Sociologist use three theories; Functionalist theory, Social Conflict theory, and Symbolic Interactionism. I will be applying these theories to the topic of teen pregnancy. First I’ll elaborate on the functionalist theory. First of all, when you’re applying this theory you’re looking at how this is affecting society as a whole. This theory also focuses on stability and public values. First of all one way teen pregnancy helped shape society is it offered more jobs in certain industries. Companies like Planned Parenthood especially focused on pregnancy options, and preventions were born. Of course there were people hired for this company. Another way this affects society of course is taxes Americans have to pay. According to the NCPTP “teen childbearing costs taxpayers at least $9 billion each year, including public sector health care costs, increased child welfare costs, prison costs and lost tax revenue.” Fifty-two percent of mothers on welfare had their first child as a teenager. Lack of education is being the blame, claiming that having children that young leads to not finishing high-school and not getting higher-paying jobs. A report from PBS I find interesting said that sons of teen moms are 13 percent more likely to end up in prison which will increase crime rates in society. Strengths of this theory is you can see how specific actions of individuals can affect a whole nation. It really looks at details of how something can affect us in the grander scheme of things. But it can also be a con because functionalism does not encourage people to take an active role in changing their social environment, even when such change may benefit them.

The Social Conflict theory claims human behavior in social contexts result from conflicts between compete groups. There will be conflict between two groups of people. This theory is
Marxist-based. With teen pregnancy there can be conflict between the parents of the teens and the teens themselves. Parents and kids are always butting heads. Parents want obedience and control from their kids, while kids want freedom from their parents. Teen pregnancy can be a form of rebellion. A lot of parents kick their children out after finding out their child is pregnant, or refuse to help financially support the child. Some parents can even force their children into abortion and adoption, even against the teen’s will which can lead to resentment and issues in that family. Another example of conflict is between taxpayers and teenage mothers. In an earlier statistic I said that our tax-dollars go to teenage mothers, and that can enrage some people in society who feel like they are being bothered with a huge burden of paying for teen moms. Another example of conflict that has arose in society because of teen pregnancy is the war between Americans and media. Many people feel like the media is promoting teen pregnancy or glamorizing it by turning it into television shows like “16 and Pregnant”. Pros of this theory is you can see the opinion of both sides of a conflict. But cons is with this theory you only experience two extreme and radical different opinions, there’s not many forms of different opinions that get focused on.

The last theory I will go into is Symbolic interactionism theory. Sociologists consider the symbols and details of everyday life, what these symbols mean, and how people interact with each other as a factor on how a person views things. According to the symbolic interactionist perspective, people attach meanings to symbols, and then they act according to their subjective interpretation of these symbols. So how something is portrayed to them will form that individual’s opinion. A pro to this theory would be you can see how people can interpret things around them and make a decision. But a con is that it neglects to focus on the bigger picture. It
looks at smaller things. An example of symbolic interactionism theory is how a classmate might talk about another student in that school that got pregnant. If student A is bashing someone, and labeling them with horrible words because they’re pregnant that could influence the way student B is feeling. Student B might feel it’s bad to be pregnant because people label them with negative names. Another example of this theory could be that someone was brought up in a church where the preacher preached about staying abstinent. Abstinent is symbolized as “pure”. That could have a huge impact on the people who go to that church and make it so they feel a certain way about teen pregnancy. The things around you can help form your opinion about an issue.

In my opinion Social Conflict theory best explains this theory, because this has been such a radical debate for Americans. There’s so many conflicts and strong opinions when it comes to this issue. Social Conflicts looks at the bigger picture, and you can see two sides of an argument. You can get a real understanding of why this topic is so controversial. It also shines light on how society has completely stereotyped pregnant teens in some ways. Not just between two specific groups but between individuals and different circumstances. This has been my explanation of the theories and the process of applying these theories to teen pregnancy.

Citations:


