The title of this paper is intentionally provocative. Teenage pregnancy is almost universally regarded as a social problem to which a solution must be found and the situation in contemporary KwaZulu is no exception. The question, “Whose problem?” focuses, however, on the fact that for those most intimately concerned, that is, for black teenagers themselves, the issue is not as simple or even as clearly problematic as it appears to be for the parents, teachers and community leaders who decry what they refer to as “this business of our girls getting babies” and for the many “outsiders”, such as health and community workers, doctors and clinic nurses, who encounter these births and their aftermath in the course of their work. It will be argued, in fact, that there are positive dimensions to early pregnancy which are either neglected, or not fully recognised by the older generation. It is these which incline teenagers in this direction and serve, moreover, to explain why few make use of the contraceptive measures which are fairly readily available, at least in most urban and peri-urban areas.

The approach adopted here is an holistic anthropological one which seeks to explain behaviour in terms of a set of cultural rules which provide the individual with alternative blueprints for action. It is from among these that she selects the behaviour most appropriate to the situation of the moment. Notwithstanding the overly critical opinion of their elders, pregnancy seems to many black teenagers an entirely rational strategy to achieve one set of important goals. Nor does it carry with it too many negative repercussions. A baby before marriage or even a pregnancy while at school does not constitute the end of the world for most black teenagers and neither, when all is said and done, for their parents. Youthful pregnancies have come to form part of a wider cultural and social system in which they not only dovetail with other institutional sets, but within which they play (although it is not generally recognized or accepted by all adults) a specific and integral part.

The implications of this analysis are far-reaching and hold out little hope of immediate success for those who seek to address the problem of teenage pregnancy only in terms of sex education, the encouragement of abstinence or, indeed, any programme directed solely at teenagers and their physical involvement in sexual relations. It is necessary to consider the wider issues of parental attitudes and actions which may not always be congruent, as well as the broader constraints which are at work in the contemporary black community. The latter may be seen to operate through a unique set of cultural forms, some of which are derived (both consciously and unconsciously) from long-standing Zulu cultural patterns, while others are the direct result of the changes imposed on the black community first by the colonial experience and latterly by the dictates of poverty and underdevelopment.

A NOTE ON THE USE OF THE TERMS ‘CULTURE’ AND ‘SOCIO-CULTURAL SYSTEM’

To argue that social phenomena (and particularly those which appear to be problematic) are the result of “culture” is to run the gauntlet of often well deserved criticisms that this type of explanation serves only to emphasise the differences between people without offering any understanding of the implications of these differences, of their meaning for those concerned or of the possibilities of change. Even more problematic is the stance often adopted by laymen of blaming contemporary problems (and teenage pregnancy is one of these) on the “breakdown” of cultural forms such as the family and “respect” for elders. On the other hand, to deny that different groups of people do things differently is equally obtuse and self-defeating.

The conventional ways in which teenage pregnancy is dealt with differ not only among black and white South Africans (Preston-Whyte & Louw 1986), but within each of these categories, where nuances of differences in both attitude and action are the order of the day. These differences stem from distinct sets of cultural rules or, as many contemporary anthropologists conceptualise it, from an all-encompassing and complex cognitive map which people, as it were, carry around in their heads and which suggests to them how they should behave in particular situations. On this definition culture is nothing more or less than an intricate and flexible set of “blueprints” for action. Cultural “codes”, that is, the rules in terms of which actions are planned, are often highly symbolic and may be difficult for outsiders to fathom at first meeting. They are, however, what make the people who share them able to interact successfully because each knows what the other’s actions mean and can to some extent anticipate what that person will do in the future. It is these shared meanings which make social life both predictable and, indeed, possible.

This conception of culture is far more limited than that used by many social scientists and most laymen. Behaviour
and the results of action, in other words buildings, dress, technology, even language, music, art, and the social groups people form and which exist over time, are excluded from it—the latter, in particular, being subsumed under the rubric of the social. Together, of course, culture, seen as a set of rules and the results of following these rules, social behaviour and, at its widest extent, society, are part of the same whole and they are distinguished merely for analytical purposes (Geertz 1957:33-34). When those scholars who find it useful to use the notion of culture in this restricted and specialized sense wish to indicate their awareness of the wider whole, they usually refer to the sociocultural system (Keesing 1981:67-75).

The analytic view of culture outlined above is derived from the work of contemporary American cultural anthropology (Goodenough 1961; Geertz 1957) and presents what is usually referred to as a mentalist or perhaps an ideational conception of culture (Keesing 1981:68). Implicit in this approach is the understanding that cultural blueprints usually present a number of alternative options for action. Differences in opinion as to how things should and may be done are thus to be expected and any one person may subscribe to and behave in what seems to the outsider completely contradictory ways at different times. Certainly it is possible for different categories of people to hold different opinions and for children and their parents to disagree on what appear to be fundamental issues of attitude and behaviour. In attempting to understand a phenomenon as complex as teenage pregnancy, the view of culture as a set of alternative but still generally shared meanings and blueprints for action has distinct advantages as it allows us to separate out the various and possibly conflicting values which people hold from what they actually do. In what follows black teenagers’ views of the world and how these affect their decisions about how to act in sexual matters will be concentrated on. Their behaviour cannot, however, be cut off from that of their parents, teachers and other adults with whom they come into contact. The opinions, attitudes and actions of both generations, although often different from the complex sociocultural system within which all move and in relation to which the sexual activities and decisions of teenagers, have to be seen together.

