Parental couple experiences of transracial adoption: A phenomenological study

By

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"I'm tired of hearing from everyone that he is not my child, that he is not my blood. He may not have my eyes, he may not have my smile, he may not have my skin tone, but he has all my heart."

Unknown

ABSTRACT

PARENTAL COUPLE EXPERIENCES OF TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

In South Africa, transracial adoption continues to be an option for many parents wanting to adopt a child. Previous research on transracial adoption has focused mainly on the psychological implications and the racial identity development of transracial adoptees. This qualitative study aimed to explore parental couples' experiences of transracial adoption and was located within a phenomenological framework. In-depth interviews were conducted with three couples and the data were analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Six themes were generated from the data. These include the aspects that were involved in beginning their journey to adoption, the pre and post adoption process, the avenues of support that were available to the participants, important aspects relating to the adopted child, the challenges that were experienced as unique to transracial adoption, and the implications of race in a transracial adoption. The implications of the findings for adoption organisations and future research are discussed.

Keywords

Transracial adoption, phenomenological study, qualitative research, parental couple experiences.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The quickest cure for racism would be to have everyone in the country adopt a child of another race.
No matter what your beliefs, when you hold a four-day-old infant, love him, and care for him, you don't
see skin colour, you see a little person that is very much in need of your love.

(Morrison, 2004, p.163)

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the research undertaken is introduced, followed by the research problem and research question of the study. The justification, aims and objectives of the study are then discussed as well as the theoretical framework, research design and method. Following from this, the concepts used throughout the study are defined and an outline of the chapters is provided. The chapter culminates with a brief summary.

1.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

Transracial adoption continues to be an option for parents wanting to adopt a child in South Africa. The research presented in this study relates specifically to White parental couples who have adopted a Black child. Further details regarding adoption and more specifically transracial adoption in South Africa are discussed in Chapter 2. An in-depth study was conducted exploring parental couples' experiences of transracial adoption using a phenomenological approach. The purpose of the study was to explore and describe the subjective experiences of transracial adoption of parental couples and more specifically, their reasons for choosing adoption, their experiences of the pre and post adoption process, and the challenges that were encountered along the way.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Transracial adoption began in the United States following World War II, due to the number of children in need of a home (Morrison, 2004). Lee (2003) mentions that nearly all of the reviewed research on transracial adoption can be classified as descriptive field studies on either the psychological outcomes or the racial/ethnic identity development of transracial adoptees. Furthermore, the predominant focus of adoption literature has been on the outcomes of adopted

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children; the research has focused on the psychological, intellectual, and physical vulnerabilities and adjustment of adopted children (Brodzinsky & Huffman, 1988; Wegar, 1995). Wegar (1995) suggests that this may have arisen due to the debate in the literature regarding the degree to which adopted children suffer from such vulnerabilities.

When consulting the research on adoption that has been conducted in South Africa, it tends to be scarce and outdated (see e.g. Gishen, 1996; Joubert, 1993; Motsikatsana, 1995; Mokomane & Rochat, 2011). More recent work on transracial adoption in South Africa has been reported in postgraduate studies (see e.g. Attwell, 2004; Finlay, 2006); one was focussed on adoptive and foster parents (in particular mothers) but at the level of discourse and not experience (see Dos Santos, 2013). More work needs to be done on examining the experiences of transracial adoption among adoptive parents.

In light of the above-mentioned the problem formulation for this research study is that there is insufficient understanding of the experiences of parents who adopt a child transracially in South Africa. Also, the focus tends to be on the adopted child as well as individuals (mainly mothers of the adopted child) and their experiences. The experiences that a couple have of transracial adoption may contribute useful information to what is known about this phenomenon. The researcher therefore seeks to explore the experiences of parental couples who have adopted a child transracially.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question stemmed from the researcher's interest in adoptive parent's experiences of transracial adoption which started when the researcher was a volunteer at a child protection and adoption organisation in Johannesburg, assisting with the children by playing with them, feeding them, taking them on outings and engaging in the "buddy programme" in which a volunteer is paired with a child until he/she is adopted. The researcher also had the opportunity to meet a number of adoptive parents who were adopting a child transracially through the organisation. Having spent time getting to know the children and their adoptive parents and observing their interactions while volunteering, the researcher questioned what the parents' experiences of adopting a child transracially were (for further information on this see Reflection Box 1). Furthermore, the researcher has a personal connection to adoption as two of her first cousins are adopted, the one being a bi-racial adoption in which one biological parent is of the same race as the adoptive parents and the other biological parent is of a different race; thus creating a multi-racial family unit.

Given the gap in the literature about parental couples' experiences of transracial adoption and the researcher's own questions about the phenomenon, the over-arching research question for this study is:

- What are the experiences of parental couples who have adopted a child transracially?

Furthermore, in order to focus into the experiences of the participants, four additional research sub-questions were explored, namely:

- What led these parental couples to adopt transracially?

- What were their experiences of the adoption process?

- What were their experiences after placement?

- Were any challenges experienced pre-adoption and post-adoption?

Reflective Box 1:

Having the opportunity to observe adoptive families while volunteering, I have seen some positive experiences, but I have also seen some of the challenges that are faced with adoption. I have observed some of the frustrations attributed to the adoption process, the excitement and anticipation of meeting the child for the first time and the fears surrounding bonding with the child. I have observed the pure joy of the creation of a family via adoption as well as the concerns of what lies ahead. As such, I felt that I wanted to gain further insight into transracial adoption from the parent's perspective as a means to give their stories a voice within the adoptive community and beyond so as to allow for a better understanding of what encompasses the transracial adoption journey.

1.5 JUSTIFICATION, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

In this section the justification, aims and objectives of the current study are delineated.

1.5.1 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Due to South Africa's political past transracial adoption was only legalised in South Africa in June 1991 and it is likely that there may be experiences of adopting transracially that are unique to this country. In this regard Kahn (2006) states that "...while there is the availability of more information written for overseas readers, there is limited research available that takes our unique South African context into consideration" (p. 3). South Africa and its people have both a unique history and a diverse culture and it is important that professionals in the humanities understand social matters in the

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framework of South Africa's uniqueness (Kahn, 2006). Thus, in order to facilitate the transracial adoption process here in South Africa, an understanding of what brings parental couples to the process as well as what the process both pre and post adoption entails, is crucial.

1.5.2 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of parental couples who have adopted a child transracially. In this regard, the study may provide potential adoptive parents with insight into transracial adoption and could provide information to adoption organisations for better preparing parents who are wanting to adopt a child transracially. Furthermore, the availability of more information about the experiences encountered along the way could ease the transitional process for new adoptive parents as well.

1.5.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the study are:

- To describe the experiences of parental couples who have adopted a child transracially both pre and post adoption

- To explore the reasons for choosing adoption

- To identify the challenges that are encountered pre and post adoption

- To make recommendations to adoption organisations in order to improve the information available to prospective transracially adopting parents and ease the transitional process

1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework chosen for this study is interpretive phenomenology. Benner (1994) states that, "the interpretive researcher creates a dialog between practical concerns and lived experience through engaged reasoning and imaginative dwelling in the immediacy of the participants' worlds" (p. 99). Interpretive phenomenology was thus employed by the researcher with the aim to understand what a given experience was like (phenomenology) and how the participants made sense of it (interpretation). It was therefore utilised in the current study on the basis of wanting to understand how the parental couples make meaning of their lived experiences of transracial adoption.

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative research approach was selected for the current study as the researcher felt that it would be appropriate considering the proposed research aims. These aims required a rich and in-

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depth exploration and understanding of transracial adoption experienced by the parental couples. As such, qualitative research enabled the researcher to produce a rich description of the phenomenon in the participants own words and from the participant's subjective experiences (Austin & Sutton, 2014).

There are a number of qualitative research approaches that can be utilised. The current study utilised a phenomenological approach. Lester (1999) contends that "phenomenological methods are particularly effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives, and therefore at challenging structural or normative assumptions" (p. 1). The researcher thus chose phenomenology as it considers the person in their entirety and values their experiences.

Data was collected through in-depth interviews with three couples in which each couple was interviewed together. An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was then conducted. After the interviews with the couples, their experiences were constructed in terms of themes. The themes that were identified are discussed in detail in Chapter 4. These themes were then linked to relevant literature which is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

1.8 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

In this sub-section, fundamental concepts used in this study are defined. This is done in order to clarify the context in which the concepts are used in this study, as they may differ from other contexts.

1.8.1 ADOPTION

Adoption can be defined as "A formal process by means of which parental power over a child is terminated, and vested in another person or persons, namely the adoptive parent(s)" (Barnard, Cronje, & Olivier, 1987, p. 279). Within the context of this dissertation, the term adoption refers to the legal proceeding that creates a parent-child relation between persons not related by blood through the intention of the birthparents to terminate their parental rights. There are a number of types of adoption options available in South Africa which include the following: related adoption (adoption of a child by a person who is related to the child and includes step-parent adoptions); disclosed adoption (where the identity of the biological and adoptive parent/s is known); closed adoption (no identifying details are available between the adoptive parents and biological parent/s); national adoption (a legal adoption facilitated by an accredited adoption social worker and/or organisation where both the adoptive child and parent/s are South African citizens or have

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permanent residence in South Africa); intraracial adoption (where the race of the adoptive parent/s and child is the same); transracial adoption (where the race of the child and adoptive parent/s differ); and intercountry adoption (where either the child or parents are not South African citizens) (National Adoption Coalition South Africa [NACSA], 2016).

1.8.2 TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION

Gishen (1996) defines transracial adoption as "any person/s adopting a child whose race is dissimilar to their own" (p. 5). Therefore, for the purpose of this study the definition of transracial adoption will refer to a specific subtype of this more global definition and is more narrowly defined as the domestic adoption of a Black child by a legally married or cohabitating couple in which both partners are White.

1.8.3 RACE

James (2016) contends that race as a term has been used to divide humanity into smaller groups which are based on the following five criteria:

(1) Races reflect some type of biological foundation, be it Aristotelian essences or modern genes; (2) This biological foundation generates discrete racial groupings, such that all and only all members of one race share a set of biological characteristics that are not shared by members of other races; (3) This biological foundation is inherited from generation to generation, allowing observers to identify an individual's race through her ancestry or genealogy; (4) Genealogical investigation should identify each race's geographic origin, typically in Africa, Europe, Asia, or North and South America; and (5) This inherited racial biological foundation manifests itself primarily in physical phenotypes, such as skin colour, eye shape, hair texture, and bone structure, and perhaps also behavioural phenotypes, such as intelligence or delinquency (para. 1).

The historical concept of race has been challenged both from a scientific and philosophical point of view; with some people disagreeing with the concept of race, viewing it as socially constructed instead of as a biologically based term (Yudell, 2009). This has led to controversy surrounding the term itself.

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Apartheid was the system of racial categorization that was implemented in South Africa in 1948 (Seekings, 2007). The Population Registration Act, no 30. of 1950 stipulated that all South Africans be classified according to one of three basic racial groups: White, Native, and Coloured. A fourth category, Indian/Asian, was added and the term "native" was replaced by the terms "Bantu/Black" (Seekings, 2007). Despite the eradication of apartheid, race continues to have a powerful presence in contemporary South Africa. The Nelson Mandela Foundation (NMF, 2015) maintains that "race is still a critical fault line in South Africa's social landscape; a fault line separating people and cleaving the hearts of individuals" (para. 3). Post-apartheid, South Africa continues to display racial inequalities especially with regards to socio-economic indicators (Booysen, 2016) such as; income, employment status, and education levels. As such, in the past, population groups based on race were used to separate and harm sections of the population. The current use of population groups as a way of classifying the population has been accepted as an effective measure of previous socio-economic deprivation (Dorrington, Moultrie, & Timæus, 2004). Therefore, its current use is to integrate and create more equality. Thus, in terms of this study, race refers to a group of people identified as distinct from other groups because of supposed physical or genetic traits shared by the group, for example, skin colour, eye colour, and hair texture because it allowed the researcher to explore the phenomenon of transracial adoption which is based on adopting a child from a race that is different from that of the adoptive parents. More specifically, the current study explores the experiences of White couples who have adopted a Black child.

1.8.4 CULTURE

Sir Edward B. Tylor (1871) was the first person who specified that culture is learned and acquired, as opposed to being a biological trait. This was in contrast to the dominant ideologies of the 19th century. His definition is also one of the first anthropological definitions of culture. Tylor maintained that "Culture... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society" (p. 1). Culture typically is thought of as though it were attached to or identified with particular groups or societies or peoples. Furthermore, although comparing one culture to another will highlight differences; all cultures share elements that are common and are known as cultural universals (Little, 2013).

South Africa is described as embodying multicultural diversity and has been referred to as the "Rainbow Nation" (Afolayan, 2004). Furthermore, the recognition of 11 official languages in the Constitution, as well as a unique hybrid national anthem which employs the five most widely spoken of the 11 official languages, provides an indication of South Africa's diversity (Ramsay, 2006). According to the mid-year population estimates for South Africa in 2016, the population was made up by the following group percentages: African 80.7, Coloured 8.8, Indian/Asian 2.5, White 8.1 (Statistics South Africa, 2016). These estimates highlight the multicultural dimensions that embody the cultural diversity within the country. As Abdel-Fattah (2012) contends, "We are, at almost every point of our day, immersed in cultural diversity: faces, clothes, smells, attitudes, values, traditions, behaviours, beliefs, rituals" (para. 3). In the current study, culture will refer to the way of life of a specific group of people and encompasses language, religion, values, customs, and beliefs of a particular group of people.

1.8.5 HERITAGE

South African History Online (2016) maintains that "a person's heritage is made up of the practices and traditions that are passed on from parents to children. Heritage is also about what has been passed on from the family, community and place where people have been raised" (p. 1). It is seen as an essential part of culture as a whole and can be expressed as either tangible or intangible (Feather, 2006). It is manifested through tangible forms such as artefacts, buildings or landscapes and also through intangible forms. Intangible heritage includes values, traditions, and oral history. Furthermore it is expressed through cuisine, clothing, forms of shelter, traditional skills and technologies, religious ceremonies, and performing arts. Thus, in this study heritage refers to the practices and ways of living that are handed down from past generations.

1.8.6 PARENTAL COUPLE

In terms of this study, a parental couple refers to two people who are legally married or in a cohabiting relationship in which the partners have legally adopted a child that is of a different race to their own. The study further includes homosexual and heterosexual partners as part of this definition, although the three couples in the study were heterosexual.

1.9 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

Chapter 1 serves as the introductory chapter and presents the context of the study.

Chapter 2 centres on the consideration of the relevant literature, deliberating on noteworthy aspects pertinent to the study.

Chapter 3 explores the research methodology, including the rationale for employing the specified methodology.

Chapter 4 focuses on the results of the study, including an exploration of the super-ordinate themes in relation to the participant's unique experiences.

Chapter 5 merges the results with relevant literature, providing an integrated account of the results obtained in terms of new, dissimilar, and consistent themes. The chapter also provides a discussion of the recommendations. Furthermore, the researcher's reflections are described as well as the limitations of the study.

1.10 CONCLUSION

In this chapter an overview of the research was provided. Attention was then given to the research problem in which the available research both internationally and locally was explored. Following this was a brief description of the research questions. The justification, aim and objectives of the study were then stated as well as the theoretical framework, research design, and research method. Thereafter, the definition of important concepts was stated as well as the chapter outline.

The following chapter provides a discussion of the literature relevant to adoption and transracial adoption both locally and internationally. Furthermore, the chapter will describe the theoretical underpinnings of phenomenology.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

I didn't give you the gift of life, but in my heart I know.

The love I feel is deep and real, as if it had been so.

For us to have each other is like a dream come true!

No, I didn't give you the gift of life;

Life gave me the gift of you.

Unknown

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on introducing the reader to the study. This chapter is aimed at providing a review of the relevant literature and is organised around the following topics: A brief overview of transracial adoption in South Africa, overview of the adoption process, transracial adoption at present, the term transracial adoption, reasons for adopting a child transracially, experiences involved in the transracial adoption process, and the experiences encountered after placement. Following from this, the theoretical underpinnings of phenomenology are addressed and the chapter concludes with a summary.

2.2 OVERVIEW OF THE ADOPTION PROCESS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Adoption can be defined as "the legal process by which the rights and responsibilities of parenthood are transferred, on a permanent basis, from a child's birth parents to another individual or family" (Thompson & Thompson, 2008, p. 160). Adoption, as it is practised today, epitomises a strong degree of social purpose; the primary aim of which being the attempt to fulfil the need to provide a stable home for a child (Mokgoro, 2002).

Adoption was for the first time legally regulated in South Africa when the Adoption of Children Act 25 of 1923 came into effect (Ferreira, 2009). The aim of the Adoption of Children Act was solely to provide for the adoption of children (Ferreira, 2009). According to Joubert (1993) the implementation of the Act was to create an institution in which the existing legal bonds between a child and its biological parents or guardians could be dissolved and a new legal bond created between the adoptive parents and the adopted child.

In South Africa, the criteria for adopting a child are specified in the Children's Act (2005). According to the criteria, a child may be adopted:

1. jointly by a husband and wife (who are classified as)

    o partners in a permanent domestic life-partnership, or

    o people sharing a common household and forming a permanent family unit,

2. by a widower, widow, divorced or unmarried person,

3. by a married person whose spouse is the parent of the child,

4. by the biological father of a child born out of wedlock, or

5. by the foster parent of the child.

Furthermore, prospective adoptive parents need to meet the following criteria to be considered eligible to adopt a child (Children's Act, 2005):

 2) A prospective adoptive parent must be:

    a) fit and proper to be entrusted with full parental responsibilities and rights in respect

        of the child;

    b) willing and able to undertake, exercise and maintain those responsibilities and

        rights;

    c) over the age of 18; and

    d) properly assessed by an adoption social worker for compliance with paragraphs (a)

        and (b).

In South Africa, the only way in which you can legally adopt a child is by contacting an accredited adoption agency, or with the assistance of an adoption social worker functioning within the statutory accredited adoption system (NACSA, 2016). When working through an adoptive agency, prospective parents are required to submit an application as each agency tends to have their own set of requirements. Taking all the criteria into consideration, the adoption process can be a long and tiresome journey as all prospective adoptive parents are also required to undergo a screening and preparation process. The screening process usually involves orientation meetings, interviews with a social worker, full medical examinations, marriage assessments (where applicable), and psychological assessments, home visits, police clearance, and references (NACSA, 2016). The screening process provides the social worker with the opportunity to get to know prospective adopters as a family, their reason for wanting to adopt, and their capacity to provide the child with a safe and

stable environment. Once the screening process is complete, prospective parents are placed on a waiting list for a child. Prospective parents may also have their own preferences about the child they wish to adopt (NACSA, 2016). They may have certain preferences in terms of the age and sex of the baby or child they would like to adopt, as well as the race and level of disability, and adoption agencies try to meet those personal expectations (Morrison, 2004). Specifically, when it comes to adopting a child in South Africa, parents do have a choice about the prospective adoptee's age, sex and race. However, the more specific parents are, the longer it may take the social worker or agency to match the child according to the parents' requirements. Some adoption agencies prefer working with prospective parents who are open to adopting any child (Morrison, 2004).

The official placement of the child with the adoptive parents is a legal process that is carried out through the Children's Court. Once the child has been in the care of the adoptive parents for a period of time, and the social worker has assessed the adoption to be in the best interests of the child, the adoption is finalised through the Children's Court (Department of Social Development, 2016). The child then becomes the legal child of the adoptive parents as if the child was born to them and has all the same rights as their biological child (Department of Social Development, 2016).

2.3 TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION

In the sub-sections that follow, the term transracial adoption is described, a brief overview of transracial adoption in South Africa and at present is provided, and the reasons for adopting transracially as well as the experiences involved in transracial adoption and the experiences after placement are considered.

2.3.1 THE TERM "TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION"

The term "transracial adoption" is seen "as originating from adoptive and academic circles and has been used to describe the lived experience of children raised in homes with a racial background different from that of their birth parents" (Espindola, 2011, p. 4). Krob (2012) contends that "while defining transracial adoption may seem simple; much of the discourse surrounding the topic misses the mark" (p. 102). He goes on to say that while many of the definitions are correct, they do not address the common misjudgements that arise with regards to the use and understanding of the term. Looking at the general perception of the term, it is normally associated with White parents adopting Black children (Krob, 2012). This is seen on various platforms, for example, The American Adoption Congress (2016) goes on to state that "transracial" or "transcultural" usually refer to the

placement of children of colour or children from another country with Caucasian adoptive parents. However, transracial adoption occurs when parents of any race adopt a child of any different race (Espindola, 2011), for example: White American parents who adopt an Asian or Hispanic child (Lee, 2003) and not solely the adoption of Black children by White parents. It is thus important when discussing transracial adoption to acknowledge that it is not unidirectional. This is supported by Stolley (1993) who maintains that "White families adopting Black children may be more common, but the disparity is not so pronounced that it would justify treating transracial adoption as a unidirectional phenomenon" (p. 34). It is thus important to be aware of the misconceptions that may arise when the term transracial adoption is taken for granted.

2.3.2 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

In terms of transracial adoption in South Africa, The Children's Amendment Act of 1965 stipulated that a child shall not be placed in the custody of any person whose classification in terms of the Population Registration Act, 1950, is not the same as that of the child except where such person is the parent or guardian of the child. Thus because of the addition of the subsection mentioned above, a child would not have been placed in the custody of a person of a different race to the child even with the biological mother's consent to such a placement.

Throughout the 1980s this stipulation remained in place and race-matching became the norm in terms of child adoptions (Zaal, 1994). However, with the collapse of apartheid and the removal of the above-mentioned subsection, adopting a child transracially was legalised in South Africa in June 1991. With regards to the transracial adoption of a child in South Africa, at the present moment, The Children's Act, no 38. of 2005 section 231(3), stipulates that in the assessment of a prospective adoptive parent, an adoption social worker may take the cultural and community diversity of the adoptable child and prospective adoptive parent into consideration. Furthermore, section 240(1)(a) stipulates that all relevant factors, including religious and cultural backgrounds of the child, the biological parents, and the prospective parents need to be taken into consideration. Adoption of a child by someone of a different racial classification to the child is not prohibited in terms of the current Act. In fact, the current Act does not list race as a factor in respect of adoption or the child's best interests. It is thus up to the discretion of the social worker to decide whether or not a transracial placement would be in the best interests of the particular child.

2.3.3 TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION AT PRESENT

When looking at transracial adoption in South Africa at present, it can be considered unique in that it differs from countries such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand and America where transracial adoption involves parents from the majority group adopting children from minority groups. In South Africa, it is parents from the minority adopting children transracially from the majority group (Doubell, 2014). Furthermore, Mokomane and Rochat (2011) found that in terms of race, White children are more readily adopted in South Africa than their Black, Indian and Coloured counterparts. It is however indicated that the large majority of adoptable children are Black and in contrast to the population of adoptable children, it is noted that within the population of prospective adoptive parents, the Black community are largely under-represented (Mokomane & Rochat, 2011). In other words, in South Africa there are not enough Black adoptive couples willing, able, or available to adopt Black children. There are a number of reasons for this, ranging from socioeconomic disparity to cultural norms to familial beliefs and traditions. These numbers can be seen when looking at the most recent review of the Registry of Adoptable Children & Parents. As at November 2013 there were 297 unmatched parents registered: 14 Black, 190 White and 43 Indian, the remainder were unspecified (Blackie, 2014). In terms of the available children, there are 428 unmatched children available for adoption: 398 Black, 3 White, 9 termed 'Mixed race', the remainder are unspecified (Blackie, 2014).

So at present, the majority of children available for adoption are Black, and the majority of parents wanting to adopt are White (Ntongana, 2014). Therefore, due to the number of White adoption applicants, Black children are placed with White families as it is in their best interest to be placed within a stable family environment, even if not racially or culturally the same as their own, instead of growing up in child and youth care centres (Ntongana, 2014). Thus, transracial adoption is considered as an alternative option to same-race adoptions. McRoy and Griffin (2012) highlight that this is supported by the fact that many people consider it unacceptable that a child would be refused a happy home on the basis of a same-race family not being available.

Furthermore, two decades ago Joubert (1993) and Zaal (1994) viewed transracial adoption in South Africa as important and necessary as it had been found that children who are prevented from growing up with a parent figure may potentially experience psychological issues and are likely to grow into adults who may be less capable than others of forming and continuing emotional ties. Yet, transracial adoption remains a disputed and complex area of interest worldwide especially with

regards to the adoption of Black children by White families (Harber, 1999; Perry, 2011; Wainwright & Ridley, 2012). Instead of focussing efforts on the debate of transracial adoptions being right or wrong, it has been suggested that resources go towards developing strategies to enhance the successful outcomes for adoptive families choosing to adopt across racial boundaries (Carter-Black, 2007).

2.3.4 REASONS FOR ADOPTING TRANSRACIALLY

Considering the reasons for adoption is an important initial step in the adoption process (Malm & Weti, 2010). In addition, Malm and Weti explain that understanding the motivations of adoptive parents for wanting to adopt, assists adoption organisations in developing appropriate recruitment programmes, thereby increasing the number of prospective adoptive parents.

