

Theoretical Perspectives

Sociology uses a number of different perspectives to look at social issues. Each perspective offers a different insight to each issue presented. Teenage pregnancy has become a large problem that our society is currently facing. Teen pregnancy has increased 3% in 2006 (Sharon Jayson, 2010). Nationally about one million teens become pregnant every year (Sound Vision Foundation, 2010). You can look at teenage pregnancy in any of three sociological perspectives: Conflict Theorist, Symbolic Interactionism, and Functionalism.

Teenage pregnancy poses many conflicts in society. Looking at teenage pregnancy through the perspective of conflict theorist, you will see an obvious conflict between religion and teen pregnancy, morals and teen pregnancy, and school and teen pregnancy.

First of all, religion does not view teenage pregnancy as anything positive. Most religions advocate abstinence until marriage. One third of girls become pregnant before age 20, and of those pregnancies 81% is to unmarried couples (Demand Media, Inc. 2010). This shows that the majority of teenage pregnancies go against most religious teachings of abstinence before marriage.

Morals are taught by your influences in life, such as religion, friends, and parents. Parents usually try to teach abstinence especially in teenage years. Becoming pregnant as a teenager goes against most morals that are taught. This is where we get the conflict between morals and teenage pregnancy.

Another conflict that immerges is between school and teenage pregnancy. Going to school while being pregnant would be a very difficult challenge. Most women become sick while they are pregnant which would make attending school harder. After the baby is born,

finding a place for the baby to be babysat can be difficult for a teen considering day care is not free. Most day cares are not cheap and are not affordable for a teenager.

Teenage pregnancy is also viewed through the perspective of symbolic interactionism. Many teenagers who become pregnant are given many labels. One may be labeled as a “slut” from a class mate or as an “irresponsible child” from an adult. As a result of becoming pregnant as a teenager people will start to treat the person differently. People might treat the both the mother and father as if they were not smart and extremely irresponsible. People might also start to think in their minds that the pregnant teen is not mature which will lead to the teen being treated with less respect.

Functionalism is the final perspective used to describe teenage pregnancy. Functionalism is used to describe both latent and manifest functions. One latent function is the teenager who becomes pregnant will receive a lot of attention. The teen will end up having many people at school or work gossiping about them. The teen would also have the family talking about what happened.

Another latent function of teenage pregnancy is the fact that it changes one’s life forever. The teenager who becomes pregnant will have many things that become impossible because of becoming pregnant so young. Two thirds of teens who become pregnant drop out of high school (Brenda, February 25, 2009). If you drop out of high school, your choices of jobs and colleges that will allow you to further your education become very limited. In the world that we live in, living off of a minimum wage job is very difficult, especially if you are raising a child. Having a child as a teen also limits your freedom. You cannot do as you want anymore. Your child will always have to come first.

A positive latent function of teenage pregnancy is that there are more children to adopt in the world. Not all people in the world can have children of their own. Having a higher teen pregnancy rate means more and more babies are being put up for adoption which means more of the people who can't have kids can adopt easier.

Another positive latent function is that becoming a teenage mother forces you to become responsible. When you have a child you must learn to take care of them. The teenage parents will have to learn how to be parents long before they should. They will have to learn how to nurture a child. They will also have to learn to budget their money and deal with the financial burden of raising a child.

A manifest function of teenage pregnancy is trapping the boyfriend/girlfriend in the relationship. The couple might use a pregnancy as something that would force them to stay together longer despite their wants. Neither the man nor the woman could just walk away from a relationship until the child is born.

A dysfunction of teenage pregnancy is all the money it ends up costing the world. In 1992 the Federal government spent over \$34 billion on welfare for families started by teenagers (Sue Christensen and Ann Rosen, 1992). All this money that is spent on teenage pregnancy has to come from somewhere, so an increase in teen pregnancy equals an increase in taxes of the rest of the people. The mother and the father also end up spending a good portion of their money on the child. A baby is very costly to support especially in high school.

All the perspectives of sociology have pros and cons behind them. First, a pro of the conflict theorist are showing the clash between two groups which helps to show what type of issue it is. A con of the conflict theorist is that it is hard to show positives of a social issue only

showing conflict between two groups. Second, a pro of symbolic interactionism is that it helps show the micro sociology within someone. Micro sociology helps show what the particular person is going through. A con of symbolic interactionism is that it doesn't show the issue as a problem with the whole of the society. Last, a pro of functionalism is that it shows what the particular issue does for society in both negative and positive light. Functionalism shows society as a whole. A con of functionalism is that it doesn't show the problems the individual faces.

Functionalism describes teenage pregnancy the best; functionalism describes this problem the best because it shows more than just negative sides to the issue. Showing the good side of an issue is valuable for shaping your feelings on one topic. Having both good and bad sides of one particular topic also helps prevent bias.

Teenage pregnancy is a rising problem in society and needs to be looked at and analyzed. Sociology's three theoretical perspectives which are Conflict Theorist, Symbolic Interactionism, and Functionalism, help us to view the social issue in different light. The three perspectives help show functions of the issue for society, the conflicts it causes, and symbols relating to the issue. For teenage pregnancy the functionalism perspective is the best for describing.

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