

'Adolescence',  
**Pregnancy**  
and Abortion



**SAMPLE  
CHAPTER**

Constructing a Threat of Degeneration

Catriona I. Macleod

# 'ADOLESCENCE', PREGNANCY AND ABORTION

Why, despite evidence to the contrary, does the narrative of the negative consequences of teenage pregnancy, abortion and childbearing persist? This book argues that the negativity surrounding early reproduction is underpinned by a particular understanding of adolescence. It traces the invention of 'adolescence' and the imaginary wall that the notion constructs between young people and adults. Macleod examines the entrenched status of 'adolescence' within a colonialist discourse that equates development of the individual with the development of civilisation, and the consequent threat of degeneration that 'adolescence' implies.

Many important issues are explored, such as the invention of teenage pregnancy and abortion as a social problem; issues of race, culture and tradition in relation to teenage pregnancy; and health service provider practices, specifically in relation to managing risk. In the final chapter, an argument is made for a shift from the signifier 'teenage pregnancy' to 'unwanted pregnancy'.

Using data gathered from studies worldwide, this book highlights central issues in the global debate concerning teenage pregnancy. It is ideal for academics, and students of health psychology, women's studies, nursing and sociology, as well as practitioners in the fields of youth and social work, medicine and counselling.

**Catriona Macleod** is Professor of Psychology at Rhodes University, South Africa. She has written extensively in national and international journals in the areas of teenage pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, methodological issues, feminist theory, and postcolonialism and psychology

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# ‘ADOLESCENCE’, PREGNANCY AND ABORTION

Constructing a Threat of Degeneration

*Catriona Macleod*

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TO THE TWO BOYS WHO TAUGHT ME ABOUT  
THE EMBODIMENT OF PREGNANCY AND  
MOTHERING: LIAM AND AIDAN



# CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xi
1 Setting the scene	1
2 Adolescence as transition?	13
3 Conundrums: sex education, ‘teenage pregnancy’, and decision-making in the context of abortion	32
4 Constructing a threat of degeneration: the invention of and research practices concerning the ‘social problem’ of ‘teenage pregnancy’	56
5 Young women and legalized abortion: the new ‘social problem’	74
6 Othering: race, culture and ‘teenage pregnancy’/abortion	92
7 Managing the threat of degeneration	109
8 From ‘teenage pregnancy’ to unwanted pregnancy	130
<i>References</i>	150
<i>Index</i>	165

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# ABBREVIATIONS

ACDP	African Christian Democratic Party (South Africa)
APA	American Psychological Association
CLA	Christian Lawyers Association (South Africa)
CSG	Child Support Grant (South Africa)
CTOP Act	Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act (Act 92 of 1996) (South Africa)
PAS	post-abortion syndrome
SABC3	South African Broadcasting Corporation's television Channel 3



## SETTING THE SCENE

On 14 November 2006, *Special Assignment*, a weekly programme aired on the South African Broadcasting Corporation's television Channel 3 (SABC3), was entitled *Silent Cries*. The programme is about teen-aged women who conceive and decide to terminate their pregnancy (which, under legislation introduced in 1996, is legal up to twelve weeks on request and thereafter under specific conditions). The following description of the programme appeared on the *Special Assignment* website (Special Assignment 2006):

Girls as young as 12 years are having multiple abortions – without their parents' consent. This week a Special Assignment investigation reveals that many teenagers regard termination of pregnancy as another form of contraception and disregard the consequent dangers of HIV infection. We follow four girls as they enter clinics and prepare for their procedures. They tell us why they have opted for abortions and how they feel going through with them. While two of the girls are still in high school, the other two are university students. Out of the four girls, two are repeat cases. Since the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act was passed in 1996, the demand for abortions has increased. Last year about half a million pregnancies were terminated in South Africa. According to the Act, a pregnant woman who asks for an abortion cannot be turned down. 72 000 teenagers missed school last year because they were pregnant. From our investigation it would seem that many underage girls are successfully exploiting two loopholes in the Act. Firstly, they don't need permission from their parents to get abortions, and secondly, the Act doesn't stipulate how many abortions a woman can have in her lifetime.

(*Special Assignment* 2006)

The actual programme starts with the following question:

Do you know where your teenage girl is? She could be in a clinic waiting to get through her most difficult test yet, terminating her pregnancy alone and without your consent. Girls as young as 12 years are having abortions. We ask, 'Are teenage girls confusing abortion with contraception?'

(*Special Assignment* and SABC)

The tone and content of the programme clearly had an effect on some viewers as evidenced in the blogs that appeared shortly after it aired. This is an example of one.

I have just finished watching *Special Assignment*. . . . I have never really formed an opinion on abortion. The main reason behind that is that as soon as I do form an opinion on it, it is my moral duty to act on it, and well, I'm lazy. What did strike me as the nurse carried out the biological waste to the dumping area, is what a waste of potential that was. And I'm not talking about the child that almost was, but more about the people that would have surrounded it.

(Time 2006)

The issues raised in this *Special Assignment* programme and the blog are what this book is about – young women conceiving, young women being pregnant, some young women giving birth and some young women requesting a termination of pregnancy. The manner in which these issues are spoken about, and the implications of these representations, are the central focus of the book. Readers will notice, as they proceed through the material that follows, that I have not used young women who are sexually active, or who are pregnant, or who are undergoing a termination of pregnancy as the object of study. Instead of focusing attention on the pregnant teenager herself, the concern here revolves around public representations of 'teenage pregnancy' and abortion and around what enables us to make the kinds of statements that are evidenced above.

For example, in the extracts above, young women are represented as 'girls', people who sneak away from adult supervision in order to terminate a pregnancy, who confuse contraception with abortion, who are irresponsible regarding the possibility of HIV infection, and who irresponsibly 'exploit' current legislation. Throughout the *Special Assignment* programme these young women are referred to as 'schoolgirls', 'girls', 'youngsters', 'underage girls' and 'underage kids'. They are represented as ignorant, immature, neglectful and risk-taking. Whatever else they may be, in the eyes of the presenters of this programme, they are not adults, not capable of independent decision and not mature enough to be involved in sexual activity, to carry a pregnancy or to decide independently on a termination of pregnancy.

In addition to positioning young women in this way, the programme intimates that ‘teenage pregnancy’ and abortion are causes for social concern. The demand for abortion is increasing, it is stated, with the implication of a strain being placed on the public health system. Many young women are missing school as a result of pregnancy, which implicitly defines them as becoming educationally and possibly economically challenged. Thus, not only are these ‘girls’ responsible for their individual suffering through their immature acts, but also they are contributing to social problems. Many of these themes will emerge in the discussions that follow.

In addition to examining how young sexual and reproductive women are represented, this book is about the research and social practices that allow for particular discursive constructions. For example, in the *Special Assignment* programme there is the social practice of addressing an audience. The implicit audience of the programme is exactly the person who wrote the blog featured above – an adult who will form an opinion on the matter. It is addressed to adults who are concerned about the well-being of their own children and of children in general, people who would want to have a say in what teen-aged women do. The people that the programme is about – young women who are pregnant and considering an abortion – are not addressed. They are not, for one moment, considered as a possible or reasonable audience.

### **The approach taken in this book**

The usual types of questions asked by social science researchers in the field of early reproduction are: What causes ‘teenage pregnancy’? What are the consequences of early motherhood? What are the consequences when a teenager has a termination of pregnancy? Are young women able to make decisions on their own when it comes to a termination of pregnancy? What are the best interventions to prevent pregnancy and to ameliorate the consequences of early reproduction or termination of pregnancy? All these questions focus attention on the individual teenager – examining her individual emotional, cognitive and social characteristics to explain why she gets pregnant, why she mothers in a certain way, how she makes a decision about her pregnancy, how she responds to abortion, and how best to help her.

This will not be the focus of attention in this book. Instead, I analyse how we, as academics writing in journals and books, as health professionals talking about young women who are pregnant, as journalists and TV programme directors producing written and visual text, and as lay-people writing to newspapers or on blogs, represent young women with regard to reproductive issues. In other words, this book examines public representations – the public discursive context – of early reproduction. The

main questions that direct the discussions that follow are: What kinds of understandings concerning young women and reproduction do these representations promote? What kinds of practices enable particular representations? And what are the implications of these kinds of representation?

The reason for this shift (from the standard approach of focusing on young women themselves to focusing on representations about them) has to do with an understanding of the implications of these representations. In analysing the manner in which these young women are defined, measured, categorized, described and spoken about, we start to understand two things. First, we obtain insight into the context (at least the public discursive context) within which these young women experience their lives. In other words, we can begin to explore some of the social constraints and possibilities that may shape their decisions, their interactions and their reactions to a pregnancy. Second, in exploring representations of young women, sexuality, pregnancy and termination of pregnancy, we can begin to understand the ideologies that influence interventions with young people. No intervention is neutral – all are based on particular premises regarding the basic good and the basic nature of the individual. It is these kinds of issues that will be discussed in this book.

In making my argument, I draw on a number of sources of data, including journal articles, newspapers, websites and television programmes. Although these media of communication have different functions, and appeal to different (albeit overlapping) audiences, they have a number of things in common. The first is that they represent the ideas and arguments of people with a certain level of material and educational resource base, with access to, and the ability to use, current information and communication technologies. As such, they potentially produce and reproduce particular representations of reality. The second is that, as public documents, they have ‘reach’. Potentially, they may be read by a wide range of people. Third, although supposedly different in function and audience, they espouse remarkable similarity ideologies, albeit in different narrative structures.

In analysing the public discursive context of ‘teenage pregnancy’ and abortion, I am not claiming to represent, in totality, the social environment within which young people will experience their lives. The public discursive contexts represented in journal articles, websites, television and newspapers (some of which will be accessible globally and some of which will be accessible at national or local level) will interweave in complex ways with local knowledge and practices, at times being re-enforced, at times being appropriated, at times being dismissed or ignored, and at times being actively resisted by practices and interactions at the micro-social level. This kind of context is more suitably studied using ethnographic methods (for an in-depth ethnographic study in South Africa, see, for example, Mkhwanazi 2004).

### The basic argument

The basic argument advanced in this book is this. Public discussions of ‘teenage pregnancy’ and abortion, for the most part, construct a threat of degeneration, in which young women are positioned as contributing, through their sexual and reproductive status, to social decline.

Underlying this assessment of young women who conceive and either bear a child or terminate the pregnancy is a discourse of ‘adolescence’ as a transitional stage, an understanding of ‘adolescence’ as a shift from childhood to adulthood. Within this discourse, vestiges of childhood remain while the characteristics of adulthood are being developed. It is this assumption of ‘adolescence’ as transition that allows for the reporters in the *Special Assignment* programme to call young women who have conceived ‘girls’ or ‘children’. Although these women have displayed the biological characteristics of adulthood through being able to conceive, they are assumed to be emotionally and socially immature, and therefore children.

That this discourse is not necessary (i.e. that young people need not be understood in this way) is borne out by historical and cultural variability in the ways in which young people have been constructed. ‘Adolescence’ as a category of development was invented in the West in the early part of the twentieth century, and has filtered into African understandings of young people through such means as education.

Not only is the discourse of ‘adolescence as transition’ a historical and cultural construction, but also it contains within it the seeds of its own destruction. ‘Adolescence’ is inhabited from the inside by paradoxes (child/not child; adult/not adult) that require constant work in order to arrive at merely temporary resolution.

There are various ideologies attached to the discourse of ‘adolescence as transition’, ideologies that have important effects in terms of research and interventions with young women who are pregnant. The first ideology concerns the linkage, made by early proponents of the notion of ‘adolescence’, between the transition of the person from childhood to adulthood and the transition of humankind from primitiveness to civilization. Although these early conceptions of ‘adolescence’ are no longer taken seriously, the threat of degeneration that primitive people posed to civilization continues to haunt our understandings of ‘adolescence’. The less developed, in the form of young people, are depicted as posing a threat of degeneration to the more developed, in the form of adults, through their careless and risk-taking behaviour – through engaging in sex, through not taking contraceptive precautions, through requiring additional health and psychological care during pregnancy or during and after a termination of pregnancy, through engaging in inadequate mothering practices and producing the next generation of problematic youth, and through relying on welfare and not being economically active.

In the same way as colonialists created a firm distinction between primitive people and civilized people, current theorists understand adolescence as clearly distinct from adulthood. The second ideology attached to the 'adolescence as transition' discourse, thus, is the construction of an 'imaginary wall' between teen-aged people and adults. This imaginary wall means that young people are treated as a category separate from adults. The similarities in trends among adults and among teen-aged people in a particular social milieu are de-emphasized, and 'teenagers' are investigated and treated as a separable class of people.

The third ideology revolves around the meaning of the transition to adulthood. This transition is no longer one that is socially defined through a range of rituals or rites of passage, but rather an individually based achievement as the 'teenager' progresses through developing the requisite cognitive, emotional and behavioural characteristics of adulthood. There are two implications to this ideology. This first is that the transition, rather than being of short duration as would be the case in social rituals marking the transition to adulthood, is depicted as a drawn out one of anything up to eight years. The second is that, because the transition is an individual achievement, the chances of the process being derailed, for problems to emerge, are high.

The 'adolescence as transition' discourse and the associated ideologies underpin our ways of talking about, our social practices regarding, and interventions with young people who are sexually active and/or pregnant. They form the bedrock of investigative practices with regard to the consequences of 'teenage pregnancy' and of abortion among young women. They are the mainstay of interventions with young people regarding sex and reproduction. And they feed into an othering process that marks black and minority group 'teenagers' as particularly problematic in the social problem of 'teenage pregnancy' and abortion.

### **Theoretical foundations**

The kind of approach I take in this book is broadly referred to as social constructionism. Social constructionism is quite a diverse and debated field. However, there are some commonalities that I shall briefly summarize here (a useful introduction to the field for those wishing to read further is provided by Burr 2003). In the first place, social constructionism is about questioning the inevitability or necessity of understanding things in particular ways. It points out that human characteristics and interactions are historically and socially variable, that ways of being differ considerably according to time and place. In other words, our knowledge of the world, the way we behave and the manner in which we talk about things are socially and historically constructed. In this book I shall discuss how, first, 'adolescence', and second, 'teenage pregnancy' were 'invented' at particular

historical times. I shall also discuss the social variability of the understanding of 'teen-age'.

Second, from this perspective, knowledge is constructed in social interactions between people. In other words, social action and knowledge are intricately interwoven. Social interaction and action is, of course, not restricted to face-to-face interaction. It may take a variety of forms, including communication through journal articles, textbooks, television, the internet and newspapers, these being the main sources of data included in this book.

Third, social constructionism is critical of what is referred to as 'taken-for-granted' knowledge. It does not accept common wisdom as truth, but questions the assumptions that are made in statements of truth. In particular, it asks how these assumptions may serve the interests of specific dominant groups. In other words, it is interested in the power relations that exist between people and how talk is used to produce and entrench these power relations. In this book, we shall see how an understanding of 'adolescence' as a transitional stage of human development (in other words as the bridge between childhood and adulthood) allows for the adult intervention in these young people's lives, interventions that are frequently infused with moral invectives and ideological injunctions.

Central to social constructionism is an understanding of discourse. 'Discourse' has been defined in a number of ways. For example, Ian Parker conceptualizes it as 'a system of statements which constructs an object' (Parker 1990: 191), while Erica Burman states that discourses are 'socially organised frameworks of meaning that define categories and specify domains of what can be said and done' (Burman 2008: 2). While there has been some debate concerning the exact meaning of discourse, what most versions have in common is that discourse has an underlying regularity and has constructive effects.

In terms of the first of these, namely its regularity, a discourse presents a coherent system of meanings. In other words, the statements in a discourse cluster around culturally available understandings as to what constitutes a topic (for example the culturally available ways of talking about and understanding 'adolescence'). This regularity, however, is found amid variability. This means that although there is some regularity and consistency to discourse, discourses do also change over time. They develop within particular socio-cultural contexts and are historically variable (Macleod 2002).

In terms of the second aspect of discourse, it is argued that discourses do not simply describe the social world. Instead, they are the mode through which the world of 'reality' emerges. They construct people and objects as well as knowledge and truth in particular ways. Norman Fairclough (1992) distinguishes three aspects of the constructive effects of discourse, namely the construction of, first, 'social identities', 'subject positions' or types of 'self', second, social relationships between people, and third, systems of knowledge and belief. Fairclough calls these the 'identity',

'relational' and 'ideational' functions of language. In this book I shall explore how the 'adolescence as transition' discourse constructs, first, the identity of the young woman as deficient and in need of assistance, second, the relationship between the educator or expert and young woman as one of guidance or facilitation, and third, our knowledge and beliefs about, for example, the consequences of abortion among young women.

Discourse is constructive, but it is also restrictive. It has a dual character, simultaneously constructing and restricting what can be known, said or experienced at any particular socio-historical moment. It is this duality, 'through which action and understanding are simultaneously enabled and constrained, that links knowledge to power' (Young 1987: 114). For example, the discourse of 'adolescence as transition' simultaneously allows certain ways of understanding teen-aged pregnancy and abortion and restricts other ways of understanding them. It enables a particular set of power relations between educator and young women, and restricts other ways of relating. This discourse emerged in a particular socio-historical moment and thus discourses prior to this would have constructed and restricted understandings of young people in different ways to the present times.

Fairclough (1992) describes a discursive 'event' as simultaneously a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice. He explains the latter two dimensions as follows: the 'discursive practice' dimension concerns the nature of the processes of text production and interpretation (e.g. which discourses are drawn upon and how they are combined); the 'social practice' dimension refers to the institutional and organizational circumstances of the discursive event and how that shapes the discursive practice. In this book, I trace discursive events that define 'teenage pregnancy' (and the associated possibility of abortion) as a social problem. The texts which form part of this event are the range of public statements – either written or spoken – about young sexually active or pregnant women. The discursive practices infused in these texts include drawing on an 'adolescence as transition' discourse, which is frequently combined with gendered and racialized discourses. Finally, I analyse certain social practices that shape the discursive practices referred to. Of particular pertinence is how particular research practices, specifically the tendency to design comparative research that fails to take factors other than age into account, provide fertile grounds for the construction of what I term a threat of degeneration.

As indicated above, social constructionism is a diverse field. Within the overarching principles of social constructionism outlined above, I utilize postcolonialist and feminist lenses to inspect the issue at hand. Again both these fields (feminism and postcolonialism) are contested fields of inquiry. Briefly, however, the postcolonial lens highlights how current power relations are embedded in colonial history, with past and present intermingling in dynamic ways to re-enforce or to trouble particular understandings and

interactions. In a sense colonialist forms function as a palimpsest: something that is reused or altered while retaining traces of its earlier form (for further discussion, see Macleod and Bhatia 2008). In this book I discuss how the colonialist construction of ‘primitiveness’, and consequently of a threat of degeneration, continues to haunt our understandings of ‘adolescence’, which have consequences for how young women and reproduction are viewed. The feminist lens that I utilize is one that attempts to understand gender in terms of the power relations that operate both at a micro-level and at structural levels. In this, women and men are not seen as groups pitted against one another, with one possessing power over the other. Rather power relations are multiple and shifting, as dominant discourses, social practices and social arrangements compete for hegemony (for further discussion, see Macleod and Durrheim 2002).

### Location

In our modern, electronic and globalized world, the public discursive context of ‘teenage pregnancy’ and abortion cuts, in many respects, across axes of location. Ideas, facts, conclusions and taken-for-granted assumptions are widely circulated through the easy access to information allowed by global media and communication technologies, such as the internet and television. Of course, there is contestation and debate, but these are frequently remarkably similar across a range of geographical locations.

In this book, I have drawn on research conducted within the United Kingdom, North America, Europe, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa in order to construct my central argument. Much of the data is sourced from South Africa. There are good reasons for this, other than the obvious fact that I live and work in South Africa.

First, owing to the legalization of abortion in 1996 (in which there is no restriction in terms of age), the HIV/AIDS epidemic which affects young people disproportionately, and the implementation of a strong public sexuality education programme, South Africa represents somewhat of a recent case study in terms of debate about practices regarding young women, sex, reproduction and termination of pregnancy. Second, these data throw into sharp relief the central issues of the book, specifically the colonial foundation of the notion of ‘adolescence’, and racialized processes of othering that occur in discussions of young women and pregnancy. This is owing to South Africa’s colonial and Apartheid past, and its current status as a country with a mixed so-called ‘First World/Third World’ economy. South Africa was colonized by both the Netherlands and Britain, although British rule lasted substantially longer than Dutch rule. Apartheid practice, which centred on race as a criterion for differentiation, evolved out of the structures of segregation established during the course of colonial settlement and conquest, and became a form of internal colonialism.

Although there are debates around race in the literature on 'teenage pregnancy' in many countries, it is virtually forgotten that colonialism forms a palimpsest of the notion of 'adolescence' in the many contexts in which it is deployed on a daily basis. The latter is also true in South Africa. However, South Africa represents a country battling with the legacy of colonialism and racism, as well as gender inequalities that formed part of these systems, and as such provides a rich source of data that speaks to these issues.

Readers should note that I am not suggesting that colonialism was the same everywhere. There were clear differences, for example, between the rationale for rule and the administration of Francophone and Anglophone colonies. Even within colonies, such as South Africa, there were contradictions and contestations (Comaroff 1989). Nevertheless, there were commonalities in colonialist discourse, such as the distinction between primitiveness and civilization, and it is to these commonalities that this book speaks.

