

Sexual theme in sula
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essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Toni Morrison doesn't include a strong sexual theme in *Usual* just for shock value. Rather, the author uses sex to reveal clues towards the personalities of different characters, and how traits get passed down from one generation to the next. Some of the important clues provided in each character's personality traits come from differing sexual attitudes they hold.

Disagreements between sexual appropriateness develop the relationship between Nell and Usual, as well as Salsa's broader relationship with the community of Medallion.

The main source of conflict in *Usual* comes from the community's strong sexual standards for men and women, which sets Usual apart from Nell, her family, and the community of Medallion. While women are expected to be subservient and devoted to their men, it is accepted in *Usual* for men to have affairs with other women and to leave their families behind for other pursuits. Both the Peace family and the Wright family are dominated by women, because of the lower standards for men to stay involved in their families' lives.

In the midst of an argument between Nell and Usual over her affair with Jude, Nell tells Usual to stop acting like a man. Usual responded by saying "Then I really would act like what you call a man. Every man I ever knew left his children" (143). This stereotype is true for many men. Even though Nell had a strong home life, her father was always away working and not very influential in her upbringing. Salsa's father Bobby was even less involved in her life. Bobby abandoned his wife and three children, forcing Usual to grow up in a home without a father.

Many years later, when Usual sleeps with Newel's husband Jude, Jude abandons the family leaving Nell with two young children. When Usual finally falls in love with Ajax, he leaves never to be heard again after Usual becomes too womanlike for him. Even for independent, strong women such as Hannah and Usual, they are expected to be subservient during sex. When Toni Morrison describes Henna's character, and her sexual openness, she also reveals an important sexual standard present. " While Eve tested and argued with her men.

Leaving them feeling as though they had been in combat with a worthy, if amiable, foe, Hannah rubbed no edges, made no demands, made the man feel as though he were complete and wonderful just as he as – he didn't need fixing – and so he relaxed and swooned in the Hannah-light that shone on him simply because he was" (43). Despite Salsa's untraditional sexual behaviors, during sex, she gave in to what was expected of women during intercourse. While the Peace family went against traditional sexual standards, Nell tended to be more traditional with it, especially with Jude.

At Nell and Suede's marriage ceremony, the couple anticipated having sex that night. " They began to dance, pressed in among the others, and each one turned his thoughts to the night that was coming fast" (85). This eagerness to have sex is more traditional, because we assume the eagerness comes from the fact that the two have never had sex. Society sets a standard that there should be no sex before marriage, sharply contrasting the role of sex in the Peace family. Salsa's sexual casualness conflicts with many marriages, and reveals the double little of it, but it has a profound impact on Salsa's life.

Of course, it was hard for Usual to understand what was wrong with her affair “ She had no thought at all of causing Nell pain when she bedded down with Jude” (119). Of course it leaves Nell feeling angry and depressed because of her husband and Salsa’s affair. “ For now her thighs were truly empty and dead too, and t was Usual who had taken the life from them and Jude who smashed her heart and the both of them who left her with no thighs and no heart Just her brain ravening away’ (1 11).

Both Usual and Jude act as a man in the affair, since neither of them take blame or any responsibility. After the affair, it is a while before Nell even talks to Usual and the audience never hears from Jude again. When Usual, the independent and promiscuous protagonist falls in love for the first time with Ajax, she loses her “ masculinity’ by conforming to the sexual standard for women. After a positive sexual experience with Ajax, Usual began to act more traditionally to her gender, prompting Ajax to leave since he liked Usual because of her masculine attitude towards sex. Every hackle on his body rose, and he knew that very soon she would, like all of her sisters before her, put to him the death-knell question “ Where you been? ” His eyes dimmed with a mild and momentary regret” (133). When Ajax mentions “ all of her sisters”, we see that Usual is usually even more independent than her sexually independent family. Ajax is unsettled by Salsa’s attempts to act more feminine, becoming uneasy looking at the gleaming kitchen, Salsa’s green ribbon and the table for two.

Ajax was just looking for sex, but the situation made him feel like he was being nested, taken in by Usual. Conforming to his own sexual standard, when too much was asked of him by Usual, he simply left without a word.

Just as seen with Bobby and Jude. Usual is simply a book about sex and its relationship with society. From it, we realize that little is expected from men in sex, and the women are much more expensible for their sexual behavior. It's an unfair double standard, which rips characters apart.

Nell and Usual, who go against the status quo to be independent of the sexual standards of society, both end up somewhat conforming to those standards. Salsa's sexual openness threatens the community of Medallion so much, that its citizens were happy when she died and stopped threatening their husbands. Though of course, if those wives would have been caught having an affair with different unmarried men, the story would have been much different.