satisfaction, social approval), or material (services, physical love, money, companionship) (Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993). Resources are any commodity, abstract or material that the persona owns and that can be given to reward another. What is a resource for a partner can be a reward for the other. Costs of a relationship are all the losses incurred in towards the relationship. They can range (in the context of dating), from courting efforts, to actual money spent on dates, to limits of freedom and further opportunities to date or engage in sexual behavior.

Sexual behavior as a form of currency was a metaphor derived from the accounts of the participants in this study. Sexual activity can be perceived as been either an abstract (source of love) or material (source of pleasure) resource, reward, or cost. Sex to the women participating in the study, was equated with love. Love itself allowed women to ignore beliefs and values, and to participate in sexual behavior. When sex is seen as an expression of love, it can be thought of as a reward, a special gift women give to the men they love.

Female sexual status in terms of virginity was seen as determining the sexual value of a woman. Participants learned about women's sexual value as a dichotomy of good/bad women. Women have something to lose (virginity) if they succumb to men's sexual advances. While abstaining from sexual intercourse may be seen as a cost for men who want a stable, marriage-conducive relationship with a virgin woman, marrying a sexually inexperienced woman is a reward many men in Puerto Rico seek.

For many of the participants, losing their virginity to please their partners was seen as a cost of maintaining the relationship. Women feared losing their partners, or the relationships they had invested time and effort in if they did not comply with their partner's sexual requests. Some of them were ambivalent in terms of whether they should engage in sexual intercourse or not. While they desired the experience, they

perceived the step as too costly to take it so lightly. Curiously, when the motive for sexual behavior was to "invest" in the relationship by pleasing the partner, the step did not appear to be so costly for the women.

Virginity was portrayed by these women as a resource to be invested only in those relationships that might ensure long-term commitment and marriage. Women need an assurance that in the end they too will be satisfied. In order for this to happen, trust and commitment must exist in a relationship. Trust is defined in social exchange theory as the certainty that a partner is not going to violate the rules of fairness and reciprocity to take advantage of the other (Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993). Commitment is defined as a person's willingness to participate in the relationship for a long period of time (Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993).

A relationship based on trust and commitment allows for the rewards not to be immediate. Women who trust their partners and believe them to be in a committed relationship (as themselves), may see engaging in sexual relations and losing their virginity as an investment in the future possibility of marriage. Because sexual favors were viewed as an investment in marriage assurance, and since these women believed that marriage was certain, the marriage ceremony was not required to be immediate. Because access to resources are unequal in patriarchal societies, women often believe that individual resources such as their sexualities must be sacrificed in order to assure themselves of future rewards such as financial stability, companionship, and love. Participants in this study saw their sexuality as both a resource/reward and a symbol of love and commitment.

Life Course Perspectives

Life course perspectives emerged as a useful approach to the study of the development of women's sexualities. This perspective explores issues of transmission and transition in families over periods of time and the socially constructed meanings that result from them (Bengston & Allen, 1993). Life course gives importance to social meanings that are applied to life events, individual development, and the development of relationships over time. Sexual scripts/meanings can be examined using this approach given they result from interactions between socio-cultural sources and individual experiences.

The study of the development and modification of sexual scripts and how they influence behavior patterns is inclusive of time, context and process as is the life course framework. Including temporal contexts is important because changes in meanings and their effects in behavior occur over time and time can be examined under several contexts: (a) ontogenic time, real time for the individual; (b) generational time, family events or transitions; and, (c) historical time, events in the socio-

cultural context that may alter role definitions or values (Bengston & Allen, 1993). All three dimensions of time merge to influence how sexual scripts/meanings develop, change, and influence behavior.

Social context is of utmost importance in studying the social construction of female sexuality in a particular country. Because social meanings are created regarding life transitions and individual development, an examination of the social context is needed in order to understand how female sexuality is conceptualized by the person's studied. Life course portrays the individual as an active agent of her development, interacting with social contexts and structures as they reciprocally influence each other. Therefore, the perspective portrays the social context as fluid and dynamic.

The perspective borrows from human ecology in that it identifies micro (individual, family) and macro (social structure) levels of development, allows for an interplay between them, and portrays a reciprocal influence between the individual or family and the social contexts (Bengston & Allen, 1993).

The focus of the perspective on process and change over time allows for studies in the area of female sexuality development and the social construction of meanings to study the impacts of becoming an adult and/or aging in cohort studies. Social meanings are the socio-cultural expectations about the right time to participate in transitional events such as sexual intercourse, marriage, and motherhood. Especially important in the study of female sexuality is the examination of the process of change of social meanings and cultural contexts in order to understand a phenomenon. Future research in the area of female sexuality, guided by a life course approach, could examine the interplay of micro and macro levels of development, over time, in different cohorts of women.