Older studies (e.g. Ladner, 1978) have found that parents who had adopted a child transracially had missionary or humanitarian attitudes and wanted to provide a home for a child in need. More recently, Simon and Altstein (2002), found that most White parents conveyed that their motives for transracial adoption were to prove that they were liberal, wanting to do something that they felt was righteous, or doing so to oppose the ever growing population, contrary to motives such as adopting transracially because of a strong desire for a child. Similarly, a South African study conducted 20 years ago by Gishen (1996) found that the reasons and motivations for parents to adopt transracially included humanitarian concerns as well as the availability of an adoptee of a different race, infertility, providing a child with better education opportunities, and the possibility that their biological children could have siblings.

Furthermore, Bausch (2006) conducted a survey looking at biological kinship, pronatalist beliefs (desire to reproduce), genetic background, and experience with adoption as factors in a person's willingness to adopt a child. The results indicated that infertility status, being exposed to adoptive relationships, and pronatalist beliefs were significantly associated with willingness to adopt a child. A South African study by Finlay (2006) found that prospective adoptive parents had automatically assumed that the only option available to them was to adopt a Black baby due to the fact that the majority of babies that were available for adoption were Black. Finlay goes on to say that a limited number of participants wanted to adopt a child based on where the greatest need existed and others had decided to adopt a child transracially after having spent time volunteering in a children's home.

As there are numerous reasons for wanting to adopt a child transracially, Schooler (1993) considers it important for prospective parents to actively explore their own decision to adopt across racial lines, taking into consideration their motivation and reasoning for wanting to adopt transracially, and that prospective parents should also take the time to review their expectations on how the adoption will impact their life. Once a decision to adopt has been made, the next step involves finding an accredited adoption agency, or working with the assistance of an adoption social worker functioning within the statutory accredited adoption system as this is the only means of legally adopting a child in South Africa.

2.3.5 EXPERIENCES INVOLVED IN THE TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION PROCESS

Despite the positive values of adoption, the experience both pre-adoption and post-adoption can be very emotionally charged for adoptive parents (Thompson & Thompson, 2008). Thus, apart from the various motivations for adopting a child transracially and whilst there is a need for transracial adoption in South Africa, there is also a need to understand the experiences of couples who undertake transracial adoption. This is important to consider in order to enable the criteria for the selection, training, and support of parents to be refined if necessary as well as to assist in providing prospective parents with insight into transracial adoption. This is especially important because transracially adopting parents have to deal with additional stressors as transracial adoption is more complex than same-race adoption and brings with it a unique set of challenges (Steinberg & Hall, 2012). In other words, parents who adopt same race children and those who adopt transracially have to face the same developmental issues and life cycle tasks. However, in transracial adoptions there are unique emotional and social experiences (Okun, 1996) as well as unique challenges that arise from adopting a child transracially (Finlay, 2006).

As the adoption process involves a number of stages that have to be adequately dealt with before the successful adoption of a child can take place, the process can be physically and emotionally taxing for prospective parents. A study by Wilson, Katz, and Geen (2005) found that prospective adoptive parents' first encounter with the social worker was extremely emotionally charged. In addition, prospective parents experienced confusion and frustration during the process, particularly with the roles played by different members of the agency as well as the overwhelming number of steps involved in the adoption process (Wilson et al., 2005). When a strong personal relationship was established from the onset between the social worker and prospective parents,

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prospective parents felt supported and open to discussing their concerns and fears as the process unfolded (Wilson et al., 2005).

Additionally, De Haymes and Simon (2003) found that many of their participants were not satisfied during the adoption process as they did not feel adequately supported by their social workers because of their decision to adopt transracially. They relayed how the social workers seemed to oppose transracial adoption and give more assistance to families that adopted within their own race. The participants were also disappointed with the training and resources they were provided with pertaining to race. Furthermore, participants in a study conducted by Finlay (2006) relayed how they often felt isolated and felt a lack of guidance from their prospective social workers and agencies in terms of their transracial adoption and their ability to face prospective challenges. Participants who engaged in a model of support provided by their agency still felt that the support given was inconsistent and poorly implemented, while others felt that it was helpful to hear what other parents had to say about their own experiences with transracial adoption.

The social support an adoptive parent receives has been found to play a crucial role before and after the adoption as a protective factor for the families (Linville & Lyness, 2007). Linville and Lyness also reported that a significant role in adaptation and resilience was connected to the families who felt supported by extended family members. Foli and Thompson (2004) found that "...adoptive parents who were prepared, educated themselves and had ties to support services were better equipped to deal with the adoption and had less stress and depression" (p. 6).

Conversely, in a study by Simon and Alstein (2002) parents who adopted transracially reported significantly more negative comments and less support about their decision from extended family compared to parents who adopted within their race. The majority of participants in their study who adopted transracially, reported receiving negative feedback from relatives during the adoption process as well as once the child had been adopted. A small minority of adoptive parents conveyed that they continued to experience conflict with some relatives and even experienced family cut-offs because of their decision to adopt transracially (Simon & Alstein, 2002) . When adoptive parents did not feel supported it was one of the greatest difficulties throughout the process (Linville & Lyness, 2007).

2.3.6 EXPERIENCES AFTER PLACEMENT

The following sub-sections provide an overview of experiences that are pertinent after placement. These include, race in a transracial adoption, bonding with the child, and caring for the child's hair and skin.

2.3.6.1 TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION AND RACE

Studies on transracial adoption have mainly focused on the negative aspects of race and have found that parents who adopt transracially cannot ignore that they become a minority family, subject to criticism, odd remarks, and prejudice from people of all races (Brodzinsky, 1990). This is supported by Attwell (2004) who maintains that it is inevitable that parents who adopt a child across racial lines will experience some form of prejudicial and stereotypical behaviour from members of society. One of the most apparent challenges is thus the visible difference in parents and their children that may limit the level of acceptance as a family unit from the community and extended family members (Steinberg, 2003). This is because transracial adoption is considered the most visible of all forms of adoption because the physical differences between adoptive parents and adoptee are more apparent and fixed (Johnson, Shireman, & Watson, 1987).

These visual differences can create anxiety in an adoptive family, as they are constantly questioned and bombarded with stares and spontaneous comments from the public (Morrison, 2004). Morrison further describes that one of the arguments against transracial adoption is that it "harms the adopting White parents because people will likely subject the White parents to hostility, intrusiveness, and/or prejudice, for adopting transracially" (p. 184). In addition, White parents who adopt transracially will have to answer questions about adoption much earlier and more often from the adoptee as well as from people in general due to the distinct differences. However, though it can be true that parents who adopt transracially face these difficulties, Morrison found that parents reported that they received far more positive than negative attention. Parents uniformly reported that any negativity was far outweighed by the praise for adopting a child that they received from people of all races (Morrison, 2004).

Additionally Mahoney (1991) stated that a number of parents who adopt transracially take on the attitude that race does not matter. However, although the intention in these instances may be honourable, it denies the experience of people of colour because the world is not colour blind. Crumbley (1999) was of the opinion that parents should acknowledge that challenges around race do

exist and should teach children how to deal with these challenges. The responsibility of parents who adopt transracially to encourage and facilitate the cultural socialisation of their children in order to develop a positive racial identity is being increasingly stressed in the literature (Vonk, Lee, & Crolley-Simic, 2010). Steinberg and Hall (2012) pointed out that when parents chose to be a family that is different to most, they must be prepared to confront their own racial biases because everybody seems to carry internalised attitudes about race. Prospective adoptive parents who are considering a transracial adoption cannot ignore the issue of race or approach it on a superficial level because "love and good intentions are not enough" (Callahan, 2011, p. 2). Parents who have transracially adopted should therefore be clear about their opinions with regard to racism and are encouraged to speak openly and frankly with their children. This could in turn help to ensure a better understanding of their children's experiences and contribute to the overall well-being of their children (Steinberg & Hall, 2012).

This is supported by research conducted by Benson, Sharma, and Roehlkepartain (1994) who found that when adoptive parents deny or underplay racial issues and racial differences (on the grounds of physical characteristics) between themselves and their child, they tend to employ parenting strategies that prevent openness in discussing race and educating their children about racial issues, which may contribute to poor racial identity development. In contrast, when adoptive parents acknowledge and are more accepting of racial differences, they are more likely to utilise parenting strategies that facilitate an openness to discussions of race, which in turn, may contribute to more positive racial identity development and mental health. Simon and Roorda (2000) also found that parents who more actively promoted discussion and exploration of race and culture within the family had children with more positive psychological adjustment and outcomes. Furthermore, families who acknowledge racial identity, provide same-race role models, and live in integrated neighbourhoods had children who showed greater interest in discussing racial identity issues with their parents and peers (Cooperstein, 1998).

2.3.6.2 TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION, BONDING and ATTACHMENT

The family life cycle perspective assists in identifying issues that may arise at specific stages within the family context (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005). Families generally progress through developmental stages which can be identified by a transitional event such as the expansion of the family due to the birth of a child (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005). Each transitional period brings with it a

unique set of challenges and developmental issues, tasks, and potential challenges that need to be resolved. Each family reacts uniquely to life events, however most families encounter a similar range of developmental crises (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005). Changes in the composition of the family (such as the birth of a child) produce inherent demands and stresses that force individual family members to make adaptations (Hull, 2016). Brodzinsky and Palacios (2005) state that "the adoptive family is and exists within an adoptive family network with specific developmental tasks associated with various systems within that network" (p.19). The adoptive life cycle combines the general phases and tasks of the life cycle framework (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005) as well as specific tasks pertaining to adoptive families (Smith & Brodzinsky, 1998).

In common with biological parents, a number of demands and stressors put significant pressure on adoptive parents as they strive to adapt to their new role (Mainemar, Gillman, & Ames, 1998). At the time of the adoption, the prerequisite attitude is one of acceptance of the new family member into the family (Hajal, & Rosenberg, 1991). This is in line with the period after birth of a biological child, except that a number of elements are missing, for example, the nine-month preparation during pregnancy. As such, the establishment of bonding ties between the adoptee and the adoptive parents take centre stage. Furthermore, the life-cycle model and adoptive life-cycle model (Brodzinsky & Palacios, 2005; Carter & McGoldrick, 2005) posit that parents who perceive they lack the necessary physical, social and emotion resources to deal with the challenges may encounter difficulties in adjusting to parenthood and may make negative evaluations of their parenting skills and competencies. Kadushin (1980) observed an interaction between parental satisfaction and child adjustment within adoptive families which subsequently impacted on the child's level of adjustment and the stability of the placement. The first crisis of this stage, then, is preparing for and adapting to the arrival of the child and resolving conflicts regarding commitment and fears associated with becoming an adoptive parent and bonding with the child (Mainemar et al., 1998).

As such, a lot of attention is focused on the bonding and attachment process. Bonding and attachment refer to "the mutual affectionate connection that is cemented between a child and a parent" (Adamec & Miller, 2007, p.62). Adamec and Miller explain that bonding can be seen as the process, whereas attachment can be viewed as the result. Helwig and Ruthven (1990) have suggested that adoptive parents may be less confident and more anxious than biological parents,

about their ability to bond with a child that is biologically unrelated. Matthews (2015) explains that in adoption, bonding is something that adoptive parents desire the most;

> We wish that there could be an instant connection when we meet our child for the first time, but the reality is that often attachment is something that you have to work towards and grows over time, even if the love is instant. (p. 2)

Furthermore, in adoption, the child must adapt to his/her new surroundings as well as to a new set of parents. Some children adapt sooner than others and this can create heightened anxiety for adoptive parents who want to bond with the child immediately (Steinberg & Hall, 2012). Steinberg and Hall state that "post-placement depression can occur when adoptive parents feel that they have not connected quickly enough to their child" (p. 129). In addition, external challenges, such as discrimination from outsiders, can also increase adoptive parent's feelings of insecurity and these insecurities can interfere with the process of bonding between the parents and child (Steinberg & Hall, 2012).

However, an interesting phenomenon related to adoption identified almost four decades ago is that many adoptive parents report a sense of attachment to their adoptive child during the months before placement as they wait for the adoptive process to be completed (Schwam & Tuskan, 1979). It was also found that adoption allows for parents to share more equally in attachment compared with biological families. This is because adoptive parents share (as well as other family members, if present), the experience or anticipation of arrival of the child during which time they invest emotionally in the idea of being parents and become attached to their shared fantasies about the child (Combrink-Graham, 1989). Hayes (2008) therefore comments on the importance of the role adoption agencies play in facilitating and reinforcing bonding between the parents and child. For example, by providing information on bonding activities that can be implemented post-adoption with the parent-child dyad which can be a means of retaining the sense of attachment felt by parents beforehand, as well as a means of reducing parental anxiety with regards to bonding once the child is in the care of the adoptive parents.

Despite parental anxiety, it has been found that children who have been adopted transracially bond just as well with their parents as White children placed with White parents, Black children placed

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with Black parents, and biological parents living with their birth parents (Gishen, 1996). Thus, according to Gishen evidence does not support the notion that parents who adopt transracially do not bond as well with their children as parents who adopt children of the same race.

2.3.6.3 CARING FOR THE CHILD'S HAIR AND SKIN

Another common experience amongst parents who have adopted a child transracially was related to knowing how to care for the child's hair and skin. Although this may sound absurd or minor, every interviewed White parent with a Black child in Morrison's (2004) research experienced situations in which they were confronted with not knowing how to properly care for their child's hair or skin. Participants in Finlay's (2006) study felt a need for additional information regarding caring and managing their child's hair. A few of the participants conveyed how they felt judged by others, for example, their Black colleagues, because of the way in which they managed their child's hair.

Hoyt-Oliver, Straughan, and Schooler (2016) explain that although the issue of grooming can be regarded as a concrete reality, it can also be considered "a metaphor for some of the emotional terrain that transracially adopting parents must navigate, not only with their children but within the wider communities in which they live" (p. 44). Hoyt-Oliver et al. (2016) noted that White adoptive parents were initially reluctant to ask for help when it came to taking care of their child's hair and skin as they tended to feel insecure in their initial role as parents and where afraid of being judged as incompetent. Morrison (2004) suggests that asking for help may provide an opportunity for parents to make connections between themselves and parents of different races, which could not only be helpful to the transracial adoptive parent, but could also be a means of promoting mutual understanding between races. Like many difficulties, this one can be turned into a steppingstone if the right attitude is employed and a bit of extra effort is expended (Morrison, 2004).

2.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS ABOUT THE LITERATURE

This section of the chapter served to inform the reader of the various aspects of transracial adoption. In particular, it has been difficult to find studies that capture and reflect adoptive parents' perspectives through their experiences of transracial adoption. Little is known about these adoptive parents' experiences throughout the transracial adoption process and how they interpret, conceptualize, and renegotiate their family lives (Ishizawa, Kenney, Kubo, & Stevens, 2006). Furthermore, the majority of studies that have been conducted internationally as well as locally are outdated and in South Africa there is a lack of information pertaining specifically to transracial

adoption. This study aims to assist in providing additional and updated information about transracial adoption, specifically parental experiences of transracial adoption. In the next part of the chapter, the theoretical approach chosen for the study, phenomenology (and specifically interpretive phenomenology) is described.

2.5 OVERVIEW OF PHENOMENOLOGY

As stated in Chapter 1 the theoretical framework chosen for this study is phenomenology. Phenomenology can be considered a blanket term comprising both a philosophical movement and a range of research approaches (Kafle, 2011). Rossman and Rallis (1998) define phenomenology as:

A tradition in German philosophy with a focus on the essence of lived experience. Those engaged in phenomenological research focus in-depth on the meaning of a particular aspect of experience, assuming that through dialogue and reflection the quintessential meaning of the experience will be reviewed. The purposes of phenomenological inquiry are description, interpretation, and critical self-reflection. (p. 72)

Although elements of the 20th century phenomenological movement can be found in works of earlier philosophers such as David Hume, Immanuel Kant and Franz Brentano, phenomenology as a philosophical movement really began with the work of German mathematician and philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Husserl's work changed over time, moving from a focus on mathematics to seeing phenomenology as equally objective and subjective, and finally having subjectivity dominate his pursuits (Reeder, 1987). This progression culminated in his interest in "pure phenomenology" or working to find a universal foundation of philosophy and science (Scruton, 1995). Husserl wanted to develop a science of phenomena that would clarify how objects are experienced and present themselves to human consciousness (Spinelli, 2005), a science of phenomena which would allow one to understand "how the everyday, inter-subjective world is constituted" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 195).

Husserl argued that the positivistic paradigm was insufficient for studying phenomena because it was not able to describe the essential phenomena of the human world (Scruton, 1995). The positivistic paradigm aims to test a theory or describe an experience "through observation and measurement in order to predict and control forces that surround us" (O'Leary, 2004, p. 5). Some of

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these essential phenomena Husserl was referring to included: values, meanings, intentions, and life experiences. Phenomenology thus emerged out of a critique of positivist philosophies of science which view reality as measurable and objective. In comparison to positivist philosophies, phenomenology focuses on the phenomenon of human consciousness and the essences of phenomena (Moustakas, 1994; Von Eckartsberg, 1986). The term essence refers to the essential meanings of a phenomenon; that which makes a thing what it is (Van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology's primary objective is therefore the direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced, without theories about their causal explanation (Husserl, 1970). As such, phenomenology is both a way of understanding the world and a method of inquiry that is focused on describing a phenomenon of human experience as it is lived and explained by specific individuals (Barnacle, 2001). As such, the critical question for Husserl became: What do we know as persons? (Dahlberg, Drew, & Nystrom, 2008). Thus, any inquiry cannot engage in "sciences of facts" because there are no absolute facts instead, according to Husserl, we only can establish knowledge of essences (Schwandt, 2000).

2.5.1 PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACHES

There are different approaches to phenomenology. In the Encyclopaedia of Phenomenology Embree (1997) identifies seven approaches namely: descriptive (transcendental) phenomenology, naturalistic constitutive phenomenology, existential phenomenology, generative historicist phenomenology, genetic phenomenology, hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology, and realistic phenomenology. Amongst them, descriptive and hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology are the two classical approaches that guide the majority of psychological research (Langdridge, 2007). In both the interpretive and descriptive methods, the researcher is open and eager to listen to the descriptions of the lived experiences as relayed by the participants. The two approaches result in knowledge that reflects insights into the meaning of the phenomena under study, however, they differ in their aim (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Each of these approaches will be described in the sections that follow and the choice made for the current study will be explained.

2.5.2 DESCRIPTIVE PHENOMENOLOGY

Using Husserl's principles as a foundation, American psychologist Amedeo Giorgi developed the Descriptive Phenomenological Method in the early 1970s. In descriptive phenomenology the emphasis is on describing universal essences and in viewing a person as one representative of the

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world in which he or she lives (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Furthermore, the emphasis is on the belief that the consciousness is what humans share and that self-reflection and conscious "stripping" of previous knowledge help to present an investigator-free description of the phenomenon (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Descriptive phenomenology is thus built up round the idea of reduction that refers to suspending presuppositions to identify the data in pure form, in other words, to be able to reach the essence through the state of pure consciousness (Giorgi, 1997).

An important factor in descriptive phenomenology is epoché, which requires the researcher to set aside any prior scientific assumptions about the phenomenon in question. It requires the researcher to refrain from including any scientific theories, explanations, and conceptualizations during the inquiry process (Giorgi, 1985). Furthermore, epoché suggests that the researcher eliminates or clarifies preconceptions (Giorgi, 1985). It is important that researchers be aware of their own prejudices, biases, and assumptions especially with regards to the phenomenon under investigation (Katz, 1987). If a personal bias were to surface during the course of investigation, deliberate and immediate suspension of that bias is required. Thus, within the process of epoché, bracketing is utilized to ensure that interpretation is free of bias. Bracketing involves a separation of the phenomena in question from the rest of the world (Gearing, 2004). In other words, it allows the researcher to suspend personal biases. Husserl believed that bracketing helped to gain insight into the common features of any lived experience. Without epochés, descriptions of a phenomenon could be contaminated by bias and epoché procedures are therefore utilised to help contribute to the credibility of descriptions (Giorgi, 1985). Descriptive phenomenology is therefore used when the researcher wants to describe the phenomenon under study and the aim of the study is to make clear and understand the most essential meaning of a phenomenon of interest from the perspective of those directly involved in it (Giorgi, 1997).

2.5.3 INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGY

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), a student of Husserl, rejected the theory of knowledge known as epistemology, and adopted ontology, the science of being. He asks the question "What is the experience like for you?" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 179). He moved away from a philosophical discipline which focuses on consciousness and essences of phenomena towards expanding existential and hermeneutic (interpretive) dimensions (Finlay, 2009). Modifying Husserl's work, Heidegger developed interpretive phenomenology by extending hermeneutics (Reiners, 2012). Hermeneutics can be

described as "the theory and practice of interpretation" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 179). Thus phenomenology becomes hermeneutical when its method is taken to be interpretive (rather than purely descriptive as in transcendental phenomenology).

The emphasis in interpretive phenomenology is on understanding the phenomenon in context and in viewing a person as a self-interpretive being (Taylor, 1985), which means that a person is actively engaged in interpreting the events, objects, and people in their lives (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Heidegger maintains that every form of human awareness is interpretive and so we give significance to a lived experience as we interpret its meaning (Van Manen, 1990). Interpretive phenomenological research also emphasizes that the research exercise is a dynamic process with an active role for the researcher in that process (Smith & Osborn, 2003). At the same time, while trying to get close to the participant's personal world, interpretive phenomenology considers that one cannot do so directly or completely (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Access is dependent on the researcher's own conceptions which are required to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretative activity (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Thus within interpretive phenomenology the researcher's personal experiences and prejudices are acknowledged as exerting a profound influence on the understanding of phenomena and are thus important to interpretation (Kafle, 2011). As such:

> Interpretive phenomenology is grounded in the belief that the researcher and the participants come to the investigation with fore-structures of understanding shaped by their respective backgrounds, and in the process of interaction and interpretation, they co-generate an understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 12).

Interpretive phenomenology was chosen for the current study with the aim to understand what a given experience is like (phenomenology) and how the participants make sense of it (interpretation). It was thus utilised in this study on the basis of wanting to describe, explore and understand the participants' daily, lived experiences and personal views of transracial adoption. Furthermore, the interpretive approach was chosen as it encourages the researcher to delve into the many layers of the participants' stories, seeking new awareness that changes the understandings of all connected with the research: reader, participant, and/or researcher (Conroy, 2003). While the researcher's intention was to make the values, beliefs, and assumptions of the parental couples understood, the interpretive

approach provided the researcher with the opportunity to examine her own values, beliefs, and assumptions. This reflexivity was important in that it allowed the researcher to become more consciously aware of these aspects which in turn allowed her to open up to the stories being shared by the participants.

2.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an overview of adoption in South Africa, focussing on the history of transracial adoption, the adoption process, as well as transracial adoption at present. The chapter also provided insight into the relevant literature, pertaining to both local and international studies. An overview of the theoretical underpinnings of phenomenology was then discussed, including a review of phenomenological approaches, specifically, descriptive and interpretive phenomenology.

The chapter that follows provides a discussion of the methodological means that were employed throughout the study, specifically focussing on a qualitative research design and phenomenology as a methodology, as well as Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the method used to analyse the participant's experiences.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter reviewed literature that was relevant to parental experiences of transracial adoption. This chapter provides the rationale for the research design as well as an overview of the chosen methodology (qualitative) and the use of in-depth interviews to collect the data. Phenomenology served as the preferred theoretical approach for this study and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was selected as the method of data analysis. Significant features with regards to the techniques of sampling, data collection, and data analysis are reviewed. In addition, a description of the means to ensure research quality, as well as the reflexivity of the researcher and ethical standards, is provided.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

In the sub-sections that follow, phenomenology as a methodology is explored. Following from this, the qualitative research methodology chosen for the study is described as well as the sampling method, recruitment of participants, and data collection methods that were utilised.

3.2.1 PHENOMENOLOGY AS A METHODOLOGY

The present study utilised phenomenology as its theoretical and methodological approach and IPA to analyse the data. A phenomenological approach was considered most likely to achieve the objective of this study, which is to understand parental couple experiences of transracial adoption. Additionally, this approach was felt to best fit the study as it involves "focusing on the way things appear to us through experience or in our consciousness where the phenomenological researcher aims to provide a rich textured description of lived experience" (Kafle, 2011, p. 181).

Smith (1997) defines phenomenology as a "research methodology aimed at producing rich textual descriptions of the experiencing of selected phenomena in the life world of individuals that are able to connect with the experience of all of us collectively" (p. 80). Phenomenology is concerned with what people experience in regard to some phenomenon or other and how they interpret those experiences. A phenomenon can be experienced and understood by individuals in various ways. As

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such, phenomenology offers an important shift from a positivist cause-effect focus to one of human subjectivity and discovering the meaning of actions (Giorgi, 2005).

Lester (1999) contends that phenomenological approaches are based in a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, and emphasise the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. So as a methodology, phenomenology is generally qualitative. The task of the researcher is to thus describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon as it appears, rather than trying to explain it within a pre-given framework (Groenewald, 2004).

Additionally, the conception of researchers about a given phenomenon is not the focus of the study, because the focus of phenomenological studies is about the conceptions that people have on certain phenomena (Ornek, 2008). Within a phenomenological study "the focus is on understanding from the perspective of the person or persons being studied" (Willis, 2007, p. 107).

Thus the final product of a phenomenological inquiry is a description that presents the essence of the phenomenon. A reader of a phenomenological study should thus have a strong sense of what it may have been like to have experienced that particular phenomenon. Phenomenology practiced within a human science perspective can therefore result in valuable knowledge and understanding about individuals' experiences (Thomas, 2010). This research attempted to gain knowledge of parental couples' experience of transracial adoption through a phenomenological investigation utilising interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA).

3.2.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

As the intention of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of parental couples who have adopted a child transracially, the researcher opted for a qualitative research methodology. This allowed the researcher to explore the subjective experiences of the participants from the participants' own unique insights and perspectives.

The qualitative research approach in its broadest sense refers to research that extracts participant accounts of experience, perceptions or meanings (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delport, 2011). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) provide the following definition:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level,

qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p. 3).

A qualitative approach was selected for several reasons. The qualitative researcher seeks to discover the meanings that participants attach to their behaviour, how they interpret situations, and what their perspectives are on particular issues (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). The qualitative researcher is thus concerned with describing and understanding rather than explaining or predicting human behaviour (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). In addition, the researcher focusses on naturalistic observation rather than controlled measures and the subjective exploration of reality from the perspective of an insider, rather than an outsider perspective as for example, in quantitative research (De Vos et al., 2011). Qualitative research produces a rich description in the participant's own words and involves identifying the participant's beliefs and values that underlie the phenomenon. It thus allowed the researcher in the current study to study the selected phenomenon, namely, transracial adoption, in depth from the participants' subjective experiences (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). Qualitative research also pursues "what and how" questions to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).The researcher strives to collect data in a non-interfering manner, "thus attempting to study real-world situations as they unfold naturally without predetermined constraints or conditions that control the study or its outcomes" (Thomas, 2010, p. 304).

Further advantages of using a qualitative design include the ability to understand the meaning that the participants in a study give to the events, situations and actions that they are involved with; and of the accounts they give of their lives and experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, the ability of qualitative data to more fully describe a phenomenon is an important consideration not only from the researcher's perspective, but from the reader's perspective as well. Lincoln and Guba further state that "If you want people to understand better than they otherwise might, provide them information in the form in which they usually experience it" (p. 120). Qualitative research reports are typically rich with detail and insights into participants' experiences of the world and therefore "may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience" (Stake, 2010, p. 5) and thus more meaningful.

There are different types of qualitative research approaches that can be used, including: narrative, phenomenology, ethnography, case study research, and grounded theory. The narrative

approach retells the participant's story by collecting stories, documents, and group conversations about the lived and told experiences of one or two individuals (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology centres around the lived experiences of a particular phenomenon, whereas ethnography is an in-depth description of a people group done through "immersed" participant observation. Case study research focuses on gaining an in-depth understanding of a particular entity or event at a specific time (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, Creswell describes grounded theory as an approach that "seeks to generate or discover a theory (a general explanation) for a social process, action or interaction shaped by the views of participants" (p. 83).

3.2.2.1 SAMPLING

Creswell (2013) explains that an IPA study requires a relatively homogenous group of participants. The reason for this is that in IPA it is important to find a more closely defined group for whom the research question will be significant and have personal relevance and meaning (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Thus purposive sampling techniques are used to ensure a homogenous sample of participants with common characteristics and experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Therefore, individuals selected to participate in an IPA study should have significant and meaningful experiences of the phenomenon being investigated (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

The participants of the study were thus selected by means of the non-probability sampling method of purposeful sampling: "This type of sample is based entirely on the judgment of the researcher, in that a sample is composed of elements which contain the most characteristic, representative or typical attributes of the population" (De Vos, 1998, p. 198). For the purpose of the study, the inclusion criteria for the research participants included the following:

- White couples

- Legally married or in a cohabitating relationship

- Have legally adopted a Black infant

- Reside within the province of Gauteng, South Africa

- Able to express themselves fluently in English

3.2.2.2 RECRUITMENT

As a volunteer at a Child Protection and Adoption Centre in Johannesburg, the researcher was able to approach the director and request permission to access the participants via an adoption social worker in order to conduct the interviews and carry out the necessary research (see Appendix I). The

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social worker made the initial contact with potential participants and sent them the letter of information explaining the nature of the study and asked whether they would be willing to participate in the research (A copy of the letter of consent is attached in Addendum III). The number of participants who were initially contacted was left up to the discretion of the social worker based on the inclusion criteria stated above. Participants who were willing to take part in the study then contacted the researcher directly and the first three couples to respond were included in the study. A pertinent part of IPA is that it is committed to a thorough interpretive account of the cases included which can be time-consuming (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Furthermore, Smith and Osborn maintain that for students doing IPA for the first time, a smaller sample size is recommended. The researcher opted for three parental couples to allow for a manageable amount of data.

3.2.2.3 DATA COLLECTION

Qualitative approaches to research such as phenomenology seek to include knowledge as co-constructed (Langdridge, 2007). That means that the choice of focus made by the researcher and the choice of his or her interview questions, for example, will aid in the data collection as much as the recorded experiences of the participants (Langdridge, 2007).

In this study, data was collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Interviews are ways for participants to get involved and talk about their views and it allows them to discuss their perception and interpretation in regards to a given situation (Kvale, 1996). It is their expression from their point of view. Interviews for this study followed aspects of the method that Seidman (2013) refers to as "in-depth phenomenologically based interviewing" (p. 15). At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 2013). Interviewers using this approach ask open-ended questions and they build upon participants' responses by exploring the meaning of what a participant has said and how she/he has said it. The main purpose is to encourage the interviewee to talk freely and openly while making sure to get the in-depth information on what is being researched. The questions should flow from previous responses (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The interviewer in this process has the ability to use prompting and probing techniques which encourages the interviewee to talk freely (Newton, 2010). Semi-structured interviews also allow informants the freedom to express their views in their own terms and it encourages two-way communication (Mueller & Segal, 2015). By contrast,

structured interviews are typically inflexible, because of the need to standardize the way in which each interviewee is dealt with (Mueller & Segal, 2015).

Furthermore, this study made use of dyadic, or joint, interviews in which each couple was interviewed together. Dyadic interviewing is most often used when the topic of research is a shared experience (Allan, 1980; Eisikovits & Koren, 2010), such as was the case with this research exploring parental couple experiences of transracial adoption. The interaction and mediation that occurs between the participants can result in a mutual agreement of events and experiences, adding depth (Bell & Campbell, 2014). It also results in the development of a "joint" narrative, rather than two individual stories (Taylor & de Vocht, 2011). In analysis, the relationship between the participants becomes a unit of analysis (Bell & Campbell, 2014). To sum up the interview process Patton (2002) recommends to:

> Explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject ...to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined (p. 343).

The researcher, prior to the interview sessions, constructed a number of open-ended questions which aligned with the research aims and were used to guide the interviews (see Appendix III). Previous literature on transracial adoption was also consulted in this regard to develop the questions and probes. An interview guide contains questions which can be used to introduce various topics; these allow the research problem and question to be addressed (Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012). However, the interview guide was used to aid the process and the researcher maintained a level of flexibility throughout the interviews, in that the researcher used her discrepancy to ask additional questions, change the order of the questions, and/or re-phrase questions depending on the participants' responses.

The interviews took place at the researcher's place of residence which was agreed upon by the participants and lasted approximately 1 – 2 hours. The researcher herself conducted the interviews in English and were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. After having conducted the three interviews, the researcher then transcribed the recordings using verbatim

transcription. Verbatim transcription is writing down everything that was said, the way that it was said, from the recorded interview (Corners, 2015).

3.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Qualitative studies are frequently conducted in settings involving the participation of people in their everyday environments (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). Therefore, any research that includes people requires an awareness of the ethical issues that may be derived from such interactions. Harm can be prevented or reduced through the application of appropriate ethical principles (Orb et al., 2001). Thus, when conducting research, the protection of participants is imperative. Ethical approval to conduct the study was obtained on 26 November 2015 from the Research and Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria.

Orb et al. (2001) considered that respect for people is the recognition of participants' rights, including, the right to be informed about the study, the right to decide for themselves whether to participate in a study, and the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Therefore, the goal of the informed consent process is to ensure that the participants are treated with respect and human dignity (principle of autonomy) (De Vos et al., 2011). The social worker at the Child Protection and Adoption Centre made the initial contact with potential participants by sending them the letter of information (see Appendix II) in which the nature, aims, and purpose of the study were explained in detail. Thus, the potential participants who were contacted were not known to the researcher. The first three participant couples who were willing to take part in the study then contacted the researcher directly so that the social worker would not be aware of who participated in the study.

All participants were asked to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix IV) prior to the conducting of the interviews and were made aware that participation is entirely voluntary and that at any time they would be free to withdraw from the study without any consequence. Furthermore, participants were made aware of the fact that should they have felt the need to withdraw after the interview, they could request to have their interview transcripts excluded from analysis and reporting.

In addition, the researcher made it clear to the participants that the research was in no way an evaluation and did not form a part of the adoption process, nor was it part of the adoption centre's procedures. This was done to prevent the participants from feeling as though their input into the study and their experiences of adoption were being judged as well as to prevent them from being concerned about being criticised in terms of their parenting.

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With regards to confidentiality, the participants were assured that their names would be kept confidential. This was done by using pseudonyms throughout the study. The participants were also made aware of the fact that confidentiality of information was to be respected and that the information obtained would be used by the principal investigator for the purposes of her dissertation and may be used by other academic researchers in the future for the purposes of research and/or training. It was made clear in the letter of information that no personal information would accompany the usage of data. Furthermore, participants were informed that in line with the University of Pretoria's data storage policy, all data would be stored securely for 15 years from the completion of the study (until 2031) at the University of Pretoria's Department of Psychology.

The principles of beneficence and non-maleficence involve an obligation to provide benefits for the participants and to balance such benefits against risks. This requires that the researcher should do the participants no harm and should prevent harm and remove existing potential sources of harm (Ramcharan & Cutliffe, 2001). In qualitative research, aspects of risk are subtle and ongoing and it may be difficult to anticipate the emotional risk involved in an interview situation. However, the potential for emotional risk can be anticipated, and researchers should make use of ethical listening which involves a blend of flexibility, structure, and sensitivity (Ramcharan & Cutliffe, 2001). In essence, it is important that the researcher is mindful of the impact of the research on the participant and should take appropriate steps to minimise associated risks.

Regarding non-maleficence: no physical, emotional or psychological harm was foreseen during or after conducting the study, as each participant had the choice to participate and was able to withdraw from the study at any time should they have felt the need to. However, as a precaution the participants had the opportunity to speak to a clinical psychologist (Dianne McCornick, Practice number: 0482137), who was available directly after the interviews had taken place, which allowed the participants to discuss anything further that they felt was necessary. This was entirely optional and was left to the participants to decide if they wanted to make use of the service.

The participants were made aware that no specific benefits for participants were foreseen and that participation involved no remuneration. During the interviews the researcher practised ethical listening and the researcher was careful about probing further depending on the participant's willingness.

In terms of beneficence, the research provided the participants the opportunity to actively reflect on their experiences and allowed them to voice their opinions and views of transracial adoption. The principle of beneficence also requires that the research benefits society as a whole (Marianna, 2011). The research participants and interested parties would benefit from the research as it is intended to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of parental couples who have adopted a child transracially. Lastly, participants were given the choice as to whether or not they would like to be sent the final report.

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is discussed in the following sub-section as well as the data analysis process and the role of the researcher in IPA.

3.4.1 INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS (IPA)

The philosophical perspectives offered by phenomenology have been adopted as a methodology, so that phenomenological psychology can be seen as "a family of approaches, which are all informed by phenomenology but with different emphases, depending on the specific strand of phenomenological philosophy that most informs the methodology" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 4). Smith's (2004) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which has gained considerable popularity in the qualitative psychology field in the United Kingdom, is one such example. Smith and Osborn (2007) state that "the aim of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world, and the main currency for an IPA study is the meanings particular experiences, events, and states hold for participants" (p. 54). Smith (2004) maintains that his idiographic and inductive method, which seeks to explore participants' personal lived experiences, is phenomenological in its concern for individuals' perceptions.

IPA is based on the elementary principles of phenomenology, hermeneutics (interpretation), and idiography (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Phenomenology is the reflective analyses of life-world experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Von Eckartsberg, 1986). Researchers using phenomenological methods aim to uncover the meaning of an individual's experience of a specified phenomenon through focusing on a concrete experiential account grounded in everyday life (Langdridge, 2007). In IPA, the meanings that participants have of particular experiences or events are central to the focus of the study (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Secondly, hermeneutics enables the researcher to make interpretations and gain an in-depth understanding of the researched phenomenon. Hermeneutics emphasizes subjective interpretations in the research of meanings of, for example, social phenomena (Davidsen, 2013). Thus, the researcher offers an interpretative account of what a phenomenon means for the participant (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2008). As Smith (2004) identifies more strongly with hermeneutic traditions which recognize the central role played by the researcher, he does not advocate the use of bracketing, i.e. suspending our assumptions. Thus as a means to overcome this difficulty he maintains that we need to acknowledge our inherent assumptions and attempt to make them known through the process of reflexivity. Researchers need to bring a "critical self-awareness of their own subjectivity, vested interests, predilections and assumptions and to be conscious of how these might impact on the research process and findings" (Finlay, 2008, p. 17). The researcher and participant therefore co-generate an understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Smith et al. (2009) explain the principles of interpretation and phenomenology in IPA as follows: "Without the phenomenology, there would be nothing to interpret, without the hermeneutics, the phenomenon would not be seen" (p. 37).

Lastly, idiography refers to the in-depth analysis of single cases and looking closely at the unique perspectives of participants in their contexts (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). In IPA the essential principle is to carefully explore each case individually before drawing any general statements or conclusions (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). The researcher strives to remain true to the participants' personal accounts whilst also highlighting more general themes (Eatough & Smith, 2006). IPA is thus a distinctive approach to conducting qualitative research in psychology and it offers both a theoretical foundation as well as a detailed procedural guide.

3.4.2 DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

The researcher conducted an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to identify the common themes that emerged from the interviews. IPA involves the detailed examination of the participants' experiences of a particular phenomenon and how they have made sense of these experiences and the meanings they attach to them (Smith, 2004). Furthermore, according to Smith and Osborn (2007), IPA also adheres to phenomenological thought in that it explores in detail intimate experiences and takes into account the person's personal perceptions of the situation, as opposed to attempting to view the situation objectively. Throughout the process of data analysis, the researcher

kept in mind that the key to performing a good interpretive analysis was to stay close to the data and to interpret it from a position of empathic understanding (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

Smith et al. (2009) highlight the importance of the participants being the focus of the analysis during the first stage. This involved the researcher in the current study carefully reading through the transcripts in order to become familiar with and to actively engage in the data. The researcher then made notes of any thoughts, observations and reflections that occurred while re-reading the text. These notes included any recurring phrases, the researcher's questions, own emotions, and descriptions of, or comments on, the language used (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). At this stage the notes were used to document points that the researcher observed while engaging with the text. These initial notes were recorded in one margin of the transcript (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999).

The next stage involved the researcher returning to the transcripts to transform the initial notes into emerging themes. Here the initial notes were transformed into brief but comprehensive phrases that captured the essential quality of what was found in the text (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Following from that, the researcher related the identified themes into "clusters" or concepts by identifying the connections between them. As the clustering of themes emerged, the researcher reverted back to the transcripts to make sure the connections were in line with the actual words of the participants (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The aim, at this stage, was to arrive at a group of themes and to identify super-ordinate categories that suggested a hierarchical relationship between them (Smith et al., 1999).

The fourth stage was to develop a "master" list, or table, of themes (Smith et al., 1999). These were produced as a table with evidence from the interview, using a quotation which the researcher felt best captured the essence of the participant's thoughts, and his/her emotions about the experience of the phenomenon being explored (Smith et al., 1999).

Lastly, the researcher translated the themes that were found into an experiential account (Smith et al., 1999). The researcher then chose themes not purely based on prevalence but also on the richness of particular passages that highlighted the theme and how the theme illuminated other aspects of the experience.

In summary, the method adopted by IPA is a cyclical process where the researcher proceeded through the following iterative stages:

- Stage 1: first encounter with the text

- Stage 2: identifying preliminary themes

- Stage 3: grouping themes together as clusters

- Stage 4: tabulating themes in a summary table

- Stage 5: writing up the themes

Reflective Box 2:

     I tried to maintain an orientation towards openness and ensure that my interpretations were grounded in the data rather than imported onto it. I found that listening to the audio-recordings a number of times and reading and re-reading the transcripts while leaving time between analysing different transcripts assisted with this. I tried to approach each new transcript as if it was the first, however I automatically began making links as I went along. Being conscious of this facilitated with new experiences and understandings emerging. Even after being informed of the time it takes to analyse data using IPA I think I was still unprepared for how time-consuming and involved it would be and I was concerned about losing the depth of the experiences, particularly when moving from the initial analytical stages to developing the emerging themes. I found it quite difficult to develop statements which were both concise and also captured understanding, and I think this is partly why the process took so long.

3.4.3 ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER IN IPA

     Given the stated recognition in IPA of the researcher's interpretative role in analysis (Smith, 1994), it would seem apt for such an acknowledgement to be made about the researcher's involvement (including the role of assumptions, beliefs and aims) prior to the analysis stage of the research. As IPA recognises the significance of the researcher's presuppositions, this can be beneficial or problematic to the interpretation of another's lived experience. Thus, the researcher must continuously adopt a reflexive attitude. Reflexivity entails the researcher being aware of his/her effect on the process and outcomes of research based on the premise that "knowledge cannot be separated from the knower" (Thorpe & Holt, 2008, p. 270).

     I felt strongly that my experiences could play a significant and beneficial role within my research and be used to enhance my understanding. Although I knew that there were multiple options available through which I could undertake this research, I felt that a qualitative approach would enable me to more fully immerse myself in the world of my participants and as a result, experience more fully

and gain a greater insight into their lives. It is through these experiences and emotions that researchers gain insight and give meaning to their interpretations of the topic they are exploring, become aware of the meanings and behaviours of those being interviewed, and enable the researcher to gain intuitive insight (Holtan, Strandbu, & Eriksen, 2014).

I experienced the design and process of this research as mainly positive. It was not easy at first and the initial thought of the interviewing process was daunting. However, after the first interview I got over my anxieties and enjoyed the process. Conducting the interviews also allowed me to engage with the participants and listen empathically to their accounts of their experiences of having adopted a child transracially. I learnt to look at transracial adoption in a new light, and appreciate the different points of view. The most satisfying part of the study for me was the fact that it allowed the participants to freely express their thoughts, opinions and experiences and it allowed me to explore and report these findings. Extracts from my research diary are included in reflective boxes at key points to give the reader an insight into these reflections and reflections will be expanded on in the final chapter.

3.5 STRATEGIES TO ENSURE RESEARCH QUALITY

Rooted in positivist and scientific traditions are the concepts of validity and reliability (Aliyu, Bello, Kasim, & Martin, 2014). However, within qualitative approaches the terms require some re-definition because the researchers are interpretively immersed in the research process, rather than attempting to objectively and neutrally observe a phenomenon (Golafshani, 2003). As phenomenology's ground is in the lived experience of a phenomenon, its validity is held within understanding that experience as experienced by the individual. Thus, whether or not the data is considered trustworthy depends on the extent to which the findings of the study are able to reflect the essence of the phenomenon from the participant's perspective (Baker, Wuerst, & Stern, 1992).

Yardley (2011) highlights a number of core principles for evaluating the validity of qualitative research. These include: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, coherence and transparency, and impact and importance. Yardley emphasises that although it is important that value is demonstrated; validity criteria should be seen as highlighting quality issues rather than providing a rigid checklist that restricts the freedom and flexibility of researchers.

3.5.1 SENSITIVITY TO CONTEXT

There are numerous ways in which sensitivity to context can be applied. One such way that it can be established is by contextualising the research in relation to relevant theoretical and empirical

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literature (Yardley, 2000). This is an important aspect in ensuring that understanding extends beyond what has already been suggested or established (Yardley, 2000). This was achieved in the study by the researcher conducting a comprehensive literature review on previous findings related to parental experiences of transracial adoption and finding a gap in the knowledge base that the current study could address.

Another way is by being sensitive to participants' perspectives (during data collection by putting the participants at ease, asking open-ended questions that encourage participants to talk about what is important to them, and showing empathic understanding) (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Sensitivity to context is further continued through the process of analysis by the researcher paying careful attention to the unfolding of the participants' accounts (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. argue that "a good piece of IPA research will be sensitive to its data" (p. 180). Thus numerous verbatim extracts from the participant's accounts were included in the presentation of the findings in order to support the claims being made, as well as to give the participants a voice and to allow the reader to check the interpretations that are stated in the study (Smith et al., 2009).

Furthermore, sensitivity to context can be gained by being sensitive to the data by not simply imposing the researcher's meanings on the data and being open to alternative interpretations of, and the complexities and inconsistencies in, the data. Within qualitative research, approaches such as phenomenology pay particular attention to threats to research quality arising from the researcher themselves, as they are immersed in the research process (Golafshani, 2003). Here steps must be taken to help ensure as far as possible that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the participants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. Thus, there is an emphasis on critical self-awareness and the researcher paid careful attention to her own biases, views and experiences and how these may have influenced the interpretation of the participant's accounts. The process of reflexivity provided the researcher with the means to maintain awareness of the above-mentioned factors throughout the research process.

3.5.2 COMMITMENT AND RIGOUR

Yardley's second broad principle of commitment and rigour are central factors in ensuring validity of a study (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. contend that "to conduct an in-depth IPA interview well requires a considerable personal commitment and investment by the researcher in ensuring the participant is comfortable and in attending closely to what the participant is saying" (p. 181). In this

study commitment related to the degree of engagement by the researcher as well as the degree of attentiveness to the participants during the data collection phase and the careful attention that was given to each case during data analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

Rigour relates to the thoroughness of the study in terms of the sample being in line with the research question, the quality of the interview, and the completeness of the data collection and analysis (Russell & Gregory, 2003). In this study rigour was demonstrated by establishing the sample criteria of the research participants to be included in the study, through thorough data collection, in the depth of the analysis, and by means of the competence and skills of the researcher (Marks & Yardley, 2004). The researcher also made use of respondent validation, which included inviting participants to comment on the interview transcript and whether the final themes and concepts, created adequately reflect the phenomena being investigated (Torrance, 2012).

3.5.3 TRANSPARENCY AND COHERENCE

Demuth (2013) defines transparency as "the degree to which the way the researcher comes to his or her conclusions is made transparent to others and hence open for evaluation" (p. 36). This involves providing a thorough description of how the participants were selected, how the data was collected, and the steps used for analysing the data. In other words, a detailed description of the steps involved in the research process. In this study, the researcher illustrated the methods and analysis employed so as to provide a concise picture to enable the reader to gain understanding of the procedures engaged in by the researcher. Such in-depth details also allows the reader to assess the extent to which proper research practices have been followed and enables the readers to develop a thorough understanding of the methods and their effectiveness (Shenton, 2004).

Coherence is defined by Demuth (2013) as "the degree to which the interpretation is internally consistent, comprehensive, and persuasive, and the degree to which findings are coherent with previous studies" (p. 37). Conducting good phenomenological research requires considerable drafting as well as writing and re-writing to achieve a coherent end result (Smith et al., 2009) thus ensuring that inferences are logical, plausible and adequately grounded in the data (Demuth, 2013). Furthermore, when reading the report of a phenomenological study, it should display clarity of the findings through persuasive and convincing interpretation of the data and it should be consistent with the underlying principles of IPA (Smith et al., 2009). To ensure coherence of the findings the researcher constantly referred back to the literature review as well as the transcribed interviews and

took considerable time drafting the final report. The drafts were proof read by the supervisor to further assess the coherence of the report before the final submission.

3.5.4 IMPACT AND IMPORTANCE

Lastly, the principles of impact and importance need to be addressed. A key test of a study's validity is whether it relates something of importance or use and whether it makes any difference (Yardley, 2000). This is in terms of the theoretical, practical and/or socio-cultural impact of the study (Lyons & Coyle, 2007). Yardley (2000) concludes that the principle of impact and importance "can only be assessed in relation to the objectives of the analysis, the application it was intended for, and the community for whom the results were deemed relevant" (p. 223). In the current study, findings were aimed at benefiting research participants and interested parties as it was intended to provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of parental couples who have adopted a child transracially. Furthermore, the research was conducted as a means to make recommendations to adoption organisations in order to improve the information available to prospective transracially adopting parents and ease the transitional process.

3.6 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the research design used in this study. Following from this, the researcher provided a discussion on phenomenology which provided a context for the discussion of IPA as research methodology. The researchers' reflexivity was addressed as well as the sample and procedures used in collecting the data. An overview of the means that were put into place to ensure that the ethical standards were met was given. The steps in the data analysis were explored and the chapter concluded with an explanation of the strategies employed to ensure research quality.

In the chapter that follows the participant couples are introduced by providing a description of their demographic characteristics and a short description of each participant. The research findings are then discussed, and are presented in the form of themes.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This study set out to explore parental couples' experiences of transracial adoption. This chapter presents the themes that emerged from the interviews with the participants. Six super-ordinate themes and 30 sub-ordinate themes emerged from the data analysis that was conducted and will be discussed. In addition, the participants will be introduced to the reader by providing a short description of each participant as part of the couple that was interviewed. The themes that have been highlighted in this chapter are central to the experiences of transracial adoption and adoption as a whole, although each story is unique and relates to the participants' unique experiences.

