EXPLORING CHALLENGES SPECIFIC TO CROSS RACIAL ADOPTION IN GAUTENG

by

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I declare that **Exploring Challenges specific to cross racial adoption in Gauteng** is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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SUMMARY

An empirical study was undertaken to **conduct applied, exploratory, descriptive research to establish challenges specific to cross racial adoption in Gauteng, South Africa**.

The objectives of the overall aim were:

- to conduct empirical work and to collect data through the use of focus groups with parents who have cross racially adopted, in order to explore challenges specific to cross racial adoptions
- to conduct analysis in order to describe the findings of the empirical data
- to conduct a thorough literature review on available literature pertaining to cross racial adoption
- to draw conclusions and make recommendations on the completion of the afore mentioned objectives

The empirical study demonstrated that:

- Parents who cross racially adopt do experience challenges and there are challenges specific to cross racial adoption
- A number of the challenges experienced by parents who cross racially adopt are directly linked to a lack of support throughout the adoption process
- A need exists for a comprehensive model of support for parents who cross racially adopt

The empirical study was successful in identifying, exploring and describing challenges experienced by parents who cross racially adopt in Gauteng.

KEY CONCEPTS

Adoption is a legally permanent parent-child relationship created through the intention and desire of the birthparents to terminate their parental rights and responsibilities, and the intention and desire of the adoptive parents to assume them.

Adoptive parent/s in the context of this study refers to a parent or parents who adopt a child who is not theirs by blood. In other words the child is of a biological decent other than the parents' own. Furthermore adoptive parents are those who assume the responsibilities of birthparents.

Cross cultural adoption is the placing of a child of one race or culture in a family of another race or culture or when a child is adopted by a family of a different race.

Cross racial adoption in the context of this study is defined by the researcher as the adoption of a black child by a white parent or parents who assume the parental rights and responsibilities of the biological parents, who terminated their parental rights by choosing to place their child for adoption or by way of abandonment. A new and unique family unit is therefore formed by the bringing together individuals from two racially different families.

Subsequent to the admission of this dissertation of limited scope it has come to light that the literary resource A guide to adoption practice first published in 1972 was in fact revised in 1996. Further investigation has revealed that the revised version was printed and bound by the South African National Council for Child Welfare and used as an internal resource. Therefore the revised guide was not published and made available to organisations such as Johannesburg Child Welfare, Cotlands and the Professional Board for Social Workers.

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1.1. INTRODUCTION

Adoption is a pertinent phenomenon in South African society and every day thousands of children are available for adoption and in need of suitable homes. A number of societal issues contribute to the increase in the number of children being placed for adoption, and HIV /AIDS is one of these contributing factors. In this regard van Dyk (2001:III) is of the opinion that "…never before in the history of the human race has one disease presented so many challenges and brought about so many unanticipated changes".

The primary focus of this particular research study was cross racial adoption. However it was essential for both the researcher and respondents in the research study to acknowledge the context in which adoptions are occurring. According to the World Health Organisation (2003), 13.2 million children were recorded as being orphaned by AIDS in 1999 and 12.1 million of those children were in sub-Saharan Africa. This alarming statistic is directly correlated to an increase in the number of children in need of care, be it through children's homes, foster or adoptive families.

In South Africa, society seems to have taken cognisance of the fact that there are a significant number of children needing homes, and as such adoption, and specifically cross racial adoption, have become ever more prevalent. According to the register of adoption at the Department of Social Development in Pretoria in 2005, 2379 children were adopted, of which 452 (of these children) were part of cross racial adoptions. In total 191 of these cross racial adoptions occurred in South Africa while the remainder 261 were inter-country adoptions. There has been an overall increase in the number of cross racial adoptions in South Africa - 150 in 2003, 219 in 2004 and 191 in 2005.

Through the process of conducting a primary and secondary literature search it became apparent to the researcher that there is limited documented literature on challenges specific to cross racial adoption in South Africa. In contrast there is extensive literature (compare Hart & Luckock, 2004; Melina, 2002 and Steinberg & Hall, 2000) available in both the USA and the United Kingdom on cross racial adoptions in these countries. The researcher acknowledges that

there may be documented information in social service and social development departments in South Africa. However, this literature is not readily available to adoptive parents or external parties. In light of the limited literature there is undoubtedly a need in South African society to understand the topic of cross racial adoption and the challenges pertaining to this matter.

1.2. MOTIVATION AND PROBLEM FORMULATION

The researcher, through extensive volunteer work and a personal family experience, has been privy to a number of cross racial adoptions. On observing adopted children and their adoptive parents the researcher questioned whether parents who cross racially adopt experience specific challenges that parents who adopt same race children do not experience. A number of the adoptive parents, observed by the researcher voiced their opinions about experiencing challenges with structuring their alternative family and undertaking a cross racial adoption. The researcher therefore sought, through formal research, to establish if the informal views of these parents indicated that parents who cross racially adopt do experience specific challenges.

An extensive overview of literature (compare Steinberg & Hall, 2000; Schooler, 1993 and Phillips & McWilliam, 1996) pertaining to adoption, and specifically cross racial adoption, in the United Kingdom and the United States implies that there are challenges specific to cross racial adoption in these countries. Some of the identified challenges include forming racial identity, forming bonds or kinship, knowledge of ancestry and social acceptance. In this regard the National Association for Black Social Workers in the United States of America (in Liptak, 1993:51) claimed that only a black family can prepare a black child to live in a society in which racial prejudice must be confronted on a daily basis. These views, however, did not according to Liptak (1993:52), change the reality that by 1993 in the United States of America an estimated 25 000 black children had been adopted by white people. These numbers would imply that while cross racial adoptions are not perceived as ideal by all, they are a reality and present challenges which must be acknowledged and addressed. These challenges have persisted for decades in the United States, and authors such as Simon and Altstein (1977:26) state that almost three decades ago both public and private adoption agencies already had a bank of white adoptive families in excess of the number of white children available for adoption.

Although it may be assumed that literature from the United States and United Kingdom would be sufficient to inform and support prospective parents in their decision to cross racially adopt, the fact remains that there is to date insufficient research to prove that this assumption is correct

within a South African context. In this regard Kahn (2006:ix) clearly states that "…while there is a wealth of information written for overseas readers, there is practically nothing available that takes our unique South African context into consideration". 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 framework of South Africa's uniqueness.

In light of the above mentioned the problem formulation for this research study was that there is an insufficient understanding of the challenges experienced by parents who cross racially adopt in South Africa. A concerted effort therefore needs to be taken to explore cross racial adoption in a South African context in order that the helping professions may better understand and support the challenges of cross racial adoption.

Due to the fact that this dissertation is of limited scope the focus of the study was to explore and describe challenges specific to cross racial adoption in Gauteng. The researcher is of the opinion that exploratory and descriptive research such as that conducted may be the initial step in the undertaking of continued research on how the cross racial adoption process may be better supported.

1.3. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

According to Fouché (in de Vos, 2002:107), the aim broadly defines the more abstract conception of the end goal toward which effort is directed and objectives are the more concrete, measurable steps a researcher undertakes to fulfil the aim of the research. The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology (1995:21) similarly states that an aim is a goal or goal state toward which behaviour is orientated. This usage generally carries the connotation of volition; successful completion of a piece of work may be an aim. The aim of the study is therefore the overall goal, while the objectives constitute the behaviour or action which aid in the successful attainment of the end goal or aim.

The broad aim of this particular research study was to **conduct applied, exploratory, descriptive research to establish challenges specific to cross racial adoption in Gauteng, South Africa**.

The objectives of the overall aim were:

- To conduct an empirical study by collecting data through the use of focus groups in order to explore challenges specific to cross racial adoptions
- To conduct analysis of the collected data in order to describe the findings of the empirical data
- To conduct a thorough literature review on available literature pertaining to cross racial adoption
- To draw conclusions on the completion of the aforementioned objectives and to make recommendations for health professionals who assist families who cross racially adopt.

The research was regarded as explorative and descriptive in that it aimed to describe the challenges of cross racial adoption which were uncovered through exploration. According to Fouché (in de Vos, 2002:109), descriptive research presents a picture of the specific details of a situation. Exploratory and descriptive objectives can blend in practice if the combination is suitable for the specific research study, as was the case in this particular research.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTION

The researcher wanted to explore and describe what challenges are specific to cross racial adoption and limited the study to Gauteng. The formulated research question is, therefore: **What challenges specific to cross racial adoptions do adoptive parents face in Gauteng, South Africa?**

1.5. RESEARCH APPROACH

The research approach was qualitative in nature and deemed the most appropriate for this exploratory, descriptive study. According to Fouché and Delport (in de Vos, 2002:79), the qualitative research paradigm in its broadest sense refers to research that elicits participant accounts of meaning, experience or perceptions and it produces descriptive data in the participant's own words. In light of the fact that the purpose of the research was to explore the specifics of a social phenomenon, qualitative research was regarded as the most suitable approach.

Reid and Smith (in de Vos, 2002:80) state that a qualitative approach is preferential when the researcher is attempting to gain a firsthand, holistic understanding of the chosen subject matter. Through this research the researcher wanted to gain a holistic understanding of the challenges

of cross racial adoption, and not to measure variables within the phenomenon. A study of this nature would not have been justified by a quantitative approach because the researcher had to explore and describe the challenges of cross racial adoption. According to Marshall and Rossman (in de Vos, 2002:80), the qualitative approach is preferred when the researcher has to delve into the complexities of a particular topic where variables have not yet been identified.

1.6. TYPE OF RESEARCH

The research was applied research with explorative and descriptive objectives. Applied research according to Fouché (in de Vos, 2002:109), seeks practical outcomes rather than theoretical outcomes which impact on knowledge development, as in the case of basic research. In practice, however, the goals of basic and applied research do overlap in that applied research, while specifically focused on practical outcomes, also has implications for knowledge development. In the instance of this research the researcher sought to gain a practical understanding of the challenges specific to cross racial adoption in order to develop knowledge about the topic. Applied research was therefore considered the most favourable approach for this particular study.

The research had exploratory and descriptive objectives because it sought to establish what challenges were specific to cross racial adoption in Gauteng in order to better understand the dynamics and challenges of this phenomenon. Strydom and Delport (in de Vos, 2005:337) are of the opinion that exploratory research often arises out of a lack of basic information on a new area of interest, and according to Khan (2006:ix) "…there is very little in the way of resources available to South Africans who want to adopt…".

According to Fouché (in de Vos, 2002:109), the typology of exploratory and descriptive are in themselves objectives of professional research. A research study may have multiple objectives, however a dominant objective usually exists. In the instance of this research the researcher regards the exploratory objective of the research as primary and the descriptive objective as secondary.

Exploratory research, according to Neumann (1997:19), is when a researcher begins at the very beginning. The goals of exploratory research as listed in Neumann (1997:20) are:

- To become familiar with the basic facts, people and concerns involved.

- Develop a well-grounded mental picture of what is occurring.
- Generate many ideas and develop tentative theories and conjectures.
- Determine the feasibility of doing additional research.
- Formulate questions and refine challenges for more systematic inquiry.
- Develop techniques and a sense of direction for future research.

All of these elements of exploratory research were congruent with the conducted research, which sought to better understand the challenges specific to cross racial adoption. Exploratory research may, according to Neumann (1997:19), be the first stage in a sequence of studies and as such this master's research study may support the development of a future proposed doctoral study.

According to Fouché (in de Vos, 2002:109), descriptive research presents a picture of the details of a specific situation and it therefore begins with a well-defined subject and conducts research to describe it accurately. The challenges specific to cross racial adoption that were explored are described in chapter 2

1.7. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research study employed the strategy of a collective case study. A collective case study, according to Creswell (in de Vos, 2002:275), can be regarded as an exploration or in-depth analysis of a bounded system, a system bounded by time or place.

Stake (in de Vos, 2002:275) states that the sole criterion for selecting cases for a case study should be the opportunity to learn. It is for this reason that the sample for the research was selected on the basis that they had valuable insights to share regarding the challenges specific to cross racial adoption, and therefore provided the researcher with insights into their bounded system.

According to Fouché and Delport (in de Vos, 2002:276), the collective case study serves to further the researcher's understanding of a specific social issue or population group. Furthermore the interest in the individual case is secondary to the outcome of the group's case. In the instance of this research the collective case study sought to explore challenges specific to cross racial adoption that a number of parents experience rather than focussing on one parent's

experiences. The collective case study is what Fouché (in de Vos, 2002:271) refers to as the tool that is used to design the qualitative research.

1.8. WORK AND RESEARCH PROCEDURE

In the following section the researcher will discuss the data collection and data analysis of the research study.

1.8.1. DATA COLLECTION

Due to the exploratory, descriptive nature of the research study, qualitative focus groups were regarded as the most appropriate methodology for collecting the necessary data. According to Millward (in Breakwell, Hammond & Fife-Schaw, 1995:276), the aim of focus groups is to "get closer" to respondents' understandings of and perspectives on certain challenges, and is not geared to the formal testing of hypotheses in the traditional hypothetico-deductive sense. In the instance of this study one of the objectives was to engage with adoptive parents of cross racial adoption through research to better understand their perspectives. Millward (in Breakwell *et al.,* 1995:276) claims that the distinct advantage to using focus groups is the group's isomorphism to the process of opinion formation and propagation in everyday life, insofar as opinions about a variety of challenges are generally determined not by individual information gathering and deliberation but through communication with others.

According to Millward (in Breakwell *et al.*, 1995:287), due to the fact that that the purpose of a focus group is to gain insight into how respondents represent a particular issue as a whole and on a collective rather than an individual basis, it is essential to capture the entire character of the discussion. In light of this fact it is essential that information is recorded professionally. Valuable information can be lost if transcripts are incomplete or over-summarised and should therefore be verbatim. The researcher recorded information from the focus groups by means of audio and video recordings and field notes.

The actual raw data of the focus groups was generated through the use of a number of well thought out yet primarily open-ended questions. According to Greef (in de Vos, 2002:309), planned open-ended questions allow respondents the opportunity to respond from a variety of perspectives. Neuman (1997:241) expands on the importance of the use of open-ended questions in exploratory, descriptive research, stating that open-ended questions allow

respondents to answer in detail and to qualify and clarify responses. A discussion guide comprised of open-ended questions was used to facilitate the group discussion.

Neuman (1991:334) states that a qualitative researcher begins with a question and little else. The theory then develops throughout the data collection process. de Vos (2002:340) states, in a similar vein of thought, that the researcher should plan for data to be recorded and stored in a systematic manner in order to facilitate analysis.

According to Greef (in de Vos, 2000:304), focus groups are especially useful in attempting to understand diversity, since they can help one understand the variety of others' experiences. The researcher utilised three focus groups made of different parent types, namely single, heterosexual and same-sex parents to enhance the understanding of the diversity of people who cross racially adopt. Millward (in Breakwell et al. 1995:279) claims that it is not the intention of focus group methodology to yield data which is generalisable, so while it is important to employ a systematic strategy when looking at group composition, random sampling is not necessary.

Field notes were recorded by a colleague, bound by the same code of ethics, who was introduced to respondents and sat in on the focus groups. The purpose of field notes was to provide insights on group interactions and dynamics and perceived themes which could accompany the final transcripts. According to Fouché (in de Vos, 2002:286) "Field notes should ideally contain a comprehensive account of the respondents themselves, the events taking place, the actual discussions and communication, as well the observer's attitudes, feelings and perceptions". At the close of each group the researcher reviewed the recorded field notes and discussed these with the colleague.

1.8.2. DATA ANALYSIS

The data gathered during the empirical stage of the research was analysed using Creswell's spiral of analysis. According to de Vos (2002:339), data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. Creswell (in de Vos, 2002:340) proposes that qualitative data cannot be analysed in a linear approach and the researcher should rather work in analytical circles. According to Creswell (in de Vos, 2002:340) these analytical circles are completed through a series of steps, namely reading, memoing, describing, classifying and interpreting. The researcher had the audio material from the focus groups transcribed and then worked through the transcripts using a colour code system to classify

information into themes that arose within the research and then the sub themes that exist within the main themes. According to de Vos (2002:343), analysis is the process whereby the researcher begins to make sense of what seems overwhelming and unmanageable.

1.9. VALIDITY OF THE RESEARCH

According to Lincoln and Guba (in de Vos, 2002:351-352), there are four constructs which must be considered in the validity of a qualitative study and that are therefore relevant to this research. The first of these constructs is **credibility,** which requires that a qualitative study be conducted in such a way that the selected subject is accurately identified and described. In light of the fact that the research was focused on a specific population group, namely adoptive parents in cross racial adoptions, and focused purely on their challenges around cross racial adoption, the research results are presented as being believed to be credible.

The second construct is that of **transferability,** and while external validity and generalisability are questionable in qualitative research, the researcher proffers that the results of the research are transferable. The research focuses on a very specific population group, namely adoptive parents in cross racial adoptions. This is a very specific target market and it is felt that the results collected are representative of the total population in Gauteng in a given time period, and in the sub-segments within the total population, namely heterosexual couples, same sex-couples and single parents.

The third construct is **dependability,** and according to de Vos (2002:352) this refers to the researcher's attempt to account for the changes in and around the phenomenon which is being studied. de Vos (2002:352) states the universe according to qualitative research will ultimately change. In the case of the conducted research the findings may be relevant for a period of time, for example five to ten years, and then no longer be relevant as the political and social climate of South Africa changes and society becomes more open, closed or neutral in their views towards cross racial adoption. According to de Vos (2002:352), this is due to the fact that our social world is always being constructed.

The fourth construct is that of **confirmability,** which is linked to the question of objectivity. Lincoln and Guba (in de Vos, 2002:352) state that the criterion for a qualitative study is simply summed up in the question: "Does the data help confirm the general findings and lead to the implications". Given the specific and emphasised focus by the researcher on understanding the

selected population and its challenges through in-depth exploration, it is in the researcher's opinion accurate to state that the results are objective and confirmable.

1.10. VIABILITY OF THE RESEARCH

According to Strydom and Delport (in de Vos, 2005:337), exploratory research, as previously stated often arises out of a lack of basic information on a new area of interest. To date there seems to be insufficient research in the researcher's opinion on cross racial adoption in South Africa, and more specifically in Gauteng. The literature review and consultation with experts confirmed for the researcher that the completion of the research study was viable.

1.10.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

The researcher used a number of books to facilitate the research process. The books utilised are materials selected from the fields of psychology and social work because both fields have displayed an interest in and conducted recognised research in the area of cross racial adoption.

A literature review conducted denotes that little literature on cross racial adoption is available to the general public in South Africa. Furthermore, a vast amount of the literature from the United Kingdom and the United Sates was published prior to 1998 and is specific to many of the dynamics in these countries. However, works such as those listed below, which were published more than 10 years ago, were regarded as being both relevant and useful to this research because they address cross racial adoption in the United Kingdom and United States when it was still a new phenomenon. In this research the researcher explored cross racial adoption in South Africa as a relatively new and often misunderstood phenomenon and therefore found this literature valuable.

Fogg – Davis, H., G. (1970). The ethics of transracial adoption. Ithaca: Cornwell University Press.

Grow, L. (1975). Transracial adoption today: views of adoptive parents and social workers: report of a study funded by grant OCD-CB-59 from the Children's Bureau, Office of Child Development, United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare. New York: Research Center, Child Welfare League of America.

Alstein, H and Simon, R. J. (1977). Transracial Adoption. United States of America: John Wiley & Sons Inc.

Mc Coy, R., G. (1983). Transracial and International adoptees: The adolescent years. Springfield, III, USA: Thomas.

Rosenberg, E. B. (1992). The Adoption Life Cycle: The Children and Their Families Through the Years. United States of America: Free Press, A division pf Macmillian Inc.

Liptak, K. (1993). Adoption Controversies. United States of America: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-publication Data

Owen, G. (1993). Adoption and race: Black, Asian and Mixed race children in white families. New York: Batsford Academic and Educational Limited.

Young, L. & Scully, A. (1993). International and transracial adoptions: a mental health perspective. USA, Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing Company.

In the best interests of the child's: culture, identity and transracial adoption. (1994). London: Free Association.

Simon, R., J. (1994). The case for transracial adoption. Washington D.C.: American University Press.

The researcher's investigations has bought to light that no local literature or research is available at Johannesburg Child Welfare or Cape Town Child Welfare. Furthermore, the advanced search for information on cross racial adoption in South Africa at the University of South Africa proved unsuccessful.

1.10.2. CONSULTATION OF EXPERTS

The researcher consulted with Jackie Schoeman, the Director of Cotlands Children Sanctuary, and Pam Wilson, the supervisor of the adoption centre for Johannesburg Child Welfare. Ms. Schoeman holds a Masters degree in Social Work and is integrally involved in the placement of Cotlands children into adoptive care. Many of the adoptions which occur at Cotlands are cross racial adoptions, and Ms. Schoeman has been involved in the facilitation of these adoption

processes. Ms. Wilson is a qualified Social Worker and has had extensive experience in dealing with cross racial adoptions.

Ms. Schoeman believes that adoption as a whole presents challenges for families, and that in the instance of cross racial adoption most of the challenges which arise are adoption challenges rather than race issues. However, Ms. Schoeman claims this is not to say that there are not challenges specific to cross racial adoption because she has not been exposed to any literature or research stating whether or not there are challenges. Ms. Wilson states that she is of the opinion that while adoption alone does present challenges for families, cross racial adoptions undoubtedly present additional challenges.

Ms. Schoeman believes that South African society is far more tolerant of cross racial adoption than societies in the United Kingdom or United States, and adds that because of history, South Africans are more aware of racial challenges and display sensitivity with regard to these challenges. Ms. Schoeman said "We don't try and pretend these children are white. We acknowledge that they are black children with white parents and that there are certain issues which need to be addressed".

Ms. Wilson states that she believes that cross racial adoption may in fact place a very heavy burden on a child because there is the issue of race to deal with over and above the issue of adoption. Ms. Schoeman says adoptive parents who cross racially adopt are also questioned with regard to their intention because cross racial adoption is currently seen as the "in" thing to do.

Ms. Schoeman commented that with cross racial adoption the issue of adoption must be addressed because the child becomes aware of different races in his or her family. Discussion of the topic is inevitable and parents are not able to take control of when the matter should be discussed because the child's cognition determines when he or she becomes aware of the differences. Parents who adopt children of their own race may be able to delay the discussion of adoption.

In closing Ms. Schoeman stated that the research topic was both interesting and relevant, and that Cotlands would welcome a copy of the findings if recommendations could be made as to how better support families of cross racial adoptions. In closing Ms. Wilson stated that there is no literature on cross racial adoption in South Africa which is available to the public or the

helping professions. Literature which could be made available for public use would be considered valuable.

1.10.3. PILOT STUDY

It was the opinion of the researcher that a pilot study was not necessary for the scope and nature of this research. However, the questions included in the discussion guide were informally discussed with adoptive parents who were not included in the sample to ensure there were no gross oversights on the researcher's part.

1.10.4. DESCRIPTION OF UNIVERSE, SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

The records of the Department of Social Development indicate that from 2003 to 2005 the total number of adoptions ordered in South Africa was 7441. The total universe of adoptive parents is therefore abundant. The researcher then sought to establish the size of the population of adoptive parents who had cross racially adopted in the total universe. According to the department of Social Development (2006) 150 cross racial adoptions occurred in South Africa, in 2004 219 cross racial adoptions occurred, and in 2005 191 cross racial adoptions occurred. This brings to total the number of cross racial adoptions in South Africa from 2003 to 2005 to 560. An estimated 70% of these 560 cross racial adoptions occurred in Gauteng, according to the Department of Social Development. These figures assured the researcher that the total population was large enough to draw the stated sample from. Powers (in de Vos 2002:198) refers to the population as a set of entities in which all the measurements of interest to the researcher are represented.

A sample of 21 adoptive parents who had cross racially adopted were recruited from the population to partake in the study. The exact number of respondents was ultimately determined by the number of parents who met their agreement to attend a focus group. The sample was comprised of heterosexual parents, same-sex parents and single parents to ensure that the sample was representative because a diverse number of people cross racially adopt. According to Strydom and Venter (in de Vos, 2002:201), representativeness is always important when we want to generalise from the sample to the general population. While this research focused primarily on understanding the phenomenon of cross racial adoption the researcher wanted to be assured that the views obtained were representative of the greater population.

The sample for the research topic included three focus groups. A breakdown of the sample is provided below.

Focus groups:

1 x focus group with 4 heterosexual couples who have cross racially adopted	1 x focus group with 4 same-sex couples who have cross racially adopted.	1 x focus group with 5 single parents who have cross racially adopted.

The researcher selected different criteria for the three focus groups so that it could be clearly ascertained which challenges are common to all parents who have cross racially adopted, and which challenges are specific to parents who are heterosexual, homosexual or single. Cross racial adoption occurs across the three defined groups and the researcher therefore felt it important to remain sensitive to the fact that there may be differences between groups. The researcher did not want to compare and contrast the different groups but rather intended to safeguard against perceiving a challenge raised in a mixed group of homosexual, heterosexual and single parents to be generalisable for the group when in fact it was specific to a certain parent classification. The researcher is of the view that the sensitivity to various variables allowed for the collection of rich data.

In light of the fact that the researcher did not want to include individuals in the sample who were acquaintances, because this familiarity may have compromised the groups dynamics, it was decided that the non-probability snowball sampling technique (compare Strydom & Delport, 2002:336) would be the most appropriate sampling method. Individuals with whom the researcher is acquainted were used as a starting point to seek out members of the target population to participate in the research. According to Strydom and Delport (in de Vos, 2002:336), it is ideal to begin with at least two or three individuals from the desired target population and collect further names from them.

In the instance of this research the snowball sampling was also purposive (compare Strydom & Delport, 2002:334) in that the snowball method was used to network and identify members of the cross racial adoption population. The researcher could then select members of this hard to reach population who met the criteria of the defined focus groups. Each group was defined in order to look at unique collective cases that could offer insights on the research topic. Neumann (1997:206) states that purposive sampling is acceptable when specific cases are being selected

with a purpose in mind. This sampling approach worked well in this instance because the research topic was exploratory and descriptive.

The researcher began the snowball sampling with one couple from Cotlands who had cross racially adopted, one individual from Princess Alice children's home, and one couple from the Rainbow Club, an informal support group for families who have cross racially adopted.

1.11. ETHICAL ASPECTS

According to Strydom (in de Vos, 2002:63), ethics are a set of moral principles that are suggested by the researcher which are then widely accepted and offer rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards respondents, other researchers and assistants.

According to Strydom (in de Vos, 2002:65), informed consent implies that the researcher has shared all possible or adequate information on the goal of the investigation and procedures with respondents. All research respondents in this study were informed about the objectives of the study when their participation was requested. Respondents were furthermore informed that the subject matter could bring up emotional challenges for them and that they may be left with difficult feelings after the group discussions. This information allowed respondents to make an informed choice about their participation.

All research respondents were informed that should the research process raise issues for them that they feel they needed to address with a professional, a list of professionals would be provided and these professionals could be consulted at the respondents' own expense. Neumann (1997:445) states that this is of importance because the ethical researcher should anticipate repercussions of the research and should be prepared to deal with these repercussions ethically and professionally.

According to Neumann (1997:455), the basic principles of ethical social research require the researcher to honour all guarantees of privacy, confidentiality and anonymity. All respondents were assured of confidentiality because their names were not published in the research findings. Respondents were similarly asked to respect the confidentiality of the subject matter discussed so that information shared in the focus groups remained in the focus groups.

All respondents verbally consented to participating. According to Strydom (in de Vos, 2005:65), respondents must be aware they are at liberty to withdraw from the process at any point, and as such respondents were made aware that their participation was voluntary.

All respondents were informed that the focus groups were being audio and video recorded for transcription purposes, but that these tapes would not be made available to any third parties without their prior consent. This is essential because the privacy of subjects can, inter alia, be affected by using hidden apparatus, as stated in Strydom (in de Vos, 2002:67).

All respondents were told where the final study results would be available should they wish to review the results.

1.12. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS AND KEY CONCEPTS

1.12.1. ADOPTION

Adoption can be defined in a number of ways. However the essence of the definition remains consistent throughout the literature. According to Liptak (1993:11), adoption or placing a child for adoption may be defined in the following manner:

Adoption is the term for allowing one's baby to be adopted, also referred to as relinquishing a child or giving up a baby.

According to Watkins and Fisher (1993:59), adoption is explained in a legal context as outlined below.

Adoption is a legally permanent parent-child relationship, created through the intention and desire of the birthparents to terminate their parental rights and responsibilities, and the intention and desire of the adoptive parents to assume them.

The above definitions are, in the researcher's opinion, accurate for the purpose of this study because the research respondents have a legally, permanent parent-child relationship with their cross racially adopted children because the biological parents of these children have, in one fashion or another, terminated their parental rights or responsibilities.

1.12.2. ADOPTIVE PARENTS

Adoptive parent/s in the context of this study refers to a parent or parents who adopt a child who is not theirs by blood. In other words the child is of a biological descent other than the parents' own. Furthermore, as per Watkins and Fisher (1993:59), adoptive parents are those who assume the responsibilities of birthparents.

1.12.3. CROSS RACIAL ADOPTION

In literature the terms cross racial, cross cultural and transracial are used interchangeably. According to Liptak (1993:50) and Schooler (1993:183), a transracial or cross cultural adoption can be defined in the following manner:

Transracial or cross cultural adoption is the placing of a child of one race or culture in a family of another race or culture or when a child is adopted by a family of a different race.

Cross racial adoption in the context of this study is defined by the researcher as the adoption of a black child by a white parent or parents who assume the parental rights and responsibilities of the biological parents, who terminated their parental rights by choosing to place their child for adoption or by way of abandonment. A new and unique family unit is therefore formed by the bringing together of individuals from two racially different families.

1.13. CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter attention was given to the methodology and work procedure of the study. In Chapter 2, the researcher will present the empirical findings of the research undertaken on challenges specific to cross racial adoption. The empirical findings present the experiences and views of respondents in Gauteng, South Africa, who have cross racially adopted.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND LITERATURE CONTROL

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The empirical findings were collected from the three focus groups which were included in the sample, namely a single parents focus group, a heterosexual parents focus group and a same-sex parents focus group. In this chapter the researcher will present the empirical findings of the research on **Challenges specific to cross racial adoption in Gauteng, South Africa**. The empirical findings will be presented within the context of a comprehensive literature control. As previously mentioned (refer to 1.2), there is limited available research on cross racial adoption in South Africa compared to the literature available in other countries.