Human Development

Moral Thinking. Kohlberg (1981, 1984) proposed three levels of cognitive stages through which moral thinking matures. The first stage which he called pre-conventional morality, seeks self interest. A person's main goals in this stage are to avoid punishment or to gain concrete rewards. The second stage is the conventional level and observes laws and social rules. A person in this stage may involve herself in actions that will gain social approval or will help social order. The third stage is the post-conventional stage. In this stage the individual affirms agreed-upon rights and follows what she personally perceives as basic ethical principles.

The women in this study may be identified as belonging to both the conventional and post-conventional stages. When it comes

to traditional sexual scripts and meanings, the Puerto Rican culture maintains strict rules regarding sexual behavior for women. Regardless of maturity and/or moral development, women are expected to approve and live by the sexual scripts of the culture. Doing this will place women at both stages, given that the scripts of female sexual behavior and the agreed upon rights and regulations are the same.

Individualism, following what one personally believes, regarding sexuality is not only frowned upon, but socially punished in a traditional patriarchal society. Kohlberg's stages value individualism which is not characteristically promoted among Puerto Rican women. Feminists have argued (Belenky et al. 1986; Gilligan, 1982, 1988) that, for women in general, moral maturity is less a matter of abstract, impersonal justice and more an ethic of caring relationships. Therefore, Kohlberg stages of moral development are seen as biased against women especially since they were originally based on the responses of male subjects.

For many women and men, morality derives more from emotional experience than from abstract principles. This is why, measured by Kohlberg's stages, women's moral development may appear in deficit. A theory of women's development proposed by Surrey (1991), explains a development of the "self-in-relation". Growth is nurtured by empathy, connectedness and communication with others (Belenky et al., 1986; Jordan et al., 1991).

This model may not be culturally sensitive because it is based on the value system of a capitalistic society that overvalues the individual at the expense of the collective. Societies which value the collective, or the development of the community as a whole over individual growth may erroneously be categorized as having individuals with lagging moral development.

Summary

Although the social constructionist/feminist perspectives were very appropriate for the analysis and interpretation of the data, other theories were discussed as possibilities for the interpretation of the data. Three family theories were discussed in relation to the findings of this study: (a) Symbolic interactionism, (b) Exchange and resource theories, and (c) Life course perspectives. In addition, the moral development stages proposed by Kohlberg were discussed taking into consideration women's distinct characteristics from those of men, and the differences in cultural values found in other countries.

Limitations of the Study

The most important limitation of this study was one that can hardly be overcome. Filtering of data through the lenses of the participants and the researcher is inevitable in practice,

especially when qualitative methods are utilized. In fact, by using a constructionist approach, I am acknowledging that the data are constructed by the participants, that they are a reflection of participant's socio-cultural background, and a function of their personal experiences. I also bring my own filtering lenses to the process. The fact that I am originally from the same culture as the participants may have aided in the process of establishing rapport and in the process of understanding the cultural influences but it limits my analysis to that from the point of view of an "insider". A different researcher, with different life experiences, may bring a different perspective as to how to interpret the stories of these women.

Another issue was the language. Participants were able to write and narrate their stories in Spanish. While at all times in the analysis process I worked with the Spanish narratives in order to present the stories in the research report, I had to translate selected portions of the essays and interviews to English. This procedure may have affected the accuracy of the words used by the participants as some words and phrases are just impossible to translate to English. In an effort to be as accurate as possible in translating the participant's quotes, translations were checked in the following manner: (a) When I met with some of the participants for confirmation of preliminary findings, I had them read both the Spanish and English versions of the selected quotes. I asked them if they felt my translations accurately represented their words, (b) I asked a graduate student who recently came from Puerto Rico to VPI & SU to compare the English translations of the quotes to their Spanish originals. All individuals agreed with the majority of the translations. Only a few translations were questioned and those were discussed further with the readers until they felt these translations represented the Spanish version accurately.

Another limitation to the study was the period of time I had available to stay in Puerto Rico to gather the data. Finding participants to discuss sensitive subjects such as sexuality was a difficult task, especially for Puerto Rican women who are socialized to be silent about it. An unlimited amount of time would have allowed for a bigger number of participants. While 25 women received informational packets, only 12 women participated in the study. With such a small number of participants, it was hard to encounter as much diversity within a group as with a larger sample. All the participants were similar in that they were heterosexual, came from a middle-class family, and had attended or were attending college.

Finally one may argue about the possibility of receiving socially desirable responses to the research questions in the study. Although there is always a possibility of receiving socially desirable responses, I believe that it is very unlikely

that the women participating in this study would have addressed the questions in such a manner. First, the socially and culturally acceptable response would have been to stick to the traditional social constructions of female sexuality in Puerto Rico and report their sexuality as such. Second, given the personal and sensitive nature of the information conveyed in the stories, participants' definitions of those stories were painful to report, and it took courage for them to relive the experiences again. Therefore, it is unlikely that their stories and actions would have been a product of their desire to answer in a socially desirable way.

I also wondered about the reasons why women who have experienced sexual victimization volunteer for a study of this nature. Several possibilities come to mind: (a) the women may volunteer for therapeutic purposes. Talking about their painful experiences and how these women have dealt with the issues revolving around the victimization experience may help with the healing process; (b) getting a chance to tell their own stories about these experiences and how they have survived through the process may be seen by the participants as a confirmation and validation of these women's survival; (c) volunteering for a study of this nature may be a way of seeking out attention or help in understanding their experiences; and/or (d) the women might offer their stories of struggle and survival in an attempt to educate and prevent those experiences from happening to other women.

Future Research Endeavors

Future research in the area should attempt to include a larger sample which could include more diversity within the group of participants. Diversity could be sought in the areas of socioeconomic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and educational levels. Only with a larger, more diverse sample will it be possible to discover in which ways these factors influence the way women create and modify sexual meanings.

A series of studies could be conducted limiting samples to a particular age cohort. Studies of this type may assist in understanding how the changing nature of social, political, and economic factors influenced generations of women and their sexualities over time.

Finally, it would be interesting to undertake a similar study exploring the scripts and sexual constructions of males in Puerto Rico. Such a study would be important because it would bring out the similarities, and, especially, the differences in the ways men and women are conceptualized in terms of their sexualities. It is these differences that may be contributing to the adversarial relationships that may, in turn result in instances of sexual victimization and feelings of impotence for

women.

Concluding Remarks

The present study was proposed as the final requirement for the attainment of a higher education degree for me. It also resulted in a reflexive journey into the complexities of social discourse and how these complexities have influenced both the participants' lives and my own. The essays and interviews provided the participants with an opportunity to construct their sexualities in a manner that they might not have otherwise had.

Many mentioned how empowering it felt to be able to discuss, with authority and respect, the story of their sexual development. This study challenged me professionally by placing tension between the roles of researcher and of fellow Puerto Rican woman, and personally, as I examined my own experiences and identified with the women's stories.

I attempted to make the research process as nonoppressive and unobtrusive as it was possible. Recent contact with several of the participants provided feedback about the research process and its influence on the participants. The participants mentioned that the study was beneficial to them because it created a forum in which they could discuss and reflect on what their sexualities meant for them. Some of the participants commented that they have continued to reflect on their sexualities in an attempt to promote sexual agency in their lives. Several of them showed interest in reading the final report of this study. All interested participants will receive a copy of the results of the study they co-created with me.

This study is over now, but the connection and relationship created in the process of the study will accompany the participants and myself forever.

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Appendix A

WOMEN'S SEXUALITY

A graduate student researcher in the department of Family and Child Development at Virginia Tech University needs volunteers for a study of how women came to define, shape, and experience their sexuality.

If you are a woman between 25-45 years of age and are willing to share your sexual development story for the purposes of research please consider participating in this study.

For more information please call:
María I. Martínó (809) 731-2764/ (809) 764-9286
Answering machines available for messages.
(To ensure confidentiality, only leave your
first name and number and ask for María I
Martínó to call you back).

This research has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for projects involving human subjects at Virginia Tech University and by the Department of Family and Child Development.

Appendix B

Classified Ad:

Women's Sexuality: Graduate student researcher from Virginia Tech University seeks women between 25-45 years of age to participate in a study about the development of Puerto Rican women's sexuality. Participation is completely confidential. Call María I Martínó at 731-2764.

Appendix C

Classroom Advertisement:

Please announce the following in your class:

1. Write my name and phone number on the board (María I Martínó 731-2764).
2. Ask everyone to copy it down.
3. Read this: A graduate student from Virginia Tech University needs volunteers for a study about the development of Puerto Rican women's sexuality. If you are female, 35 to 45 years of age, and willing to share you story, please consider participating in this study. Confidentiality is assured and you will decide on how much you will share with the researcher. Please call María I. Martínó if interested.

THANK YOU!

Appendix D

Letter of Intent:

Thank you for your interest in participating in my study on the development of women's sexuality. I want to remind you that the information that you provide will be kept strictly confidential and no one will be able to identify you. If you have decided not to take part in this study, you do not have to. You can stop at any time.