4.2 PARTICIPANTS

The participants consisted of three White couples who are legally married or in a cohabitating relationship, have legally adopted a Black infant, and reside within the province of Gauteng, South Africa. All three of the couples adopted their child through the same adoption organisation and the adoptions are classified as closed adoption. All three couples stated that they were willing to be a part of the research as they felt that they could offer valuable insight because of their first hand experiences pertaining to transracial adoption. The couples also wanted to share their experiences in the hopes that it may assist potential adoptive parents. Each of the couples' contexts are described in this section. Pseudonyms are used to protect their identities.

4.2.1 PARTICIPANT COUPLE ONE: STEVEN AND MARY

Steven and Mary reside in Johannesburg. Steven (aged 37) is of South African nationality and Mary (aged 42) is of European nationality. Both of them hold a master's degree. Steven is currently employed as a civil engineer and Mary is working on her PHD. The couple had been married five years at the time of the interview and have a biological daughter who is four years old They legally adopted one Black child who was five-and-a-half months old at the time of the adoption. He is presently two years old.

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4.2.2 PARTICIPANT COUPLE TWO: JAMES AND LESLEY

James and Lesley reside in Johannesburg. James (aged 43) and Lesley (aged 44) are both of South African nationality. Both of them hold a diploma. James is employed as a draughtsman and Lesley is a home executive. The couple had been married 10.5 years at the time of the interview and have two biological children; a son who is six and a daughter who is nine years old. They legally adopted one Black child who was eight months old at the time of the adoption. She is presently four years old.

4.2.3 PARTICIPANT COUPLE THREE: ROLAND AND TRACY

Roland and Tracy reside in Johannesburg. Roland (aged 36) is of British nationality and Tracy (aged 33) is of South African nationality. The husband holds a diploma and the wife holds a post graduate degree. Roland is an IT consultant and Tracy is a video production manager. The couple had been married five years at the time of the interview and currently have no biological children. They legally adopted one Black child who was six months old at the time of the adoption. She is presently two years old.

4.3 THEMES DERIVED FROM THE ANALYSIS

Six super-ordinate themes and 30 sub-ordinate themes were extracted from the relevant interviews that were conducted with the parental couples. The quotations that are presented with the themes have been taken verbatim from the transcribed interviews. The six super-ordinate themes, stemming from the related experiences of the participants as well as the sub-ordinate themes are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1 Summary of themes.

Super-ordinate themes	Sub-ordinate themes
Theme 1: Beginning the journey to adoption	Initial thoughts of adoption
	Biological as well as adopted children
	Reasons for choosing adoption
	Awareness of the transracial element of adoption

Theme 2: The pre and post adoption process	Experiences of the adoption organisation and the social worker
	The checklist and the unexpected feelings of guilt
	Being informed
	The importance of having time
	The adoption triangle
	Administrative frustrations and future decisions to adopt
Theme 3: Avenues of support	Support from family and friends
	There is no 'I' in team
	Support from the social worker
	Online resources and reading materials
	Practical support
	Formal sources of support
	Informal sources of support
Theme 4: The adopted child	First bits of information about the adopted child
	The anxiety around bonding with the adopted child
	Adjusting to having an adopted child
	Being open and honest about the child's past
Theme 5: Challenges linked to transracial adoption	Second language
	Caring for hair and skin
	Questions around culture and heritage
	The child's age and racial awareness
	Expected challenges
Theme 6: The implications of "race" in a transracial adoption	Standing out
	Heightened awareness of race
	The couples view of a "transracial adoption"
	The South African context

Each of the super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes will be discussed in the sections that follow.

4.3.1 THEME 1: BEGINNING THE JOURNEY TO ADOPTION

This first super-ordinate theme covers aspects of the couple's preliminary journey to adoption and provides an in-depth look at the participants' initial thoughts of adoption, their discussions around having biological as well as adopted children, their reasons for choosing adoption, and their awareness of the possibility that it could be a transracial adoption. As a researcher I was intrigued by what attracted the couples to this option and what lead them to make the decision to adopt. This theme is presented as four sub-ordinate themes: initial thoughts of adoption, biological as well as adopted children, reasons for choosing adoption, and the awareness of the transracial element of adoption.

4.3.1.1 Initial thoughts of adoption

It appeared that for all but one participant, their previous experiences or prior exposure to adoption, whether from a religious stand-point or from a more direct experience with adoption, for example, a family experience, or through volunteering lead to these initial thoughts of becoming prospective adoptive parents. Two of the couples, James and Lesley as well as Roland and Tracy, thus spoke about having thoughts of adopting a child that had lingered with them for a substantial part of their lives. James stated:

> *You had that thought [referring to his wife] and I also had thoughts that it would be great to do. So ja, we put our minds together and decided to take the plunge.*

Similarly, Roland spoke about how they too had had thoughts and discussions around adopting a child. He said:

> *I think we've always had that in the back of our mind and in our conversations that we've had before.*

In contrast, for Steven and Mary, Mary had had thoughts about wanting to adopt a child, whereas her husband Steven had not thought about the prospect of adoption until he met his wife and their relationship reached the point where they began to discuss children. So for Roland, the thought process started shortly after he met his wife, when their relationship became more serious, and *"these sorts of topics of children come up"*. During these discussions, his wife was the one to raise the idea

of adoption and he confirmed that *"the idea of adoption really came from Mary and I dwelled over it for a while…"*.

4.3.1.2 Biological as well as adopted children

It emerged that two of the three couples were able to conceive their own children and one couple had not yet experienced problems, but nevertheless had had discussions with each other about having biological as well as adopted children. Two of the three couples (Steven and Mary, James and Lesley) had decided to have biological children before choosing to adopt. Steven revealed that they had "*decided in principle that [they] would probably have two children; a biological child and an adopted child*". Once they were married, the couple decided to have a biological child first because of the potential risks involved due to Mary's age. Similarly, James and Lesley had two biological children before adopting.

As for Roland and Mary, they mentioned the following:

We figured that we'll adopt a child and then we'll have our own child.

The couple had not yet had any issues with having biological children, but felt that the way the children would integrate would be better if they adopted a child before having a biological child at a later stage.

Reflective Box 3:

I found it interesting to note how the participants had chosen to adopt for reasons other than not being able to have biological children. I realised that this was an assumption that I had made prior to conducting the interviews with the couples. It therefore allowed me to re-assess this assumption and opened up a world of insight into the many reasons that people choose to adopt, apart from fertility issues.

4.3.1.3 Reasons for choosing adoption

The reasons behind the couples' decision to adopt varied amongst the couples. Underlying the three couple's motivation to adopt however, was the fact that they wanted to start a family or add to their families. Steven supported this in saying:

Our motivation was; let's create a family and we are going to do that through adoption.

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In addition, for Steven and Mary, as well as Roland and Tracy, their motivation for wanting to add to their families through adoption, was based on the fact that there are already so many children in need of a home. Mary relayed the following:

I've seen a lot of the world and you come to realise that there are a few too many people on the earth and, um, I've seen many different cultures as well and it makes it a bit easier to decide that, No!, why should we have biological children, why not have an adopted child? I mean, they are there already so why do we need to put extra children on this earth that is so full already… so that was my main reason for adopting.

As for Tracy and Roland, their initial thoughts became a reality when Tracy, through her work, had the opportunity to visit a children's home and see all the children. She also had the opportunity to hold a two-day old boy and described her experience as follows:

I was just overwhelmed by the work that the organisation did and also the need for little people to have homes and how beautiful and perfect this little guy was and just to know that he didn't have a mom or dad.

Tracy went home and told her husband about her experience and they began volunteering at the organisation. Roland noted that their initial thought of adopting a child was not acted upon until it was triggered by their experience of volunteering. He revealed that *"it became a reality when we actually had access to seeing their little smiles and how innocent and lovable and everything they are"*. Tracy too felt that adoption was a way in which the couple could start a family as there are so many children in need of a home. She went on to say the following:

Roland and I talked about it and, um, we can have children but we were just like: Why wait and start the whole trying process and all of that when there are so many little people out there, so we approached the volunteer manager and said; we want to adopt.

Roland and Tracy have found so much purpose in their journey of adoption and they *"wish [that] everybody could experience the feeling of love and happiness that comes out of it"*. They spoke about how people do not always consider adoption and through their experience they have found that some people have not *"thought that [they] can love another child; a child that hasn't been borne by [them]"*. This is something that Tracy would like people to reconsider and for their *"impressions to change"*. She stated that *"love is something that grows. It's not something that's just immediately given"* and Roland added that *"it grows in your heart. It doesn't need to grow in your tummy"*. The

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couple feel that they have been *"fulfilled in so many ways"* and that *"it's just a blessing"* and they hope that more people will consider adoption.

As for James and Lesley, their motivation to expand their family via adoption was largely driven by their Christian beliefs. Thus, their religious beliefs played an important role in transforming their initial thoughts of adoption into starting the adoption process and consequently the adoption of their daughter. James revealed:

> *We are Christians and we also believe that part of Christian life and what's commanded in the bible is to care for the orphans and the widows. So, um, we've always thought it would be good to take in an orphan and give this person a chance in life.*

As the participants relayed their reasons for choosing adoption it became apparent that it was a means of expanding their families. However, underlying this reason there appeared to be deeper reasons at play pertaining to the participant's altruistic traits; in that adoption would also assist a child in need.

Reflective Box 4:

I was deeply moved by this particular sub-theme as I was able to witness the incredible concern for others that the participants embodied. The couples could have easily chosen to expand their families by other means but decided to embark on this journey of adoption with all of its ups and downs.

4.3.1.4 Awareness of the transracial element of adoption

What emerged from the transcripts was that when the decision to adopt a child was made by the couples, the couples were aware that the majority of children put up for adoption are classified as Black and that it was highly likely that they would be adopting a Black child. Steven explained it as follows:

> *So you know what it's like when you adopt a child; you can choose a boy or girl and an age. The social worker explained very early that there's not really a choice on race.*

Mary felt that it was important to share the fact that they did not adopt to *"do a fantastically good deed"*, but that they wanted another child and it was their choice to expand their family through adoption, and *"he happened to be Black"*. Adopting a black child lead to broader social experiences as Mary stated:

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In making that choice I hope we can also be a bit of an example of how different people are still people.

Furthermore, she felt that people should embrace the experience and mentioned that it also allows one to *"overcome a whole lot of racial kind of barriers"*. She would also like others to *"just embrace the fact that people are different but can still live together"*. This was a point that was very important to her and she also spoke about how people should not be scared of adopting transracially and she stated that *"He's just a human being. He's just a little boy, just like everybody else"*.

Similarly, Tracy and Roland had not specifically chosen to adopt transracially. Tracy revealed that when they were asked by the social worker if they minded what colour the baby was, she said:

We were like, 'No!' We kind of always just figured it would be a Black baby because we're in this country.

4.3.2 THEME 2: THE PRE AND POST ADOPTION PROCESS

The second theme focused on the aspects of the pre and post adoption process as experienced by the couples. The sub-ordinate themes that were generated included: experiences of the adoption organisation and the social worker, the checklist and feelings of guilt, being informed, the importance of having time, the adoption triangle, as well as administrative frustrations.

4.3.2.2 Experiences of the adoption organisation and the social worker

The specific adoption organisation that the couples went through as well as their respective social workers was found to be significant aspects of the process for the couples as they contributed to their confidence in the process as well as the ease of the process. Steven explained that *"having an organisation and a social worker that we felt we could just trust absolutely to make this process work for us was great"*. This led the couple to feel confident and have a sense of faith in the social worker and organisation for the duration of the process. Mary also commented on the professionalism of the organisation as an *"important part of the process"*.

James and Lesley spoke about their trust in the adoption organisation as well as their social worker and they described how she was *"so helpful and giving"*. Similarly, Roland and Tracy confirmed that they too found their social worker and the organisation to be invaluable parts of the process and how they *"have been very blessed with [their] social worker and the organisation"*.

Furthermore, two of the three couples (Steven and Mary as well as Roland and Tracy) felt that adopting through the specific organisation that they had chosen contributed to the ease of their

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adoptive process and that it was *"one of the key things"* for them. Both couples knew of people who had adopted through a government social department and thus they had a means to compare their experiences. Steven made the following comment:

> *I think working with [our specific] adoption agency; we're very glad that we followed that*
>
> *option because it, for us at least, seemed to result in a smooth process.*

Steven then spoke about how his experience was very different to that of his cousin, who adopted a child through a government social department, and how *"that wasn't so smooth"*.

Similarly, Roland and Tracy described how one of their friends had adopted a child through a government social department and how their process was "*completely different*". In addition, they explained how they were not allowed to meet their daughter beforehand, whereas their friend was able to decide which child they wanted to adopt. Tracy went on to explain how she and Roland were instead matched up with their daughter by the social worker as the social worker is tasked with finding the best family for the child, and thus they consider the mutual needs of children and families in order to make matching decisions and that it *"was a really great way of doing it because when we did meet her, it was love at first sight".* In addition, she stated that with the government social department adoption, her friend did not get any sort of support: "*like you know workshops about hair and the transracial problems that they might come into. They didn't get any of that, so we are very grateful".*

4.3.2.4: The checklist and the unexpected feelings of guilt

Once the couples had decided to adopt a child, they were required to fill in "the checklist" as part of the pre-adoption process. This list is made up of a number of questions that covers aspects about the child, such as: medical illnesses, learning difficulties, or disabilities; the couples then have to decide which of these aspects they would be willing to deal with. In addition, the checklist was not something that the couples had thought about beforehand and thus when they were faced with having to fill it in, it was a daunting process. Steven explained his experience with the checklist as follows:

> *Another thing I hadn't really thought about was the fact that we have to fill out this form as to*
>
> *what sort of child you would like. What I think I hadn't really anticipated was that you are*
>
> *physically going through a form of like fifty questions, particularly on the medical side, and the*
>
> *extent of those sort of questions and how many there were!*

Furthermore for all three of the couples, having to go through the checklist was a difficult part of the process due it not being something they had previously considered. As such the checklist

elicited unexpected feelings of guilt for the couples as they had to decide what aspects they were willing to have in a child. Steven described his feelings as follows:

I felt a bit guilty in a way for saying: "No, no, no, I want an absolutely healthy child. I just want it to be as simple as possible". There's a bit of guilt that's attached to that which I just had to think through and feel comfortable with.

James and Lesley expressed a similar experience to the checklist. James said that *"it was heart-breaking because you realise that every child deserves a chance"* and *"no child is better than anybody else and you feel a bit guilty in that you're not taking a child who's got all these problems which are huge problems".*

Roland and Tracy also experienced guilt after going through the list. Tracy revealed that she wanted to be *"a good person"* and say, *"Yes, we can handle a special needs child"* but the couple's social worker reassured them that they did not have to be *"that person"* and make that decision because *"there are so many kids out there who are perfectly normal that just need a home".* Tracy and Roland engaged in a big discussion around this and Tracy mentioned that she was still a bit unsure because of the guilt she felt at not adopting a child with special needs. She confirmed this by saying:

I was like; I don't know. I feel bad!

Furthermore, by going through the checklist and looking at the various aspects, the couples were faced with the task of having to take the time to look at other areas of their lives which would also impact their decision about whether to adopt a child with special needs or a medical condition. For Steven and Mary and James and Lesley who already had children, this was an important factor to consider. Another factor was the couple's employment and how this would impact the time that they had to raise a child who may need additional care. Mary revealed:

We had to realise that we would be better parents for a child without any medical situation simply because, I am a part-time working mother, Steven is working, and it would mean too much of a sacrifice for us.

Mary went on to explain how she feels that it is important for people to be aware of *"what fits to you as a family"* and to be able to *"overcome exactly those things; guilt feelings".*

James and Lesley discussed the specifics that they were willing to go for and there were some that were for them an absolute yes, but other things like if they had learning disabilities or

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difficulties, had to be thought about very carefully. Lesley explained that this was due to the fact that she also had two children already and so she felt that she couldn't say, *"Well, let me just take a kid that's got as many problems as possible because nobody else is going to take that one"*. She mentioned that she could easily have felt that it was something that she wanted to do if she didn't have children at home already because she had to take them into consideration too.

Reflective Box 5:

     This was an aspect of the adoptive process that I was unaware of and as the participants relayed their experiences with the check-list, the difficulty of having to go through this task became that much more apparent. As the mood became more sombre, the feelings of guilt became more tangible to me and I was able to gain a better understanding of how difficult this must have been for the couples.

4.3.2.3 Being informed

     For two of the three couples (Steven and Mary, and Roland and Tracy), being informed emerged as an important part of the process as it extended beyond merely receiving information of the steps involved, but elicited a sense of reassurance and a means whereby the couples could plan around the process. Steven and Mary found that it was helpful right from the beginning because they were told what the process would involve, what was expected of them, the tests that would be administered, as well as the costs involved. Steven stated:

> *So there were no surprises along the way. At each step we knew what was coming and it happened like that.*

     Roland and Tracy explained how they too were kept up to date about what could be expected during the process and how they were also given a timeline which was structured in a way that enabled the couple to plan around it, for example, planning their baby shower. For the couple, this contributed to a smoother process, in that they felt prepared and well-informed along the way. Tracy confirmed:

> *It was incredible! Every step of the way we were informed.*

4.3.2.1 The importance of having time

     For Steven and Mary, it became apparent that an important aspect of the process was the time they had from the start of the process to when they met their son. The process for Steven and Mary took around nine months from when they approached the organisation to when they met their

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son. This period embodied a sense of value as it allowed them to process important discussions around the adoption and more specifically around transracial adoption and the aspects linked to it, such as the questions around culture and language, as well as to really think about what it meant to adopt a child. Steven revealed:

> *I think it was valuable for me to spread that time out and have time to think about it and not feel that things are developing too quickly and that I can sort of move with the process and really start thinking about and realising all the questions I hadn't thought about beforehand.*

Mary added:

> *…and what they say with a biological child; you're pregnant for nine months and that is the time you prepare yourself and in a way with adoption it's the same, well at least in a way more important, it gives you time to get your mind around: What does it actually entail?, because it is a bit more than just having a child.*

Mary went on to mention that they were faced with *"not the standard questions",* by the social worker, but questions around language and culture and how to go about dealing with these aspects that are pertinent in a transracial adoption. Thus this period afforded the couple important time to contemplate these questions.

4.3.2.5 The adoption triangle

For two of the couples (Steven and Mary as well as Roland and Tracy) an important aspect of adopting their child extended beyond the steps involved in process to the birthmother becoming an integral part of the process. For Steven and Mary, they spoke about how seeing their son for the first time made them more aware of how he has a biological mother and this made them realise *"how difficult it must have been for her to give up the child"*. Mary conveyed the following:

> *It makes it very emotional. All those kinds of emotions from the other side also come through. So it's not just about you anymore, but also the other side comes into the picture.*

Roland and Tracy spoke about how the triangle of the parents and the birth mother is a *"sacred one"* and how they always want their daughter to be proud of where she comes from and "*know that her mom did what she thought was best for her"*. For Roland, it was extremely important to look back and not judge the birth mother for her decision. He stated:

> *Everyone paints this picture of the birth mother as being a bad person…..With such small bits of information you can make these assumptions of the person being bad but when you get a*

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little bit more information you build on the story and you can understand the decisions they

made and why they were forced to make the decisions.

He found this to be a very important element, in that it was imperative for him to make sure that there

was no "*animosity or anger or resentment or anything like that*" and he felt that "*it's very important to*

come to terms with that".

4.3.2.6 Administrative frustrations and future decisions to adopt

Up until the adoption was finalised for the couples, they spoke about a smooth process in

terms of the administrative elements that had to be completed. From then on it became difficult as

they had to contend with a very frustrating and long waiting period for the birth certificate to be

approved. Steven explained:

We had the court approve the adoption in a couple of months and then we hit the red tape

with the Department of Home Affairs.

He continued by describing how they are still waiting for the unabridged birth certificate, now

two-and-a-half years later and that "*the administrative part post-adoption has been the most*

frustrating".

James also found the administrative aspects post-adoption to be very exasperating. He

described their administrative process as follows:

We went to court and in terms of the law the baby is now our baby and then it was just a long

process to get the birth certificate and all that. We can't complain about it apart from the birth

certificate.

Roland and Tracy are still waiting for the birth certificate, and Roland explained:

So now we're without a birth certificate. We can't go anywhere. We can't even go on a plane

locally and my whole family is in the UK, so we can't go see them. So there are restrictions

with that. We feel restricted!

In addition, because of how long it has taken, it has made Roland and Tracy doubt whether

they would want to go through the adoption process again. Tracy mentioned, "*It makes us question if*

we want to adopt again". The couple explained that in a couple of years' time they may consider living

abroad but they would not be able to guarantee that they would have the necessary documents for

them to be able to move elsewhere, should they adopt a second time. Furthermore, when speaking to

the couples about the delay in the documentation, it was revealed that "*everybody is going through*

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that" and *"there's nobody I know who hasn't actually been through that".* This frustration of having to wait for the birth certificate was shared by all three couples.

4.3.3 THEME 3: AVENUES OF SUPPORT

The third theme incorporated the various avenues of support given to the couples both pre and post adoption. This super-ordinate theme included seven sub-ordinate themes: support from family and friends, social worker, supporting each other, practical support, online resources and reading materials, formal sources of support, and informal sources of support.

4.3.3.1 Support from family and friends

The sub-theme support from family and friends encompassed the support given to the participants by their immediate family members as well as by their friends as they embarked on and journeyed through the adoption process. All of the couples had experienced mixed reactions from their families after having discussed their decision to adopt with them. This had a direct impact on the support that they initially received. For some family members it was about the adoption itself, while for others it was because of the adoption as well as the child's race, which lead to some family members being more supportive than others, especially during the pre-adoption process. The changes experienced by the couples in terms of the support received by their family post-adoption, are also discussed.

Steven and Mary told their family quite early in the process about their decision to adopt. Steven mentioned that his family thought that "*it was great"* and that they were *"fully supportive"* of their decision. He stated:

> *I suppose my parents often with those things don't really talk and analyse it. In principle, they feel that whatever I decide as their son, they want to support me and if that's my decision then that's it. So they have always been supportive and encouraging and sort of, ja, happy to understand what it means to have an adopted grandchild.*

His wife, Mary, received more concern from her father when she had initially told him about their decision to adopt. She revealed:

> *My side was a little bit different. They are supportive of what we do but my father was a primary school teacher and he's seen a few adoptive children coming through the school and he's seen a few difficulties with adoptive children when they get a little bit older, um, so he was a little bit cautious from that point of view.*

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She went on to explain how her father had wanted to protect them from having to deal with the challenges that may arise and how it was more about adoption in general, as opposed to the fact that their adoption would also be regarded as a "transracial" adoption. Mary revealed that *"it wasn't that we would have a Black child; that wasn't the problem at all. It was more wanting to kind of shield us from the potential challenges and he wanted us to be aware of the fact that these kinds of issues can pop up".*

Similarly, James spoke about his parent's initial reluctance as his parents had adopted a daughter and had themselves experienced difficulties. He said that *"my parents were a bit reluctant because it didn't go well for them"*. Lesley was also upset about a comment her father-in-law had made with regards to the child being Black. She stated:

> *I was really upset by that [referring to the comment], you know, because there is all that stigma attached to it.*

Roland and Tracy also experienced mixed reactions from their families. Roland said that *"some people found it difficult"*. However, his family were accepting of their decision and were very supportive and he described how during apartheid, his mother would house Black children who needed a place to stay; *"so race was never an issue for her".* Tracy went on to explain that,

> *Unfortunately for my family, my brother and his kids were very accepting but my mom didn't come to terms with it…..It was very tough.*

Not getting the support that they had hoped for from Tracy's mother was the biggest challenge for Roland and Tracy during the pre-adoption process. Because her mother did not accept their decision and was not able to be there for them through the pre-adoption process, this was extremely heart-breaking for the couple. Tracy contended:

> *My mom was the challenge! Until she met her granddaughter it was: "What are they doing with their lives?" It was very emotional!*

Roland also found this to be an emotional struggle during the pre-adoption process. He revealed that *"it was a huge challenge actually because it was a very psychological challenge for us to get through".*

The initial sense of reluctance and lack of support from specific relatives created an emotional turmoil for the couples' and contributed to a challenging period that had to be navigated. This proved to take a toll on the couple's and created bitter-sweet feelings where they had to contend with the joys

and excitement of embarking on the adoptive journey, while dealing with the disappointment of not having everyone's support.

Despite the initial reluctance that the couples experienced during the pre-adoption process with some members of their families, it was found that once their families had met their respective grandchildren, the perceptions of the family members who were initially reluctant and were not supportive, changed and they developed a close and loving relationship with their respective grandchildren. This had a positive impact on the support that the couples received post-adoption.

Mary explained that her father has been great every time he comes to visit them and that *"it's a grandchild like any other"*. Steven went on to explain:

> *It was really just before the adoption took place. He [Mary's father] wanted to make sure that we had really thought about it properly but once that decision was made, he has been really supportive and Ja, from our families and my sister, really supportive as well.*

Similarly, James mentioned when referring back to his father's upsetting comment about the child being Black that *"he's proud of her and when brown people come to the house or whatever, he tells them that he's got a Zulu granddaughter and he quite likes her"*.