The exploratory research has resulted in a number of key themes being identified by the researcher. During the focus groups some of the themes were presented by the researcher as questions put to the respondents while other themes were spontaneously put forward by respondents. The researcher will present each of these themes individually and then explore these themes in relation to the literature that has been gathered throughout the research process. The **seven identified themes** and the **32 sub-themes** (refer to Table 2.1) which arise from the analysis of the primary data are challenges that arise at various points in the adoption process, namely challenges prior to adoption, at the point of adoption and post the adoption.

In the researcher's view the identified themes do not represent challenges exclusively specific to parents who have cross racially adopted. On revision of the available literature the researcher is of the opinion that a number of the identified challenges are generalisable to all parents who adopt and therefore not just parents who have cross racially adopted. The researcher will indicate throughout this chapter which identified challenges are challenges which are commonly experienced by all parents who adopt and which challenges are specific to parents who cross racially adopt.

The researcher has provided a flow diagram which illustrates the identified themes overleaf.

THEME 1: THE DECISION TO ADOPT

1. Exploring the circumstances under which parents decide to adopt.
2. The choice to adopt cross racially
3. Choosing to adopt a younger or older child

THEME 2: THE ADOPTION PROCESS

1. Adoption agencies and the start of the adoption process
2. The role of agencies and organisations in the adoption process
3. The screening process
4. Information and guidance

THEME 3: ADJUSTING TO ADOPTION AND BECOMING AN INSTANT FAMILY

1. The adjustment period within the instant family
2. Attachment

THEME 4: SUPPORT AND ACCEPTANCE

1. The extended family
2. Friends
3. Colleagues
4. Community and Society

THEME 5: CURRENT CHALLENGES THAT RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCE

1. Living with racism
2. Answering questions from people
3. Religious identity
4. Acknowledging similarities and differences
5. Racial awareness
6. Identity formation
7. Behavioural challenges
8. The issue of teaching a child a second language
9. Management of hair
10. Inappropriate comments

THEME 6: ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES

1. Seeking biological parents and a link to history and culture
2. Seeking biological parents
3. Seeking a biological parent who is deceased
4. The abandoned child who seeks a biological parent
5. The child who seeks biological parents and siblings
6. The child who seeks a biological parent from a different social sector
7. Seeking a link to history and culture
8. A history of apartheid

THEME 7: COMMUNICATION WITH CHILDREN

1. Age appropriate communication
2. Non-verbal communication

TABLE 2.1 DEFINING 7 MAJOR THEMES AND 32 SUB-THEMES TO BE PRESENTED IN THE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS.

2.2 THEME 1: THE DECISION TO ADOPT

The empirical findings show that there are a number of personal reasons why a person may come to the decision to adopt, however the underlying motivation for all parents is the same. The primary reason for adoption for each sub group of the sample is identical in that they wish to either create a family or add to an existing family. In light of the fact that there are only a limited number of ways in which individuals can become parents, it is not surprising that adoption is a consideration for those who cannot conceive their own children or for those who choose to create a family in a different way. Coughlin and Abramowitz (2004:56) state that adoptive parents usually adopt because they believe that adoption is the best option for them and not, as is often incorrectly assumed, because they are out of other options.

The researcher will discuss under the main theme the following sub-themes which pertain to the intricacies of the decision to adopt.

2.2.1 EXPLORING THE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH PARENTS DECIDE TO ADOPT

According to Schooler (1993:15), prospective parents must explore their decision to adopt, taking into consideration their reasoning and motivation to adopt and their expectations of how adoption will impact on their life. Furthermore, the decision-making process should include a process of self-assessment of attitudes about themselves, their current situation, their current family life and how they interface with their social environment.

This particular research highlighted that for respondents in each sub-group of the sample the inability to conceive their own children due to physiological or circumstantial factors resulted in a limited number of choices to explore in terms of creating or adding to an existing family. The researcher explored with each sub-group of respondents why adoption had been a consideration for them and how they came to make the final decision to adopt.

In the case of **single mothers**, the options for creating a family include adoption and invitrofertilisation. Invitrofertilisation is an intrusive process that can cost anywhere from R10 500 to R28 000 a treatment (http://www.ivf.com/globalfee.html, 2006). The **single mothers** included in this research sample felt that adoption was therefore a more sensible choice to make in terms of creating a family, or in some instances the only choice. As one of the single mothers worded it: "I was 30 at the time and realised Mr Right wasn't knocking at the door and I wanted children".

Another mother said that she always knew that if by the age of 30 she was not married with children, she would adopt. In the case of **single fathers** the only two feasible options they have for creating a family are finding a surrogate mother to bear a child or adoption.

Same-sex female couples, have the same options available to them as single mothers. In the case of one female same sex couple for whom invitrofertilisation had proven unsuccessful, adoption became the next obvious route to attain the goal of creating a family. In the instance of same-sex male couples, like with heterosexual, single men, their options are surrogacy or adoption. In the same-sex sub-segment at least one of the respondents in each relationship had always wanted a child or children and therefore explored all options available to them in terms of creating a family. In the end for many single and same-sex respondents it would appear that adoption was their only chosen option to create a family.

In the case of **heterosexual respondents** who are unable to conceive, the options are invitrofertilisation, fertility treatments and adoption. Invitrofertilisation can prove unsuccessful, or as in the case of single mothers, too intrusive. Heterosexual couples also find adoption a feasible means of attaining the goal of creating a family. One heterosexual couple said "…that when we realised that we were unable to conceive naturally but there were also no specific reasons why we couldn't, we decided to adopt instead of proceeding with invasive fertility treatment". Another heterosexual couple stated that after eleven years of trying to conceive they decided that it was time to explore all their options. In the case of one heterosexual couple their age prevented them from choosing to create a family through conception and they decided to create a family by adopting. According to Melina (2002:3), those who claim that adoptive parents get their children "the easy way" know little about the decisions parents must make when they consider becoming a family through adoption. The decision to adopt is a life-altering choice which in turn becomes a life-long responsibility.

2.2.2 THE CHOICE TO ADOPT CROSS RACIALLY

The empirical findings revealed that while the respondents chose to adopt black children, in effect the choice to adopt a white child was not an option. The majority of respondents claimed they had automatically assumed that the only option available to them was to adopt a black baby due to the obvious reality in South Africa that the majority of babies available for adoption are black. In this regard the official website for the Johannesburg Child Welfare (www.jhbchildwelfare.org.za, 2006) states the following: "Unfortunately, at this stage, we are not

accepting applications for those wishing to adopt white babies due to the unavailability of white children awaiting adoption. However, the Society does accept applications for inter-racial adoptions". The Cotlands website (www.cotlands.co.za, 2006) states similarly that all the children requiring placement through adoption or foster care are black. These statements send a clear message to prospective parents that the reality of adoption in South Africa is cross racial adoption. A limited number of respondents claimed they wanted to adopt a child where the greatest need existed, and in South Africa, due to our population dynamics and demographics, a black baby became an obvious choice. In some instances respondents had been volunteering at children homes when they decided to adopt a child, and the only children available at the time they made their decision were black.

The option of adopting a black baby has not always been a reality for white prospective parents because in South Africa in the apartheid era cross racial adoption was prohibited by acts including the Group Areas Act and the Population Registration Act (compare http://www.go2africa.com/south-africa/people/apartheid.asp, 2006). While the researcher has not been able to access literature outlining the challenges which surround changes in legislation around cross racial adoption in South Africa, literature from the United States indicates that challenges are experienced. Liptak (1993:50) for instance stated that one of the most heated debates among adoption experts and adoptive families pertained to concerns around the introduction of cross racial adoption in the United States. Respondents said they had been exposed to similar debate in South Africa in popular media and society, and had to take these factors into consideration when deciding to adopt cross racially.

The most vocal critics of cross racial adoption in the United States, The National Association of Black Social Workers (in Liptak, 1993:51), stated that cross racial adoption was cultural genocide and that only a black family could prepare a child to live in a society in which racial prejudice must be confronted daily. While such concerns may be valid and may well mean that cross racial adoptees will have greater challenges to deal with, there are counter arguments. Simon and Alstein (1977:11) claimed that in America cross racial adoption arose out of a need to accommodate reality, a reality in which changing circumstance around abortion, contraception and reproduction had resulted in a decrease in the number of white babies available for adoption.

The increased occurrence of cross racial adoption in South Africa (compare South African Department of Social Development, 2006) is, in the researcher's view, the recognition and

accommodation of the South African reality. Respondents stated that while they acknowledge that cross racial adoption may potentially mean their children have issues and challenges to deal with, the reality is that there are white South Africans across society looking to adopt and the vast number of infants and children available for adoption are black. One of the respondents claimed that they were specifically asked why they wanted to adopt a black baby. Their response was: "But there is not a single white baby here". In the researcher's view respondents' comments imply that their choice to adopt a black child was in response to the reality of the available options.

The decision to cross racially adopt can be complex and this is perhaps best illustrated by the respondent who admitted to having questioned himself about his ability to love a black child as his own. This respondent expressed a fear that perhaps by being raised and having lived in South Africa, one has undigested racism within them even though one has always chosen to be liberal and treat others as equals. Another respondent couple elaborated on the challenge of considering a number of complex aspects of cross racial adoption, such as the implications for self, the adopted child and extended family. This couple stated that to begin with they were overwhelmed by the complexity of the factors they had to consider and the following statement captures this sentiment: "…I think initially having to consider that you do need to adopt cross racially and not knowing how everyone will react and also how you can really make your kids feel okay about themselves is hard".

2.2.3 CHOOSING TO ADOPT A YOUNGER OR OLDER CHILD

The majority of the respondents specifically stated a preference for adopting an infant or young child and had various reasons for doing so. One couple specifically requested a younger child because they believed this would give them the greatest opportunity to mould and shape the child's life. This couple were aware that when older children have experienced deprivation, there can be a greater propensity for behavioural and emotional problems. In another instance a respondent couple specified that they would like to adopt a child under the age of three and they were then matched with a child who was two and half months old. In the instance of this same couple's second adoption they were specific about adopting a child who was as young as possible because their first adoption had made them realise the importance for being integral in the first year of a child's life. Literature indicates that parents may be justified in their need to adopt a younger child, because the adoption of an older child brings to the fore additional

possible challenges for consideration. (Compare Melina, 2002: 36-40, Schooler, 1993: 98-103 & Howe, 1998: 9-116.)

The researcher reviewed literature on the differences between adopting younger and older children, and while an outcome is never certain it seems there are significant possible differences that parents should be made aware of and that should be discussed with them. Numerous outcome studies, including those drawn on in Patterns of Adoption by David Howe (1998), indicate that distinct differences are apparent between children who are adopted as babies and those who are adopted as toddlers or in middle childhood. These differences can pose various emotional, social and developmental challenges for the adopted child and his or her parents.

According to Howe (1998:14), in many instances birth mothers of adopted babies tend to neglect their own physical wellbeing during pregnancy. While this appears not to have any adverse long term outcomes for the physical development of the adopted child, there are risk factors which should be taken into consideration. Excessive drinking and smoking may, for instance, result in lower birth weight which has been correlated with learning difficulties and minor physical disadvantages in later childhood. In more severe cases alcohol abuse may result in Foetal Alcohol Syndrome. Seglow, Pringle and Wedge (1972:61) are, however, of the opinion that in light of the fact that most adoptive families have high material, social and health standards, even children with low birth weight are anticipated to reach their full physical potential because poor birth circumstances have usually been negated by the age of seven as a result of these previously mentioned beneficial factors. Wachs (1992:34) concurs there is sufficient evidence to suggest that children adopted as babies will achieve their full cognitive competence if their home environment provides sufficient physical and social opportunities during the first few years of life.

As children grow older, according to Howe (1998:15), their cognitive development is further facilitated if parents offer help and guidance through joint teaching, participatory learning and shared problem-solving. In one instance one couple mentioned that their need to adopt an infant "…centred around having the greatest chance to influence and mould the child. Older children have often experienced great levels of deprivation, which shape them and may lead to greater levels of behavioural and emotional problems. So the younger the child, the more we were able to prevent him from facing harm".

The controversy surrounding placing older children with adoptive families stems from two primary schools of thought. Theorists such as John Bowlby (in Howe, 1998:72) proffer that poor quality care and an emotionally unstable environment in the first year of life have lasting negative effects on development and personality while others, such as Clarke and Clarke (in Howe, 1998:72), claim that full developmental recovery is possible if children can be placed in stable and nurturing families. This controversy has called for a series of outcome studies that assess the nature and quality of the development of children who are adopted as older children and findings imply that there are additional factors which must be taken into consideration when an older child is adopted.

Howe (1998:73) claims that there is greater risk involved with placing an older child for adoption, especially if there has been early trauma in the child's life and the child is considered to be a disturbed child. According to Howe (1998:82), research also indicates that over and above the heightened risk of behavioural disturbances in all adopted children, children who are placed later in life appear to have an increased chance of mental health, behavioural and psychiatric problems. The aforementioned studies imply that the child adopted as an older child may have greater challenges to face in terms of emotional, social and behavioural adjustment than children adopted as babies.

In the researcher's view it cannot be assumed that prospective adoptive parents have empowered themselves with knowledge relating to the theory and academic views on adoption at various ages. One particular respondent had been encouraged to adopt an older child but had spent a year working with her social worker and discussing the possible emotional and behavioural challenges she might face. The placement of the older child has gone exceptionally well and he has not presented with behavioural or emotional issues, but his adoptive mother was well-prepared to deal with these challenges if they arose.

While some of these studies may indicate that adopted children have a higher propensity to display problems with social and emotional development, not all adopted children per se display difficulties with social and emotional development. The results of studies such as the aforementioned are not significant enough to indicate that children adopted as babies differ from the general population. However it would appear that the studies are significant enough at some level to dissuade the majority of prospective adoptive parents from adopting older children.

2.3 THEME 2: THE ADOPTION PROCESS

The adoption process is, in the researcher's opinion, of vital importance to the success and smooth transition of the placement of a child within a family. It is at the point of initial contact that the first impression of the welfare and social services departments is formulated and it is this impression which seems to remain with respondents. According to Schooler (1993:19), the adoption process is emotionally charged for adoptive parents because they are personally scrutinised by those involved in the process, and in many instances adoptive parents may feel their future is out of their control.

2.3.1 ADOPTION AGENCIES AND THE START OF THE ADOPTION PROCESS

The adoption process begins when prospective parents first make contact with an adoption agency or an organisation which facilitates adoptions. The researcher found it important to take cognisance of how prospective parents began the adoption process, because the initial contact appears to be directly linked to respondents' first impressions of the adoption process and the agencies and organisations which facilitate this process.

A number of the **single** respondents were tentative in their first contact because they believed that being single would not count in their favour. One respondent said: "I looked at long-term fostering first and then approached child welfare. They asked why I wasn't looking at adoption and I said well I am single and live in a flat and they said it really was not a problem, there were other factors that were more important". The news of being a possible candidate seemed to create a positive first impression because the interaction implied that adoption was in fact a possibility. The **couple respondents** had varied responses from various agencies they made contact with. While some couples found they were treated with courtesy and respect and viewed as genuine prospective parents, others felt the response from the agency or organisation they approached was unprofessional and unenthusiastic.

Across the sample respondents shared conflicting stories about adoption agencies and organisations implying, in the researchers view, that there is no regulation and consistency in terms of how the first point of contact interfaces with the public and prospective parents. Throughout the research no single adoption agency or organisation was identified as having delivered consistently professional and courteous service.