For the contemporary anthropologist an explanation which is couched in terms of a mentalist view of culture is one which seeks symbolic cultural context for action which they present as flexible and ever changing in response to changed conditions. Culture is viewed as a resource which people manipulate (or try to manipulate) to their perceived advantage. This is what many black teenagers are doing with pregnancy and, as has been shown elsewhere (Preston-Whyte & Miller 1987), what their parents may also do in the performance of ceremonies thought by many Zulu-speaking people to be the appropriate manner in which to cope with the domestic crisis caused by the pregnancy of a young girl. It must be stressed, therefore, that when the term culture, and specifically Zulu culture, is used in what follows, it must not be taken to mean an ossified set of outdated notions, but rather a changing and often lively assemblage of models which have been drawn from many quarters and which are above all adaptive to the opportunities and constraints of the present. The layman’s notion of culture or of specific aspects of culture which are changing as in the process of “breakdown” is quite contrary to the understanding of change espoused here. The emphasis is placed on creative adaptation rather than on disintegration and “culture” is not conceptualized as a single unchanging, all-or-nothing entity. Instead it is viewed as being made up of a flexible mosaic of alternative and often contradictory notions of how things may or could possibly be done.

Implicit in this approach is a perception of human beings as rational, as continually summing up situations, and as choosing from the whole repertoire of possible behaviour that model for action which in their estimation best fits their current needs. These may change and there is no surety that their opinion of what is best will remain the same or that it will accord with the opinion of their peers, let alone with that of those who are older or from a different language or class group. The so-called “generation gap” is a case in point and it is a well-worn sociological truism that people’s notions of what is appropriate alter as they age.

The argument presented here is that individuals have access to a range of models for action but that they choose only one at any time on which to base their behaviour. Their choice is determined by the many social pressures to which they are subject as members of particular sociocultural formations. In most cases what is interesting and important if one is considering change in both attitudes and behaviour is that individuals come into contact with others who expose them to different models and they may be influenced by these to change their own behaviour. It is particularly characteristic of modern society that major differences in models occur—and accordingly, that behaviour is not only different, but changing. Seen from this perspective, culture may be seen to provide not only blueprints for action, but mechanisms for coping with and managing the changing eventualities of life. Whether the behaviour it produced is judged adaptive or maladaptive by outsiders is, of course, another question and one to which the answer often depends on the outside observer’s own cultural notions of how things ought to be. In South Africa the people who are often the loudest in their criticisms of the behaviour patterns of others are those who do not try to see things from the “other side”, be it that of a different class, culture or generation.

**BLACK TEENAGERS AND TEENAGE PREGNANCY**

Leaders and spokesmen for the black community roundly condemn teenage pregnancy and programmes designed to stem it have been in operation for at least 50 years and, in some church groups, for considerably longer. Yet these births continue apparently unabated.

What struck the researchers at the beginning of their investigation into the so-called “problem” and attempts to cope with it, was that (with a few notable exceptions in very little of the literature on the topic) no genuine attempt had been made to see the issue from the point of view of the teenagers themselves (Moeno 1977; Craig & Richter-Strydom 1983; Khoza 1988). If any questions were asked of them directly, their answers were largely discounted and any justifications offered by them for their actions were noted as irresponsible or misguided. In most public forums on the topic, teenagers are represented by their elders who decry the lack of morals of the younger generation which they often ascribe to the “breakdown” of the family and of peer group control. If teenagers are conceptualized as a distinct social category, this view is essentially that of a series of “outsiders”, in this case their parents and teachers, to whose voices are added the shocked reaction of the church and the concerned comments of medical personnel and social workers. It is, of course, on the shoulders of these people that the task of dealing with the negative results of teenage pregnancies invariably fall and it is therefore no wonder that the general “adult” view of the situation is a problem-oriented one. Serious problems
undeniably exist and should be addressed as a matter of urgency. There is, however, another and logically prior side to these problems.

Armed with the belief that people (and this includes the youth) do not act completely irrationally and that they make choices about how to act which are based on where they perceive their best interests to lie, the researchers set themselves the task of trying to penetrate the cognitive world of black teenagers. In this endeavour they worked with two teams of black researchers, the one consisting of male and female school and community nurses based in KwaMashu under the leadership of Mrs M. Zondi, and the other made up of members of a community development organization, the Mpumalanga Child and Development Project, led by Mr L. Mabaso and Mrs H. Gamede. Although the more senior members of the teams were middle-aged, some were little more than teenagers themselves. Going into the homes of the community, they soon established excellent rapport, especially when they made it clear that they were genuinely sympathetic to the views and problems of the teenagers themselves and wanted to know what the latter thought about having a child when they were young and not married. The response was immediate and overwhelmingly rational. It is this perspective which we outline below in the belief that it is one which is important both for the older generation and those in what are often referred to as the “helping professions” to appreciate, and that an understanding of it will help to explain why teenage pregnancies occur across such a wide spectrum of black families, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, it is indeed the last fact which makes the issue of black teenage pregnancy so fascinating and challenging to the social scientist. Although none of the teenagers we interviewed had passed matric and most came from homes in which the parents held unskilled jobs and had themselves not achieved high educational standards, members of the research teams could all point to the families of the professional educated elite in which daughters had also fallen pregnant before marriage. As one said, “Class is nothing here ... it doesn’t matter if you are a ‘somebody’ in the town, it can still happen to you ...” Any explanation of teenage pregnancy must therefore come to terms with the fact that while class education may have a role to play, an explanation considered in these terms does not appear to go far enough.

THE CULTURE OF TEENAGE PREGNANCY

In talking to both young unmarried girls who have had, and those who have not had a child, some very good reasons for having a baby, or at least for not trying to avoid pregnancy, soon surfaced. Added to this there appeared to be relatively few compelling reasons why teenagers considered this an eventuality to be avoided. These reasons will be discussed first because they are related to observable behaviour and concern teenagers as a specific category, while the positive factors have a bearing on the general attitudes and values which permeate the thinking of the whole community. As such, like all cultural codes, the full meaning and many nuances are far more complex for the outsider to appreciate fully. Although men and boys as well as women and girls were interviewed, the female perspective will be outlined first. It is women who bear children and who, with the exception of the use of condoms, for the most part take the active role in using contraceptive measures. The influence of men operates in terms of values and persuasion to have intercourse and the male perspective will be considered when the positive inducements to fall pregnant are considered later in the paper.

THE REPERCUSSIONS OF TEENAGE PREGNANCY; IS IT SO BAD?