Tracy and Roland had similar experiences with Tracy's mother post-adoption. Tracy revealed how on the day her mother met her granddaughter for the first time, "*her whole perception changed*" and that *"she was emotional about it and she said that she didn't know how she could have ever thought those things…...she just had a complete shift in mind-set and now she has a very soft spot for her granddaughter"*.

In terms of the support received from friends, all three of the couples experienced their friends as supportive and accepting from the onset of their decision to adopt as well as throughout the adoption process and beyond. Steven reported:

> *I don't think that there have been any negative experiences right from the beginning till now from our friends in terms of not accepting or not understanding. It's been really positive.*

Likewise, Lesley commented that *"they've all been so accepting and love her to bits"*. Tracy and Roland had a similar experience with their friends. Tracy declared:

> *My friends, Oh my gosh! All super supportive! All of our friends! There was no judgement from my friends.*

4.3.3.2 There is no 'I' in team

What emerged from the three couples was that their greatest source of support, both pre-adoption and post-adoption, was the support that they received from each other. Steven confirmed:

I think the biggest support I had by far, in a way, was Mary. So I think the support really came from each other and because things were smooth and it was a decision we had made before, um, and we were mature in terms of the age at which we were adopting, it wasn't such a challenging process that we desperately needed outside support. I felt sort of what we got from each other was probably just about enough.

James and Lesley also acknowledged the support that they have given and continue to give one another. James said that *"in terms of support, we've supported each other"*. Lesley continued by saying:

…and we chatted a lot: What about this and what about that? Always talking about it, you know. So I think being able to speak and being like-minded in it with each other; like where we are coming from. It was good.

As for Roland and Tracy, they too found the support from each other to be a very important source throughout their experience of adopting their daughter. Tracy stated:

We were very lucky in that we had each other. Roland is my rock and my pillar and we talk about everything. We like to be on the same page. I couldn't have done it without him, that's for sure!

4.3.3.3 Support from the social worker

The role that the couples' social workers played in terms of support was conveyed by all three of the couples. They described having a positive experience from the initial meeting to the finalisation of the adoption and even beyond that. They felt understood, accepted and supported by their respective social workers in their decision to adopt a child. Steven acknowledged that *"we felt comfortable and confident that the person we were talking to would be able to support us and knew how this process worked and how to assist us"*. Mary continued by saying that *"she was always very professional, always interested, engaged….. She was definitely a good support"*.

James and Lesley also had a strong relationship with their social worker. James mentioned that "*She was great! She was very giving. It was good".* Lesley also spoke about how they found the

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social worker to be very open to talk about anything, even certain things that they had never thought about beforehand.

Roland and Tracy also spoke very highly of the social worker that was assigned to them. Roland confirmed:

> Our social worker; she was massively supportive and the nice thing was that our social worker kind of calms you down. She makes you realise that you're just like everybody else; normal, and that you're making an exceptional decision and there's no pressure on us to make any specific type of decision. So she at least gave us that kind of support and understanding…. So that was probably one of the most important and she really did support us through the whole process.

Tracy also found the social worker to be *"a go to for everything"* and said that she allowed them to feel confident about the process, especially with regards to how they match the child with the adoptive parents and how they look after the children before the adoption is finalised.

4.3.3.4 Online resources and reading materials

The internet and various reading materials also proved to be important means of support for the couples both pre and post adoption. It allowed the couples to gain access to additional information on transracial adoption and allowed them to find additional support groups and workshops. James revealed:

> On Facebook I like to keep track on what's going on. So I'm on Facebook looking at what's going on in children's homes and then also there's transracial adoption groups and all those sorts of things which are interesting because there's sometimes interesting articles which are posted.

James had also found a lot of books on adoption from a Christian perspective and he said that *"those were great, those were very helpful and I've still got them and those are books that I will keep".* Roland and Tracy also spoke about a number of reading materials that were given to them by their social worker and how the internet provided them with *"some bits of nuggets of knowledge, which were great".*

4.3.3.5 Practical support

In describing the support that the couples received post-adoption from family as well as friends, what became prominent was that the support could be regarded as *"practical support"*. This

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was especially evident in the initial stage of the post-adoption process when the adoptees were very young. Roland explains it as follows:

At this early age you're not really dealing with; how do we explain adoption to them? It was just really; oh, she's got a runny nose so use Iliadin [a nasal spray].

Tracy added:

So ja, really then it was like just as if one just had had a baby and you needed the support of day to day looking after the person and the fact that everybody was just so understanding made such a difference.

4.3.3.6 Formal sources of support

In terms of the support that the couples received that was specific to transracial adoption, it emerged that all of the couples had formal sources of support. The formal support received was in the form of workshops that were provided by the adoption organisation as well as additional workshops and/or support groups that the couples were informed about and attended.

Steven and Mary found the workshops to be very supportive, especially once the adoption had been finalised. Mary confirmed:

It makes you realise that you are not on your own and like we haven't done anything that's out of the ordinary. There are other people and that's comforting to hear…. and that I have exactly the same questions, even if it just comes to, What do I put on his skin?. It's reassuring.

James also mentioned that he and Lesley have tried to find out where various support groups are and that they *"have tagged along to a few of those".* Lesley had also attended the adoption conference and found it to be very beneficial. She said:

I went to mix with other people. They don't have the exact same criteria that we have but they still adopted transracially, so to just sit and chat and hear from their perspectives how they manage.

Roland and Tracy spoke about the support they have received which was specific to transracial adoption and that they *"got access to a lot of support".* The support was in the form of an adoption group as well as external workshops. Roland went on to comment on how they have *"talked with a whole lot of people when [they have] been to other support groups"* and how *"they kind of immediately gave [them] tools and it was brilliant".*

Although the couples had attended and benefitted from these formal means of support in the past, what emerged from the interviews was that they currently felt that is was not needed at the present moment. However, they mentioned that these formal means of support are still available to them should they feel the need to be supported further, specifically with regards to aspects related to transracial adoption. Steven viewed this in the following way:

It's still an opportunity to just go back to thinking about these things and asking questions because to be honest, on a day to day basis, these sorts of questions of transracial adoption kind of get forgotten.

Furthermore, James and Lesley felt that it was not needed anymore and Lesley explained it as follows:

I think as you get more used to the idea of a transracial adoption you don't feel, well I don't feel I need that type of support anymore.

Roland and Tracy acknowledged the support that they have received and continue to have access to, should the need arise. The couple felt that because their daughter was still very young, they would most likely join the support groups when she is older and starts asking them questions about her adoption and the transracial aspects of the adoption. Tracy confirmed:

Whether we need it? Well, I don't think that we feel we need it yet.

4.3.3.7 Informal sources of support

When speaking to the couples, it emerged that the informal support relating to transracial adoption that they had received played an important role both pre and post adoption. This involved support from other people including: family members, friends, and acquaintances who had also adopted a child transracially. The couples described how the informal support was invaluable to them and how it continues to be so as they have formed strong bonds with one another.

Steven and Mary found Steven's cousin to be very supportive as he had adopted a Black girl 3 years before they did. Steven acknowledged:

It was good to talk to her to gain awareness of the potential issues and things that people can say and to be aware that everybody is not going to be like our friends and family and that it will depend on where we live and who we associate with and what sort of reaction we will get and how easy or hard it might be for us emotionally.

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Steven also had a colleague from work who had adopted a Black child through the same organisation and that child was going to the same school as their children. Steven explained the following:

> So whilst it may not be a monthly arrangement to meet up with somebody for supportive purposes, just these little selective conversations with different people. I think that all those little bits of discussion are useful.

James and Lesley spoke about, how at their child's school, there are some other adoptive families and the coordinator of the pre-school where their daughter attended has an adopted granddaughter. Lesley confirmed:

> So it was just connecting on some other level, so not an official support group but just to be able to talk, you know, and know where you are coming from. So people who get you, like other adoptive families who are not necessarily a support structure in the full sense of it but who are an unofficial support group….. I think it's important to have someone that you can share everything with and support you, you know, that you can trust.

James explained how the family go on holiday to a guest house with a number of adoptive families whom they engage in discussions with and are regarded as a form of informal support. He said:

> We've got lots of adoptive families who come there, which is great because there are professionals amongst them as well, so things get thrown around amongst us…. So it's nice to catch up and it has sort of becomes an annual thing.

Lesley also found this to extend beyond just being supportive for them, but an opportunity for their daughter to interact with other transracially adoptive families. She revealed that, *"also our daughter sees that she's not that different. There are other families that are very much the same as ours"*.

Roland and Tracy expressed how they had met friends, in various places, who have also adopted children transracially and how they have co-supported each other. Roland also explained:

> So we could go to support groups but I think, internally, what we've done is created our own support groups. We've created these bonds and friendships that we use as our support groups.

Tracy spoke about one of their friends whom she described as *"a perfect example"* of informal support and how what they discuss *"is all relevant"* and includes "*the challenges that [they] are immediately facing*" and how they are "*sometimes unique challenges to transracial adoption but most of the time*

they are just normal kid challenges". They too felt that on top of the support that they have received from other adoptive friends, it was also important for their daughter to be able to interact with other transracial adoptive families. Roland revealed:

> *We want it to always be that we're raising just a normal child and I think that's why we like to have friends that have also adopted children because we want her to get used to the idea that this is normal.*

4.3.4 THEME 4: THE ADOPTED CHILD

This super-ordinate theme covers the aspects that are related to the couple's adopted child, from the first time the couples were given information about their adopted child, the questions and concerns around bonding, the adjustment period as well as being open and honest with the child about his/her past.

4.3.4.1 First bits of information about the adopted child

Hearing about their child for the first time embodied more than merely receiving information about the child as it elicited many emotions for the couples. Steven and Mary described it as *"emotional"* and *"a bit surreal".* There was also a build-up of expectancy for them as they waited to hear about the child they would be adopting. Mary expressed:

> *From my side it was like; just tell me! You already know who you are going to pair us with but we don't know yet.*

 The couple also felt that it was a positive aspect that they did not have the information about the child that they would adopt long in advance as this could have lead them to question or second guess their decision without having actually met the child. Steven explained that *"it was very brief biographical details"* that they were given in the morning and then they went to meet their son directly from there and he explained how "*immediately the child then supersedes the picture you may have created by reading the file".*

James and Lesley revealed that for them, finding out about their daughter was, *"one of the most exciting things in life".* James went on to say, *"We were over the moon! The social worker called us and said that there's a baby and she said we must come and meet her and she would show us a photo".* Lesley revealed how they did not like the picture the social worker had shown them and that the social worker explained to them that if that was the case, they could decide to not go ahead with this particular child. Lesley went on to say*:*

So it was a question of; Do I like what I see or do I not like what I see? So that is hard initially because how do you make a decision from what you see in a picture?

Roland and Tracy received information about their child on the day they met her. It was also brief biological information. Roland described the experience as follows:

It was so emotional! It was absolutely the most amazing thing!

4.3.4.2 The anxiety around bonding with the adopted child

The couples spoke about how, after they had found out about their respective children and had gone through the biographical information, there were feelings of uncertainty and anxiety about meeting the child for the first time, especially with regards to how the child would bond with them. Steven recalled:

For me there was a lot of nervousness because it wasn't as if we had sort of chosen this child. Well, this is the child that has been chosen for us…..you sort of have that question of: Am I going to immediately bond with him or not? So ja, I was quite uncertain about that first meeting.

Steven and Mary went on to describe how adopting and seeing their son for the first time was "*an absurd kind of meeting because if you think about it rationally you are introduced to a child that you do not know but you're going to be the parents*" and "*it's going to affect your life for the rest of your life to a massive degree*". The couple commented on how questions around bonding with their son were raised because of the fact that they were adopting a child and how "*it's in a way a bizarre situation*". Mary described how as an adoptive parent, you now have to take responsibility for a completely unknown child "*who [is] not asking for us specifically*" and so you question, "*Will he fit in with us? Will we fit in with him?*"

Roland and Tracy also had questions and concerns around bonding with their daughter and they explained how their social worker had prepared them for the fact that meeting their daughter for the first time might not be everything that they had imagined it to be and how "*it might be the case where [they] don't bond with the child at first and to not be upset if that happens because [they] still have a choice to move on or say that [they] are not feeling comfortable or not feeling a connection*".

The nervousness and uncertainty that manifested around the thoughts and questions on bonding were eased in the couples by their respective children's initial reaction to them, in that first encounter. All of the couples commented on their child's initial reaction when meeting them for the

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first time and how this contributed to decreasing their anxiety and concerns about their child bonding with them.

Steven spoke about how their son's initial reaction made it easier for them, as he did not start crying when they picked him up and so this prevented them from second guessing themselves, especially emotionally, by worrying about: "*How are we ever going to establish a bond if the first thing he does is cry?*". The couple went on to explain their relief when this did not happen and that, "*that was positive, it made it easier*".

James and Lesley were also reassured by their daughter's initial reaction to them. Lesley described their experience as follows:

> *She just looked at us with these huge eyes and she didn't do anything, she just held onto the caregiver, so it was just: How would I feel if I was in her space? but as we held her and spent time with her she started holding James's hand and looking at the kids and just sort of settled and that was lovely.*

Roland and Tracy also found comfort in their daughter's initial reaction to them. Tracy explained how "*she just looked up at Roland and felt his beard and she didn't smile immediately but she came straight to [them] and she was just looking and assessing and you could see she was comfortable. She wasn't crying and she fell asleep in [Tracy's] arms*". This reaction reassured Roland and Tracy and eased their concerns about their ability to bond and to connect with their daughter.

4.3.4.3 Adjusting to having an adopted child

Two of the three couples, Steven and Mary and James and Lesley, spoke about how they had expected that there would be a period in which the child would have to settle down and get used to their new environments and how this expectation differed from their actual experience. This also led to feelings of reassurance for the parents especially because they had anticipated that there may be adjustment difficulties. Mary revealed how she "*had this sort of expectation that there will be a period of adjustment particularly for him*" and how she thought that "*he would be uncomfortable and that the change would be really difficult for him….but in reality none of that seemed to happen*". She explained how he instead, "*quickly adapted to a whole lot of new things*".

James and Lesley spoke about how their daughter quickly learnt to know her home and how within the first day that she came home, she started crawling and within a few days after that, she started teething. Lesley stated that it was like, "*just waiting for her to land in our family, in our home*

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and sort of take ownership of the home and family for other milestones to catch up". Also that *"It was nice to know that, OK, she's obviously feeling at home here"* and that it was great for them to see "*how she sort of like blossomed".*

Furthermore, the age at which the couples adopted their respective children, was found to have been helpful in the parents process of adjusting once their children were adopted. Lesley revealed*:*

> *It was nice to get her at eight months because she was weaned, she was into her food, eating well, sleeping well, and that was just a bonus. We didn't have to do all those bits and pieces, so it was just trying to settle her into life with us.*

Similarly for Roland and Tracy, their daughter was adopted when she was five months and her age at the time of the adoption was found to be helpful and contributed to the ease of settling in as a family. Tracy commented:

> *We missed out on the tough part I guess. So, it was easy to understand what she needed, when she needed it.*

4.3.4.4 Being open and honest about the child's past

The importance of being open and honest about the child's past was conveyed by all three of the couples. Mary contended:

> *My understanding is that it's good to tell the children as much as possible about their own history and be able to answer their own questions as truthfully as possible, rather than trying to close the door on the past and say: No, that's not who you are now, you don't need to know about it! Because it is who he is! It's part of him; that history and that side of his life.*

Similarly, James spoke about how he and his wife are very open with their daughter and how "*[they] made this book for her and talk to her about the adoption all the time".* Likewise, Roland and Tracy spoke about how they were encouraged to get stories and books about adoption to build it into their lives. Tracy relayed:

> *So for us now, it's building the story into our life. She's talking now and we want it to be a natural inclusion into how we talk about stories and things and just to build it and make it a normal thing; Ja, I'm adopted! , not like when she hears the 'adopted' word that it's: Ooh, what's adoption?*

This has been one of the ways in which the couple feels that they can introduce the word "adoption" or "adoptive family" into their daughter's vocabulary, especially as *"a positive thing"*. Therefore, conveying this through stories as well as the fact that *"she needs to know that we wanted her so badly and not every child has that option or opportunity",* has been an integral part of the post-adoption journey for the couple.

4.3.5 THEME 5: CHALLENGES LINKED TO TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION

This super-ordinate theme explores the issues and challenges that the couples are currently dealing with post adoption as well as the challenges that the couples expect to face in the future with regards to transracial adoption. Some of these challenges are diverse and are experienced in various ways by the different couples. The sub-ordinate themes include: second language, caring for hair and skin, questions around culture and heritage, the child's age and racial awareness, and expected challenges.

4.3.5.1 Second language

All three of the couples expressed the importance of their children learning an African language especially because they feel that it is expected of the child. They also described their difficulty in finding a way for their child to learn that additional language, although they have tried various means to go about these themselves.

 Steven spoke about the importance of having his son learn an African language, largely because of the expectation that he should be able to speak one of them and how difficult it would be if he wasn't able to. Steven revealed:

> *It's going to make his life in South Africa much simpler, easier if he could speak a language that people expect him to be able to speak when they meet him.*

However, for Steven, trying to decide what that language should be and how to give him that language has been *"the most difficult thing that* [he has] *experienced".* Mary also commented on how when he is seen by Black people, "*they kind of expect him to speak the vernacular"* and this expectation has put pressure on the couple to find a means to teach their son an African language.

In addition, Steven and Mary, have a domestic worker and gardener who are both Tswana, so their solution has been to ask them to speak to their son in Tswana to try get him to learn an African language. This has proven to be a challenge because the domestic worker and gardener do not feel comfortable speaking Tswana to their child. Mary explained that it's "*because they know we don't*

understand what they say… so that hasn't really worked out. So that's been a challenge and it

remains a challenge".

James and Lesley spoke about a similar experience in which they find that it is often assumed that their daughter speaks a different vernacular. Lesley revealed how *"some of the packers in the shops will talk to her in Zulu and she will just look at them".* She also spoke about having Congolese friends who did not speak Zulu and she mentioned the following:

…and so we knew that this type of thing would come up; But you're Black! How can you not speak the lingo? So we knew that it would come up.

They added that they want their daughter to learn Zulu and how they think it is important for their family to learn the language, even their other two children. The couple have also struggled with ways to go about teaching/learning the additional language and James revealed:

I would love to teach her Zulu and I was hoping to do it this year but unfortunately it just hasn't worked out.

Roland and Tracy too described the importance of their daughter learning an African language and how this has been a challenge for them. Tracy explained it as follows:

The language challenge; it's a very important one for me. We want her to speak an African language. Ideally I would love her to learn Xhosa. I also want her to have the option when she's older to say: 'No, I don't want to speak Xhosa anymore' or she needs to speak it to have the option to say: 'No, I don't want to speak it anymore'.

Tracy also relayed a story about her friend who was adopted, and how he felt that what he missed out on was not being able to speak the vernacular and how he was often stopped in the street and spoken to in Zulu, but was unable to understand what was being said. Tracy explained how he was segregated in school and in other contexts, "*because he didn't fit in that way and I don't ever want that to be the case with her [referring to their daughter]".* They too discussed their struggle with finding a way to teach their daughter Xhosa but were adamant to find a way. Tracy stated:

Because we don't speak it every day in our house, it may be a case of us taking her to lessons which is not ideal but it's really important.

4.3.5.2 Caring for hair and skin

All three of the couples made mention of having uncertainties and difficulties with managing their children's hair and skin and having to learn how to care for it. Mary commented*:*

> *Sometimes I think like; what do I do with your hair? Or what do I do with your skin? It's not familiar.*

As for James, he also found it to be a challenge and said:

> *Her hair has probably been the challenge. I mean, Lesley tried all that she can; she's even been on courses and things like that.*

Roland and Tracy's experience extended beyond the difficulties in managing their daughter's hair. For them, the challenges with her hair brought up feelings of inadequacy and concern as parents because of how this would affect their daughter's level of self-confidence regarding her hair. Tracy revealed:

> *I do feel bad that I'm not good with her hair but I know many of my Black friends who say: "we're not good with hair either, that's why we go to salons" (laughs). But we in specific feel quite inadequate in that sense. I think that we're just a bit….we're gonna learn, we'll get there.*

Roland also felt that their daughter's hair has been a challenge for them and has highlighted the importance that it has in relation to her self-confidence. He stated the following:

> *The hair for us is actually a huge thing because that's a self-confidence thing and we want to instil her with a whole mountain of self-confidence. So that's why we want to get the hair right.*

4.3.5.3 Questions around culture and heritage

Various questions and thoughts around culture and heritage were raised by the three couples. For them, there is the question around how much to incorporate of their child's birth culture and heritage into their current lives as well as how to go about doing this. There were also various challenges related to this that the couples are facing post-adoption and will be discussed below.

For Steven and Mary, the cultural aspects that transracial adoption raised for them, continues to be a pertinent point of discussion. Steven commented that *"it's more almost in a way for me the question has been about transracial adoption that now this is a child that comes from a different culture….. How do we as a family respond to the fact that his biological culture is different from his adoptive culture?"*. Mary continued by discussing, how when people see their son without them, it is assumed that he knows the cultural values. She stated:

> *… but we don't know his culture so we can't give that to him as much as if he had grown up in his own culture. So we are definitely aware of that and how are we going to make sure that he still gets some of that cultural background that is foreign to us?*

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The couple explained how this has been a challenge that they face and how it is important for them to give their son a connection to his birth culture. Mary confirmed:

We want to give him those links. That's a challenge we face.

For James and Lesley, they spoke about the importance of acknowledging their daughter's birth culture and Lesley explained how their social worker had strongly advocated this but they also commented on how they felt that there was too much of a strong emphasis on incorporating it into their current lives. Lesley revealed:

….. but I don't think that they have to push, push, push that we have to go to every cultural event that's happening. Just because she is brown; she's Zulu, doesn't mean that. I really believe… also believe that this is our culture and she's got to embrace our culture as well.

Thus, embracing both cultures and the extent and means of going about this is something that James and Lesley are continuing to have to work out as a family.

In addition, various aspects around culture and heritage were also described by Roland and Tracy and a number of questions arose around their daughter's birth culture and heritage. Roland revealed:

We were talking about how in the Xhosa culture you have ancestors and how our daughter has ancestors and she [referring to a friend] was like: "But does she have ancestors? Is it not your heritage?" It's an interesting question; whose heritage does she follow? But she does have Xhosa blood in her.

This question is a complex question that the couple have had to discuss and decide upon and the couple went on to speak strongly of the importance of educating their daughter about her birth culture and heritage and the degree to which they want to incorporate it into their lives. Roland stated:

We did make a few key decisions and that was that we wanted her to be informed about her Xhosa heritage.

The couple felt very strongly that their daughter should have this solid understanding of her Xhosa heritage so that as she grows older, she will have a choice as to what aspects and how much she would like to continue incorporating in her life. Tracy confirmed, *"So when she is 13 she can do her coming of age ceremony if that's what she wants to do but she needs to at least be educated to the point where she has that option".* Roland went on to speak about the ways that they are bringing

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the Xhosa heritage into their daughters life and he too commented on educating her so that she can make decisions for herself with regards to her culture and heritage. Roland relayed the following:

We have a Xhosa doll with all the dots and one outfit, so heritage is definitely there but at the same time we also don't want the extreme elements of the heritage and we won't be doing all of the traditional visiting the elders but she must know about it. If she wants to exercise that right then we can take her.

In a similar way as James and Lesley, Tracy also felt that it was important that their daughter learns their heritage as well because Tracy's mom comes from a Jewish background and Roland's parents are British. Thus the couple are continuing to find ways to incorporate their culture and the Xhosa culture into their daughter's life.

4.3.5.4 The child's age and racial awareness

This sub-ordinate theme developed as the couples spoke of their current challenges relating to their children, particularly with regards to their children's current age and thus to what extent their children are aware of their "racial differences". Roland and Tracy spoke about how, because of their daughter's current age, the challenges at the moment are *"all external things"* that they pick up on and which their daughter is *"not psychologically noticing and picking up on"* at the moment.

However, for James and Lesley, because their daughter is four at present, they have experienced a number of issues. Lesley explained that, for example, *"She [her daughter] wants to be Rapunzel. She wants to grow hair and have long blonde hair"*. Lesley also revealed how *"[her daughter] didn't want to be brown anymore, she wanted to be peach because peach people are beautiful"* and how for Lesley and her husband *"that is hard"* for them to have to deal with.

Furthermore, on one of the courses that Lesley had attended, she explained how the ladies were discussing how Black women do not always feel beautiful and how they possibly *"feel inferior to White women for the hair sake or the eye colour sake or the skin colour"*. For James and Lesley, they felt that *"on top of the adoption and on top of all the other issues that she [their daughter] has, it's just the fact that this is the way she is and she's got to accept it and trying to help her understand this......and that that's the hardest part of it; just helping her still feel that she is wonderful! She doesn't have to be a peach colour or White or whatever"*.

Roland and Tracy also mentioned that because their daughter is young at the moment and thus her racial awareness is still in the process of developing, the couple felt that they *"don't have to*

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stress too much up until 3 or 4 when self-identity starts becoming an important factor" and that's

when, if they need to, they will *"probably join the support groups cause that's when [they] will probably*

need to go and get some help specifically for the questions that are being asked of [them]".