The researcher is of the view that so much thought has been put into taking the initial step of making contact to enquire about adoption that there is a great deal of emotion and expectation surrounding the initial contact for prospective parents. In the words of one respondent: "…it was a bit traumatic for me because I so badly wanted to do it but I was really scared, worried I wouldn't pull it off, maybe there was a reason I had never had children". These are the anxieties that individuals face when considering adoption as a means of creating a family. In the researcher's opinion those facilitating the adoption process must be aware of the possible elevated emotional state and respond to these first enquiries, if not with empathy then at the very least professionalism.

2.3.2 THE ROLE OF AGENCIES AND ORGANISATIONS IN THE ADOPTION PROCESS

As in the instance of the initial contact with agencies and organisations, each respondent had a unique story to share about their adoption process. There were respondents who described a positive and supportive process and those who described feeling frustrated and unsupported. The respondents who had less positive experiences felt frustrated but were reluctant to express this frustration while still in the adoption process for fear of the consequences. Schooler (1993:19) agrees with this reluctance in stating frustration in that parents may feel they need to monitor what they say out of fear that a trivial comment may disrupt the process. In the researcher's view adoption agencies should be taking the full spectrum of emotions surrounding adoption into consideration and be encouraging parents to express their fears and concerns.

Inconsistency presents itself as the biggest shortcoming of the agencies and organisations facilitating the adoption process. There are respondents who waited nine months to have their child placed with them despite the child having been legally signed over for adoption at birth and in contrast there are respondents who had a child placed with them within 60 days after initiating the adoption process.

In this regard Hart and Luckock (2004:28) claim that the fundamental flaws in the social services systems are what give rise to inconsistencies and a sense of being unsupported. According to these authors the downfall arises from weaknesses in adoption laws and policy which fail to give adoptive families strong rights to multidisciplinary support. The weaknesses are viewed as the inability of staff to practise and supervise effectively, repeated and bureaucratic assessments, competing claims to authority by different professionals, prioritisation of resources for use elsewhere and administrative inefficiency. The researcher acknowledges that while the

aforementioned refers to a British system (compare Hart & Luckock, 2004:28), a number of comparisons can be drawn in light of the empirical findings. In South Africa there is no policy which exists to ensure multidisciplinary support to adoptive families and parents must therefore seek their own resources. As Pam Wilson (2006) of Johannesburg Child Welfare states, insufficient funds and resources result in only the very basic support being provided to South African parents. Respondents also make mention of social workers working against each other rather than with each other, and of the alarming administrative inefficiency in terms of processing the paperwork in an adoption case.

Frustrations that respondents experienced with the adoption process varied. One respondent said: "There was a great deal of frustration and a tremendous delay. It felt as if there was a great deal of time wasted. I knew people who had adopted and their experience was completely different". Another respondent claimed: "I had met my son and decided I wanted to adopt, and it felt as if because I had chosen him in effect they dragged their heels. I think there were issues between the social workers". A third respondent stated: "…I found the process chaotic. There was a great deal of over-promise and under-deliver. We have had no follow up. We have never had another visit to our home after the adoption. The inconsistency is disturbing".

There are, however, some respondents who had positive experiences which the researcher believes highlight, by comparison, the advantages of a professional and efficient adoption process. One respondent claimed the following: "I spent a year working with the social worker in preparation to ensure I was ready emotionally and mentally". This respondent felt there was a great deal of time and energy given to her adoption process. Another couple said: "We approached the final adoption agency on our list and we had a much better response there than from other organisations. We then entered the formal process and the entire process took two months". An additional couple claimed a more complex but ultimately positive experience; "We went through a private adoption agency that put us in touch with the Johannesburg children's home. We were asked to spend time in the home and get to know the children and also to learn more about the adoption process". The entire orientation took eight months and this respondent feels it was imperative because her daughter was already six and needed time to adjust.

Many respondents acknowledged that their frustrations could be directly attributed to a lack of resources and funding, however acknowledging the weaknesses in the system do not make the acceptance of negative processes any easier for those who experienced them. Respondents seemed to be of the opinion that the system is bureaucratic and although they state that they

understand "that not just anyone can adopt a child", they would ideally like to experience a system which is consistent, real and acting in the best interest of the child. In some ways it seems the process is a farce. One respondent said: "They phone your friends and family and come and visit your home but once you have adopted you don't hear from them. They do not call to ask how you are or how the child is. We call them to say our child is doing well". According to A guide to adoption practice, compiled by the South African National Council for Child Welfare (1972:39), the period of continued contact between the adoption agency and the adoptive parents post placement should not be shorter than three months. Based on respondents' feedback, the guide is not adhered to.

According to Hart and Luckock (2004:28), some of the greatest weaknesses in giving support around the adoption process are insufficient knowledge and experience of adoption workers and inertia on the part of the individual adoption worker or institution being dealt with. While Hart and Luckock are referring to a British system, the researcher need only highlight the manner in which some respondents describe the adoption process in the following sections to illustrate that inconsistency and inertia are also shortcomings of the institutions and organisations in South Africa.

2.3.3 THE SCREENING PROCESS

A guide to adoption practice (1972:26-27) states that once applicants have been accepted as prospective adopters they should be given an indication of the length of the investigation and how soon they may expect a result. Applicants should also be informed that the investigation will consist of several interviews with the couple seen singly and together, and there will be more than one home visit.

The empirical findings reveal that no single screening process was alike for respondents, and respondents themselves voice concerns with regard to inconsistencies in screening processes. There are respondents who claim that their total time of interaction with a social worker did not amount to five hours, and there are respondents who claim that they had a series of five-hour interviews. In some instances respondents had psychological and medical assessments and in other instances respondents simply completed psychographic questionnaires. One particular respondent felt that same-sex couples were perhaps more rigorously screened than others even though agencies and organisations have become more accepting of same-sex couples adopting.

This inconsistency leaves respondents questioning the merit of their screening process and whether they were appropriately prepared.

2.3.4 INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE

Respondents were asked to share their views on how much information and guidance they were given in the process to cross racially adopt and how they felt this element of the process could be improved on.

It would appear from the research findings that not all agencies and organisations offer cross racial adoption training. Those organisations that do offer such services do not offer a set programme because some parents receive training before their adoption while others receive training after their adoption. Furthermore, it also seemed that training is not mandatory and does not need to be completed as a prerequisite to adopt.

Respondents who had attended cross racial adoption training had varied feedback. Certain respondents felt the cross racial adoption training was not particularly helpful in that they "…heard what other parent's stories were which was interesting but there was no further guidance". Other respondents felt the process was most valuable and appreciated the opportunity to meet parents in a similar position. At agencies and organisations where training is not offered some respondents were given the opportunity to speak with other parents who had cross racially adopted and while this did prove to be interesting for respondents and helped them gain some insight, the educative and preparatory value of the exercise was questioned.

Melina (2002:5) feels that in general adoptive parents are not thoroughly prepared by stating that:

> They tell parents the symptoms of teething but not how malnutrition can affect a child's teeth. They talk about the awareness of sexuality that develops in adolescence, but not about the fear some parents have that their child may be at specific risk for teenage pregnancy. They give advice for handling a child's nightmares, but do not address the real fears of a child who may have been abused in another family. They provide ways to build a child's self-esteem but offer no guidance for helping a child who thinks he was given away.

The empirical findings indicate that prospective adoptive parents are in need of information and guidance around the adoption process. The remainder of the chapter will elaborate on challenges which parents most require information and guidance on.

2.4 THEME 3: ADJUSTING TO ADOPTION AND BECOMING AN INSTANT FAMILY

The empirical findings indicated that the majority of parents who adopt become families in a relatively short space of time, hence the term instant family. Becoming an instant family can leave very little time for preparation and increase the period over which the new family takes to adjust. Even for respondents who had planned and discussed their adoption in great detail the time that elapsed between being notified that a child had been identified for placement and that child being placed was incredibly short and not always sufficient to be fully prepared.

Respondents spoke openly of their adjustment to becoming an instant family. One respondent said, "I think when we got our son for us it was just the shock of getting a baby for the first time and that we got him so suddenly. We were put on the list on the Wednesday and then the following Monday our social worker phoned us to come and collect him the next Wednesday. There was not much time to get used to the idea". Another respondent said: "The process happened quite quickly and we did not have a great deal of time to prepare for the arrival although I had been collecting things for years". These verbatim quotes are just two examples of how becoming an instant family impacts on parents.

According to Foli and Thompson (2004:15), having high expectations and trusting your heart in the adoption process is one thing, being unprepared for adoption is another. In studies conducted by Foli and Thompson (2004:15) "…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". Observations such as these may indicate that becoming an instant family is not always advantageous because it may result in additional and unnecessary stress. Selman and Wells (in Phillips & McWilliam, 1996:197) state that it is now widely agreed that if adoption is to work well, parents must be carefully prepared for the arrival of their child.

2.4.1 THE ADJUSTMENT PERIOD WITHIN THE INSTANT FAMILY

Melina (2002:3) notes that while adoptive parents have waited a long time to become parents, they are often not prepared psychologically or physically for the arrival of a child. Parents' delay in getting ready might be due to the uncertainty of the adoption process. An example of such a

delay is that of a respondent couple who had decided they would adopt, prepared their families and discussed the logistics of an adoption, but never physically set up a nursery. When this couple heard that a child was to be placed with them they had only three days to prepare. While expectant mothers in many instances are forced to slow down and take care of themselves in preparation for their baby, Melina (2002:4) claims that waiting adoptive parents have nothing to remind them that they should be preparing.

The researcher notes that for many respondents there was anxiety around coming to terms with the reality of having a child become part of their family. One respondent said: "Initially you have anxiety about the adoption not going through or a biological relative arriving to adopt a child". Another respondent said: "My husband was concerned that if we did meet the birth parents that they would try and contact us or track us down and want the baby back, like in those strange movies".

Melina (2002:5) states from her own experience in working with adoptive parents, that parents can feel overwhelmed when they realise they have taken on not just parenting but adoptive parenting. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for adoptive parents to minimise what they are facing and adopt the assumption that once their child is with them, life will continue as if that child had been born to them. Melina (2002:6) also mentions that while parents cannot assume that every aspect of their life will now be altered by their cross racial adoption they also cannot discount the fact that it will have some impact. The researcher is of the opinion that a number of respondents included in this study seemed to minimise the challenges they have faced or will possibly face in the future. One respondent said: "I had no problems. I was fine". Another said: "I had a perfectly smooth transition". The researcher's view is that while the motivation behind minimisation stems from good intentions, adoptive parents should not overlook the fact that they may need support and guidance, as indicated in 2.3.4.

There were respondents who spoke of difficult times during their period of adjustment in terms of becoming an instant family. One respondent said: "I was overtly strict, a Nazi, so terrified to not get things right that I was strict and fearful, and then only later I eased up". Another respondent said it was only in retrospect that he realised he had post-adoption blues:

I really battled. I had the child I wanted all my life but it felt like something was wrong. You don't get nine months to get ready and prepare. In five days you are a parent. It is a huge shock to the system. It also affected the adoption of our second child. It wasn't

the same kind of magic. I think I only realise now, looking back, that I had post-adoption blues and it is a real thing. We were never told about this. You go from not being a parent to being a parent in five days and you are not told about post-adoption blues, and it is a real thing. Your body actually doesn't know what to do with all the information.

Melina (2002:18) states that post-adoption blues may occur because the excitement of the arrival of a new child is somewhat dampened by the reality of carrying out daily tasks and a few respondents stated adjusting to a lack of sleep. In addition to this parents may grieve the loss of an idealised child they thought might arrive. While only one respondent spoke of post-adoption blues it seems all had an initial adjustment period, even if regarded more positively.

Literature indicates there is a period for many parents in which they must come to terms with their new status as parents and their right to parent. Melina (2002:20) says there are times when adoptive parents may think or feel that not being able to have their own children means they should never have had a child, or that they cannot express any disappointment or frustration for fear of seeming ungrateful. The researcher's view is that this may have been the case for some of the respondents. One particular respondent said that perhaps the reason she had not been able to have children was because she was not meant to be a mother. Respondents who adopted older children spoke of a notable adjustment period. One respondent couple who adopted two children in middle childhood spoke of their adjustment period as a trying time by mentioning that: "The second adoption was exceptionally difficult because the child battled to adjust and was exceptionally unhappy". Another respondent couple who adopted a child at 17 months of age said: "…it is hard. He is not a baby he is a little person. Being institutionalised, he stuck to his routine, which was strange and only eventually did we start to see him settle and begin to test his boundaries".

In some instances the adjustment is something the entire family must work through. One respondent couple in particular spoke of their challenging time by stating that:, "Our daughter reacted really badly to my husband and in general. She was very timid and scared of people and places. She only really got to accept my husband about four months after she came to live with us. This put huge strain on the whole family because he just needed to be in the same room and it would make her cry".

In terms of the adjustment phase it is apparent that adjustment may be an issue for all adoptive parents. According to Smith and Sherwin (1988:68), the relationship between the adoptive

parent and the adopted child may be challenged by dynamics within the family unit as well as environmental stressors. In the researcher's view it may be of value for prospective adoptive parents to do an analysis of what support systems, if any, are at their disposal, and what environmental stressors they may have to contend with before adopting a child.

Although adoption creates challenges it is, however, of importance to highlight that there seem to be many elements of excitement, joy and fulfilment that come with becoming an instant family. One single mom said: "It is a completion even though there are only two of you. You are a family, it completes the circle". Another respondent said: "The child you adopt becomes part of your life, completes you".

2.4.2 ATTACHMENT

According to Berk (1997:405), by the second half of the first year infants have become attached to familiar people who have responded to their need for physical care and stimulation, provided such individuals are available to the child. In this research respondents made very little direct reference to the specific term attachment and more reference to bonding and an adjustment phase, indicating that they are perhaps not familiar with attachment theory. Many respondents spoke of an instant connection and an automatic bond but did not elaborate on the days that followed the initial placement. One respondent, however, said: "I think it is hard to bond initially. You don't think it consciously or verbalise it but it is difficult and does create stress". In the researcher's view none of the respondents were aware of the subtleties of attachment and the challenges that attachment disorders can create for both adoptive parents and adopted child at the point of adoption and in later years.

According to Bowlby (in Berk, 1997:405), the inner representation of the parent-child bond becomes a vital part of the personality. It serves as an internal working model, or set of expectations about the availability of attachment figures, their likelihood of providing support during times of stress, and the self's interaction with those figures. This image becomes the model or guide for all future close relationships through childhood, adolescence and adult life. In the instance of prolonged maternal deprivation Bowlby (in Berk, 1997:406) states that the child will experience difficulty with attachment and bonding. The researcher is of the opinion that all parents who adopt should be educated about and prepared for possible attachment issues, even if these never arise.

Ainsworth (in Smith & Sherwin, 1988:65), in contrast to Bowlby, feels that there are a number of other factors at play over and above that of maternal deprivation, such as the child's disposition and strengths, the differences in the child's environment before and after deprivation occurs, and the child's previous pattern of development. Literature, therefore, shows that maternal deprivation may or may not have consequences. However, the researcher is of the opinion that it may be beneficial to provide adoptive parents with advice and guidance on how to enhance optimal, or at the least improve attachment. According to Schooler (1993:80): "…for parents adopting children who have experienced more than one significant caregiver in their early life, it is critical to understand how the dynamics of attachment can affect their relationship with the child in the initial stages of adjustment and beyond".