Put in a nutshell, the world does not come to an end if a black schoolgirl or young unmarried woman becomes pregnant. It is true that her parents are angry—sometimes extremely angry—and they may chastise her severely. Fathers are reported to have beaten a daughter, although much of their ire is often directed at the mother of the girl for not watching her more carefully. When the baby arrives they may at first refuse to take an interest in it but it is clear that this negative attitude eases with time. On the part of the mother of the girl, the acceptance seems to come quickly and the baby is indeed welcomed and loved as would be any other new child in the family. A young girl is not thrown out of the parental home for pregnancy and few run away or seriously consider abortion rather than reveal their condition to their mothers. It is true that they usually confide in an older “auntie first, saying that they are “afraid” to tell their mother, but this is in keeping with the general reservation between parents and children on matters connected with sex (Krige 1936; De Haas 1987).

Some of the anger and distress felt by the family of the girl may be dissipated by the observance of what many (but by no means all) black parents regard as correct and vital reparation for seduction and impregnation in the form of either inhlawulo (the payment of damages) or umgezo (cleansing of the bad luck or ritual impurity thought to be occasioned by a premarital pregnancy) or both. These are culturally specific actions centered on the handing over of either money, or as the case may be, a goat or head of cattle or both, by the family of the man responsible for the pregnancy to the girl’s father or guardian (Krige 1936:158; Ramon 1973:452; Ngubane 1977:9; Siluma 1991:148). In the rural areas, the girl’s age-mates and the local political representative may also be recompensed. Although it is not to be suggested that these payments cancel out the wrong which has been perpetrated completely, they are taken as evidence of a recognition of responsibility and good faith by the man, and if he is young, by his family also. These gifts and the accompanying meetings which they necessitate between the parties concerned serve to regulate an unordered and potentially chaotic situation and may even establish some degree of rapport between the two families on the basis of which a marriage may (but will by no means necessarily) be built (Preston-Whyte & Louw 1988).

In the transactions outlined above and in the relationships (however fleeting) which they establish, can be seen one of the distinctive ways in which cultural traditions and ways of dealing with a crisis in the past have continued into the present, albeit in a slightly altered form. Those who do not accept either the necessity or advisability of following these models for action are left with that much less with which to mitigate their distress, and parents who have not received these forms of reparation may, indeed, be more bitter and angry than those who have received them. Although the obligation to give umgezo is a moral one only, inhlawulo can be sued for in court. In rural areas and particularly in conservative communities, both are standard procedures in handling premarital pregnancy. In town, although both are found on some occasions, the payment of inhlawulo alone is common. In all cases, however, there is a clearly recognized way of informing the family of the man or boy responsible and even if there are disputes over the payment of what are usually spoken of as “damages”, the man usually pays for the confinement and a set of clothes for the baby, and he may contribute to the costs of rearing the child for some time at least. In these
ways, it is suggested, culture provides both a recognized way of dealing with the domestic crisis precipitated by the pregnancy and, because people know "what should be done", the crisis is not only made manageable, but its potentially disruptive aspects are lessened. Above all, the girl is not left destitute and once her parents have accepted responsibility, the child is publicly as well as legally accepted as their responsibility. In the time the disappointment and anger fade as the family grow accustomed to the new arrival. When the baby is born its antecedents are outweighed by the very real joy it brings with it. This point will be returned to later.

It is not merely the immediate reaction to teenage pregnancy which needs to be considered, but how the crisis is dealt with in the long term. Here too the sociocultural system appears to be accommodating. It is standard practice from the baby of an unmarried woman to be cared for and reared by her parents, at least in the first instance. In legal terms the child takes the name of the father of the unmarried woman and he is the guardian. A number of commentators have pointed out that in both urban and rural areas a high proportion of black domestic units are three- and even four-generational (Marwick 1978; Dubb 1974). While in the rural areas the patrilocal extended family into which the sons bring their wives and children to live in the paternal home is both the most usual and the preferred form of household, in urban areas it is far more usual for the third generation to be constituted by the offspring of unmarried daughters (Paw 1963:144-146; Dubb 1974). The restricted size of most state built urban housing mitigates against the addition of full nuclear units to the core household, as is the preference of a growing number of young married couples. In the case of a daughter and her child, however, the problem of overcrowding is less acute and the new baby could easily be an additional child of the housewife. Indeed, he or she is often raised as such, and it is largely in the minds of the outsider that the family has taken on the structure of a multi-generational unit. Not to quibble over structural definitions however, it is clear that black domestic units have accommodated the challenge to unmarried parenthood by incorporating the child into what would otherwise be a simple nuclear or, in the rural areas, perhaps, extended household. The girl concerned has therefore neither to find separate accommodation for herself and her child, nor is she forced into an immediate marriage. Rather, she and the baby remain in and swell the household of her parents, while the father of the child remains with his family. In the case of black teenage pregnancy today it is clear that culture, conceptualized both as a set of models for action and the social groupings which have resulted from this behaviour, has accommodated a common, if by no means popular, eventual. In practical terms, what this means is that young girls grow up in an environment in which a premariatal pregnancy does not lead to ostracism from the family home and neither does it threaten the support they can expect from it.

Looking further at what it means for a young black girl to have a baby today is instructive. If she is at school she may be forced to leave, but often only for the rest of the academic year. It is standard practice for girls to return to finish their schooling after the birth of a child, in some cases even at the same school. Her mother usually cares for the baby, or it joins the other youngstes in the household. In some cases it was found that the father of the baby gave money to the family of the girl specifically for a nurserymaid to be employed to release the young mother to continue her education. So high is the value placed on schooling and postschool training that pregnancy is not allowed to jeopardize it. If the parents can afford to keep the girl at school, arrangements are soon made for the care of the baby. In this fact lies yet another, and perhaps the major conscious reason why girls are not afraid to fall pregnant; it will not inevitably spell the end of their education and their hopes of a professional status or of earning a reasonable wage in the future. Parents are so aware of the need for their daughters to secure their "certificates" that they make sacrifices to this end—one of them being to care for the baby—which burden usually falls on the shoulders of the girl's mother.