4.3.5.5 Expected challenges

This sub-ordinate theme highlights the aspects that the couples raised when discussing their

future expectations with regards to having adopted a child transracially. It emerged that all three of the

couples expect to encounter challenges as their children get older and this raised questions around,

how as parents, are they going to prepare their children for the potential challenges that they may

face.

Steven and Mary spoke about how within their circle of family, friends and acquaintances,

they feel that there will be support, understanding and awareness towards their family and especially

towards their son. However, when stepping out of this circle, Steven expects *"that for the rest of our*

lives there are going to be challenges" and he discussed how these challenges may be related to

interacting with different races and different cultures and that *"people are going to respond differently".*

He went on to explain that despite these reactions and different responses, they as parents, have a

choice about the extent to which they can engage with others.

When discussing their future expectations, Steven and Mary also mentioned that one of the

things that they think about is, *"where do we want our children to grow up?"* and how *"all of a sudden*

the fact that he has a different skin colour becomes a very important question". For the couple, this

brought up additional questions around what is to be expected for their son in future, depending on

where they choose to live. Mary expressed the following:

> *So what is better for him? Where will he feel more at ease; here as a Black child with a White*
>
> *background or there [referring to Europe] as a Black child in a way completely different? So*
>
> *these kinds of questions come up simply because he has a different skin colour.*

Furthermore, the questions that may arise in the future were also an aspect raised by Steven

and Mary. They discussed how they expect their son to be faced with questions from others and how

he too will have questions that he may struggle with and how the questions from others are

"something that [they] really want to protect him from" (Mary). Steven elaborated on this and revealed

how he expects more questions as their son gets older that they will need to *"talk through and deal*

with and manage and respond to" , especially when *"he's aware, well more aware that he is a*

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different race" and how this will then be *"a lot more challenging".* The potential questions that the couple expect to encounter extends to their daughter, whom they feel will, *"also be faced with a lot of questions"* and how they expect there to be times when, for example, her friends may say, *"He's not your brother"* and how *"there's going to be difficult times for her too".* Following from their discussion around what is to be expected in future, Steven and Mary spoke about the importance of preparing their children, as well as *"being able to guide them through the possible issues that may arise".*

Expecting challenges in the future, as well as anticipating questions from their daughter and others, were also mentioned by James and Lesley. James revealed:

We do expect challenges and I think that as she gets older, more questions will also come.

You know: Why am I Brown? And why did my tummy mummy do what she did?

The couple also commented on the importance of being able to prepare themselves and their children for the potential challenges that may arise and how they have "*just got to take it when it comes".*

As for Roland and Tracy, the challenge that they see themselves going into is "*making sure [they] give her the tools for dealing with that [people staring, questioning and commenting] because that's not going to go away".* Roland went on to say:

What we need to do is figure how we deal with it. I think that's probably our biggest challenge.

The couple also spoke about ways which could be helpful in dealing with the challenges and questions that may arise and they stated that, if at a later stage they felt the need to, they would "*probably join the support groups cause that's when we'll probably need to go and get some help specifically for the questions that are being asked of us".*

Reflective Box 6:

As the participants' spoke of the expected challenges, I became aware of their fierce need as parents to protect their children and to be able to provide them with the necessary means to handle the challenges that they may face. This made me realise just how difficult being a parent can be especially as you are not able to protect your child from every harshness that they may encounter.

4.3.6 THEME 6: THE IMPLICATIONS OF "RACE" IN A TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION

This super-ordinate theme arose as the couples engaged in discussions related to their experiences of "race" in a transracial adoption which they encountered during their journey. The sub-

ordinate themes that are discussed below were experienced by all three of the couples in varying degrees. These include: standing out, heightened awareness of race, the couples view of a "transracial adoption" and lastly the South African context.

4.3.6.1 Standing out

What stood out for the couples post-adoption was that, as a family, they became more noticeable to others and the target of stares. The extent to which the couples have experienced "standing out" because of having adopted a child transracially was not fully considered by the couples in the process leading up to the adoption.

Steven stated that *"the big difference with a transracial adoption is that everybody is aware, everybody can see, everybody knows, and everybody will have questions"*. He went on to explain how he sees this as both a positive and a negative because, *"It is obvious [referring to the transracial adoption], which is a good thing in a sense that there is not like this big surprise. People see it immediately and you can immediately start moving on"*. He spoke about the negative side to it, being that, *"sometimes you just want to be normal to a person in the street or like the shopping centre, but everybody can see and you know that they are now thinking about these questions and sometimes you just want to be a nameless face in the crowd and you can't because, well, he's Black and we're White"*.

James and Lesley explained that they too got noticed a lot more after the adoption of their daughter. James explained:

> It's more outer circles, you know, not within the inner circle, more at the shop you see people noticing us and talking amongst themselves.

Roland and Tracy also expressed their experience around standing out and how during the pre-adoption process they had not fully considered the impact that this would have. Roland revealed:

> People notice it and we do get noticed a lot. We get people walking by, staring backwards and this and that and the other and I think that was probably the only element that we didn't really think about of the whole transracial thing.

Interestingly enough, what was also mentioned by the couples was that, for example, in the shops, if their child would veer off on their own or be apart from them in distance, they received no recognition as a family or confused looks from bystanders as to who's child this was. However, as

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soon as they appeared as a "family unit" there were increased stares and comments as the bystanders tried to figure out the relation between them.

Reflective Box 7:

While reading and re-reading the transcript I was struck by how incredibly frustrating this increase in visibility must be for the couples and how it remains a permanent part of their lives that they will have to always contend with. It reminded me of being continuously in the spot light and not being able to switch the light off.

4.3.6.2 Heightened awareness of race

The participants' accounts revealed the complex nature of race in transracial adoption and how apart from them being noticed more by others, there was a definitive increase in their own racial awareness, especially in public. They also spoke about how, at times, they felt like everyone's eyes were on them and how this could lead to frustration, anxiety, defensiveness, and self-consciousness. This can be likened to being put in the spotlight and it appears that having to contend with the additional attention from those around them brought up uncomfortable feelings and difficult questions that the participants had not fully anticipated.

 Steven captures it as follows:

I have certainly felt very much aware of race, more aware and in particular more aware of my own feelings towards race because I do have feelings of race. I don't see things in a colour-blind way ….so it has really made me very much aware of my own feelings. You kind of think that if you adopt a Black child then you must be perfectly colour-blind but the reality is that I'm not and how do I reconcile that and the fact that I've adopted a Black child?

Steven also spoke about how when he is seen in public with his son (whom he described as having skin that is quite light), he wonders if people sometimes think that his wife is Black and that his son is in fact his biological son. He commented that *"even just sort of the tone of his skin brings up some different questions in my mind".*

His wife Mary also relayed how she is very much aware of the racial difference, especially when she is in public spaces. She revealed how she is *"very much aware of the fact that he has a different skin colour to me and people can immediately see that he is not my biological child and sometimes I feel a bit defensive about it and I want to say: Look, he's my son, there is nothing wrong*

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with me, there is nothing wrong with him, we are just a family". She also spoke about how this increase in racial awareness is experienced, more so when she is alone with her son, compared to when her daughter is with them. She conveyed how *"it's been quite interesting finding that it makes so much of a difference when I'm with both children or whether I'm with either one of them and how different that impact is on me"*.

Similarly, James and Lesley spoke about how they too experienced an increase in their racial awareness and Lesley revealed:

> *Initially, right in the beginning, you are very hyper aware that you've got a Brown child with you, especially with your other two who are White.*

Lesley found that this was most prominent when going to the shops and *"when she throws a tantrum and you've got to discipline her".* She felt that it raised the attention of others and she would worry about what they were going to say to her. Lesley went on to say how, getting the birth certificate was an important aspect that contributed to easing her feelings of anxiety and increased her confidence as a parent of a transracially adopted child. She explained:

> *What helped was getting a birth certificate with my name on it and I can say: "Look, she's my daughter and I can discipline her….I can speak to her if I need to". But initially it was like: "Oh, we don't want to put a foot wrong cause you going to get called out by the person in the shops and are they going to take her away because I'm obviously not looking like her mother?" I felt that long, right until I actually got that birth certificate.*

Roland and Tracy expressed how they too noticed an increase in their racial awareness. Roland noted the following:

> *I think what's interesting is the whole process leading up to it, we didn't notice much around the whole colour thing, the whole transracial element of it, but what we definitely did find is post-adoption it becomes more prevalent.*

4.3.6.3 The couple's view of a "transracial adoption"

This sub-ordinate theme was conveyed by all three of the couples and they expressed similar views about their experiences around the experience of a "transracial adoption". Their descriptions included their own experiences as well as the views that they have encountered from their family, friends, and the wider community.

For Steven and Mary, they spoke about how firstly, the term 'transracial adoption' did not really come up for them as from the beginning they knew what their expectation was in terms of adopting a child transracially. Mary described how for them and their family, the term as well as the transracial adoption itself, was *"never an issue"*, especially because they knew beforehand that, *"it was not going to be not a White child, or at least the chances were very, very, very slim"*. Steven also spoke about how - because their families and friends are *"quite liberal"* and that *"there's not a lot of racism going on in [their] friendship group"* - a transracial adoption was *"less of an issue"*.

James and Lesley expressed a similar experience and after asking the couple about how they viewed a 'transracial adoption', James revealed the following:

Look, she's my daughter, you know, and you come to, you over look it, you don't see it.... His wife also described how they have a lot of Black friends and that they are not *"a totally White community of people that suddenly bring this little brown child into it"*. She also felt that because they had a diverse friendship base, adopting a child transracially was *"not quite so strange"* and because of this diversity, *"it wasn't as difficult"*. James agreed with this and also mentioned that it had been helpful to *"have that diversity around, even at school, where there are many Brown children in the classes"*.

As for Roland and Tracy, they also commented on how they *"don't really see it that much"* in terms of the transracial aspect of the adoption and Roland went on to explain how he came from a background where his mother, *"didn't notice it"* and that *"she didn't give [them] a feeling of it"*. He went on to describe how his mother used to work in a hospital and that when one of the ladies that she worked with passed away, her son moved in and lived with them and how, *"it's been a natural thing"* for him and that *"it's been a natural progression of always having mixed colour around"*.

Reflective Box 8:

I found it interesting to note how the participants expressed their views of a transracial adoption. All the views seemed to be around transcending the racial aspect of the adoption, being accepting, and acknowledging the diverse community around us. I appreciated how the couples exuded openness and acceptance.

4.3.6.4 The South African context

This sub-ordinate theme captures the couple's experience of transracial adoption in relation to the South African context in which they engage with every day. All three couples spoke about different experiences involving various contexts and experienced both positive and negative encounters. Apart from the negative attention, what emerged from two of the couples was how they have also experienced positive attention, in the form of an increase in communication between themselves and others, due to the fact that they have adopted a child transracially. The positive attention received appeared to correlate with greater feelings of acceptance for the couples.

For Steven and Mary, adopting a child transracially in South Africa and raising their son in this context was seen as having both positive and negative associations. Steven spoke about how there is *"undoubtedly an underlying racial sensitivity within this country which can manifest itself positively sometimes and negatively at others"*. He went on to explain how because many people view racism as *"bad"*, people tend to be more aware and are increasingly careful in considering their feelings and opinions towards race, especially *"because of our past"*. Yet Steven described how *"at the same time there is also a very, very entrenched racism"*. Furthermore Steven explained how he has experienced adopting a child transracially in various communities within South Africa. He relayed the following:

> *… and I think that in SA, in the sort of White community, I think that's sort of the expectation as I have experienced it; no one has been surprised that our adopted child is not White. Um, so I think that here because there is this expectation and awareness that there are many adoptions that are transracial; that's people's expectation.*

In terms of adopting a child transracially in South Africa, Mary explained how for her, the experience makes her family *"so much more a South African family"*. She spoke about how South Africa is a *"mix"* and how *"it is a culture"* and she feels that their family *"can illustrate that"* and how this possibly *"makes it easier for [their] friends to look beyond just skin colour"*. Furthermore, for Mary, bringing up her son in South Africa has also made her very much aware *"of the fact that [her son] is just a human being"* and she feels that *"it's a wonderful example of how hopefully South African society is going to be soon"*.

Mary seems to encapsulate the feeling of acceptance and the importance of not basing judgements on race. She seems to take a positive stance on how transracial adoption can break down racial barriers and focuses on a reassuring and encouraging outlook. Mary captures this when

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she explained how transracial adoption *"takes away the barriers that have been there for many years"* and how all of a sudden *"the people see you like: Oh Wow! What are these White people doing with a Black boy? It must mean that they don't mind us being Black. I don't know it must be something like that... Ja, ja, definitely breaks down those barriers".* For Mary, she hopes that as a family they *"can contribute a little bit to bringing South Africa a little bit closer and that [they] can also make it a little bit easier for people in [their] direct environment to look beyond skin colour".*

James and Lesley spoke about how having adopted a child transracially has "*been welcomed by a lot of people [they] mix with".* James and Lesley also found that their family situation has elicited positive attention in certain contexts. Lesley described how she is being recognised more and more as an adoptive parent, especially by people in the shops who see her together with her daughter often. She commented on how they will ask about "*your child"* and not "*that child"* and "*it's like you're accepted and yes, essentially they are strangers to you, but they have accepted you, so I think that's encouraging".* For Lesley, the importance of being accepted and recognised as an adoptive parent became clear within her interview.

Despite these positive reactions, James also relayed how he imagines that *"a lot of people don't accept it".* He went on to describe the reaction from some people and spoke about how he sees them *"murmuring to themselves in their group".* The couple also described how they get the odd person who will comment by saying something like, *"Yes, you're doing well, you're practicing Ubuntu".* Whereas, if they go to places often *"the usual people get to know [them] and they realise that there's nothing really strange about [them]".*

For Roland and Tracy, when looking at their experience in a South African context, they stated how *"the majority of people are non-confrontational"* about the fact that they have adopted a child transracially. Tracy elaborated on this by explaining how from her experiences the *"majority of White people are non-confrontational about it"* and how they *"think it's great and they love [her daughter]".* She also described how their helper can be very critical about the things that they do and that *"she makes as though [they are] doing stuff wrong because [they] are not Black".* For example, Tracy mentioned how her helper had questioned them as to why their daughter did not have earrings yet or why they had not done braids in her hair. There is a sense of hurt and judgement from having received these comments and she explains:

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…. and that's the general sense that we get from Black people is that we're, um, a lot of them are: 'Ah cute', but generally in malls people that we don't interact with will sort of give us side eyes.

Furthermore, as Roland and Tracy *"put a big focus on how [they] communicate about adoption"* and how they do not use the term abandonment; they also commented on how this has been problematic when interacting with the schools. The couple mentioned that they felt that the schools *"don't seem to see the importance of that".* Tracy also confronted the schools about how they would be doing their family tree when the children did the activity in class. She questioned them as to whether they would be doing *"Black parents or White parents"* and while she conveyed that she understood that the *"teachers are quite young"*; she stated that *"they [the teachers] should have some more knowledge that it's a different situation".*

4.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided a description of the findings of the research process in the form of super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes that emerged from the analysis. Six super-ordinate themes were presented. The themes focused on the experiences relayed by the participants as they engaged with the researcher during the interviews. These themes were aimed at providing the reader with a look into these experiences. As the participants willingly shared their experiences with the researcher, it is hoped that this chapter has brought the participants as well as their unique experiences to life.

The final chapter is designed to merge the findings with existing literature. Following from that, the researcher's reflective process will be described as well as the limitations of the study as identified by the researcher. Penultimately, recommendations for future research and for practice will be presented and the chapter will conclude with the researcher's personal reflections in a summary.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the findings that arose through the exploration of the parental couple's experiences of transracial adoption. Furthermore, the findings will be integrated with existing literature. Following from this a discussion of the limitations of the study is made, followed by the recommendations for practice as well as potential research. The researcher's personal reflections are explored and the chapter ends with the conclusion.

5.2 DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to explore parental couples' experiences of transracial adoption and the research question was: What are the experiences of parental couples who have adopted a child transracially? Through exploring and describing the lived experiences of the couples, six super-ordinate themes were generated: beginning the journey to adoption, the pre and post adoption process, avenues of support, the adopted child, challenges linked to transracial adoption, and the implications of "race" in a transracial adoption. In the sections that follow, these themes are discussed and integrated with existing literature and the phenomenological perspective undertaken by the researcher is discussed.

5.2.1 BEGINNING THE JOURNEY TO ADOPTION

The sub-ordinate themes in this section convey the couples' first thoughts around the decision to adopt, their reasons for choosing to adopt and their desire to have biological as well as adopted children. The transracial element of the adoption is also discussed.

5.2.1.1 Initial thoughts of adoption

The first super-ordinate theme concerned the beginning of the couples' journey to adoption. Attwell (2004) is of the opinion that adoption "is a permanent decision, which may not be reversed; therefore both parties must be in total agreement with the decision being made" (p. 56). In the current study, the initial thoughts of adoption were in accord for two of the three couples. For the third couple, the prospect of adoption was introduced to the participant by his wife and he pondered over the idea before the couple reached consensus.

5.2.1.2 Reasons for choosing adoption

Apart from the initial thoughts of adoption, considering the reasons for adoption is an important initial step in the journey to adoption (Malm & Weti, 2010). When consulting the literature on the motivations for adoption, it was found that the most common reason as to why parents choose adoption is due to their inability to have biological children (Simon & Altstein, 2002). However, in the current study all of the participants were able to conceive biological children and thus were not motivated to adopt due to infertility difficulties. Due to their ability to have biological children, the participants in the current study stated their desire to have both biological as well as adoptive children. In addition, The National Survey of Adoptive Parents (Vandivere, Malm, & Radel, 2009) that was conducted in the United States, found that the most commonly reported reason for adoption was to provide a permanent home for a child in need, followed by a desire to expand their family, wanting a sibling for another child, and having previously adopted the child's sibling. In the current study, all three of the couples stated that their underlying reason for choosing adoption was to expand their families.

For two of the couples, besides wanting to expand their families, their motivation lay in the fact that there are so many children in need of a permanent home. For one couple in particular, the reality of how many children are in need of a home came about after spending a substantial amount of time volunteering at an adoption organisation. Similarly, in a South African study conducted by Finlay (2006) a small number of participants had decided to adopt a child after having spent time volunteering in a children's home. In addition, some families choose to adopt because they believe they will be "saving a child" who otherwise would not have the opportunity to grow up in a permanent home; "such a belief in the goodness of saving a child through adoption often has its genesis in adoptive parents' religious, ethical, and/or emotional feelings and their desire to make the world a better place, even if only for a single child or a few children" (Patricelli, 2007, para. 5). In the current study, one of the couples felt that it was their Christian duty to adopt a child and consequently, to give the child a chance in life. Thus, their religious beliefs were a strong motivating factor. Thus, beyond the need to expand their families and choosing adoption to do so, there lay a deeper need in the choice of adoption which appeared to be unique to each participant and pertained to their own need to help a child in need.

5.2.1.3 The transracial element

Besides the reasons behind the parents' motivation to adopt, if one consults the literature, specifically on the motivation for adopting a child transracially, there are a number of reasons that have been put forth as to why White parents chose to adopt a child of a different race. Some motives, of course, are common to most adoptive parents and do not distinguish between transracial and intraracial adoption (Zhang & Lee, 2011). In support of this, Ladner (1978) states that "contrary to what many believe; people adopt transracially for basically the same reason they adopt intraracially" (p. 39). In a study conducted by Zhang and Lee (2011), it was found that the participants were motivated to adopt a child transracially for altruistic reasons, i.e. to selflessly enhance the wellbeing of another person. Furthermore, one of the participants in their study also mentioned being motivated to adopt a child because of the number of children in need of a home. These reasons were in accord with the participants in the current study.

Furthermore, in South Africa, due to the limited availability of White children in the adoption organisations and the concentrated number of White parents wanting to adopt, this has become a factor for considering transracial adoption. Thus for some White prospective adoptive parents, they opt to adopt a child irrespective of the race difference (Ntongana, 2014). In a South African study conducted by Attwell (2004), it was found that transracial adoption was not always discussed when the participants approached certain adoptive organisations. However, it was found that the participants in this study were aware of the limited availability of White babies and the extensive waiting process that would follow if they were to have chosen to adopt intraracially. This was made clear to them by the respective social workers. Thus, the option to adopt transracially was openly discussed with the participants. Furthermore, in South Africa, according to Brown (2014) "if a family is willing to adopt transracially, race is almost never a stumbling block in the adoption process" (para. 12). This willingness can impact the length of the process and, as a participant in this study found, not wanting a particular child contributed to a quicker process. Overall, it was found that the participants' reasons for adopting a child transracially were similar to the reasons stated by couples adopting a child intraracially as stated in the literature. In addition, adopting a child transracially was a decision that was also linked to the country's availability of children rather than their personal motivations which were instead linked to adoption as a whole.

5.2.2 THE PRE AND POST ADOPTION PROCESS

The following sub-ordinate themes relate to aspects that were encountered by the couples during the pre and post adoption process. These include: being informed, experiences of the adoption organisation and the social worker, the importance of having time, the adoption triangle, the checklist and feelings of guilt, and administrative frustrations.

5.2.2.1 Being informed

The second super-ordinate theme captured various elements that were found to be integral to the pre and post adoption process. The adoption process has an extensive number of steps. As such, the process can be overwhelming, tedious, and fraught with delays. Furthermore, because of the number of steps required, when prospective adoptive parents begin the process, they are often not fully aware of what the process entails (Wilson et al., 2005). This is possibly due to inadequate information or may be due to confusion about what a specific step entails (Wilson et al., 2005). In the current study, two of the three couples mentioned that they felt that they were adequately informed about what was to be expected throughout the pre-adoption process. This allowed the participants to have a sense of reassurance, which extended beyond merely receiving information of the steps that were involved and also allowed them to plan around the process. For example, one of the couples mentioned being able to plan the baby shower.

5.2.2.2 Experiences of the adoption organisation and the social worker

All three of the couples found the adoption organisation as well as the social worker to be an essential part of the process as they felt that they were able to trust them and thus felt confident in knowing that they would be taken care of during the process. Furthermore, all three of the couples in the current study had adopted via the same organisation and two of the couples stated that they found the process to be seamless and attributed this to having adopted through this specific adoption organisation. They also explained how, in comparison to people they knew who had adopted children through other adoption agencies such as a government social department, they received additional support in the form of workshops about transracial adoption, which was found to be extremely beneficial. This is in accordance with Finlay (2006) who states that not all adoption agencies and organisations provide prospective adoptive parents with support and training specific to transracial adoption. Furthermore, the adoption agencies who do provide this support differ in terms of when it is

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provided; with some providing it during the pre-adoption process while others provide it post-adoption (Finlay, 2006).

5.2.2.3 The Importance of having time

Another aspect of the process that was found to be significant for one couple in particular, was the time that they had from when they made the decision to adopt to when they met their son for the first time. Brodzinsky and Pinderhughes (2002) state that because of the uncertainty as to when the adoption will be finalised, as the adoption process can vary in length, this can lead to feelings of frustration and apprehension for prospective adoptive parents. Conversely, in the current study, the couple found this period to be of value to them as it provided them with time to prepare for the adoption, answer questions they had about the transracial aspect of the adoption, as well as to really think about what it meant to adopt a child.

5.2.2.4 The adoption triangle

The participants' accounts revealed the encompassing nature of the adoption process pertaining to the importance of acknowledging the birth mother. For one couple, what became important was recognising and understanding the adoption triangle (the birth parents, the adoptee, and the adoptive parents) and the importance that their daughter knows where she comes from and is proud of it. The ability to be understanding towards the birthmother's decision and to not make false assumptions, based on limited information, was also found to be an important aspect for the couple.

Another couple also acknowledged the birthmother and how the experience was therefore not just about them as a couple. It was discovered that for them, meeting their son for the first time highlighted how difficult it must have been for his birthmother to decide to have him adopted. The couples agreed that they did not want there to be feelings of resentment or anger towards the birthmother. One couple wanted their daughter to know that her birthmother acted in her child's best interests. This was in accordance with Attwell (2004) who found that participants were in agreement about sharing the information on the birthparents with their children. Attwell also highlighted the value of adoptive parents providing the adoptees with positive information about the birthparents to prevent the adoptee from cultivating a sense of hatred or resentment.

5.2.2.5 The checklist and the unexpected feelings of guilt

During the pre-adoption process the couples were faced with having to decide certain aspects about the prospective adoptee such as; the child's age, gender, learning difficulties/disabilities, and race. This was done in the form of a check-list that the couples were given to fill in. These findings were in line with Ishizawa, Kenney, Kubo, and Stevens (2006) as well as Morrison (2004) who stated that parents are often able to specify which children they are willing to adopt and which children they are not willing to adopt. Apart from all three of the couples not being fully aware and prepared for having to fill in the check-list, it emerged that this element of the pre-adoption process proved to be one of the most burdensome aspects as it elicited feelings of guilt and heartbreak at having to decline some of the options put forward on the list, for example, learning disabilities. It became apparent that in having to make these choices, the couples were also faced with having to consider other aspects of their lives, one being, having children already and another being their employment and how taking care of a child with special needs would impact on both. These findings were consistent with Park (2012) who found that for parents who had other children before adopting another child, it was imperative for them to maintain the consistency of their current family structure. Thus engaging with the check-list was not merely a task involving the selection of criteria, but one which lead to the couples having to confront burdensome emotions and to re-evaluate their current family contexts.