2.5 THEME 4: SUPPORT AND ACCEPTANCE

Support and acceptance are, in the researcher's view imperative for the optimal functioning of all family units. In the next section the researcher will explore the theme of support and acceptance in various aspects of the lives of parents who cross racially adopt.

2.5.1 THE EXTENDED FAMILY

Melina (2002:53) claims that in most instances relatives do eventually accept adoption. However the initial reaction can be negative, especially if the extended family has had little or no experience with cross racial adoption. It is, however, important where possible to give relatives the time to accept the idea and to respect the fact that they may need time to gather information. In this research study there were examples of families who had time to prepare themselves for the cross racial adoption. For example, in instances where respondents had volunteered their services at a children's home and/or hosted a child or children prior to the actual adoption, families were more supportive of the decision to cross racially adopt. There is insufficient evidence to make a conclusion, but a period of hosting may allow the extended family a period of adjustment and therefore make the transition of accepting a cross racially adopted child into the family easier.

A lack of support from family at the time of adoption may have a lasting impact on family dynamics. Melina (2002:54) states that adoptive parents who receive little support from family have to become self-reliant. Even when relatives do eventually accept the adoption, adoptive parents may remain self-reliant and fail to use family members as a support or comfort, thus

indicating that initial resistance by relatives can make the adoptive parent feel both isolated and unsupported, feelings which may persist in the future.

It is in the immediate and extended family unit that the idea to cross racially adopt is first tested. Respondents looked first and foremost to their parents and siblings for feedback about their decision to adopt, and received a variety of responses. The researcher notes that respondents were often anxious about sharing the news with family. As one respondent worded it: "…at first we did think that because of the cross racial nature of the adoption that it may cause some waves". This, for the researcher, implies that adoptive parents who want to adopt cross racially are often aware that there are race issues in their family prior to voicing their decision.

In many instances the greatest resistance seems to be met from parents. Respondents who experienced resistance from their parents claim that the argument against the adoption was masked as basic concern for practical reasons. Parents made comments such as "children are expensive", or "children are hard work", or "your life will never be the same again". These respondents, however, felt that the underlying resistance was due to the cross racial aspect of the adoption. A respondent couple had one set of their parents' state that they should remove their names from the adoption waiting list because they did not know what they were doing.

In some instances resistance has come from siblings who have vocally stated their resistance to the cross racial element of the adoption. Respondents who were exposed to sibling resistance expressed a mixture of disappointment and resentment. One respondent said: "We expect our siblings to accept that these are our children and wish they could respect the opportunity we have been given to be parents just as we have supported them over the years".

The empirical findings indicate that in time the parents and siblings of respondents who have displayed high levels of resistance came to accept their adopted family member. As one respondent said: "Once we adopted my parents were a huge disappointment as grandparents and it has taken them a year to become grandparents and be supportive". Respondents believe that their adopted children, through their mere presence, have altered the perceptions of resistant and racist family members. One respondent said: "My brother and his family were very resistant and held back. With time, as they have come to know our son as a person, they have gradually come to accept him". Another respondent shared the following: "My mother had said if I adopted a black child it would kill my father. When we decided to adopt our daughter I invited my parents to the organisation where our prospective daughter was and they spent three hours

there. When we left my father said we had opened his eyes". The respondents who experienced resistance from families said that whilst the resistance in many instances was not unexpected, it was nonetheless hurtful and disappointing.

In contrast to those who have experienced resistance from their families, there are respondents whose families were exceptionally positive toward their decision and continually supportive of their family units. In such instances respondents claim that family has been their greatest support. It would seem, in the researcher's opinion, that a great deal of strength and encouragement are drawn from the extended family unit. .

2.5.2 FRIENDS

Respondents experienced varied responses from friends and social circles. In most instances respondents claim that their friends were supportive both emotionally and materially and supported their decision to adopt cross racially.

The only challenging aspect to arise around the support and acceptance of friends is that a number of respondents felt that their social circles changed. One respondent claimed: "My circle of friends changed. I had many single friends and once I adopted I found I wasn't as welcome so I started spending more time with people with children". Other respondents went so far as to say the world is made up of two groups of people: those with children and those without children, and in many instances these groups stick together. Respondents feel that the change in their social circles is something that occurs to parents who adopt same race children as well as those who have their own children, and this phenomenon is therefore a natural part of becoming a parent. The researcher concurs that this issue is specific to all parents and not only to those who have adopted.

2.5.3 COLLEAGUES

In most instances respondents claim that colleagues were as supportive as friends were. The only issue of significance raised in the discussion of this issue is that while some respondents were granted maternity leave by employers, others were not. In the instance of respondents who were not granted maternity leave, they feel their role as a parent was not fully acknowledged by their employer and is on some level indicative of discrimination against the adoptive family. Melina (2002:17) states that adoptive parents may well take exception to any

situation which implies discrimination, stating that she thinks that "…adoptive parents are unusually sensitive to any remark or implication that calls into question their authenticity as a family". A system should be in place to protect against all such instances of discrimination.

2.5.4. COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY

Simon (in Liptak, 1993:54-55) claims that cross racial adoption works best when a prospective adoptive family **a)** makes a concerted effort to understand society's racism and how this impacts on the child, **b)** respects and preserves the child's heritage, and **c)** take active measures to becoming a multicultural family. In the researcher's opinion the challenge for parents who have cross racially adopted in communities where racism and prejudice are experienced is to understand the racism and deal with it directly rather then overlooking or avoiding it.

The researcher had anticipated that respondents would have a great deal to share about negative experiences at a community or societal level due to stories that have been publicised in mainstream media or shared informally. Respondents had, in fact, experienced very few instances where individuals had made racial or inappropriate comments. In the sample a total of five stories were reported where members of the public had passed racially inappropriate or derogatory remarks.

It seems that respondents are more concerned that negative remarks made at a community and societal level may have a negative impact on their children. A few respondents said there have been times when they have heard people use the term "coconut" to imply that their adopted children are black on the outside but white on the inside. While this term may appear harmless, it is perceived by respondents as derogatory.

Respondents claim that the greatest number of questions they are presented with are from black South Africans who are interested to know how they came about adopting a black child. Respondents claim that in many of these interactions black members of the public are supportive of the cross racial adoption, but there are limited instances where the opinion is held that black children should be raised by black parents. In most instances respondents claim that members of the public stare and overtly observe the family but while this can be uncomfortable and annoying at times, people usually stare out of interest or intrigue rather than for negative reasons. Respondents believe this will become less apparent as the number of families who decide to adopt cross racially increases and cross racial adoption becomes more common place

at a societal level. A number of respondents feel that in the last two to four years cross racial adoption has become more widely accepted.

A separate issue raised by respondents is that members of the public often make the assumption that they may touch their children or pick them up without asking permission. This occurs as if boundaries that apply to biological children are not the same for cross racially adopted children. This frustrates parents because they believe that the norms of parenting rights should apply equally to their cross racially adopted children. Melina (2002:16), from her personal experience, says: "I've even had people who know my children were adopted express surprise when my parenting behaviour is consistent with basic parenting behaviour". An issue such as this implies that society as a whole must be educated to some extent about the etiquette of how to treat families with cross racially adopted children, with the ideal being that all families are treated equally.

When reviewing acceptance and support for respondents who have cross racially adopted it becomes apparent that the cross racial element does present challenges. These challenges are unavoidable because the visual appearance of the family means that the make-up of the family is apparent to all, unlike in the instance where families adopt children of the same race.

2.6 THEME 5: CURRENT CHALLENGES THAT RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCE

Under the theme of current challenges the researcher will explore the issues and challenges which respondents are presently experiencing. These challenges are diverse and are experienced in various ways by the different respondents. There are some challenges which all respondents are experiencing, and there are challenges which only a limited number experienced.

2.6.1 LIVING WITH RACISM

The researcher observed that respondents did not want to discuss the challenges of racism for their multiracial family units in great detail, but that they had, however, inadvertently already acknowledged the challenges by stating that families were resistant of their adopting a black child or that they found terms such as "coconut" derogatory.

Steinberg and Hall (2000:39-41) state that when parents chose to be a family that is different to most they must be prepared to confront their own racial biases however overt or subtle because

everybody seems to carry internalised attitudes about race. Internalised racism refers to the stereotypes that are commonly accepted about certain people, and this is racism that is often expressed unconsciously to those with whom one interfaces.

In South Africa, with a history of racial prejudice and discrimination, society cannot, in the researcher's view, overlook the fact that South Africans exist in a society where racism and prejudice are a part of reality. Maloney in Melina (2002:222) states that a number of parents who cross racially adopt 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 (in Melina, 2002:228) is of the opinion that parents should acknowledge that challenges around race do exist and should teach children how to deal with these challenges. The best approach to use in this regard is to teach children to identify situations in which racism and prejudice may occur and then teach them to develop a sense of selective confrontation and selective avoidance and how to deal with both of these actions appropriately. The researcher concurs that a proactive approach is best because while children cannot be protected from racism they can be empowered to deal with it constructively.

Steinberg and Hall (2000:42) are of the opinion that parents who have cross racially adopted must be clear about their opinions with regard to racism and speak openly and frankly with their children while also ensuring that they are hearing how their child is experiencing a certain situation. Racism exists and adoptive parents must acknowledge that all individuals experience it at one time or another in their lives. Children who are adopted cross racially have a family of one race, but by definition and skin colour are part of another race. According to Melina (2002:229), the challenge is enabling children of cross racial adoption to feel that they can be loyal to both races without betraying one.

The issue of pretending that race does not matter drew the researcher's attention to two particular quotes, one by a respondent in the research sample who stated: "I must admit I've not had any bad experiences that I notice. My mother notices. I don't notice what others are doing or saying". One in Liptak (1993:50) by a black male adoptee: "As a black man raised by a white couple, I know that my parents didn't pick up the signs of racism in my community. They thought everything was just fine. But it wasn't". These quotes highlight that it is important that parents who cross racially adopt acknowledge that race does matter because it may matter to their children and be their reality. The issue of handling racism is, in the researcher's view, undoubtedly a greater challenge for parents who cross racially adopt as parents and their

children may have entirely different experiences of race in light of the fact that they belong to different race groups.

2.6.2 ANSWERING QUESTIONS FROM PEOPLE

Coughlin and Abromowitz (2004) compiled a book of questions and answers to aid adoptive parents in dealing with potentially difficult questions from both children and adults. In the introduction to their book they mention that for them the importance of answering questions correctly is the difference between protecting their child's sense of belonging and identity and allowing it to be harmed. Some of the questions they recommend parents should be able to answer include:

- What does adopted mean.
- Who are her real parents.
- Why didn't her real parents want her.
- Why does she look different.

Adoptive parents should be honest when answering questions from people but simultaneously share only what is appropriate because the adoptive parents and the adopted child are also entitled to their privacy. Some of the single respondents specifically stated that they answered difficult questions in front of their children in order to provide a model for how questions about cross racial adoption could be answered. Respondents provided a number of examples of questions asked by other children in their children's schools such as, why are you white if she is black, where is her Mom, and what does adopted mean.

2.6.3 RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

Respondents spontaneously raised the challenge of deciding how to handle the concept of a religious identity for their children. This seemed to be a challenge for respondents who actively practiced a religion as well as those who did not.

In the researcher's view the only issue of direct consequence for South African parents who have cross racially adopted is that they allow their children to partake in the family's religion of choice, but that they also, where applicable, allow opportunity for their child to explore the religion which may be part of their history or ancestry. In South Africa, for example, there are many black cultures which emphasise the importance of ancestors and spiritual rituals.

According to a quote by Robert Baum (http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu, 2006) African religions are often closely associated with African peoples' concepts of ethnic identity, language and culture. They are not limited to beliefs in supernatural beings or to ritual acts of worship but these elements impact on all aspects of life. Respondents acknowledged that children question a religious identity and seem to have a need to know what their religion is and how they can define themselves religiously. The researcher is of the opinion that the challenges around religious identity may be raised because there are challenges around identity in general for the child who is cross racially adopted. One respondent said: "I have turned back to religion because of my son so that he can have a religious identity".

There were respondents who saw the task of ensuring that their children have a religious identity as giving a gift. One respondent said, "Your children need something to turn to when all else fails. When they are frightened and scared they need somewhere to turn so that they can feel comforted and safe. This is one thing I can give our children. If they are in trouble it is something other than us and their uncertain past that they can turn to". Another respondent said by introducing your child to religion you "…give your child the option to have a kernel of goodness, a faith".

2.6.4 ACKNOWLEDGING SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

A number of respondents indicated that their children notice differences between themselves and their parents as well as differences between the people around them. In some instances respondents are not entirely sure how to handle the acknowledgement of differences, and as such this presents a challenge. In the researcher's view the literature (compare Steinberg & Hall, 2004:14-17 and Wright, 2000:74-81) again advocates that parents be honest and open, listen to their children's observations and, where appropriate, normalise differences. Differences, like similarities, are all a part of life and Steinberg and Hall (2000:14) advise parents to remember to take cognisance of the similarities and differences between how they and their children perceive the world by stating that "…your child is having a different experience than you are in the world".

2.6.5 RACIAL AWARENESS

Respondents with children in middle childhood claim that their children are race aware and that they often refer to others by race. In this regard one respondent has observed that their son,

aged four, is very race aware and refers to others by their race, for example the black man or the white lady. Another respondent couple note how their daughter acknowledges colour but instead of using race terms such as black and white she uses terms such as yellow and grey. In many instances parents may feel that their child's race awareness is inappropriate, especially when they have made every effort to adopt the "race does not matter attitude" which Maloney refers to in Melina (2002:222). Parents may feel that in order to feel good about themselves and to believe that everyone is equal, children should essentially not see colour.

Wright (2000:2) states that when children observe race it is not loaded with the racial prejudice and bias that adults may have but that it is merely an observation of the facts. Through her work Wright (2002) aims to educate adults that children are not ashamed of their race and that they are incapable of feeling shame about their colour or race unless they have been unduly sensitised or somehow traumatised. According to Wright (2000:13) parents should therefore be cautious not to taint their child's racial awareness with their own interpretation of race terms.

A number of respondents claim that their children have openly acknowledged that they are a different colour to their parents, and in some instances have expressed that they would like to change their own colour. Wright (2000:19) implies that this is very normal, given the egocentricity and magical thinking of the preschooler and the belief that their skin colour is not permanent. This is very much in line with their developmental phase.

The issues of race awareness raised by Wright (2000) indicate that parents who cross racially adopt must be even more vigilant in their handling of race awareness. The challenge is to present, at the very least, the best of both racial and ethnic groups for children so that they can have an appreciation for their own race and ethnicity and that of their adoptive families. The researcher notes that parents will need to spend time considering their own views on race and prejudice in order to facilitate a healthy racial awareness in their children. In the researcher's view parents must acknowledge that there are racial differences. People with different colour skins do exist, but there are also countless similarities between countless people regardless of race. As one respondent said: "We have to acknowledge similarities if we want our children to be completely part of us and completely part of our family, but there are differences too".

Melina (2002:211) states that while parents should take the opportunity to comment positively on their child's appearance, they should try to develop racial awareness in their children by pointing out differences. The challenge is not to group people by physical differences or similarities

because this advocates racial stereotyping but rather discuss differences the child may observe themselves in a natural and spontaneous way.

In the researcher's view if parents are able to familiarise themselves with a model of stages of race awareness, such as Wright's (refer to Table 2.2), they may be better equipped to interact appropriately with their children when they make use of race terms or ask questions regarding race.