If a pregnant girl can still look forward to a career or at least to finishing school, she can also still look forward to securing a good marriage. In fact there is a good chance that she may even have enhanced her marriageability marginally by showing that she can bear a child. Some girls admitted to falling pregnant in the hopes that the father of the child would marry them; however their aim was not to "trap" the man (as it might be considered among white South Africans), but to show their fertility and so suggest their desirability as a wife. This is another point that will be discussed in greater detail later. Suffice it to point out here that if the girl subsequently marries, her child may either be left with her parents or accompany her. If her husband is the guardian of the child, the latter is, of course, standard practice. Sometimes a man may claim his natural child by passing "cattle" (either in money or in kind) to legitimize his claim but refuse to marry the mother. The point is that a number of possibilities are open and although teenage pregnancy is by no means an unstressful situation, it is not irreparable.

**ROLE MODELS FOR 'SINGLE PARENTHOOD'**

Yet another aspect presents itself for consideration. It has already been established that children outside marriage are a commonplace occurrence in black families. These births are by no means confined to social drop-outs or to a few mavericks who willfully flout convention. Some of the most successful and respected women in the urban black community have not married, but have children. To be unmarried and have a child does not blight one's future as it does or once did in a number of other cultural milieus. Put in sociological jargon, there exist sufficient positive role models for today's black girls not to feel that a child before marriage will jeopardize their chances of being either respected and respectable, if indeed they are concerned about either. From a far more practical point of view, teenagers see unmarried women rearing their children in nice homes with all the trappings of material comfort. Neither the fate of perpetual poverty nor ostracism thus presents itself as the inevitable result of falling pregnant before marriage. What is now generally referred to as 'single parenthood' has in effect been part and parcel of black community life and ideology for some time.

If the perspective of teenagers is by no means negative with regard to having a child before marriage, it must be noted that many parents find themselves, if not exactly in agreement, at least taught on the horns of a dilemma between the ideal and reality. Although in theory solidly and vociferously critical of teenage pregnancy when it occurs in their own homes, most realize that however disappointed they are, it does not mean that their daughters have no joins of achieving either respectability or material success, education, marriage and a home of their own. For mothers who themselves were not married, the situation is particularly complex and potentially conflict-ridden. The ideal and the realities of life are before them in stark contrast and it is impossible to condemn outright what they have themselves experienced and, in many cases, weath-
ered successfully.

This brings us to a characteristic feature of the contemporary urban scene to which serious consideration must be given. While we believe that for most young women reared in town, marriage is a predominant value, there are an increasing number of black women who take a more jaundiced view of the prospects which marriage holds out for happiness and long-term security (Hellman 1974; Van der Vliet 1982:228-247). Most of these women have been married and either through widowhood, divorce or abandonment by their husbands have been forced to make their own way and support their children virtually single-handedly. Many have not only done this successfully but would resent having to submit themselves to the control of a husband. Other women who have achieved professional status or have built up flourishing businesses also state openly that marriage is "just a trap" and "a woman is better off alone". Some are the mothers of teenage daughters for whom, as suggested above, they provide a major role model. Few, if any, would, however, subscribe to the view that they should not have children. It is by no means only white feminists who, while they argue on theoretical grounds that the cultural odds are weighted against women in marriage, nonetheless want children. Many black women feel exactly the same. In order to understand their viewpoint, however, further common cultural attitudes to the bearing and rearing of children, as well as the related issue of birth and fertility in relation to marriage have to be explored.

Subsequently it is necessary to move beyond the experiential realities of teenage pregnancy itself and the female view, and focus on the wider cognitive universe which women and girls share with other people, young and old, male and female. It is here that the force of a broad spectrum of cultural values will be apparent. In order to highlight these values and show how they operate to influence behaviour in the black community, they may be compared with the corresponding cultural models found in the white South African community and with the typical behaviour to which these give rise in the case of young white girls who fall pregnant.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEARING CHILDREN

In the black community as a whole an extremely high value is placed on children for and in themselves. This is seldom appreciated by white South Africans and especially by social workers and medical personnel who have been professionally socialized to put the macroproblems of overpopulation before the cultural dictates of individual preference and desire. It is also difficult for many Westerners to appreciate the cultural nuances implicit in the fact that the bearing of a child may be seen in a positive light even when the parents are not married. Indeed there is a sense in which the value placed upon children is so high in the black community that marriage is, in some contexts, quite irrelevant to bearing a child.

This is not to suggest that in general, marriage is not regarded as the appropriate arena for birth. It is. But failing marriage, children have a value in themselves which cannot be gainsaid. This is clear in the desire of women who either decide not to marry or who, as they get older and face the probability that they will not marry, decide to have a child. During the first encounters the authors had with this view, they spoke to single women in domestic service about their future and found that all of them were greatly preoccupied with having a baby. "Who else will care for me in my old age?" asked one woman pragmatically. Another put it more emotionally when she said succinctly, "You must have a baby if you are getting older otherwise people will think you can't and pity you". Although, as noted above, today's white feminists might agree about the need for a child, they would not, perhaps, couch it in the same terms. This is probably because in the wider Western cultural view having a baby is still largely seen as dependent on or inextricably linked to marriage. Although there are exceptional cases, some of which receive a good deal of publicity in the popular press and in women's magazines aimed at a predominantly white South African readership, in fact few white women, at least in South Africa, choose to conceive a child in the knowledge that they will rear it alone.

In the case of the black community many women do rear children alone. Even those whose marriages last may find themselves bearing the brunt of support and child care, and for those who do not marry or whose marriages offer less than lifelong security, children and child care is a major preoccupation. One could go so far as to suggest that the bearing and rearing of children have taken on the parameters of an institution in itself. Marriage is something which is liked if it occurs—but if it does not, life goes on and takes another route. This naturally happens in many communities, until relatively recently in Western history spinsters were at a disadvantage and pitied. If a black woman is single, she is not necessarily regarded as being badly off, nor does she regard herself as to be pitied, provided she has a child.

A CONCEPTUAL BREAK BETWEEN BIRTH AND MARRIAGE?