5.2.2.6 Administrative frustrations and future decisions to adopt

Apart from the checklist being a taxing part of the pre-adoption phase, what emerged from the couples was that post-adoption, they were faced with administrative aspects that lead to frustration and annoyance. This was caused by a delay in getting the birth certificate from the Department of Home Affairs. It became apparent that this was something that was experienced by all three of the couples and that they knew of other adoptive parents who had experienced a similar issue. Besides the annoyance caused because of the delay in getting the birth certificate, one couple in particular felt that this setback lead them to doubt whether they would want to go through the adoption process again. In experiencing these administrative delays one couple in particular felt that this setback had lead them to doubt whether they would want to go through the adoption process again and so what may be seen as a mere paper work delay had a direct impact on the couples decision to adopt another child. There is currently no previous literature available on the delays in birth certificates after adoption in South Africa.

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5.2.3 AVENUES OF SUPPORT

The following sub-ordinate themes capture the various avenues of support that were available to the couples and that the couples sought out both pre and post adoption.

5.2.3.1 Support from family and friends

All three of the couples spoke of having made the decision to adopt and then sharing the news with family members. This was similar to findings by Attwell (2004) who reported that the adoptive parents consulted their family members after making the decision and would have gone ahead with the decision to adopt regardless of the responses from their family members. The participants' accounts revealed how some family members, particularly their mothers or fathers, were reluctant about their decision to adopt and one couple in particular had experienced racist comments from their immediate family. This evoked a deep battle for the participants as they struggled with feelings of sadness and disappointment due to the responses from these relatives. It also added an additional layer of stress as they had to contend with having to go through the pre-adoption phase knowing that the people closest to them did not fully support their decision. Attwell also reported that the adoptive parents were met with apprehension by some of the family members. Furthermore, Finlay (2006) reported that the adoptive parents encountered the most resistance from their parents. However, for some of the participants, their families were supportive and accepting of their decision to adopt from the onset. Despite the reluctance that was experienced from some of the family members pre-adoption, the participants reported that negative reactions to the adoption resolved over time and that the child has been accepted by all of their family including those members who initially voiced concerns. This change in perspective resulted in a huge sense of relief for the participant's and highlighted the importance and meaning of having support from those closest to them. These findings were similar to those of Attwell (2004), Finlay (2006), and Miller (2008).

In terms of the support received from friends, the couples reported that they had experienced their friends as supportive and accepting from the onset of their decision to adopt as well as throughout the adoption process and beyond. These findings were in line with Simon and Alstein (2002) who stated that friends were found to be more supportive and accepting of the adoptive parents' decision to adopt as well as the decision to adopt transracially. One couple in particular commented on how it is important for adoptive parents to find people who support their decision. They stated that adoptive parents and especially parents who adopt a child transracially are not always

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going to get understanding from everybody, but should surround themselves will those who do understand and support their decision as it makes the journey a lot easier.

5.2.3.2 There is no 'I' in team

Given the journey that the couples would be embarking on and the potential difficulties that they would encounter, it became important for them to work as a team and support each-other every step of the way. As such, the greatest source of support, both pre- adoption and post-adoption, was the support that they received from each other. The couples expressed the importance of communicating with each other, being there for each other, and being in accord with one another. This allowed the couples to feel that they did not necessarily have to rely on outside support as the support they provided each other was ample. Similarly, Wetzler (2008) found that the adoptive couple in her study provided each other with support and "worked as a team through their adoption process" (p. 80).

5.2.3.3 Support from the social worker

In terms of the support received from the adoption organisation, Wilson et al. (2005) maintain that having a supportive relationship with someone at the adoption agency can have a positive impact on the adoptive parents' experience of the adoption process. In terms of the support received from the social worker, all three of the couples agreed that their respective social worker formed an integral part of the process and that they felt adequately supported. They also found their social worker to be approachable and understanding in their decision to adopt as well as in their decision to adopt a child transracially, and in terms of any questions or uncertainties that they had. This was in accord with Attwell (2004) who found that the participants were in agreement about the importance of the social workers role during the adoption process and had experienced their social workers as supportive. Conversely, De Haymes and Simon (2003) stated that many of the participants in their study conducted on transracial adoption and support services in America, experienced poor levels of support from the social workers because of their decision to adopt a child transracially, in comparison to the support received by parents adopting intraracially.

5.2.3.4 Online resources and reading materials

The findings highlight the varying sources of support that the couples utilised throughout their journey and how this extended beyond direct help to using online resources and reading materials during the pre and post adoption phases. Some of the resources were sought by the couples

themselves, while others (e.g. articles and books) were given to them by the social worker. These resources provided additional information on adoption as well as transracial adoption and allowed the couples to keep up to date with recent articles and current support groups that were advertised online. Similarly, Wetzler (2008) found that adoptive parents used the internet as a supportive tool to gain information on adoption and to join online forums as a means to engage with other adoptive parents.

5.2.3.5 Support specific to transracial adoption

Apart from internet and reading materials, it was found that the participants had access to and made use of both formal and informal means of support. Peer (2016) found that the majority of participants in her study had access to support services both during and after the adoption, and all but one of the participants stated that they had received support in terms of race and culture. In the current study, the formal support that was offered to and utilised by all three of the couples was in the form of workshops and/or support groups and some were specifically aimed at addressing transracial adoption. These findings show that the adoption organisation and social workers acknowledge the importance of providing formal means of support to prospective adoptive parents; and that they see the importance of providing support services for parents adopting transracially. These findings are consistent with the findings noted by Peer (2016).

Despite the couples having attended and benefitted from these formal means of support, it was found that the couples currently felt that they were not needed at the present moment. These findings are in accord with Attwell (2004) who stated that none of the participants in her study were part of a support group at the time of the interview as they did not see it as necessary, whereas one participant felt that it could be utilised again when the adoptee was older. Likewise, one of the couples in the current study stated that they would most likely join a support group when their daughter is older and begins to question them about her adoption and the transracial aspects of the adoption. Furthermore, the couple noted that because their daughter was still young, the support needed at the moment had more to do with practical support in raising a child, rather than support related to the transracial aspect of the adoption. Attwell (2004) contends that adoptive parents should continue to be encouraged to make use of the support services offered to them post-adoption as it could be beneficial in helping them gain insight, express concerns, and share their own experiences. Likewise, Brodzinsky (2011) maintains that adoption preparation and support needs to be an ongoing process;

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there should be natural progression from pre-adoption preparation to post-adoption education and support.

In addition, what emerged from the couples was that the informal support relating to transracial adoption that they had received played an important role both pre and post adoption. This included support from other people who had adopted a child transracially, for example friends, extended family, or acquaintances. Furthermore, it was found that the informal support was a crucial part of the post-adoption phase and continued to be utilised by the couples. Similarly, Welsh, Viana, Petrill, and Mathias (2007) found that post-adoption, adoptive parents were likely to favour informal support over formal support and/or professional services. Wetzler (2008) states that the adoptive couples' support network can be strengthened by engaging with others who have adopted and who share similar experiences. Furthermore, the couples noted that interacting with other adoptive families, not only provided them as parents with a supportive platform to engage in, but it also provided their children with opportunities to interact with families who were similar to their own.

5.2.4 THE ADOPTED CHILD

The fourth super-ordinate theme concerned factors that were pertinent to the parental couple's experiences with the adoptee. This included receiving the first bits of information about the adopted child, bonding with the adopted child, adjusting to having an adopted child, and being open and honest with the adopted child.

5.2.4.1 First bits of information about the adopted child

Hearing about their children for the first time extended beyond receiving the first bits of information as it elicited heightened emotions in the couples as well as feelings of anticipation in waiting to meet their child for the first time. The information that the couples received consisted of brief biographical details and was only given to the couples shortly before meeting the child. One couple reported that they preferred it this way as this prevented them from second guessing their decision and spending too much time over-analysing the information, as when they met their son, he immediately superseded the image that had been formulated from reading the child's file. Another couple reported that they, along with the biographical information, had received a picture of the child. The picture caused mixed reactions for the couple as they noted how they did not like the picture. This caused turmoil around having a single photograph and then having to make a decision to go ahead with the adoption, based on liking what they saw or not. Nelson-Erichson and Erichson (1997)

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contend that adoptive parents who have high expectations about how they think the child should be are more likely to be left feeling initially disappointed in comparison to those with less expectations about the adoptee.

5.2.4.2 The anxiety surrounding bonding with the adopted child

Adoption brings about a unique set of tasks and demands for the family unit. Adoptive parents who feel uncertain about their ability to parent effectively as well as their ability to bond with the adoptee can subsequently impact the child's level of adjustment and the stability of the placement (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005). What emerged from the study was that the couples experienced anxiety about whether or not they would bond with the child, particularly during their first encounter. These findings were similar to those of Ashley (2012), who maintained that the adoptive parents expressed their concern about bonding with the child. Larkin (2006) states that the emotional bond between a parent and child is dependent on factors associated with both the parent and the child, for example, the parent's personality characteristics and his/her attitudes towards the adoption. Likewise, the adoptee's personality characteristics and his/her history (such as abuse or neglect) will also impact their ability to bond. Research has also suggested that children, who are adopted within the first year of birth, are said to experience less issues related to attachment in comparison with children who are adopted at an older age, which may aid the parent-child bonding process (Van den Dries, Juffer, Van Ijzendoorn, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2009).

Furthermore, all of the couples spoke of feeling a connection to their child. They spoke of their child's positive initial reaction when meeting them for the first time and how this contributed to decreasing their anxiety and their initial concerns about their child bonding with them. In studies conducted by Finlay (2006), it was reported that the majority of participants mentioned feeling an instant bond with the child. Likewise, Goldberg, Moyer, and Kinkler (2013) reported that more than half of the participants spoke of an immediate and strong bond with their child.

5.2.4.3 Adjusting to having an adopted child

In terms of adjusting to having an adopted child, two of the couples reported that they had expected there to be a period in which the child would have to adjust and get used to his/her new environment. Furthermore, one of the couples spoke of anticipating that their son would have difficulties in settling in and that he would be uncomfortable with the change. Despite the couple's concern about their child's adjustment, they reported that their children adjusted well and thus their

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expectations differed from reality which contributed to feelings of reassurance. Attwell (2004) maintains that children who are adopted at a younger age may settle quicker into the new family routine. Additionally, two of the couples reported that the age of the adoptee at the time of the adoption contributed to their adjustment. One couple, whose child was adopted at five months, stated that they found it easier to understand what their child wanted and another couple, whose child was adopted at eight months, mentioned it being easier as their child was already weaned, was eating well and sleeping well. Conversely, Finlay (2006) reported that adoptive parents who had adopted a child who was no longer in infancy (birth to one year of age), spoke of a distinctive adjustment period. Furthermore, Brodzinsky (1993) maintains that adoptees display differences in their patterns of adjustment which is linked to aspects such as the child's age, gender, their history before the adoption, and the adoptive family's structure and dynamics.

5.2.4.4 Being open and honest about the child's past

The couples spoke of the importance of their decision to be honest and open with their children about their pasts. These findings were consistent to those of Attwell (2004) and Baltimore (2008) who noted that all participants in their studies mentioned being open and honest with the adoptee. Furthermore, the couples in the current study utilised various methods to communicate about the adoptee's past. This involved answering any questions as truthfully as possible and also engaging in discussions about adoption from a young age. One couple had created a photo album for their daughter which they use regularly to explain the adoption to her. Another couple spoke of making use of stories and books about adoption to build it into their lives so that their daughter can view adoption in a positive manner. Similarly, these means of communicating about adoption were found by Baltimore (2008), who noted that adoptive parents utilised open communication, created photo albums, and read books to the adoptee. Baltimore also found that adoptive parents had made use of videos and engaged in adoption-day celebrations as a means of communicating about adoption.

5.2.5 CHALLENGES LINKED TO TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION

The fifth super-ordinate theme concerned the challenges that were linked to the couple's experiences of transracial adoption. Smith, McRoy, Freundlish, and Kroll (2008) maintain that adoption brings with it issues that the family have to navigate and that transracial adoption adds an

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additional layer of complexity that has to be dealt with. In the current study, the participants noted a number of issues that were pertinent to their experience in having adopted a child transracially.

5.2.5.1 Second language

The findings highlight the complex nature of learning a second language. In a South African study conducted by Finlay (2006) it was found that transracially adopting parents were concerned about their child not being able to speak an African language and these parents expressed their desire for the child to learn a second language. Furthermore, participants in the study had also encountered instances where it was assumed that their children spoke the vernacular and were thus not addressed in English. These findings were consistent with the current study in that all three of the couples spoke of wanting their child to learn an African language and how they had experienced this as something that is expected of their children, especially by Black people that they encounter. The couples in the current study spoke about being adamant in their pursuit of teaching their children a second language. All three couples, however, noted that this had been particularly challenging for them as they themselves could not speak an African language. As such, the couples showed determination in attempting to resolve these difficulties and had resorted to a number of means in order to address this issue. One couple spoke of asking their domestic worker and gardener who are Tswana, to speak to their children in the vernacular, but this had proven to be a challenge. Another couple spoke of wanting to teach their daughter themselves, but that this had not manifested successfully. Whereas the third couple suggested taking their child for lessons to try and combat the language challenge that they were currently experiencing. The findings are in accord with a study conducted by Bilodeau (2015) who states that all of the participants noted that the adoptive parents should make the effort to learn about the culture of their adopted child. They should also try and introduce that culture to their child via various means, such as teaching the child their cultural language.

5.2.5.2 Caring for hair and skin

It was found that all three of the couples experienced difficulties with managing their child's hair and skin. The participants in the current study had also received little information on hair care pre-adoption, but did not merely accept the fact that their child's hair and skin was difficult to manage and that they felt poorly informed and poorly equipped. They actively engaged in various means to increase their knowledge and learn how to care for their children's hair post-adoption. For example,

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one of the mothers had attended a workshop specifically addressing hair and skin care, while another couple had organised for a suitable hairdresser to come to their house so that they could learn how to do their daughter's hair.

The findings support Finlay (2006) who is of the opinion that in order to deal with the difficulties in caring for hair, parents should educate themselves by consulting with others who are knowledgeable and experienced in caring for hair that is not familiar to them. Finlay relayed how the participants in her study felt the need for more information about how to care for their child's hair.

Apart from the couples not being familiar with managing their children's hair and skin and thus encountering challenges in this regard, it also emerged that for one couple in particular, they had experienced feelings of inadequacy as a parent and concern about how their difficulties in managing their daughter's hair would affect her level of self-confidence. Marco (2012) contends that "literature about the symbolism of hair explores how hair is socially embedded and represented in historical Black societies as well as in contemporary society where there remain political and colonial undertones" (p. 10). Hair is seen as a symbol of identity, and different hairstyles have been used to signify marriage, age, social rank, as well as wealth (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). Hair is thus more than an aesthetic feature; it is also a source of self-doubt or self-esteem, especially for Black people (Rubin 2011). Black culture has been impacted by colonialism which affected people's perceptions of Black beauty, with hair being an important component of this (Marco, 2012). Therefore, being cognisant of the underlying importance of hair, especially in Black culture, and using the appropriate hair care techniques can therefore help build a child's self-confidence (Marco, 2012).

5.2.5.3 Questions around culture and heritage

In terms of the questions that arise around culture and heritage, the findings highlighted how certain issues and questions surrounding the child's birth culture became more prominent post-adoption. This included the importance of acknowledging that their child is a part of their family but also has a birth culture that needs to be acknowledged and respected. Some couples, however, felt that they did not want to incorporate all of the cultural elements or the more "extreme elements" of the birth culture, but felt that the child should be educated about these nonetheless. This seems to support the research done by Friedlander (1999) which states that there is an increasing number of White adoptive parents who have adopted a child transracially and who acknowledge the cultural

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differences between themselves and the adoptee and try to incorporate elements of the child's culture into the process of raising a Black child.

All of the participants in the current study were also aware of the multicultural aspect of the family that adopting a child transracially would create. Park (2012) states that post-adoption, more concrete thoughts, experiences, and issues pertaining to the child's culture begin to manifest themselves. Smith et al. (2011) found that the majority of the adoptive parents that they had interviewed, agreed that adoptive parents who adopt a child transracially should take pride in their child's cultural background. The adoptive parents in the Smith et al. study fostered this cultural pride by educating their children through books, films, culture camps, and dialogue. Similarly, Lee (2003) contends that "adoptive parents with a belief in enculturation (taking an active role in teaching their children about their birth culture and heritage) typically provide their children with educational, social, and cultural opportunities to instil ethnic awareness, knowledge, pride, values, and behaviours, as well as to promote a positive ethnic identity" (p. 715). Despite the fact that all of the parents in the current study expressed their intention to incorporate the culture of the adopted child, there was uncertainty for two of the couples around the extent and means of incorporating their child's birth culture with their own culture. One couple in particular felt that there was too much of an emphasis on incorporating the child's birth culture and noted the importance of the child embracing their culture as well. Whereas another couple spoke of deciding from the onset that they would inform their daughter about her Xhosa heritage and they had begun by buying her a traditional Xhosa doll. Steinberg and Hall (2012), maintain that the adoptive parent's ability to acknowledge the adoptee's birth culture does not mean that the adoptive parents' heritage should be overlooked, but that it should be shared and lived as it would be with a birth child.

In addition, Park (2012) states that adoptive parents expressed how they had limited knowledge about their child's birth culture. Likewise, one of the couples acknowledged their lack of knowledge and understanding of their son's birth culture and were left questioning how they were going to ensure that he had those links despite this challenge. For one father in particular, he wanted to tell potential adoptive parents who are considering adopting a child transracially, to carefully consider the aspects of language and culture and *"really try to be proactive about thinking about how you would want to respond to it"*. He went on to say that each person should make *"their own conscious decision"* in this regard. They should think about whether they would want to *"embrace that*

or give their children that exposure or don't they", because it can prove to be a substantial challenge post-adoption if these questions have not been thought about or discussed.

5.2.5.4 The child's age and racial awareness

Apart from wanting to educate their children about their birth culture and the importance of incorporating those roots into their current family, the participants' accounts revealed the importance of the child's racial awareness. Particularly with regards to the child's age and how this had an impact on their racial awareness, it was found that the couples who had very young children (under the age of four) had not yet encountered questions from their children concerning racial differences. Melina (2010) states that by the age of three, a child is aware of differences in skin colour and that by the age of four, a child can relate this to racial differences, in that they are aware that people with different skin colours are part of various "racial groups". One of the couples in particular related, how - because their daughter is now four - she is more racially aware and has begun to make comments; such as wanting to have long blonde hair and not wanting to be brown anymore. The couple conveyed how this has been challenging for them and has evoked feelings of sadness and concern as well as questions surrounding how best to navigate the way to help her understand her racial identity as they want her to be confident and proud of who she is. This reflects the findings in other studies which have found that transracially adopted children struggle more with accepting and being comfortable with their physical appearance than do children who are adopted into same race families (Kim, 1995).

Although receiving questions and comments from the adoptee was currently being experienced by one of the couples in the study, there were expectations from the remaining couples about there being similar comments and questions about adoption and particularly in relation to transracial adoption from their child as they got older. Another expectation shared by all three of the couples pertained to being faced with continuous comments and questions from the greater community. These expectations extended to the couple's biological children who were viewed as also being on the receiving end of questions and comments about their adopted sibling. This evoked concern for the participants and they spoke of foreseeing this as an emotionally difficult challenge for them as well as their children,

5.2.5.5 Expected challenges

Reflected in the participants' transcripts was the importance of being able to prepare themselves and their children for the challenges they may face in terms of comments, questions, and

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stares from others. Thus the need to protect and equip their children was strongly conveyed in this theme as the participants' spoke of the potential challenges that they foresee. Vonk (2001) maintains that it is important for parents to engage with their children and discuss race and racism as well as strive to teach them effective coping skills. One couple mentioned that how within their inner circle of family and friends, there would be support and understanding but that other people may respond differently towards the adoptee and their family as a whole. Thus, equipping their children with tools to handle these challenges was an important consideration mentioned by the couples. However, one couple spoke of the challenge that they face with trying to figure out concrete ways in which they could provide their daughter with healthy coping skills to handle the questions, comments, and stares that she may face. Whereas, another couple spoke of trying to handle the challenges when they happened, and the third couple spoke of wanting to guide their son through the challenges he may be faced with by talking through them. Thus, it was found that although the couples saw the importance of preparing their children for potential challenges and wanting to teach them coping skills, there was no consensus of how to go about doing this. Similarly, Lee (2003) states that "there is limited empirical research on the extent to which transracial adoptive parents engage in racial inculcation or the teaching of coping skills to help children deal effectively with racism and discrimination" (p. 735).

5.2.6 THE IMPLICATIONS OF "RACE" IN A TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION

The sixth and final super-ordinate theme captured the implications of race in a transracial adoption.

5.2.6.1 Standing out

One of the aspects that have been related to transracial adoption in both past and current studies is the raised visibility of the family within the community. The participant's accounts revealed that post-adoption, as a family, they became more noticeable to others and the target of stares and comments. This elicited feelings of 'standing out' amongst the participants which lead to increased feelings of vulnerability as they had to contend with continuously being in the spotlight. This increase in visibility was an aspect that the couples had also not fully considered pre-adoption. De Haymes and Simon (2003) state that in a transracial adoption, the increase in attention because of the racial differences between the parent and child, is associated with an increase in unwanted stares, comments, and puzzled reactions. Similarly, Miller (2008) found that transracially adopting families reported that they were increasingly being noticed in public. Their family unit was not easily

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recognised but met with confusion, in that bystanders would have difficulty figuring out the relation between the family members as there was not the automatic assumption of a parental relationship or automatic recognition as a family unit (Miller, 2008).

Furthermore, the participants in the current study stated that when their children were not physically by their side, people would not recognise that they were a family. When the child returned to a close proximity, people would then resume their stares and/or comments and try to figure out the relation between them. Similarly, Miller (2008) noted that if the children in a transracially adopting family were not physically close to their parents, there was no realisation that they were connected to their children at all. In addition, the increase in visibility became noticeable to the couples in the current study, whereas they mentioned that because of the current age of their children, their children are not currently noticing the reactions of others towards them.

5.2.6.2 Heightened awareness of race

While participants in the present study were heterogeneous in the extent of their racial socialization, it was clear that for the participants, parenting a child of colour had impacted their experiences of race, had prompted various responses in their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviour, and resulted in their own racial awareness became heightened once their children were adopted. They spoke of how they were initially very much aware of the fact that their child had a different skin colour to them, particularly in public. One participant mentioned this awareness being more evident when she was alone with her adopted son in public compared to when she was with both of her children (the one being adopted and the other biological). Another participant mentioned how this heightened racial awareness would impact how she disciplined her daughter in public as she was anxious as to what bystanders would think of her. This is in accord with the findings by De Haymes and Simon (2003) in which a number of participants indicated that their awareness was increased as a result of transracial adoption.

5.2.6.3 The couple's view of a transracial adoption within the South African context

In terms of the couple's view of a transracial adoption, it was found that all three of the couples spoke of it "not being an issue" for them as well as the ability to "overlook" the fact that their child had been adopted transracially, particularly in direct relation to how they viewed their adopted child. In addition, two of the couples noted that a transracial adoption was less of an issue for them partly because of their diverse friendship and family base. Morrison (2004) mentions that because of

the interaction between the adopted child, their parents, and their immediate and extended families, these individuals who are engaging with transracial adoptive families, acknowledge that people of different races deserve to be treated equally. In the current study, one of the couples attributed their upbringing to being open to diversity in terms of the transracial aspect of the adoption.

Furthermore, Kubo (2010) noted that research shows that White parents who adopt Black children have varying views on race and that they often display a degree of racial ambivalence by adopting colour-blind ideologies, particularly in direct relation to the child, as well as racial awareness when engaging with the community. In the current study, it was found that the couples separated their views and feelings about their children from their views about how the greater community would respond to their adopted children. The couples took on a "colour-blind" approach in their personal relationships with their children, yet they noted that the way in which the greater society related and interacted with their adopted child would be different and may involve less acceptance and understanding from some individuals. Miller (2008) contends that it is important for parents to be aware of the differing views of their children by society and to recognise the impact that this may have on them as they navigate their own racial identity. Yet he states the importance of parents valuing their own children equally, regardless of their racial differences. In addition, when paying attention to the views of the greater community, Morrison (2004) found that transracial adoption can have a positive impact in reducing racism in society because of the increased social contact between individuals of different races. These findings are supported by the "intergroup contact theory" which proposes that contact between members of different groups can help to alleviate prejudice (Everett, 2013). According to Morrison this theory "is well suited to the transracial adoption context because transracial adoption involves the development of meaningful relationships between persons of different ethnicities" (p. 190), specifically between the adoptive family and the greater society. This was consistent with one of the couple's experiences in the current study in which they noted that if they go to places often, they are welcomed and accepted as a family because of their frequent interaction with members of the community. Furthermore Morrison (2004) stated that "people in society who see White parents with Black children learn that Whites and Blacks can and do love each other" (p. 190). With the ever growing diversity and transformation of family structures, transracial adoption in particular has the potential to challenge the preconceived ideas about the family unit and may help to create and develop new understandings of the notion of the family (Walsh, 2012).

