

Cultural anthropology assignment



IMPORTANCE OF SEX EDUCATION 1 Importance of Sex Education Lynda M.

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Abstract This paper explores the benefits sex education for the teenagers of the United States. It shows cause and statistics for and against the issue of further education in the fight to prevent teenage pregnancy. It is a growing epidemic that affects our culture and has begun to cramp an already declining economy. IMPORTANCE OF SEX EDUCATION 3

Importance of Sex Education This is a topic that for many years has fueled heated debates both personally and politically. Throughout the years many have made decisions that were later changed by someone else. In my personal opinion, I believe this type of education is just as important as the regular curriculum in every school today. Much attention is placed upon educating adolescents about the prevention of pregnancy, but discussion about pregnancy and what happens after pregnancy is just as crucial in helping teens in the United States make better decisions about sex.

When I began reading the information available to write this paper, it was absolutely staggering to see the statistics and read the stories of the youth of the United States. Sex education within the last ten years has been largely abstinence based under the Bush Administration. These programs have advocated waiting to have any form of sexual interaction until marriage. They did not educate adolescents about the use of contraception, and often times, there were moralistic overtones within the education literature. Thirty years of public health studies have clearly determined that the provision of information about condoms and contraception does not increase sexual

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activity among teens or lower the age of sexual initiation; again putting into question why the U. S. would want to withhold such information from young people. (PR Newswire. New York: February 2nd, 2010) Under the Obama Administration, sexual education has taken on a more scientific approach, but there is still much lacking from sexual education in the United States.

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This needs to be approached in a three-fold manner. Education first needs to be taught at home, then taught again at school, and re-iterated through media. Educators are reluctant to teach sex education due to a large number of parents who become upset at the content being taught. Although, this education is just as necessary as any other lesson a student needs to learn. Pregnancy should not be a “ life lesson” that children learn from. There is education about preventing pregnancy, and it needs to be made available to adolescents so they can avoid teenage pregnancy.

Sex is rare among very young teens, but becomes more common in the later teenage years. Nearly half (46%) of all 15-19 year olds in the United States have had sex at least once. Most young people have sex for the first time at about age 17, but they do not marry until their middle to late 20s. This means young adults are at risk of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Ten percent of all U. S. births are to teens. Fifty-nine percent of pregnancies among 15-19 year olds end in birth. Seven percent of teen mothers receive late or no prenatal care.

Babies born to teens are more likely to be low birth weight than those born to women in their 20s and 30s. More than three quarters of teen females

report their first sexual experience was with a steady boyfriend, a fiancée, a husband, or cohabitating partner. (Guttmacher Institute: Facts on American Teens' Sexual and Reproductive Health. New York. 2006.) An abstinence only study altered the sex education landscape; the study found that abstinence-only sex education showed relative success in dissuading 12 year olds from having sex for two years afterward.

It is the most comprehensive study to date to bolster an abstinence only approach to reducing teen pregnancy. (The Christian Science Monitor. Boston, Mass. : Feb 2, 2010.) As I previously shared, most 12 year olds weren't having sex to begin with so this IMPORTANCE OF SEX EDUCATION 5 information was troubling to me as it didn't seem to adequately study the needs of this type of education for United States teenagers. The " talk" is no longer just coming from parents or educators, but being seen in the media, represented by " teenagers", more and more.

The " talk" was often previously presented in the media as an after school special or by some other educational, feel good means. Now, teens are exposed to sex as a regular part of their media experience. There are a multitude of shows that focus on glamorizing American teenagers and some radical behaviors. These shows need to be dually responsible in showing the benefits and the pitfalls of having sex as a teenager. Some shows that currently take a stab at being entertaining, yet educational are; The Secret Life of The American Teenager (ABC Family), 16 and Pregnant (MTV), and True Life (MTV).

Some other ways to incorporate media into education is by creating public service announcements, and creating more educational programming aimed at the teenage population in America. Comprehensive sex education is a better deterrent of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases than abstinence only education. Students who were taught a comprehensive sex education curriculum had a 5 percent lower risk of getting pregnant or impregnating someone than students who had received an abstinence only education or no sex education at all.

Researchers have found that 9 percent of the teenagers who had received no sex education were generally in low-income and rural areas, while 67 percent of those who had received comprehensive sex education were from higher income and urban areas. About half of the adolescent in both areas reported being sexually active. (Editorial Projects in Education, Inc. Bethesda. April 2, 2008.)

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American policy has begun to accurately acknowledge the need for preventative sexual education, but there is still little that is taught or mentioned about pregnancy itself or what it takes to raise a baby after he or she is born. More discussion on pregnancy and caring for a child may re-iterate the ideas that are being taught to help prevent pregnancy in the first place. A sexually active teen who does not use contraceptives has a 90 percent chance of becoming pregnant within a year. The majority of sexual experienced teens used contraceptives the first time they had sex. The condom is the most common contraceptive used among teenagers.

Twenty one states explicitly allow all minors to consent to contraceptive services without a parent's involvement. Sixty percent of teenagers who use

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a publically funded clinic for sexual health say their parents know they are there, yet, seventy percent of teens would not use prescription contraception if their parents had to be notified. Every year, almost 750, 000 women aged 15-19 become pregnant. In 2006, the rate declined by 41 percent. The majority of the decline in teen pregnancy rates is due more to consistent contraceptive use rather than teens choosing to delay sexual activity.

American Journal of Public Health, 2007. 97(1): 150-156) In conclusion, I feel that all the information available on sex education points to a direct need for more. Too many people take for granted that most people in general are just trying to fit in, and the more that teenagers talk about their thoughts and feelings on sex and sexual issues, the more they will see that the media often does not portray the " American Normal" when it comes to teens having sex.

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