One would suggest that what has been described above may be best conceptualized as the existence of a cognitive break between birth and marriage. While in other and most pertinently in both white South African cultural traditions and Zulu concepts of the past the two important arenas of experience associated with birth and marriage were largely linked or the existence of the one presumed the other, today they may belong to different domains of action. Not only does the one not necessarily presume the other, but each has different correlates and each is entered into for different reasons and in a different manner. Each of these behavioural fields and their controlling cultural models will next be discussed in detail.

(e) Marriage and its concomitants

Marriage in the black community is invariably accompanied by ilobolo, which consists of the passing of a sizeable gift in money or cattle from the groom and his family to the father of the bride. In return the bride's family provide umabo which constitutes a reciprocal gift and seals the bond created between the two families by the marriage (De Haas 1987). Both presentations and other incidental but often costly gift giving are accompanied by feasting and a show of unusual and, considering the resources of many black families, even extreme hospitality. It is often said by both outside observers and the people concerned that the necessity of making marriage payments delays marriage and may even, in the long term, mitigate against it ever taking place. This is an extreme view and the indications are that when people are serious about marriage, the expenses are met by savings in other areas of social life which are made gladly.

What is clear is that marriage is not undertaken lightly and it is an action which is also seldom entered into by the groom on his own. His family has to back and assist him both in meeting the costs of providing hospitality and in amassing the bridewealth itself. Similarly the parents of
girl have to finance their side of the transaction and in both cases, because the kin are so heavily involved in providing the bulk of the costs of marriage, they may have an influence in the choice of spouse. The personal attractions of the girl for the man concerned may in some cases, therefore, have a lesser part to play in the final choice of marriage partner than is expected in Western marriage. The negotiations for any marriage, furthermore, take a long time and have to be done in a circumscribed manner. To force a hurried marriage simply because a girl is pregnant is no part of the usual or approved pattern. In short, this is why so few black parents take the cultural route preferred by many white South African parents in the case of a teenage pregnancy—a hasty marriage before the baby arrives. In the case of the parents of some black girls there is, furthermore, the matter of preparation for seduction to be considered even before the illebolo negotiations can be thought about.

In summary, when one follows the process of bringing a marriage about in the black community it will be found to be not only a serious and lengthy business, but one which is entered into for pragmatic as well as emotional reasons. There is often a great deal of economic manoeuvring to be done on all sides and especially on the part of the groom and his family who, initially at least, are seen as having the greater financial burden to face. Indeed it is they who open negotiations and call the pace of the proceedings by their bridewealth contributions. It is therefore not easy for the family of a pregnant girl to hasten a marriage, unless of course they are willing to forego bridewealth and all the other much-valued marriage formalities. A “shotgun” wedding is not a preferred option and seldom, if ever, takes place.

(b) Sex relations outside marriage

In contrast to the public nature and group complexion of marriage, sexual attraction and non-marital sexual relationships, including those which constitute a fairly long-term commitment between two young people, are largely their own affair. In the rural areas early sexual encounters and what is often referred to as “courting” (Krige 1936) are sometimes monitored by older teenagers in the neighbourhood, but in town schoolmates seem to encourage rather than caution sexual involvements. This is not an area in which the black child usually interferes or thinks it is their duty to exercise vigilance and control. As they put it, they are embarrassed to discuss these matters with their teenage children and a girl does not introduce her boyfriend to her parents even if she is proud of him and has every confidence that he will marry her. Both she and they await the visit of the abakoni or marriage go-between who acts on behalf of the man’s family and whose task it is to negotiate the amount of bridewealth acceptable to the girl’s people.

Most parents, and mothers in particular, warn girls to “stay away from boys” but take few active steps either in explaining the “facts of life” to youngsters or guiding their interaction with men and boys. When it comes to their own daughters they turn a blind eye to what they acknowledge is a very real and widespread problem. In the case of boys mothers usually say that they could not even approach the topic and fathers, if anything, actually encourage sexual experimentation in their sons. In fact it is expected that boys will seek sexual relationships with girls and the boy who does not is ridiculed. The double standard is exposed in the fact that when a man’s daughter becomes pregnant, he is outraged, but when his son makes a girl pregnant, he may be secretly (and even overtly) pleased, and although he may grumble about the indwana, he usually helps to pay it fairly philosophically. Among his peers a boy who

has many girlfriends and who is known to have fathered a child or a number of children is approved and his father often shares this attitude. The emphasis is therefore towards rather than against teenage sexual involvement before marriage. Boys are positively encouraged in this direction and for most girls, little practical guidance or overt understanding of the pressures to which they are subjected is available.

The relationship between a girl and a boy who are “going together” is invariably one involving full intercourse. Some teenagers and especially those who are the members of strict churches with active youth programmes, do try to practise abstinence. Some succeed at least for a while, but as will become apparent later, the odds are stacked against them for the majority of their peers follow different standards. In the case of girls who have boyfriends from outside their church, the pressures build up because many boys demand full intercourse as proof of the girl’s faithfulness to them. Boys (and older men also) aver that a girl, to quote one informant, “who is refusing one man is likely to be going with another”. Boys and young men are open to pressure to show that they are sexually capable. In the rural areas there is some evidence to suggest that children from conservative homes are still schooled in the practice of ukusona, that is, intercultural intercourse, but in Christian homes this was stopped long ago in favour of chastity. Now that this has ceased to be a widespread reality, teenagers are caught in a complex circle of pressure and counter-pressure and the result seems almost inevitable—teenage pregnancy.

(c) But what of contraception?

A purely pragmatic response to the above assertion might be that pregnancy is by now the inevitable result of intercourse. Contraceptive measures are available and the question then arises why few teenagers seem to make use of these. The provision of contraceptives to teenagers is by no means an uncontroversial issue—even in the white community—and many black parents, like their white counterparts, raise major objections to allowing young girls free access to contraceptive clinics and more so to the provision of contraceptives at schools. Their reasons range from those based on morality to a fear that contraception will encourage sexual freedom and experimentation and, in many cases, that it will impair future fertility.