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Conversely, one of the couples reported that they had experienced mixed reactions from Black people and had received critical comments from their domestic worker about how they were handling certain aspects, such as, their daughter's hair and not piercing her ears. Furthermore, the couple reported that they were not satisfied with how adoption was communicated in the school environment and that teachers should have a better understanding about adoptive families so as to be better prepared for engaging in activities such as the family tree.

5.2.7 PHENOMENOLOGICAL DIMENSION

The researcher encouraged the participants to share their stories and paid respectful attention to the participants' experiences of the phenomenon of transracial adoption. Thomas (2010) asserts that phenomenology practiced within a human science perspective can offer valuable knowledge and understanding about individuals' experiences. Phenomenology was thus used to understand the participants' subjective views through personal interpretations of their lived experiences of transracial adoption and the meanings they attached to these experiences. Patton (2002) maintains that the findings that are derived through phenomenology paint a picture of the phenomenon as seen through the eyes of the participants who have experienced it. Thus the final product presents a picture which captures the essence of the phenomenon and provides others with an understanding of that which is being explored. Van Manen (1990) contends that each of the emerging themes can be seen as a statement of a concept and provides structure for a wider description of the greater phenomenological dimension of the lived experience. The themes provided valuable insight into the participants' experiences of transracial adoption and the phenomenological dimension is that which enabled the researcher to go "beyond the data" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 153). From the themes that emerged from the three parental couples, the following phenomenological dimension portrays the lived experiences of transracial adoption for the parental couples in this study.

The couples' desire to expand their families led them on a journey to consider adoption. However, in terms of the decision to adopt, what emerged from the study was a deep sense of altruism that was portrayed by all of the participants. For two of the couples, their awareness of the number of children in need of a home became a prominent factor, and for one couple, their religious beliefs and desire to help a child in need, had a strong influence on their decision to adopt. Although adoption is commonly motivated by infertility (Baltimore, 2008), the couples in the current study had motives that extended beyond this common assumption that the main motivation is not being able to

have biological children as the couples has no known fertility issues. All three of the couples were open to adopting a child irrespective of their race and due to the limited availability of White babies (Ntongana, 2014) the couples embarked on a journey through the adoption process which led to the creation of a racially diverse family consisting of White adoptive parents having adopted a Black child.

What emerged was that the couples had not fully anticipated all of the challenges that could arise with transracial adoption, however challenges and concerns during the pre-adoption process gave rise to opportunities to see the situation in a new light and to appreciate the aspects that were seamless and the positive support that was encountered both pre and post adoption. A strong sense of positivity and resilience emerged by the way in which the participants were able to navigate these challenges. Some initial apprehension from family members with regards to the couple's decision to adopt appeared to create tension within those relationships and created an emotional turmoil that proved to be a prominent challenge in the pre-adoption phase. It appeared that with time the apprehension dissipated and was replaced with acceptance and relief. In contrast, friends appeared to be more accepting and supportive from the onset of the couple's journey to adopt. Furthermore, the importance of support in the form of the couple supporting each other stood out as an important aspect in that there was comfort in knowing that there was someone they trusted to turn to and gain understanding from when challenges arose. What ensued was the portrayal of the couple as a team and the emphasis of strength and resilience in working together. The social worker also fulfilled the need for support, as did the informal support that the couples received and sourced themselves, in line with Welsh et al.'s (2007) finding that adoptive parents tend to favour informal support structures over formal support.

Welcoming their child into their lives brought with it an array of overwhelming emotions and the couples spoke of an "instant bond" that was created. However, there were initial concerns from the adoptive parents with regards to whether or not they would bond with the child which gave rise to heightened feelings of anxiety. When adoptive parents perceive that their child is not "attaching" to them as they hoped, this may threaten their bond and lead to a sense of tension and a tendency to question their ability as parents (Harris, 2012). As the couples moved into this new phase as a family unit, the incorporation of openness and honesty about the adoption became apparent and facing the challenges that were encountered in a proactive manner was highlighted. What emerged was a strong sense of resilience by the couples and a strong sense of will in the way that they faced the

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various challenges post-adoption. The couples also found themselves contending with issues that were not fully apprehended post-adoption, such as standing out in the community and having to reflect on their heightened awareness of race, and the importance placed on equipping their children with tools to deal will the challenges that they may encounter as adoptees. Davis (2009) contends that importance is placed on providing the adoptee with a stronger sense of their heritage to prepare them for questions and possible prejudice. The social workers who engaged with the couples strongly advocated the importance of the adoptive parents educating the adoptee about their birth culture and heritage and all three couples saw the importance of incorporating elements of the birth culture and had begun to do so in varying degree.

Furthermore, a variety of situations that have been encountered by the couples have made them feel both accepted and "set apart" because of their distinctive family unit. Overall, a sense of satisfaction in the adoptive journey was conveyed by the couples and what seemed to stand out was how it has brought so much love and joy into their lives. As Roland maintains: "Love is something that grows; it's not something that is immediately given. It grows in your heart and doesn't need to grow in your tummy". Of particular importance has been how the couples' experiences may lead to an improved understanding for prospective adoptive parents in gaining a deeper sense of what the adoption journey involves and the transracial aspects thereof (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003).

Having discussed the findings and the relevant literature, the section that follows will draw attention to the limitations of the study.

5.3 LIMITATIONS

Researchers bring in their inherent (researcher) biases to qualitative studies which must be acknowledged and identified (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thus, embarking on this research, I as the researcher acknowledge that there are multiple truths and that the findings are coloured by my own experiences. Another researcher may have interpreted the data and written up the themes in a different way. Therefore, the findings of this study can be seen as a co-construction in which the participants' stories, my own views and experiences, as well as the literature that was consulted, are merged to form a rich and colourful story but can be seen as one of many possibly co-constructions. Thus, it is important to note that the themes that have been identified do not represent the participants' only truth as they are possible interpretations that have emerged through my perspective as the researcher. It is recognised that these themes are one possible account of the experience of

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transcial adoption and they do not cover all aspects of the participants' experiences, and were selected due to their relevance to the research questions. A further limitation involved all three couples adopting children through the same organisation, and thus the data collected does not pertain to couples adopting via a private adoption social worker, another organisation, or via a government social development department In addition, the couples that participated in the study formed a heterogeneous sample with regards to their nationality as two of the participants were not of South African nationality and thus did not represent a typical White South African adoptive parental couple.

Furthermore, the exploratory nature of IPA allowed the researcher to collect data about what a select group of participants experienced, in other words; the participant's unique subjective accounts of transracial adoption. Thus, this does not provide proof for any of the findings, nor does it allow for the relationships between constructs to be examined (Polit & Beck, 2010). In other words, the results cannot always be generalized as it is difficult to infer findings to more broad populations or to draw general conclusions from the findings. However, having said that, a qualitative study allowed for a rich and in-depth description of the participant's lived experiences (Polit & Beck, 2010).

In addition, using dyadic interviews may pose a number of challenges. These include: the possibility of one of the members dominating the conversation, the dilemma that can arise if an argument between the pair arose, the interviewer displaying more sympathy and paying more attention to one member over the other, as well as the response given by each member due to the presence of the other (Bell & Campbell, 2014). In the current study the use of dyadic interviews posed a minor challenge. The couples in the current study shared their experiences in a manner that did not always allow each person the opportunity to put forth their views equally. However, no arguments arose between the couples that were interviewed and the researcher utilised her listening skills in a way that did not favour one person over the other and in a way that encouraged both participants to share their views.

Reflective Box 9:

When first deciding to use dyadic interviews I had wrongly assumed that the female participants would do most of the talking because of my pre-conceived idea that women talk more than men. This was however not the case as in all three of the interviews the male participants were very vocal about their experiences. At times I had to encourage the female participants to share their unique views so their partners did not continuously talk on their behalf. This was something that I pondered about after the interviews as I wondered if it may have been due to them not having a

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study could be researched further by interviewing a greater number of parental couples in order to expand on the experiences that were discussed by the three couples in the current study. Another possible way of furthering this research would be to re-interview the couples when the adoptees reach middle childhood in order to compare their experiences then to now - and see how the age of the adoptee impacts the couple's experiences of transracial adoption.

Furthermore, future research should aim at incorporating parental couples who have adopted a child transracially via a private adoption social worker, through another organisation, or via a government social development department. Meza and Lopez (2016) maintain that there is limited research pertaining to the experiences of same-sex couples and their journey through the adoption process. Thus, a further recommendation involves incorporating same-sex couples as part of the sample.

From the research that has been previously conducted on transracial adoption, the findings suggest that limited information is given to adoptive parents about the nature of bonding and attachment. It is thus important to continue researching the parent-child bond in adoptive families as it may benefit prospective adoptive parents by providing them with useful information about the nature of bonding and attachment, so that they are equipped to approach parenting with a greater awareness of the bonding process, ease their anxieties, and voice their concerns about their ability to bond with the adoptee (Goldberg, Moyer, & Kinkler, 2013).

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The findings from this research can be used by adoption organisations and in particular by the social workers to aid prospective adoptive parents in navigating their way through the adoption process and beyond. This could be in terms of providing them with adequate information about the process (including the check-list) as well as what is to be expected post-adoption in terms of the potential administrative frustrations with the Department of Home Affairs. Furthermore, the social worker could prepare them for the potential challenges that may be encountered post-adoption and provide them with information on the importance of support, bonding, and managing the child's hair and skin, which in turn could ease the transitional process.

Prospective adoptive parents can benefit from the study as they can make use of the findings to better prepare themselves for what is to be expected both pre and post adoption. Additionally they

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could gain a greater understanding of how adoptive parents who have adopted a child transracially made the decision, the supportive networks that were utilised and found to be beneficial, their experiences with the adoptee as well as the challenges and experiences that were specific to transracial adoption.

5.6 PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Schmidt (2005) said the following: "I believe that a researcher should delve into and acknowledge their personal understanding, experiences and conceptual perspectives on that they are investigating" (p. 8). Therefore, in this section, I would like to share with you part of my own journey as the researcher as I embarked on this study and my reflections of what it was like to listen to the stories that were shared with me.

Firstly, this research study has been a massive undertaking and is comparable to a white-water rafting adventure that has been filled with calm waters, tremulous rapids, and some very turbulent patches. As I began this journey, I felt prepared and excited at the prospect of what was to come. Despite the limited information pertaining to parental couple's experiences of transracial adoption, the literature that was reviewed, contributed to increasing my knowledge and my own understanding of adoption and more specifically; transracial adoption. There were times when the lack of literature and the outdated literature led to me feeling extremely frustrated and left me feeling like an excavator trying to dig up rare findings.

I also had to take the time before conducting the interviews to assess my own understanding and assumptions surrounding transracial adoption so as to be aware of how this may impact the process going forward. Interestingly enough, when I conducted the interviews a number of pertinent assumptions came to light which I had not previously considered. One such assumption was that prospective adoptive parents chose to adopt mainly due to fertility difficulties. After meeting the participants I was surprised to learn that their choice to adopt was unrelated to fertility difficulties.

Another assumption that I had made was that the families would be supportive of the participant's decision to adopt and to adopt transracially. This assumption emerged because of my personal experience with having two adopted cousins and the one being a mixed-race adoption and experiencing the entire family as supportive. After hearing the participants' relaying their difficulties with the initial lack of support from some family members, I was left feeling saddened and angered by this. I had to reflect the fact that I see myself as an accepting and open-minded person and that I

have a need for others to be the same. I also had to be aware of portraying this theme from the participants' perspective without allowing my emotions and judgements to cloud what was being portrayed.

In terms of the participants, I was deeply moved by the couples' willingness to join me on this quest to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences of transracial adoption. As I reflect back to the interviews, I can recall being in awe of the couples that I got to meet, especially their openness and readiness to engage with me. As they shared these experiences with me they moved through an array of emotions while recalling their journey. I too experienced an array of emotions; at some points I would be grinning widely, at others, tearing up as they reminisced and recounted their experiences. Furthermore, I thoroughly enjoyed interviewing the participants as a couple and I particularly enjoyed watching them engage with each other. Sometimes they would finish each other's sentences, or turn to each other to see if the other had anything more to add. At other times they would nod in agreement or voice a different view. I had also wrongly assumed that the mothers would do the majority of the talking and this preconception was undoubtedly changed when I found that the fathers had a lot to say and spoke a considerable amount of the time. I was also concerned about the couple disagreeing with each other to the point where a conflict would arise, however, this did not happen and so I was left feeling relieved.

For me, the fact that two of the couples had biological children and then decided to expand their families by adopting a child really touched my heart and I felt so incredibly fortunate to be in the presence of such incredible people. I also experienced the couples as so open minded and so accepting of differing views and not afraid of "disrupting" the status quo. I was touched by their willingness to trust me with their experiences and feel so incredibly grateful for being given the opportunity to get to know them and their children. I was also able to learn so much from the participants as they relayed their experiences and came to realise that I was unaware of many aspects involved during and after the adoption.

I was unaware of the fact that there was a check-list to fill in and so when the participants' spoke of this check-list I was deeply moved by their emotional responses at having to go through this list and 'select' the criteria that they wanted. The guilt that resulted was almost tangible and was a difficulty that I was unaware of in the adoption process.

The process of analysing the data was the most time consuming aspect of this study. I was initially anxious about IPA and eased my nerves by reading as much information as I could find. I transcribed the interviews myself and although there were times when I regretted making that decision, I was nonetheless grateful that I persevered with it, I was amazed at how many things I had forgotten from the initial interviews or I had not heard properly. I then read the transcripts a number of times and tried to approach each one separately. Throughout this process I was also made aware of my own perceptions that surfaced from engaging with the participants and reading about the participants' experiences. I found it useful to reflect on my perceptions by journaling as I journeyed through the process. Some of the themes evoked strong emotions in me, one being the South African context and how Mary spoke with such passion about wanting her family to be a reflection of acceptance and the ability to look beyond skin colour.

I also struggled with writing Chapter 4 as I wanted it to be an accurate reflection of the couples' accounts and I wanted to honour that. This led to me spending a lot of time writing up the chapter until I felt that I had captured their unique experiences as best as I could, without merely writing up the reflections in a parrot fashion.

As I proceeded through the study, my interest in transracial adoption grew and I have gained considerable appreciation for the couples and the journeys that they embark on to become adoptive parents. It also allowed me to gain insight into and an appreciation of my Aunt and Uncle's journey in becoming adoptive parents as had not been aware of what the process entailed and the challenges that could arise. I am indebted to the couples in this study and hope that I have done them justice in recounting their experiences and adding to the literature on transracial adoption experiences in South Africa.

5.7 CONCLUSION

The study enabled the researcher to explore parental experiences of transracial adoption by collecting data from three couples on their experiences of transracial adoption in South Africa. The aim of the study was therefore to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of parental couples who have adopted a child transracially and more specifically; the experiences of White parents who have adopted a Black child. This was supported by the following over-arching sub-questions related to the parental couple's experiences: what led these parental couples to adopt transracially? what were their experiences of the adoption process? what were their experiences after

placement? were any challenges experienced pre-adoption and post-adoption? Based on its philosophical underpinnings and focus on lived experience, IPA was adopted as the most suited research method to address the research aims and the participants were asked to talk about their experiences of transracial adoption, through the use of semi-structured interviews. Six super-ordinate themes emerged during the analytic process, demonstrating the richness and complexity of the experiences being explored. The six super-ordinate themes show a common experience shared by the majority of the participants. By providing rich descriptions of the phenomenon, the study attempted to capture the essence of the parental couple's lived experience of transracial adoption.

In the current study all of the participants were able to conceive biological children or had not yet experienced problems and thus were not motivated to adopt due to infertility difficulties. Thus the motives for choosing adoption included: wanting to expand their families, the number of children in need of a permanent home, and for one couple, their religious beliefs. Furthermore, the couples decided to adopt irrespective of the child's race. The couples encountered both positive and negative experiences across their journey of transracial adoption. The importance of support both pre and post adoption was highlighted by the couples as well as how the lack of support pre-adoption, especially from family members, was found to be a great challenge. It was also found that post-adoption, adoptive parents were likely to favour informal support, such as from family, friends, and others adoptive families, over formal support and/or professional services. The couples experienced the pre-adoption process as largely positive which was attributed to adopting through their chosen adoption organisation, being informed and being supported by their respective social worker. The check-list and administrative frustrations were experienced as challenging parts of the process. A number of challenges specific to transracial adoption were also noted. These included: the decision around a second language and how to implement it, the extent of incorporating the child's birth culture into the family and the means to address this, caring for the child's hair and skin, as well as preparing for and dealing with the reactions, comments, and stares from people in the community. Furthermore, a number of implications of race in a transracial adoption were highlighted by the couples. This involved the raised visibility of the family within the community, the couple's increase in racial awareness and their views towards their children and towards the community, particularly post-adoption. Despite the challenges faced by the couples, they noted that is has impacted their lives positively and would encourage other couple's to adopt transracially.

The review of the literature in Chapter 2 highlighted how current research in the area of transracial adoption is limited, especially in South Africa. It also demonstrated that participants in previous studies have been interviewed individually and not as a parental couple. Thus, the reflections that were captured from the couple's experiences in the current study offer valuable information to the literature for understanding the complexity of transracial adoption and provide insight into both the pre and post adoptive phases. Another valuable aspect of this research was to provide a unique look into the experiences of both the mothers and fathers as a couple and how they have experienced the phenomenon together. The aims of the study were thus successfully achieved. A final aim was to make appropriate recommendations in order to improve the information available to adoption organisations and to prospective transracially adopting parents thus contributing to ease the transitional process.

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APPENDIX I LETTER OF PERMISSION

Office: +27 11 640 1343
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Email: msk@global.co.za

Physical: 20 Leigh Ave,
Fairvale Ext, Johannesburg

Postal: PO Box 1675, Bramley 2018
Log on: www.impilo.org.za

27 October 2015

To whom it may concern,

Stefania Romanini – permission to conduct research at Impilo

This letter is a response to Stefania Romanini's request to conduct her research on 'Parental couple experiences of trans-racial adoption'.

I hereby grant her permission to conduct her research at Impilo Child Protection and Adoption Services, located at 20 Leigh Avenue, Fairvale Ext 1, Johannesburg, and grant her permission to work with our social workers to assist with contacting potential participants.

For any queries kindly contact the undersigned.

Yours sincerely

Susan Krawitz
Director

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Registered CPO & Accredited Adoption Organisation (National and inter-country) | Caring for orphaned and vulnerable children 055-213-NPO

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Letter of information

Research conducted by: Stefania Romanini

Dear Participant,

The aim of writing this letter is to request your voluntary participation in this research, aimed at exploring parental experiences of transracial adoption. The following information has been compiled to enable you to be fully informed about the research study in which you have been asked to take part. It is important that you feel comfortable about your contribution and that the process takes place in an atmosphere of trust and transparency. If any aspect of it seems unclear, or should any matter of concern arise, please feel free to discuss any time.

Title:

Parental Couple Experiences of Transracial Adoption: A Phenomenological Study

Purpose of the study:

The study aims to explore the parental experiences of having adopted a child transracially in order to contribute in providing a deeper understanding of the topic in the hopes that it will in turn provide potential adoptive parents with insight into transracial adoption and will allow adoption organisations to take the necessary steps in better preparing parents who are wanting to adopt a child transracially. Furthermore, the availability of more information about the experiences encountered along the way could also ease the transitional process for new adoptive parents.

The study is not an evaluation, nor is it a part of the adoption centres procedures.

Procedures:

The process will consist of you and your spouse being interviewed together. The researcher will interview each couple privately. You will be asked to reflect on your experience of having adopted a child transracially. You may talk about anything that comes to mind when you reflect on these experiences. You will be free to talk about these experiences in a way that is comfortable for you, and not to talk about anything that you do not feel comfortable with.

Please take note of the following:

- The interview will be audio-recorded with your consent.
- The time required for the interview may vary, but will by estimate take 1 – 2 hours.
- Interviews will be scheduled according to each couples preference.
- Interviews will be analysed and themes will be extracted from each set of information.

- You will be presented with a summary of the interview and the themes derived from your interview. You will be given the opportunity to comment (agree, disagree and elaborate) on the researcher's preliminary analysis.
- The aim is to complete the study within the year of 2016
- The results of the study will be reported on in the form of a dissertation and an academic article.

Risks:

No risks or discomforts are foreseen. However should you feel the need to discuss anything further after the interview, a Clinical Psychologist (Dianne McCormick) will be available. This is entirely optional.

Benefits:

No specific benefits for participants are foreseen. No remuneration is given for participating.

Participants' rights:

Participation is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time and without fearing negative consequences. You may feel free to ask about any aspect of which you are uncertain and need further clarification. If you wish to withdraw after the interview, you may request to have your interview transcripts excluded from analysis and reporting.

Confidentiality:

Be assured that all information that you provide will be treated with the utmost of respect and confidentiality at all times. Fictitious names (pseudonyms) will be used and your identity will not be revealed. This will be done from the outset so that the pseudonym is used from the very first word that is written about your experience.

Documents in electronic format will be password protected and stored on external media (CD or DVD) and kept in a locked cabinet. Original hardcopies of documents will be also placed in a locked cabinet, to which only the research has access.

Data will be used by the lead researcher and possibly also academic staff of the University of Pretoria for the purposes of this project and may be used by other academic researchers in the future for the purposes of research and/or training. No personal information will accompany the usage data. In line with the University of Pretoria's data storage policy, all data will be stored securely for 15 years from the completion of this project (until 2031) at the University of Pretoria's Department of Psychology.

You have the right not to participate in this study. Furthermore, should you wish to withdraw at any stage, you may do so without consequence.

If you have any questions, suggestions or requests, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for considering being a part of this research process

X_____
Prof Claire Wagner
Supervisor

X_____
Stefania Romanini
Researcher (Masters Counselling Student)

Supervisor: Prof Claire Wagner
Tel: +27 12 420 2319
Email: Claire.wagner@up.ac.za

Lead Researcher: Stefania Romanini
Cell: 083 379 1886
Email: romanini@global.co.za

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APPENDIX III

Interview Guide

Thank you for being willing to speak to me about your personal experiences. I want to understand more about your experiences of becoming a father/mother through adoption. Once again there are no right or wrong answers because all of your experiences are important to me. I encourage you to share all that comes to your mind during this interview. As we discussed before, you can stop the interview at any time that you would like and you can choose to skip any question that you would prefer not to answer. If you are confused about any question that I ask, please let me know. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Opening Question:

Tell me about your experience of adopting your child

The following probes will be utilised when necessary:

1. The decision to adopt

Can you tell me about your experience of deciding to adopt a child before the adoption process?

Which organisations did you approach?

Did you tell your family/friends about your decision to adopt a child?

What were the reactions from friends and family?

2. The process of adopting

What was your experience of the adoption process?

What did you find to be helpful during this period?

Who did you find to be most supportive?

Can you tell me about the type of support you received?

What were the challenges during the process of adopting?

How did you experience engaging with your social worker in the process of adopting your child?

When did you find out about your child's race, gender etc.? What was it like when you were told about your child?

People would typically refer to your situation as a 'transracial adoption', i.e. you would be classified as one race and your child as another. How do you experience this term?

Did you experience any need for extra support because of the race issue? In what ways did the organisation prepare you in terms of what people see as a transracial adoption?

Overall, what was the experience of the adoption process with regards to adopting a child transracially in South Africa like?

3. Experiences after placement

Tell me about the time when your child was first placed with you

Tell me about your experience of parenting a transracially adopted child

What did you find to be most helpful?

Who offered the greatest support during this period?

Can you tell me what you found to be most challenging?

What have the reactions been from friends and family?

What, if anything, would you have done differently?

What have the experiences around race been like for you?

Is there anything else that I should know about your experience? If so, what?

Is there anything that you would like to tell people about your experience of transracial adoption?

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities
Department of Psychology

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear participant

This letter serves as notification that you have read and retained a copy of the letter of information concerning:

Parental Couple Experiences of Transracial Adoption: A Phenomenological Study

1) I am aware that the first three couples to respond to the researcher will take part in the study. Furthermore, the research study has been explained to me and all questions have been sufficiently answered. I am aware of the purpose and procedures of this study and I have been informed that the interview will last between 1 - 2 hours and that my partner and I will be interviewed together. I am also aware that it may be audio-recorded with my consent.

2) I have been informed that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any point during the study or request the removal of all or part of my data without any consequences to myself. I understand that my identity will be kept confidential for this study. I have been informed of the steps taken to ensure confidentiality, non-maleficence, beneficence and justice.

3) I have been informed of the steps taken to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of all the research data. I understand that the transcribed data as well as the original recording will be kept in a secure place.

4) I acknowledge that data will be used by the lead researcher, and academic staff of the University of Pretoria for the purposes of this project and may be used by other academic researchers in the future for the purposes of research and/or training. No personal information will accompany the usage data. Data will be stored for 15 years at the Department of Psychology, i.e. until 2031.

5) I am aware that I can contact the researcher or her supervisor, by email or telephonically should I have any enquiries about this research study.

I ....fully understand the nature of the research project and I am willing to take part in the process.

Signed at ....on this ....day of......................year........

.... (Participants signature)

Please provide your e-mail address at the bottom of this sheet should you be interested to receive the completed dissertation

_____   _____

Prof. Claire Wagner   Stefania Romanini

Supervisor   Researcher (Master's Counselling Student)

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