STAGE	RACIAL SELF-IDENTIFICATION	RACIAL CONSTANCY	ORIGINS OF RACIAL IDENTITY	RACIAL CLASSIFICATION	RACIAL ATTITUDES
RACIAL INNOCENCE 0 – 3	Most are unable to accurately identify their skin colour, much less their race / ethnicity.	Children reside in a fantasy world where anything is possible, including changes in skin colour and gender.	Children are unaware of the biological origin of their skin colour.	Children are unable to correctly categorise people by race / ethnicity.	Preschoolers are developmentally inclined to see people as individuals rather than as members of racial ethnic groups.
COLOUR AWARENESS 3 – 5	When asked what colour are you, children are just as likely to describe the colour of their clothes as their skin. Children may accurately identify their skin colour using words like brown, white, pink, tan and black, or familiar words related to food such as chocolate, peach and vanilla.	Children believe that if they desire they can change their skin colour by magical means like wishing and painting.	Preschoolers believe that God, their parents or they themselves have used magical means to produce their colour.	Children may accurately group people by skin colour but not race. Children describe others in the terms of Self-Identification. All light complexioned people, including Asians, whites, and black, are seen as "white". Children describe people as "brown" who have medium brown complexion. "Black" is used only to describe dark-skinned people.	Children are predisposed to be friendly to anyone who acts positively toward them. Children at this stage continue to see people of their own and other races without skin colour and racial prejudices. However, children who are routinely taught racial bigotry begin to form negative associations with certain skin colours.

AWAKENING TO SOCIAL COLOUR 5 – 7	Children can accurately identify their skin colour and begin to make relative skin colour distinction such as light-skinned and dark-skinned. Most children are unable to reliably identify their race / ethnicity.	Children begin to perceive that their skin colour is a permanent feature of their bodies and understand that the effect of the sun on skin is only temporary.	They begin to grasp the connection between their colour and their mother's and expect skin colours of family members to be similar. However, they do not yet fully comprehend the genetic basis of skin colour.	Children begin to understand that skin colour means something more than mere colour but they are inclined to categorise people by colour rather than race / ethnicity. They use conventional terms like brown, black and white to describe people. Children begin to use ethnic labels like Puerto Rican and Italian, sometimes inaccurately.	Although they do not yet fully understand them, children begin to adopt skin colour prejudices of their family and friends as well as those presented by media. For example, children may begin to express a preference for light or dark skin and to see "white" or "black" people as negative stereotypes.
RACIAL AWARENESS 8 – 10	Children can accurately identify their race / ethnicity using terms like black and African American. Some biracial children say they are part black or African American and part another race, like white.	Children comprehend that racial / ethnic identity is permanent.	Children understand the genetic basis of racial ethnic identity. Unlike younger children they understand the reason members of the same family can have different skin tone.	Children rely on skin colour and other physical cues to determine a person's group. As they mature children realise that some physical cues can be unreliable. Children begin to also rely on more subtle cues, including social and behavioural ones, when making racial / ethnic identifications.	Unless they are sensitively taught not to prejudge people based on their race, children may adopt full-fledged racial stereotypes, common in the culture and their own racial / ethnic group.

TABLE 2.2 STAGES OF RACE AWARENESS AS IDENTIFIED BY WRIGHT (2002:266-267)

2.6.6 IDENTITY FORMATION

According to Rogers (in Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 1995:379), the self refers to the picture which the person has of himself and the value he attaches to himself. According to Baumeister (in Tesser, 1995:52), self and identity are made up of the collection of social roles, memberships to groups and various other attributes such as personality traits and achievements. All aspects of identity are combined to make up the single self. There are no aspects that stand alone, and unity and continuity are therefore integral to a healthy sense of self. This relates to the current research in that parents who cross racially adopt must foster in their children that all aspects of the self can exist in unity to form a whole and complete identity.

In instances where the individuals cannot come to accept that all aspects of the self collectively comprise the self, an identity crisis may occur. Baumeister (in Tesser, 1995:65) claims that all identity crises begin and end with difficulties in defining the self. The identify crises of greatest concern for cross racial adoptees is identity conflict. Identity conflict, according to Baumeister (in Tesser, 1995:65), arises when multiple definitions of self come into conflict and dictate competing, incompatible courses of action which often results in passivity, guilt and a feeling of being a traitor. The researcher is of the opinion that identity conflict may arise for cross racial adoptees who are conflicted by being black and simultaneously having full membership in a white family.

Steinberg and Hall (2000:54) state that children who are cross racially adopted may have special challenges around developing a strong racial identity due to the fact that a great deal of self-image is shaped by the way in which we perceive our racial or ethnic heritage and how we perceive society's view about that heritage. This matter becomes a specific challenge in a country like South Africa, where views on race and ethnicity are varied and children may encounter numerous and diverse opinions (Refer to 2.6.2.) The challenge for parents, according to Steinberg and Hall (2000:53), is to encourage a clear definition and value of self so that children value themselves for who they are. One respondent with two teenage daughters who were cross racially adopted claims that her daughters have battled with identity formation and have required significant professional assistance to work through these challenges. In the researcher's opinion the challenge of identity formation may need the assistance and guidance of professionals.

Steinberg and Hall (2000:53) also caution that parents who cross racially adopt should be aware that children who have been cross racially adopted may suffer low self-esteem if they feel they were abandoned not only by their parents, but also by their racial or ethnic community. In light of this observation it is important for parents to discourage negativity toward the birth parents and their race group of origin so that children do not come to despise their own racial group (black) and come to idealise the race of their adoptive parents (white). One respondent made specific reference to the fact that his adopted son grieved the loss of his mother and questioned the reasons for her behaviour that led to his adoption.

Nakawaza (2003:53) states that because children who are cross racially adopted have few others like them, racially and phenotypically within their immediate family, it is important to help them realise that there are numerous elements beyond skin colour and facial characteristics which contribute to matching as a family group. The best way, according to Nakawaza (2002:53), to do this is for parents not to categorise other families or groups by race. In a bid to create healthy race identity in children Nakawaza (2002:54) and Wright (2000:24) state that parents must lay the foundations between the ages of five and eight before children have schemata for categorising people by race. In the researcher's view, and in that of a number of respondents, children should be empowered to have their racial identity and family identity coexist harmoniously.

2.6.7 BEHAVIOURAL CHALLENGES

In the empirical findings there were two specific issues which arose around specific behavioural challenges. In both of these instances the children had been placed after the age of a year. According to Howe (1998:82), research indicates that over and above the heightened risk of behavioural disturbances in all adopted children, children who are placed later in life appear to have an increased chance of mental health, behavioural and psychiatric problems.

The researcher is of the opinion that where the nature of the behavioural issue is such that a parent feels they are not equipped to deal with the issue, a health care professional should be consulted. In the case of one respondent who has experienced behavioural challenges with both her adopted children, she has sought the assistance of specialists including play therapists, psychiatrists and psychologists.

2.6.8 THE ISSUE OF TEACHING A CHILD A SECOND LANGUAGE

A number of respondents expressed concern about their children not speaking a black South African language. Their concern was based on stories of adult cross racial adoptees who have spoken at the Rainbow Club, an informal support group for families who have cross racially adopted, who express that their biggest regret is not having learnt a black language. Parents therefore do express the wish that their children would learn to speak a black language.

In some instances respondents claim that not speaking a black language is already an issue for their children because black people they encounter assume they can speak a black language and therefore do not converse with them in English. In this regard one respondent's son had claimed that "…he is going to live in England where black people don't speak Zulu". This comment could, in the researcher's view, imply that this particular child would rather live where he assumes people only speak English rather than learn to speak a black language. A number of respondents claimed that their children had no interest in learning a black language.

Steinberg and Hall (2000:251) claim that learning a second language, and specifically one that links the cross racially adopted child to those who share their ethnicity, is invaluable. Learning a second language can assist the adopted child in having a connection to their birth culture and can minimise the encounters with prejudice, for example being referred to as a "coconut" in South African society.

2.6.9 MANAGEMENT OF HAIR

Steinberg and Hall (2000:319) claim that young children need to feel handsome and beautiful to take pride in themselves and if their hair becomes a source of frustration for the parent and for them, it may impact negatively on self-esteem. Steinberg and Hall (2000:323) therefore recommend that parents should allow their child to make decisions regarding their hair because their desire to look a certain way more than likely had something to do with fitting in with their peers, and parents should be cautious of making value judgements about what is considered an appropriate black or white hairstyle.

The respondents in this research study expressed a need for more information about how to manage their children's hair. A number of respondents felt that they were judged for the way in

which they managed their child's hair by black colleagues, friends and members of the public. The researcher is of the opinion that the only manner in which parents can overcome the challenge of hair management is to educate and empower themselves through reading and by consulting with hairdressers and specialists who are knowledgeable about black hair.

2.6.10 INAPPROPRIATE COMMENTS

One of the greatest frustrations for adoptive parents is when family, friends and members of public proclaim that their adopted child is lucky for having been adopted. Respondents are angered that people express the sentiment that their children should be grateful, even if it is meant with no ill intent. Coughlin and Abramowitz (2004:55) compiled a list of don'ts for dealing with adopted children. Fairly high on this list was "do not say how lucky she is" because hearing this enough times the child begins to feel like a lifelong charity case rather than the cherished child she is.

Respondents feel that it is insulting when people imply that their adopted children are lucky. One respondent said: "People say you are so lucky to our children. We are the lucky ones. Our children should never feel we are doing them a favour". A second respondent said: "I am the lucky one. All my life I wanted to be a mother". A third respondent said: "The view that I have saved a child is absurd. It is deeper than that. It is a two way deal. I wanted a child, I did not rescue him". This frustration is an indication that there is a lack of education at a societal level on etiquette around adoption.

2.7 THEME 6: ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES

In this section the researcher reviews challenges which respondents feel may present as challenges in the future. Although respondents cannot speak of these challenges from a point of knowing, they hypothesised what they might need to be equipped with in order to deal with these challenges in the future.

2.7.1 SEEKING BIOLOGICAL PARENTS AND A LINK TO HISTORY AND CULTURE

In light of the fact that seeking biological parents and establishing a link to history and culture may only arise as future challenges, the researcher was intrigued to discover how much thought

respondents had given to the issue in that many were able to readily articulate their views on how they would handle the challenge of their adopted children seeking their biological families in the future. The researcher is of the opinion that parents, of their own accord, understand that it may be advisable to begin preparing for the possible eventuality that the cross racially adopted child may wish to seek out their biological parents or rekindle a link with the birth history and culture from the time their family is formed.

2.7.2 SEEKING BIOLOGICAL PARENTS

All respondents were in agreement that their cross racially adopted children have a right to seek out their biological parents and that they would support them in doing so. One respondent said: "We would support our children in finding their parents because they will do it with or without us if they really want to do it". However, respondents are also adamant that they would like to maintain clear boundaries between their family units and that of the birth family. One respondent stated: "I wouldn't want our lives getting tangled up."

Respondents were in full agreement that in the case of seeking out biological parents that the same elements of honesty and openness that apply to all other areas of making a cross racial adoption successful, apply here equally. In the words of one respondent: "The happy adoptees are the ones who have support, honesty and closure and the unhappy ones are the ones who have lies and deceit". In this regard Palacios and Sandoval (in Brodzinsky & Palacios, 2005:140) point out that secrets and lies surrounding adoption have been shown to have a negative effect on the adopted child. In his novel Thomas Brooks (2006:5) said that because he knew nothing about his biological parents or heritage he felt that his own human identity was partially lacking. Literature indicates that although seeking biological parents is often difficult, it is an important process for the adoptee. (Compare Melina, 2002:199-206 and Schooler, 1993:199-210.)

Melina (2002:200) says adoptive parents may question what the search for birth parents represents and what it fulfils but research has shown that the reasons adopted children search for birth parents are vast and varied. Some adopted children want a link to ancestors, some want to fill in missing parts, some to know what parts of their self are inherited and some require closure, among many reasons. The challenge for the adoptive parent, in the researcher's view, will be being able to

accept and support the individual adoptee's reasoning for searching, regardless of whether it makes sense to them. It is, in the researcher's view, the responsibility of adoptive parents to educate adoptees that not all reunions are successful or pleasant and they should be prepared for a number of possible outcomes.

Respondents acknowledge that their adoptive children may be reluctant to speak to them about seeking the birth parents for fear of hurting or offending them. One respondent shared the following: "My son has this thing that when he is 18 he wants to see his file and he is worried about how I feel about that and I have said I support that. That is information he will want to have and he should". This is in accordance with Melina (2002:198), who states that although adult adoptees are able to make their own decisions to contact birth parents, the fear of hurting their parents keeps them from searching. In some instances adopted children only seek birth parents after the death of a biological parent or simply do not tell their adoptive parents that they are searching.

2.7.3 SEEKING A BIOLOGICAL PARENT WHO IS DECEASED

Certain respondents worry that, with the prevalence of HIV/Aids and violent crime in the country, birth parents may no longer be alive when their children decide to seek them out. This creates a whole new set of criteria for consideration. One respondent said: "I would like my daughter to have the opportunity to meet her mother, even if it were now, so she has a face, a memory because in the times we live in her mother may not be around when she is 18". Another respondent said "…it is hard in the instance when you know that a parent was HIV-positive and will probably not be around when the child is older". Melina (2002:120) says in the instance where a birth parent has had AIDS the adoptive parent should explain that the birth parent was too ill to look after them but when the adoptive parent is ill they must clarify that this is a different type of illness to avoid anxiety. In later life if the parent became HIV-positive through irresponsible behaviour, the adoptive parent will need to explain this in such way that they display empathy without excusing the behaviour. Adoptees may need to grieve when they learn that a parent is deceased when they search for birth parents. In this instance adoptive parents will need to support their child as they grieve for what was lost in the past and what is lost for the present and future.

2.7.4 THE ABANDONED CHILD WHO SEEKS A BIOLOGICAL PARENT

The abandoned child faces a different set of challenges. As one respondent said: "Our child was abandoned and this will cause different challenges for us". Respondents fear that there will be additional heartache for the abandoned child when they cannot answer any questions about their history or past and when they must come to terms with the concept of having been abandoned. Melina (2002:119) states that children cannot see abandonment as anything other than a rejection until they are able to think in an abstract manner and see the situation through the eyes of the birth parents. For this reason parents should spare their adoptive child the details of their abandonment until abstract reasoning is intact. When adopted children are old enough parents should share details that may indicate that the child was valued despite the abandonment. Parents could, for example, say to the child that he or she was left in a safe place where he or she would be found. To this Schooler (1993:141) adds that parents must emphasise that the child is not at fault regarding his circumstances.

2.7.5 THE CHILD WHO SEEKS BIOLOGICAL PARENTS AND SIBLINGS

The child who has biological siblings being raised by their birth parents has additional questions to deal with. In the words of one respondent: "There are additional issues when you know your child has biological siblings who their parents kept that could create heartache". Melina (2002:104) says that once children are able to understand more complex relationships, they may themselves come to the conclusion that they may have had biological siblings. It is important for parents to be honest about this matter and allow opportunities for discussion as to how siblings may have been born under different circumstances so that the adoptee can deal with this information throughout their lives.