It is the last objection that should receive particular attention for it is part and parcel of a set of interlocking cultural values which have already been referred to in this paper. These values are the love of and a desire for children either within or outside marriage and the emphasis upon and approval and encouragement of male sexuality. Both are derived (as does the fear that a girl may lose the ability to bear children), from the paramount importance which is placed on fertility in the black community and which is conclusively demonstrated in pregnancy and birth. It is this value which not only lies behind and makes understandable the refusal of parents to allow young girls access to easy contraception but which consistently pushes teenagers themselves in the direction of pregnancy.

FERTILITY AS A CULTURAL VALUE

It is but seldom that all or even most ordinary people can explain to an outsider the essence of their most dearly held values. It is in action that these are expressed and it is from the observation of behaviour that the anthropologist first picks up clues as to what is regarded as important in any society or community. In building up a picture of the culture, or as culture has been defined here, of the rules that govern behaviour, people’s statements about why they did
things and their descriptions of the events leading to their decisions often indicate both their perception of the existence of alternative models for action and the pressures under which decisions about how to act were finally made. In the case of the teenagers under discussion it is unlikely that any would have said to the research team that they and their peers and parents valued fertility highly. However, many of their descriptions of how and why they became pregnant, clearly pointed in this direction.

When a 17-year-old girl who had had a baby the year before, was interviewed, she told the researchers the following: "I know I might get a baby and the sister at school warned me also, but I had been going with my boyfriend for over a year and my girlfriends were beginning to laugh at me. They whispered that I must be inyumba, that is how you say, sterile; even my boyfriend asked why I was not having a baby. Then when I did get pregnant my mother and father were very cross but I was pleased as it showed everyone I can have a baby after all." This testimony was by no means an isolated one. In fact the majority of younger girls interviewed in Kwamasha volunteered the fact that they felt it was important to get the reputation of being infertile, and much the same motivation lay behind the decision of another girl, this time one of over 20, to stop using contraception. She said, "I was once taking the pill. My employer didn't want me to have a baby and introduced me to the clinic. But then my boyfriend found out. He was mad and threw the box away. Then I got an injection but my periods stopped and one of my friends said wasn't I afraid I would never have a baby? The sister at the clinic had said it would be O.K. but I still wondered and I never went back."

It is not only among young unmarrieds that attitudes such as these are widespread. The mother of a teenager who was herself on contraception echoed the fear of infertility when she said, "It is all right for me. I don't want more babies but I would rather Sibongile (her daughter) had the baby than went for the injection. You don't menstruate and that means you can't get a baby. What if that goes on and she never has one?" This statement is a forcible reminder of the remarks quoted above of older single women who desperately wanted to have a child and, particularly of the one who spoke about the fear of being suspected of infertility. All these cases indicate the positive emphasis which is placed on fertility in the black community in general and on the fact that the bearing of children is seen as an essential part of being and achieving success as a woman.

When faced with evidence which points to the existence of a fundamental value in the area under investigation, the anthropologist turns to the literature both for corroboration and for any additional insights it may offer. In this case, the ethnographic record is quite explicit. Fertility and health were, and it is clear from contemporary research, still are major foci of concern in daily life and religion in many Zulu-speaking communities (Krige 1936). To take only the more recent field studies, both Ngubane (1977) and Berglund (1976) have documented the predominant value placed in rural situations on the demonstration of fertility in both humans and nature and have shown the lengths to which people go to ensure successful reproduction and mitigate its failure. The work of both authors has, moreover, demonstrated the intimate relationship between the ancestors and the fertility of their descendants which they are believed to both desire and control. Although the majority of the people interviewed were Christians, the value placed on fertility was clearly present, children being seen as the "gift of God". From the research on black Christian churches, much of which was carried out in KwaMashu and its surrounding areas, it is furthermore clear that the emphasis on health is present in town as in the rural areas and that fertility is seen as an intimate component of general health and well-being (Sundkler 1961; 1976).

In contrast, white South African perceptions of fertility, although also generally positive, are tempered by the spectre of overpopulation and the largely urban middle-class value of a small family. Attitudes are neither so unfailingly positive nor, with the exception of the members of some churches, is fertility associated with religious belief and practice. There is in addition an alternative model of female achievement in existence in which the bearing of children is not the sine qua non of either personal or public fulfillment. A single woman and one who does not have children is not necessarily regarded as a failure. Many white South African women indeed choose not to have children and achievement in open competition with men in both professional and business spheres is not only generally recognized as a legitimate female ambition but, in most circles, it is a highly prized and praised course of action. The material presented in this paper, although it indicates that some black women are successfully mastering male domains, also suggests that success in these fields does not entirely compensate for a woman not having children. In comparison with white cultural models, a different and "dual" model of gender achievement for women appears to dominate in the black community. In view of this it is hardly surprising that both black women and black men value evidence of fertility very highly. Nor is it surprising that for even unmarried women and teenage girls pregnancy has a positive side not experienced in the white community. Black girls who bear a child even if they are not married have at least achieved one of the major role expectations into which they have been socialized. In these terms, actively preventing conception would seem an irrational strategy indeed. Taken in combination with the few really negative repercussions following most premarital births, the total picture is strikingly clear—teenage pregnancy is not something to be avoided at all costs—and this fact is of course given reality in the overall lack of a long-term negative reaction both on the part of peers and the community at large to every new birth which occurs.

While the fear either of becoming infertile or even of being branded inyumba are potent reasons why girls do not see any reason to prevent pregnancy, it must be asked if many actively seek to fall pregnant. Some indeed appear to do so. Although the stereotype held by many white South Africans that black men will not marry a woman until she has demonstrated her ability to bear a child is belied by the number of marriages that occur in the absence of children, the proven ability to have a child is, as noted above, widely regarded in a positive light by both men and women, young and old. A number of girls reported that their lovers opened marriage negotiations after a baby had been conceived or born. Most reported that their lovers were pleased and in only a few cases the lovers had responded to the pregnancy by abandoning. The following statement is instructive in this connection: "I was upset and my father was mad at me but the boy was so pleased and so was his mother. When my mother and auntie went to report the matter they were ready with money and spoke nicely to my mother. Then when the baby arrived I took him to visit them and they paid everything. Even now he goes to stay with them and we are saving for the illobolo. The other brother’s wife has only one girl so my boy is spoilt by his Gran."