### **An outline of the book**

In Chapter 2, I discuss what has been termed the 'invention of adolescence'. The basic argument here is that 'adolescence' has only recently (in the past 150 years, more or less) been seen as separable stage of human development. I explore the sociological and academic trends that allowed for this invention within the Western world, as well as its infiltration into understandings of young people in Africa. I discuss how the invention of 'adolescence' has allowed for the construction of an imaginary wall between teen-aged people and adults, in which teen-aged people are seen as a group apart, as a subcategory with its own unique features and trends, and how this distinction (between teenagers and adults) together with the colonialist roots of the notion of 'adolescence' allow for the construction of a threat of degeneration.

In Chapter 3, I argue that the inevitability of the 'adolescence as transition' discourse breaks down not only when we view it in historical terms, but also when we start unravelling the various paradoxes that it presents. Internal contradictions haunt the basic premises of the 'adolescence as transition' discourse. These internal contradictions are evident in a number of events, such as sex education, the pregnancy of a teenager, and decision-making in the context of abortion. In each of these, the adult/not adult, child/not child nature of the transition are exposed and placed in contradistinction to each other. The purpose of this chapter is to deconstruct the 'adolescence as transition' discourse, an action that allows for a questioning of this discourse that underpins the construction of a threat of degeneration.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I turn to the nitty-gritty of the topic at hand. In Chapter 4 I explore how 'teenage pregnancy' was invented as a social

problem in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s. At this stage the signifiers ‘unwed mother’ and ‘illegitimate child’ collapsed into the supposedly neutral scientific signifier of ‘teenage pregnancy’, allowing health and social scientists to investigate the negative consequences of early reproduction. These negative consequences have been listed as the disruption of schooling, socio-economic disadvantage, poor child outcomes, health risks, welfare dependency and demographic concerns. In this chapter I trace some of the social practices that allow for this construction of degeneration, in particular the research practices in which comparative work that foregrounds age to the exclusion of socio-economic status and other social issues is conducted.

In Chapter 5, I explore how, despite the fact that abortion seemingly solves the problem of teen-age mothering, it has become the new social problem. This is made possible through research practices that allow for a construction of abortion as medically and psychologically damaging. After providing the legislative framework of legal abortion in two countries (United States and South Africa), I discuss debates on the psychological consequences of (legal) abortion for women in general, and for young women specifically. I show how the notion of post-abortion syndrome has been taken up by the anti-abortion lobby in ways that turns the personal degeneration, implied in the attribution of health and psychological consequences to abortion, into social degeneration.

In Chapter 6, I turn to the thorny issue of ‘race’ and teen-aged pregnancy and abortion. I trace the connection made between ‘race’ and social degeneration in relation to young people conceiving and either terminating a pregnancy or bearing a child. I discuss how ‘culture’ is used in contradictory ways to explain the occurrence of the social problems of ‘teenage pregnancy’ and abortion among ‘black’ and/or minority group people.

There are a number of implications inherent in the discourse of ‘adolescence as transition’ and the accompanying imaginary wall and threat of degeneration. In Chapter 7, I turn specifically to the implication that intervention on the part of the expert is justified. The expert is invested with managing the risks associated with young people and sex, pregnancy, abortion and childbearing. I analyse the talk of some health service providers with regard to the risky behaviours of young women, as well as the recommendations of a number of South African researchers concerning the educational interventions that should occur in young people’s lives in order to prevent the occurrence of abortion. Two distinct philosophies emerge: one in which the educator is seen as guide for the young person on the way to adulthood, and one in which the educator is viewed as a facilitator of the development of naturally emerging patterns. I argue that each of these set up power relations based on the ‘adolescence as transition’ discourse and that other, more liberatory ways of viewing the educational interface between teen-aged women and educator are possible.

## SETTING THE SCENE

Finally, in Chapter 8 I turn to the question of how young women who do indeed have unwanted pregnancies should be viewed. I argue for a shift from the signifier 'teenage pregnancy' to 'unwanted pregnancy'. Although the term 'unwanted pregnancy' is not without its problems, concentrating on 'unwanted pregnancies' achieves three things. These are, first, a shift away from slicing off a segment of women (young women) from other women of similar social and economic circumstances; second, the potential to understand the circumstances under which pregnancy may be deleterious to women, and third; a shift in focus from the individual young woman to the gendered space within which conception takes place. Preventing unwanted pregnancies is clearly an important aim. In this final chapter I start to explore some of implications of a shift to unwanted pregnancy in terms of research practices and service provision.