2.7.6 THE CHILD WHO SEEKS A BIOLOGICAL PARENT FROM A DIFFERENT SOCIAL SECTOR

Respondents contemplate the challenge of a birth parent living in an entirely different social sector and that this may cause conflict around reunification. Steinberg and Hall (2000:142) support the notion that it can be exceptionally difficult to interact positively with someone who is living in a very different economic group. In South Africa it is a very probable that parents may live in an entirely different economic sector. A difference in economic sector can result in a difference in education,

lifestyle, values and social status, making it even more difficult for the adoptee to see a connection between themselves and their birth parents. This could mean that the adoptee does not necessarily find the closure they sought.

One of the respondent couples said of their fears of seeking birth parents in a different economic sector that "…when our daughters decide to search for their birth parents we will deal with our own fears in our own way and do our best not to put these issues on our children". Melina (2002:204) suggests that the best way adoptive parents can support a search and/or a reunion is to work through their own fears and anxieties, rather than allowing these to impact on and be carried by the adopted child.

2.7.7 SEEKING A LINK TO HISTORY AND CULTURE

Respondents readily referred to cross racially adopted children questioning their roots and heritage as a future challenge. The researcher, however, believes that this should be regarded as a current challenge because in an ideal world children's history and culture of origin should be kept alive and well from the very beginning. Some respondents, however, were angered by the inferences made by some individuals that cross racially adopted children lose their culture and heritage. Respondents feel this sentiment is unjustified because firstly, they believe a child can share in the adoptive parent's culture as if it were their own and, secondly, because cultural practices are becoming more eclectic in modern South African society and the distinction between black and white culture is dissipating. Respondents made specific reference to the fact that in some instances they share the same culture as black families that their children attend school with.

According to Steinberg and Hall (2000:15), acknowledging a birth culture does not mean that the adoptive parents' heritage should be overlooked because this should be shared and lived as it would be with a birth child. However, if parents promote an interest in and connection to a birth culture children, get to enjoy exposure to all elements of the self throughout their lives. According to George (1990:82), many professionals agree that good parenting involves encouraging the child, and even becoming a partner in the child's search for his biological roots.

There were respondents whose adoptive children expressed no interest in their culture of origin despite parent's encouragement. In these instances the child's choice should be respected

because their primary culture is the culture they live. One respondent's comment in this regard was: "As a parent you never own a child, and if a child has a history and a story they have a right to that if they choose it, but it is their choice".

Schoeman (2006) believes a real challenge with cross racial adoption is protecting the adopted child's cultural heritage. Adoptive parents in cross racial adoption often express a strong need to protect their adopted child's culture and birth mother tongue but the challenge is how to ensure this is carried out. Schoeman (2006) believes that the challenge lies in how, where and when to expose children to their cultural heritage and how to foster an appreciation for this culture.

2.7.8 A HISTORY OF APARTHEID

There was only one respondent who raised the concern of how she would handle a discussion of South Africa's apartheid history with her cross racially adopted child. This respondent claimed that she was not sure how, if asked, she would explain exactly what her part in history had been. The researcher felt that this was an interesting point because even if one had been liberal the question from a cross racially adopted child may be "were you active in making a difference for those who were oppressed and treated unequally".

In the researcher's view parents should be honest and explain apartheid history and its atrocities objectively and with empathy. The researcher is of the opinion that children should feel free to discuss their questions and feelings on South Africa's black and white history.

2.8 THEME 7: COMMUNICATION WITH CHILDREN

Communication is an important element in the adoption process whether between social workers and parents, between adoptive parents and their relatives or between adoptive parents and their adopted children. The researcher is of the view that continuous, open and appropriate communication is crucial to the optimal functioning of an adoptive family.

Brodzinsky (in Liptak, 1993:105) conducted one of the largest studies of adopted children in America pertaining to communication around adoption. Brodzinsky (in Liptak, 1993:106) concluded from his study that as preschoolers, adopted children are generally very content with their adoptive

parents' explanation that they were specially chosen to be a part of their family. As these children become older and begin to think more logically they know that in order to have been chosen by their adoptive parents, someone else must have given them up. It is at the ages of eight to eleven that adopted children begin to fully grasp the concept of adoption and reflect on the alternatives available to their birth parents and adoptive parents alike. This stage may be accompanied by feelings of anger or resentment towards birth parents and a fear of rejection by adoptive parents. Respondents are most concerned about what will await them at this stage of their adopted child's life. One respondent said: "…I think you question your roots, everyone does at some stage, and he doesn't ask questions now, but let's hit the teenage years and I am sure there will be many questions".

The realisation of what adoption means can trigger feelings of grief in the adopted child as they acknowledge what they have lost in their birth parents giving them up. One respondent claimed that his child cried and grieved his birth mother regularly. These feelings of grief can, according to Brodzinsky (in Liptak, 1993:106), give rise to behavioural and emotional problems due to the persisting issues or fears on the child's foreground. It should also be noted that according to the research findings of Brodzinsky's study (in Liptak, 1993:106), grieving may often present itself as more intense and more abstract in adolescence because children grieve the loss of their birth parents and the sense that they have lost a part of themselves at this crucial age when they are forming their self-identity.

2.8.1 AGE APPROPRIATE COMMUNICATION

When prospective parents adopt children of the same race they have the choice about when to disclose to their child that they are adopted. However, in the case of cross racial adoption, the racial differences mean that parents must begin communicating with their children regarding their adoption as early on in life as they possibly can. Melina (2002:96), however, claims that adopted children learn what adoption means whether their parents tell them or not. Therefore it is the role of the parent to provide information about their child's particular situation and to provide emotional support and reassurance so that the child is able to approach them with questions. Melina (2002:97) is further of the opinion that at different ages children require and focus on different types of information and their story needs to be retold so that they can make sense of their situation.

Based on studies at Rutgers University, Melina (2002:97) provides extensive information about what can be understood about adoption at various ages and how communication can be handled. The researcher is of the opinion that research such as this makes a number of things apparent, for example that it is essential that communication should be age appropriate and honest. Melina (2002:114) states that it can be difficult to remain honest, especially as children reach adolescence and ask questions about how they were conceived, especially if the conception involved incest, rape or prostitution or if a child was abandoned or sexually abused.

The respondents appeared to be well versed in terms of how to communicate with their children regarding adoption. The adoption agencies and organisations respondents dealt with were also fairly forthcoming with information on communication. However, more extensive information may have been valuable.

The researcher has included some of the thoughts and ideas communicated by respondents which relate to Melina's (2002) overview of communication. One respondent said: "We were told to talk to our children from the very beginning, even when they were babies, about where they came from and to have our own special story". Another respondent said: "We have had a story that we have adapted at each developmental stage for our son and we have provided as much rich information as possible. This has been tremendously important for him". This respondent illustrates the importance of sharing rich yet appropriate information to help his son better understand his unique story. Another respondent shared that "At each age there are new questions. Our son is nine and I fetched him from school the other day and he was in tears and very angry and wanted to know why his mom had had unprotected sex". This is the age at which Melina (2002:103) stated that a child is gradually becoming more aware and can be overwhelmed by this awareness.

All the respondents included in this study seemed to appropriately begin communicating with their children from the time they were placed with them or from when they began communicating. According to Watkins and Fisher (1993:4), children who are told about their adoption early and in a positive manner have a sense of wellbeing and are proud of their adoptive status. In contrast those who are told late have issues with self-esteem and feel they should be ashamed of their adoptive status.

Grief is an integral part of coming to terms with adoption for adoptees and adopted parents should have some idea of how to facilitate their child's grief in a healthy way. According to Eldridge (1999:5), grief is the natural response to loss, and those touched by adoption must be given permission to revisit emotionally the place of loss so that they are able to move forward and be loved by others. In the researcher's view the resolution of grief is essential to the optimal functioning of the adoptive family. Melina (2002:97) made mention of the use of concrete items such as names and photographs to add richness to their child's story. For some of the respondents in the research groups a visit back to the children's home their adopted child was in as an infant or an introduction to the social worker who facilitated the adoption has been of tremendous value. One respondent said: "…My son expressed a need to go back to the children's home where he was taken. It seems this gave him some kind of closure because we went once but he has never asked to go again".

Melina (2002:100-101) makes specific reference to adoptive parents, including mention of the birth father, when communicating with adopted children about their adoption so that children do not fill in the gaps in the story with fantasy. In the research two respondents mentioned examples of how their children had fantasies about their fathers. One boy, for instance, had told people his dad was Warrior the wrestler from the television show Gladiators while a girl had told of her father's tragic death in an airplane crash.

Respondents agreed that in many instances their children guide them in terms of how much information they need. The researcher would concur, provided that in the absence of questions parents do not neglect communication. Melina (2002:106) claims that some children are by nature less talkative and curious but parents should ensure that there are not other reasons inhibiting communication, for example a fear of exploring the past or offending adoptive parents. Steinberg and Hall (2000:362) concur that it is essential for the adopted child's stability and self-esteem that their adoptive parents are honest about their past and their heritage. The researcher believes this is particularly challenging for parents who cross racially adopt abandoned children because one of the respondent couples in the sample said: "…we do not know what our son's culture is because he was abandoned so we don't know how we can answer these questions".

2.8.2 NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Melina (2002: 127) makes specific reference to life books, a book which outlines the adopted child's story which can be used to initiate discussions. Life books can be made for the child by a parent, or a child and parent can work on the life book together and fill in the story of their life. It is important for parents to remind their child that the importance of the exercise is to get the story right rather than make the life book a perfect work of art so that the child feels free to express themselves as they see fit. According to Probst (2001:19), a life book is for and about the child and answers such questions as what do you know about my early life and how and why did I come to be adopted.

A number of respondents had found alternatives to further add to the richness of their child's unique story of adoption, like writing a book for their adopted child. One respondent made a book for her son on his first birthday explaining how they couldn't have a baby and how he had come to be in their family. Another respondent has kept a diary from the day she met her daughter and will keep it for her until she is older. Other respondents had books to which they added letters and photographs from time to time.

According to Schooler (1993:136), through the employment of literature pertaining to adoption challenges adopted children can be helped to see how other children in similar circumstances confronted difficulties and overcame them. Adoptive parents are the ideal people to facilitate the introduction of literature regarding cross racial adoption into their homes.

2.9 CONCLUSIONS

The empirical findings indicate that parents who adopt cross racially face a host of challenges. The literature control, however, highlights that the majority of challenges raised are challenges experienced by all parents who adopt regardless of the race of the child adopted. The challenges which are experienced exclusively by parents who adopt cross racially are:

- The choice to adopt cross racially.
- The element of racism in support and acceptance.
- Answering race related questions.
- Acknowledging race differences.

- Teaching a child a second language.

- Managing hair.

- A history of apartheid.

- Appropriate communication around race.

The majority of the challenges which arise are exasperated by a lack of systematic structure guidance and support from adoption organisations and agencies. Respondents in most instances feel that they would be better equipped to deal with challenges if they were empowered with knowledge and supported through their adoption process. The researcher is of the opinion that even in the instance where respondents have not identified that there is a direct link between the lack of support and guidance they receive and the challenge they face, a link does in fact exist. Respondents, for example, do not realise that support and guidance could be offered on how to prepare friends and families for cross racial adoption in order to minimise resistance.

The empirical findings and literature review indicate that formal and informal models of support are essential for the successful facilitation of adoptions, and more specifically cross racial adoptions. Existing models of support will be explored in Chapter 3.

LITERATURE REVIEW OF MODELS OF SUPPORT AND ADVICE

3.1. INTRODUCTION

While the primary objective of the research was to explore and describe challenges specific to cross racial adoption, the researcher was of the opinion that there would be value in establishing if the challenges identified in the research had been addressed by existing models of support and advice in literature. In light of the fact that there is limited research and literature on cross racial adoption in South Africa, the researcher felt it advisable to review existing models of support and advice from other countries. In reviewing existing models of support and advice in literature, the researcher was able to establish which identified challenges could be supported and addressed through existing literature and which challenges called for further investigation and the development of literature.

The researcher acknowledges that the majority of the models of support and advice for cross racial adoption have been proposed in the United Kingdom and the United States, but is of the opinion that the information applies universally. The goal of this chapter, therefore, is to gain greater clarity on whether the challenges raised by the respondents in this research could be addressed by these proposed models in existing literature.

In this chapter the researcher will refer to formal proposed models of support, such as those proposed in Hart and Luckock (2004) in A guide to adoption practice (1972), as well as to informal step-by-step approaches and advice, as outlined by Melina (2002), Wright (2002) and Schooler (1993), among others. The literature review has indicated that there are fewer comprehensive models of support for adoption challenges and a greater number of step-by-step approaches or general advice on handling specific challenges in adoption. These step-by-step approaches are discussed below.

3.2. A SYSTEM OF SUPPORT

Hart and Luckock (2004), in their book **Developing Adoption Support and Therapy,** explore the support of a number of adoption challenges in the United Kingdom. Central to this poignant piece

of literature is a model of support (Compare Hart & Luckock, 2004:80) which proposes that a number of professionals be integral in supporting the adoption process and the adoptive family. The key role players in the model are referred to by Hart and Luckock (2004:79) as the broker, systems healer, social supporter, educator and therapeutic broker and each role player has a specific role, as indicated in the table below.

ROLE	CHARACTERISTICS
BROKER	a. Fulfils a strictly care management role with individual families b. Operates as a mediator between different services and, to some extent, as an advocate / trouble shooter c. Puts together packages of support for individual families and/or provides them with relevant information to access services directly themselves
SYSTEMS HEALER	a. Provides advocacy for communities of adoptive practice b. Has little or no involvement with individual families c. Ensures appropriate systems and organisational structures are in place to help adoptive families
SOCIAL SUPPORTER	a. Provides long-term direct help to individuals b. May have statutory professional support role, or non-professional support role
THERAPEUTIC BROKER	a. Works directly with parents and/or children b. Undertakes intensive emotional labour, often underpinned by a professional training, key task c. Holds in mind difficulties faced by adoptive families d. Contains the family and explicitly avoids involving other workers where possible e. Provides advocacy within the service system for children and parents
EDUCATOR	a. Has explicit pedagogic function b. Teaches others – members of adoptive families or professionals about the consequences of adoption and how to deal with them.

TABLE 3.1. ROLE PLAYERS IN THE MODEL OF SUPPORT AS PROPOSED BY HART AND LUCKOCK (2004:80)

This model is of particular interest to the researcher because it implies that comprehensive adoption support requires a **professional team** rather than an individual case worker, as currently seems to be the case in South Africa. The researcher further notes that Hart and Luckock's (2004:80) model of support refers to the concept of a community of adoptive practice, which implies the involvement of a number of persons at a variety of levels. According to Hart and Luckock (2004:171):

The concept of communities of practice was introduced as a way of thinking about knowledge management, reflection and learning within commercial organisations. People are beginning to use the idea as a framework to think about public sector relationships and organisational structures. …From the start the potential of such communities of practice was seen to be enormous. In the words of Wegner, "As a locus of engagement in action,

interpersonal relations, shared knowledge and negotiation of enterprises, such communities hold the key to real transformation – the kind that has real effects on peoples lives.

The vision for Hart and Luckock (2004:172) is that various parties involved in adoption and adoption support become informally bonded through shared expertise and a passion for a joint enterprise. The result of this informal bonding is that professionals will share their experiences in a creative and spontaneous manner, which will result in the development of new approaches to problems. The researcher is of the view that a model such as this, which makes use of the combined resources and funding of organisations, may prove successful in South Africa where resources and funding of independent organisations seem to be insufficient to support the adoption process adequately.