It is cases such as this and those in which a marriage eventually takes place that encourage girls to take a posi-
tive view of having a baby before marriage. In making this point we have once more moved from values and cultural models to the actual situation in which girls find themselves and to the decisions they make. The influence of what will be referred to as the social context must now be considered in detail, as it is only in this way that one can build up a fully holistic picture of the socio-cultural system. In this case, since the people under discussion are black South Africans, the effects of long-term political and social deprivation provide the basic parameters within which individuals move and in which cultural models and action have to be constantly negotiated. On the other hand, the personal physiological pressures experienced by teenagers who are discovering and exploring sexuality are, if not universal, at least shared by both black and white in South Africa.

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

While culture and the values it enshrines are important in directing people towards certain forms of action, the situation in which one finds oneself at any particular time may be equally decisive for action, or it may at least incline one in a particular direction. Take the following example of a young mother living in a poor home who said, “I left school when I was in Standard 4 because my father lost the job and could not pay the school fees any more. I just stayed at home because nobody wanted me to work for them. But I got very lonely and had nothing to do. Then I saw how nice it was for my friend to have a baby. It was a little girl and she wore nice dresses and people stopped my friend and said what a nice baby. So I thought, why shouldn’t I have a baby too? Maybe my boyfriend will marry me when he loves the baby ... Well it is nice even though that boyfriend has left me, but it is hard to feed my baby and buy her everything.” Clinic nurses report that it is by no means uncommon for young girls with little else to do or to which they can look forward to find the prospect of having a baby appealing. They refer to this as “seeing a baby through rose-coloured spectacles” and one commented, “It is only later that they find out what life is really about!”

There are many, many young black girls and black women who indeed have little to look forward to in life except the fulfilment of the maternal role and a substantial number of them will not marry. In contrast, white girls usually have some possibility of earning a reasonable living in terms both of their generally higher educational achievements and the greater number of job opportunities open to them at present. With her limited education the girl quoted above spoke only broken English, no Afrikaans and had, realistically, very little hope of ever getting more than a poorly paid domestic job. So far she had even failed to keep a position as a daily carer for longer than a few weeks. Here the history and continued reality of black disadvantage in an apartheid society is clear.

The same forces can be seen to be at work in creating the general social environment in which many black teenagers are raised in town. In many of our conversations with both girls and boys the relative ease of arranging meetings emerged. Said one girl, “My parents were strict but I used to creep out of the house when they were asleep. I pretended I was visiting the toilet and often my mother was not at home in the afternoon because she goes selling Tupperware. There are also some bushes on the side of where my boyfriend lives. His mother works as a full-time domestic in Durban and does not come home till late so she never checked on him.” In other instances young people explained how, even if their own parents were strict with them and controlled their activities after school, it was possible to persuade a friend whose home was near their school and whose parents were out all day to let them use a room to meet in at break. “If you really want to you can find a place and if necessary there are always people willing to make a bit of money”, one said.

In many parts of the world teenagers intent on being alone together usually manage by some means or other. Where parents are out a great deal and where earning a living absorbs the energies of both mother and father, these opportunities proliferate. This is the case in many black urban areas and it is well known that few guided recreational facilities are available for children and teenagers in particular. The latter are left to their own devices a good deal of the time and although parents are aware of the problem, there is little they can do about it. This compounds the likelihood that girls will fall pregnant through opportunity as well as inclination. Although many white South African parents also keep less than a strict hand on the teenagers in their family, the fact that there are adequate facilities for keeping the youth off the streets and busy with a range of sporting and other recreational activities helps to direct much of their attention to other pursuits. Said one black girl, “Well, I really didn’t have anything else to do after school and so it was exciting to have a boyfriend.”

To stress the paucity of the social provisions for teenagers in most black urban areas is not, however, to minimize the importance of the many positive pressures to have intercourse which seem to come at them from all sides. The words of a 14-year-old girl who was pregnant and upset because it looked as if she would have to leave school, bring these poignant to the fore. She confessed, “I only did it because he said he would go to another girl if not. In fact he wanted to have sex with me because the other boys were saying he was a child. Now he is pleased because he is a man and having a child.” Her friend who already had a baby commented, “With me it was because my girlfriends told me it was nice to go with a boy and in any case they made fun of me when I was nearly the only one in my class who hadn’t got a proper boyfriend.” Here the influence not only of a persistent lover but of the peer group is clear, as is the influence of the general acceptance of the normality of a full sexual relationship before marriage.

In this connection it is important to realize that most of the teenage boys with whom the matter was discussed pointed out that they believed it to be “unhealthy” not to have regular sexual release. Said one, “You might run mad if not ... all that (semen) goes up into your head and then what?” With fears such as this rife and the overwhelming value placed on sexual performance in men and fertility in women and girls, it is hardly surprising that teenagers find it difficult to take seriously the injunctions of their elders to remain virgin before marriage. “My boyfriend is saving for lobolo but it will take long ... meanwhile what must we do?”

In the last instance there is the effect of their own emotions on teenagers. Take the following statement made by a girl from a strict Christian family whose boyfriend had actually warned her to visit the clinic but who had ignored him “because I was so sure that I will never have sex until I get married. But I was fooling myself. One day I told him that my parents were going away for a day and he can visit me at home. On that day we played mom and dad, we were so free touching, hugging and all that. For some reason I just felt I wanted him the way he wanted me, (then) he wanted to know from me if I have been to the clinic. I could not resist the chance to experience the thing called sex, so I said yes, telling myself it won’t do any harm just
for today. I will go to clinic first thing tomorrow ...Well I think you know the rest..."