I am interested in your story about your sexuality, how you discovered it, what has influenced it, how it has changed, and how all this have affected the ways in that you experience your sexuality. You can send me your story written by hand, typewriter, computer, pencil, or whatever you feel most comfortable in. You can also send me a recorded tape which I can later transcribe for analysis.

I have included guidelines for you to follow when writing your story. This is a way to facilitate the memory and completeness of the information needed. This is your story, so feel free to include everything that you deem important. After you return your 'story', I will contact you in order to schedule the interviews. A separate page with background questions is included for you to fill out and return to me. If you want to continue in this study, you will need to read and sign the enclosed consent form. If you do not do so, you can not participate in this study.

Please return the consent form in one of the envelopes provided and the background information sheet along with your story in the other. As soon as I receive the envelopes, you will be assigned a code name. I will address you by this name for the rest of the study. If you are interested in receiving a summary of the results of this study, please make sure you provide me with your real name and address at the end of the second interview.

Some persons find that sharing such personal information is distressing, especially if negative or painful memories are elicited through the study. If you would like to seek professional help, a list of local counseling resources is included in the packet for your convenience. If you have any questions regarding the research, please feel free to call me at 731-2764. Please return your stories to me before (date). Thank you again for your participation.

Cordially,

María I. Martínó
Doctoral Student

Appendix E

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Projects

Title of Project: The Social Construction of Sexuality, Personal Meanings, Perceptions of Sexual Experience, and their influence on Female's Sexuality in Puerto Rico.

Investigator (s): María I Martínó
Michael J. Sporakowski

I. The Purpose of this Research/Project

You are invited to participate in a study examining women's sexuality. The purpose of this study is to explore the meanings that sexuality has for Puerto Rican women, how they perceive their life experiences, and how both affect their sexuality. Approximately ten women will be included in the study.

II. Procedures

For the first part of this study, you will be asked to write a story about your own sexuality following the guidelines included in the packet. These guidelines are provided as suggestions but you can write about anything you feel might be important regarding your sexuality. After I receive this story, I will be contacting you in order to schedule an appointment for an interview in which we will discuss your story more in depth. This interview will provide you with a chance to further explain your experiences and with a chance to clarify questions regarding your story. A second interview may be scheduled in which I will share with you some of the preliminary interpretations in order to receive confirmation and feedback. The interview setting will be of your choice. You will have a chance to choose a place where you feel comfortable talking and where minimum distractions exist. A private office will be available as an option. These are the essential parts of the study. An additional part, a group session, will be offered in which participants as well as the researcher will have an opportunity to bring closure to the study and share their experiences. There is no obligation to participate in this group even if you contribute with the story and the interviews. You can stop your participation in this study at any time you choose to do so.

III. Risks of this Research

There are no personal risks inherent in this study. Some participants may find the disclosure of personal experiences in their life to be emotionally disturbing. The only potential risk in participating in this study is that it may bring back negative or painful memories and/or feelings. If this is the case, and you wish to do so, you can withdraw from the study at any point.

A list of area counseling services is included in the informational packet.

IV. Benefits of this project

No benefits are guaranteed to you in this study. Participating in this study may help you re-examine your views about your sexuality and how life experiences have helped shape it. You may find that writing and talking about your views and experiences might help you to better deal with unresolved feelings. By participating in this study you will help researchers better understand how Puerto Rican women construct, re-define, and experience their sexuality. A summary of the results from this study will be available to all participants through the main researcher. She can be contacted at (809)731-7264 during the study period, and a later time at (540)951-5094.

V. Extent of anonymity and confidentiality

Both your story and the recorded interviews will be kept in a locked file cabinet. They will only be available to the main researcher. As soon as the stories/recordings are received, I will remove any type of identification and will replace it with a code name. The coding sheet will also be kept at the locked cabinet. I will break confidentiality only if you include identifying information indicating imminent danger to you and/or someone else. The tapes will be transcribed by the main researcher and once transcribed, destroyed.

VI. Compensation

There will be no compensation (monetary or material) earned from participating in this study. Your participation is completely voluntary. Your participation in this study will be contributing to the existing knowledge base of the field of Family Studies/ Human Sexuality.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. You are also free not to answer any questions without penalty.

VIII. Approval of Research

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and by the department of Family and Child Development.

IX. Participant's Responsibility

By signing my name below, I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. This includes writing a story following the guidelines provided, and attending the interviews at my setting of choice. I understand that attending a closure meeting with the rest of the participants is optional and I am not required to

attend.

Tear here and return to researcher

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study please contact:

María I Martínó (809) 731-2764
(after the study) (540) 951-5094

Michael J. Sporakowski (540) 231-4794

Ernest R. Stout (540) 231-9359

X. Participant's Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this study. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this study.

If I participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the rules of this project.

Signature

Date

Appendix F

GUIDELINES FOR YOUR STORY

As I mentioned before, I am interested in your story about your sexuality, how you discovered it, what has influenced it, how it has changed, and how all this has affected the ways in that you experience your sexuality. You can send me your story written by hand, typewriter, computer, pencil, or whatever you feel most comfortable in. You could also send a recorded tape which I can later transcribe for analysis.

I suggest that you describe your sexuality in terms of three chapters: childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. You may want to think about the following questions when writing your story.

- a. When and in which ways were you aware of your sexuality?
- b. Which social, cultural, and religious messages were taught to you? In which ways they influenced the way you learned, experienced, and defined your sexuality?
- c. Describe instances or experiences related to your sexuality. Their nature, how they happened, how you felt about them at that point, and how do you see them today. In which ways have these influenced your sexuality and the way you define and experience it today?
- d. What other things, persons, situations, or institutions have influenced the ways in which you see, feel, and experience your sexuality?

Appendix G

Background Questionnaire

I am asking you to answer these questions to help me describe the characteristics of the women who will participate in the study. You may choose not to respond to any question you chose to do so.

1. How old are you?

2. What is your marital status?

3. What is your sexual orientation?

4. How did you find out about this study?

a. Flyer at _____

b. Newspaper ad at _____

c. During class (which one) _____

d. Word-of-mouth _____

e. Other (specify) _____

5. What is you highest level of education?

Appendix H

COUNSELING SERVICES

Asociación Puertorriquena Pro-Bienestar de la Familia- Servicios medicos y educativos sobre el sexo responsable y la prevención de enfermedades de transmisión sexual. Servicio de lunes a viernes de 8:00 a.m. a 12:00 m. y de 1:00 p.m. a 4:30 p.m. Línea de auxilio: 765-7373 y 766-0000.

Casa Julia de Burgos- Ayuda a víctimas de Maltrato. 723-3500.

Clínica de Salud Mental de la Comunidad- Centro Caribeño de Estudios Graduados- Psicoterapia individual, familiar, y de pareja. Evaluaciones psicométricas y psicológicas. Tratamiento de víctimas de abuso sexual, orientación y referimento. Honorarios razonables. 725-6500.

Clínica Interamericana de Servicios Psicológicos- Psicoterapia individual, familiar y grupal. Servicio de evaluación psicológica, orientación y referimento. Se atiende a niños, adultos, y envejecientes (L a V). Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico, Recinto Metropolitano. 767-8718, 250-1912, ext. 2455.

Comisión Para Asuntos de la Mujer- Consejería, asesoramiento e intercesoría legal para mujeres en areas de violencia doméstica, hostigamiento sexual y discrimen. 722-2977, 722-2907.

Instituto Panamericano- Programa diurno de tratamiento psiquiátricos y de adicción, evaluación clínica preliminar y referido gratuito. 758-9575.

Mepsi Center- Servicios para problemas mentales, adicción, alcoholismo, orientación confidencial y profesional. Emergencias psiquiátricas y orientación confidencial. 793-3030, (800) 981-7875.

Mujeres y Hombres en Crecimiento- Grupo de Apoyo anónimo para personas en relaciones codependientes con parejas, familiares, amigos, u otras personas. Río Piedras: Grupo mixto- lunes 7:00 p.m. Mujeres- jueves 7:00 p.m., tel. 758-1015. Ponce: 856-0140, Carolina: 762-7367; Guaynabo: 748-2756/781-4363; Isla Verde: 768-8746.

APPENDIX I

VITA

María Isabel Martínó Villanueva was born in Mexico City, Mexico to Puerto Rican parents. She grew up with her parents - Jesús F. Martínó and María I. Villanueva - and three younger sisters - Marta, Margarita, and Mariana - in Río Piedras, Puerto Rico. She received a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Puerto Rico in 1991. She earned a Master of Arts in Health Education with a concentration in Human Sexuality at New York University. After completing her M.A. in 1993, she attended Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University where she pursued a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Family and Child Development. She is a member of the National Council of Family Relations and the Society for the Scientific Study of Sex.

Maria has worked and volunteered as a caseworker, counselor, and health educator in the AIDS Center of Queens County, AIDS Foundation of Puerto Rico, and the Adolescent Health Services Clinic at Elmhurst Hospital in Queens New York.

She currently lives in Blacksburg, VA with her husband Eugenio A. Lomba and her dog Taína.