Other girls reported similar experiences, and one made the point that although she knew something about babies she was largely ignorant of the full mechanics of sex. "...only my granny told me about menstruation. She wouldn't go further and I was too afraid to be seen going to the clinic." Although it is no longer the case at most clinics in the KwaMashu area, at one time school girls were not allowed to attend without their mothers. Said one girl who had fallen pregnant some years ago, "How could I tell my Mum? She didn't know about my boyfriend and would have killed me if I had asked her to take me to the clinic."

Such are the pressures on today's teenagers and it is clear that, quite apart from any physical enjoyment involved in intercourse, there are good reasons why girls and boys sleep together and do so in most cases without taking precautions against pregnancy.

Subsequently an attempt will be made to assess what the material presented here suggests for the design of intervention programmes aimed at reducing the number of teenage pregnancies in black communities.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It is clear that black teenagers are presented with a number of different and conflicting models for action. Whether parents and the older generation realize it or not, they are saying one thing and sanctioning another. Christian parents speak approvingly of chastity by which they mean abstinence from intercourse before marriage. Even in homes in which parents are not Christians but follow conservative Zulu ways, few girls are taught akusuma and it is only in the strictest homes that girls are examined for virginity. For the teenagers seem to turn a blind eye to the probability that their children are having full sexual relations before marriage and at school. When girls become pregnant they are upset, often outraged, but they take no decisive action to sanction those concerned and in time the child is welcomed into the family and the young mother may even return to complete her education. She may also look forward to a good marriage—if not to the man responsible for her pregnancy, to somebody else who may even take her child into his home. If not, the child stays with her parents and is reared as their own. The crisis is thus accommodated within the domestic unit and, because virtually all families face the problem at some time, both the event itself and the way in which it is coped with have become virtually normal. In addition, in many families some reparation is made for the pregnancy in terms of inhlawulo and contributions to the confinement and maintenance of the child. Teenage pregnancy has, it is suggested, been virtually institutionalized and has taken on all the forms and behaviour patterns of a recurrent or fairly typical stage in the domestic cycle of most families. This is not to say it is liked or given open encouragement—merely that it is rather like the plague in the Middle Ages, something that parents dread but cope with when it occurs.

Added to this is the high value placed on fertility and the bearing of children which provides a compensatory aspect to birth whenever and under whatever circumstances it occurs. This is reflected in the emphasis on male sexuality as well as on the demonstration of female fertility in birth. The role model of the successful single woman who has children and who is neither ostracized nor openly ridiculed is a further encouragement not to avoid pregnancy at all costs. Birth seems to operate in a sphere which in some contexts is quite separate to marriage and the value of children means that although most women would rather bear children within marriage, they see no reason to deny themselves a child simply because they are not married. Birth and marriage, it has been argued, have become separate issues for many women in the black community and herein lies one of the roots of the widespread and pragmatic acceptance of premarital pregnancy. Furthermore, the fact that marriage is regarded as a serious long-term commitment which has major economic and social concomitants involving the families of the couple concerned, makes the forcing of a hasty marriage both inappropriate and highly undesirable. It is for all these reasons that teenage pregnancy has taken on the trappings of an institution, in other words, a set of social forms and behavioural reactions which have a life of their own and continue despite the overt disapproval of a large and influential section of the population. At the cultural level, that is, at the level of "blueprints" for action, teenagers are presented with alternative models for sexual behaviour and have no difficulty in justifying to themselves their neglect of the parent's injunctions against sexual involvement. When a pregnancy befalls a family, as was shown above, there are adequate ways of coping. Once more cultural rules provide guidance and models for action.

MODELS FOR INTERVENTION?

If teenage pregnancies have become "institutionalized", that is, they are tacitly accepted and there are well-charted and not-too-disruptive ways of dealing with them, it is going to be extremely difficult to intervene successfully unless action is directed at the whole institution at once. Encouraging abstinence through pride in chastity falls foul of the value placed on fertility and the need for both men and women to demonstrate their competence in this sphere. The tacit acceptance by parents of the situation and (what form from the perspective of some outsiders seems) their sensible and humane acceptance of the baby into their home, in fact perpetuates the situation since both girls and boys realize that nothing too drastic will result from a premarital pregnancy.

As in most of the "problems" which are identified by "outsiders" rather than by those concerned, it will be necessary for the latter themselves to recognize that there is a problem before it can be addressed fully. If they do not do this there seems to be only two alternatives. In the first instance the "outsiders" could rethink their assessment of the situation as problematic and concentrate on its positive rather than its negative aspects. They might at least try to see it from the point of view of those concerned. In the case of teenage pregnancy this will undoubtedly be an extremely unpopular suggestion and will be received with horror by parents, the church and by social, medical and community services. It flies in the face of all conventional wisdom and, worse still, conventional adult morality. In other words it falls foul not only of one set of dearly held and extremely influential cultural blueprints, but of blueprints which are publicly espoused by those in authority who have the formal influence to encourage or oppose change.

Leaving this option aside then, with what are we left? We believe that intervention programmes will have to be focused as much on the parental and community levels as on teenagers alone and they cannot rely on directing attention to the need for chastity without offering some concrete benefits from this difficult path. Until girls, in particular, can see some good reason not to fall pregnant before marriage, it seems unlikely that they will be sufficiently motivated to ignore and withstand ridicule, peer pressure and personal inclination and either refuse intercourse or use contraception. This is likely to occur only when the very real obstacles
in the way of their earning professional and/or independent economic status on a large scale are removed and black women can find both personal satisfaction and public recognition in the absence of the maternal role. When fertility is no longer the touchstone of gender achievement it may follow that pregnancy may appear to carry with it so many detractions that it becomes something to be avoided rather than welcomed or put up with. What is being looked at is nothing short of a social and cultural revolution, the result of which will be a radically different dispensation for black women, one which allows them to be the decision makers in terms of their own fertility and their own futures. This line of argument is in keeping with findings and prognostications of both demographers and anthropologists who have concerned themselves with the more general problem of fertility control in other Third World situations (Caldwell 1982; Caldwell & Caldwell 1988).

FOOTNOTE

REFERENCES