The key role players in the proposed model of support would ensure that all the identified challenges of cross racial adoption (refer to Chapter 2) namely; supporting the decision to adopt; supporting the process, supporting the adoptive family in preparing their extended family for adoption; support around attachment; support around communication; supporting a child who seeks their biological parents and supporting the child who seeks a link to their origins and history are addressed accordingly.

3.3. ADVICE ON SELECTION AND PREPARATION OF PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENTS

In chapter 2 the researcher discovered that the decision to adopt could in itself be a challenge for numerous reasons. It is in light of this information that the researcher believes that the decision to adopt should be explored fully with parents by the appropriate professional. An appropriate model of screening would therefore include a comprehensive approach to all the factors of consideration applicable to the couple or person in question, for example the age, race and level of physical functioning of the child prospective parents would be prepared to adopt.

A number of authors (compare Schooler, 1993:15; Hart & Luckock, 2004:150 and Howe, 1996:10) provide information and informal guidelines on how prospective adoptive parents should be screened and prepared for the potential challenges of adoption. According to Howe (1996:10), parents should explore the complexity of their decision to adopt so that they themselves are clear on their motivation. Howe (1996:10) states that:

Parents' reasons for wanting to adopt convey an idiosyncratic mixture of the personal and the universal, the unique as well as the general. Motivations therefore vary from the desire of infertile people to have children, the wish of experienced parents to care for children in need, and the preference by some individuals and couples to form or extend their family by adoption rather than give birth to children and thereby add to the world's population

Schooler (1993:15), on the other hand, suggests a number of self assessment questions which parents could be encouraged to reflect on and which professionals could discuss with parents. These questions involve the following:

- What are the reasons I want to adopt.
- How do I see adoption as a positive way to build my family.
- Do we have personal problems that we think may improve if a child enters our family.
- Is our motivation to adopt "to save a child".
- Can we love and nurture this child without knowledge of his or her history.
- When we think of a child what do we envision.
- How has infertility affected our marriage.

While these questions are not presented in a formal model of support they do provide advice on questions which can be used to facilitate the preparation of prospective parents and to enrich the role of assessment, preparation and training of adoptive parents as outlined in Hart and Luckock's (2004:80) model of support.

In the researcher's view a standardised screening model should exist and form the basis of interaction with and preparation of prospective adoptive parents. Individual agencies may add to the basic model to include their own criteria, for instance to have specific requirements around religious practices of parents. In this regard A guide to adoption practice (1972:25) points out that "…an agency that is affiliated to a particular church may wish to deal only with applicants who are members of that church and will take this factor into account during the preliminary screening process". In the researcher's view there is sufficient existing literature to design a standardised screening and preparation model or versions thereof to ensure ethical, professional and appropriate preparation of prospective parents.

3.4. MODELS OF COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT

According to Hart and Luckock (2004:149), a key criterion in supporting the family in coming to terms and accepting their adoptive family identity is to encourage open communication around the unique context of the family. These authors are of the opinion that open communication enables children to deal with their issues of their adoptive identity within the context of their new attachments.

Allowing for communication around adoption results ultimately in what Hart and Luckock (2002:149) refer to as an adoptive family life story work, where family members are able to find ways to talk about and tell their unique adoption story and explore elements of identity, kinship and relatedness. In order for an effective model of communication to exist Hart and Luckock (2002:149) have identified five key roles or areas which must be viewed as interlinked.

The following illustration shows the five key roles or areas which Hart and Luckock (2002:150) refer to in their model of support.

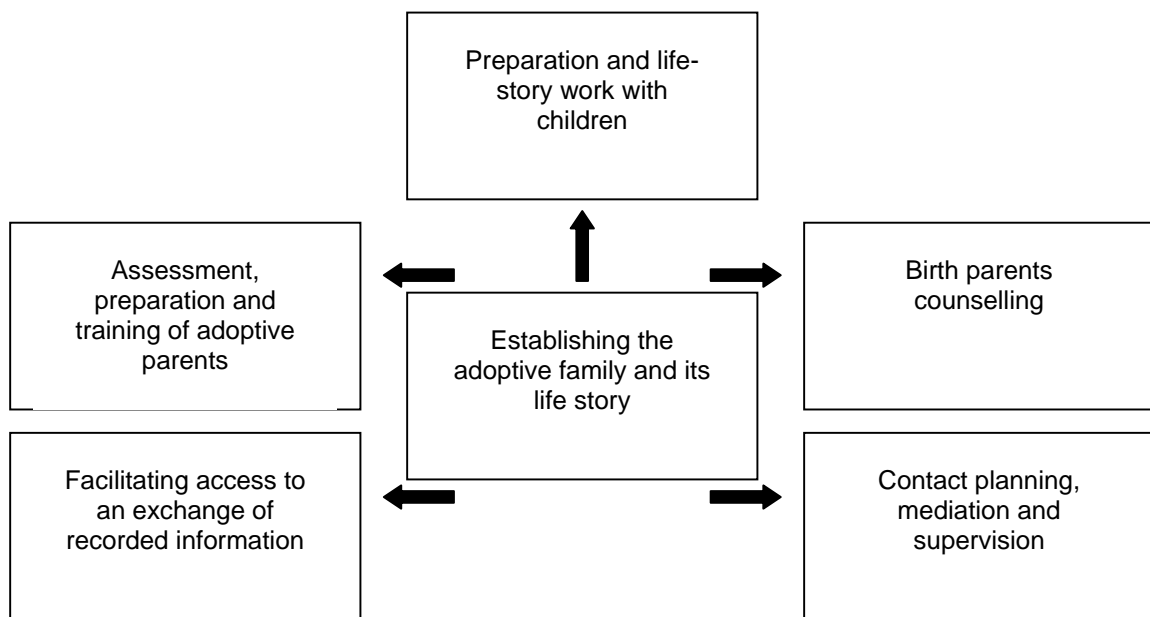|	Preparation and life-story work with children	
Assessment, preparation and training of adoptive parents	Establishing the adoptive family and its life story	Birth parents counselling
Facilitating access to an exchange of recorded information		Contact planning, mediation and supervision

DIAGRAM 3.1. ADOPTIVE FAMILY LIFE STORY: A MODEL OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE HART AND LUCKOCK (2004:150)

The researcher acknowledges that while the reality of supporting all elements of the adoption process may not be feasible or possible, there are certain elements that are more easily supported when a network of professionals exists. In order to serve the best interests of the child being placed for adoption the researcher is of the opinion that the elements which should be prioritised are assessment, preparation and training of adoptive parents, life-story work with children, facilitating access to and exchange of recorded information, and contact planning between adopted children and their biological parents, mediation and supervision of all parties involved in the adoption process. These elements strike the researcher as crucial and deliverable variables in creating a life-story work of the adoptive family.

Hart and Luckock (2004:151) suggest a number of practical steps that can be implemented by professionals to aid in the facilitation of communication within the adoptive family so that the family story may be scripted.

- Inviting prospective parents to reflect on and reconstruct their own family story in preparation for placement.
- Enabling adoptive parents and children to know about and make sense together of the child's family experiences and their legacy in order to integrate them in adoptive family life.
- Encouraging the depiction and discussion of the adoptive family future and who is intended to be involved in it.

These are just a few examples put forward where the family is essentially guided to prepare for their own process and to create an opportunity for open communication once a child is placed.   Of interest is the fact that these steps require input from parents and professionals, which means that the burden of support does not rest purely on the involved professional. The researcher believes that such a model is highly beneficial in the instance where resources and manpower are limited, as they are in South Africa. Hart and Luckock (2004:151) propose that the involved professional begins the process, as they currently do, but that parents are then empowered to facilitate the process of going forward.

A number of the models of support and advice identified in literature compliment each other. The researcher's view is that while Hart and Luckock (2004) provide the formal framework, richness is

added to the framework by including the insights of informal models on specific challenges such as age appropriate communication around adoption and race awareness provided by Melina (2002) and Wright (2002). In the researcher's opinion Wright's (2002:266-267) model of Stages of race awareness explored in chapter 2 would serve as an adequate starting point for parents to address questions around race and Melina's (2002:96-106) overview of communication on adoption would serve well to guide parents on how to manage questions around adoption. The abovementioned models would, in the researcher's opinion, address the challenges specific to communication raised by respondents as well as all other challenges as they include practical and specific guidelines. According to Hart and Luckock (2004:150), all systems in the network and all challenges within the systems or network must be underpinned by successful communication in order for the adoptive family to function optimally.

The researcher has provided a breakdown of Melina's (2002:96-106) stages of communication on adoption at various ages in the table overleaf to illustrate how a step-by-step guide can be utilised by parents to deal with communication on adoption.

2 – 4 YEARS At this age to tell a child quite simply that mommy and daddy wanted a baby but could not make a baby grow in mommy's tummy and your birth parents could not look after you so they asked us to be your parents should suffice. Parents will adapt this first story in a way that is comfortable for them and relevant to their circumstances.	a. At this age information should be limited to basic facts b. Preschoolers cannot differentiate between being adopted and being born c. Preschoolers perceive anyone who lives with them as family d. They are willing to accept their adoptive status but they do not understand it e. They parrot their adoption story f. A discussion of adoption with preschoolers is merely a foundation for future elaboration g. The parent goal is to establish a comfortable atmosphere where stories can be shared
5 – 7 YEARS At this age the child is told their specific story with as much detail as is appropriate for them to understand how they came to be a part of the family they are in. At this age it is essential to clarify for the child that children are placed for adoption due to their birth parent's inability to care for them and not because of any wrongdoing on their part.	a. Children begin to differentiate between birth and adoption because they begin to understand conception b. Parents must repeat the story of adoption again c. Children must understand that they were born and their birth must be included in the story d. Actual circumstances of the birth can be shared e. Talking about the birth acknowledges the past and implies it is acceptable to think and talk about it f. The birth father should be included in the story g. Concrete details such as the name or a photograph of a birth parent, may be included h. The parent goal is to help the child understand the adoption process
8 – 11 YEARS At this age parents need to reassure their child that their feelings are normal and that they are able to discuss any questions or feelings that they might have. It is imperative at this age that parents do not avoid uncomfortable questions. If your child has asked a question, they are in all likelihood ready for the answer.	a. Children begin to distinguish between blood relations and other relations b. The understanding of birth and adoption are enhanced c. Children do not understand that adoption is legal and binding and may feel unsure of their place in the family d. Children may think biological parents could reclaim them e. They want to know why they were placed for adoption f. Parents should speak in concrete terms to avoid confusion g. There may be anxiousness around separation h. There may be a normal grief response to the realisation that they were placed for adoption i. Can be difficult to keep up with the increasing emotional awareness j. Needs to know that there are other people who are adopted k. They may wish to know more about their birth parents and how they were conceived l. The child may want to know how adoption makes him or her different and how adoption is perceived in society at large.

TABLE 3.2. AN OVERVIEW OF COMMUNICATION ON ADOPTION TAKEN FROM MELINA (2002:96-106)

According to Watkins and Fisher (1993:57), there is no set way in which a parent shares with their child the story of their adoption. These authors share their experience by stating: "…we sit back and listen to the curious ways in which our story is transformed and incorporated into her sense of the world. We may make a revision, add some details, or start all over. Each of us in turn takes the story further". This text highlights that each parent will undertake a unique experience of communication. However there are certain models of support and advice which will make this undertaking more manageable.

3.5. A MODEL OF SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT AND ACCEPTANCE

The researcher is of the opinion that a model such as Bronfenbrenner's (in Berk, 1997:24) model of support and acceptance provides a solid explanation of social systems and the interaction between these systems which could be helpful for prospective adoptive parents. Such a model could provide prospective adoptive parents with a theoretical understanding of the systems in their environment and the interactions between these systems. On reviewing Bronfenbrenner's model it becomes evident that support and rejection can exist at numerous levels in various systems and that each level and system affects other levels and systems. From the empirical findings (refer to 2.5.) it seems that adoptive parents must be equipped to deal with resistance and questions from family and friends as well as society at large.

In **Table 3.3** the researcher provides an overview of Bronfenbrenner's model which should provide prospective adoptive parents with a heightened awareness of the interconnectedness of the systems within which they exist. In the researcher's opinion a model such as this encourages prospective adoptive parents to reflect on the systems in which they exist and what levels of support and acceptance exist in these systems.

MICROSYSTEM–"A pattern of activities, social roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social and symbolic features that invite, permit or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interactions with, and activity in, the immediate environment. Examples include family and school."

MESOSYSTEM–"comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person (e.g., the relations between home and school) In other words, a Mesosystem is a system of Microsystems."

EXOSYSTEM–"comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not contain the developing person, but in which events occur that indirectly influence processes within the immediate setting in which the developing person lives (e.g., for a child, the relation between the home and the parent's workplace; for a parent, the relation between the school and the neighbourhood peer group)."

MACROSYSTEM–"consists of the overarching pattern of micro-, meso- and exosystems characteristic of a given culture or subculture, with particular reference to the belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, lifestyles, opportunity structures, hazards and life course options that are embedded in each of these broader systems. The macrosystem may be thought of as a societal blueprint for a particular culture or subculture."

CHRONOSYSTEM–"encompasses change or consistency over time not only in the characteristics of the person, but also of the environment in which that person lives (e.g., changes over the life course in family structure, socio economic status, employment, place of residence and so on.

TABLE 3.3. BRONFENBRENNER'S MODEL OF ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY (IN BERK 1997:24)

3.6. ADVICE ON THE PREPARATION OF THE EXTENDED FAMILY IN THE ADOPTION PROCESS

The empirical findings highlighted that prospective adoptive parents often experience resistance around their decision to adopt from their parents and siblings. In the researcher's view a comprehensive model of support should include steps for prospective adoptive parents on how to prepare their extended families. Authors such as Schooler (1993) and Melina (2002) provide practical advice on how to prepare extended family members for adoption.

Schooler (1993:66-67) believes the first steps in preparing extended families is communication. This involves that the prospective parents should **a)** introduce the idea as a tentative plan rather then a final goal to allow family members time to adjust to the idea, and **b)** develop creative ways to educate family members about adoption. One example of developing creative ways to educate

family members is that of prospective parents who invited their parents to an informal information session with their social worker and other prospective adoptive parents.

Melina (2002:55-56) expands on the aforementioned by stating that extended family can be helped to accept adoption in the following ways:

- Introduce the idea gradually instead of springing the final decision on family.
- Give them an opportunity to get information they need. Invite family members to information sessions for adoptive parents and provide the opportunity for them to ask questions of a social worker or other adoptive parents.
- Provide them with an opportunity to see other adoptive families.
- Provide them with an ongoing source of support and information. In the United States publications such as the Adoptive Families magazine can be subscribed to.
- Tell family what you need and how you would like to be supported.
- Include them in any ceremonies or rituals such as naming.
- Forgive relatives for insensitive remarks that may have made while getting used to the idea of adoption.
- Encourage contact between relatives and the adoptees as early as possible.

Schooler (1993:68) points out that the concerns that the parents of prospective adoptive parents have are often as simple as where will they fit into the adoptive child's life and what their role will be. In this regard it is recommended that prospective adoptive parents discuss with their parents their role as grandparents and include topics such as what the adopted child will call them and what special thing they could teach or share with the adopted child.

In the instance of continued resistance and prejudice Steinberg and Hall (2000:145) suggest that for adoptive parents their first priority must be their children and not extended family members. Melina (2002:56) states that if relatives remain resistant, despite having an opportunity to become educated, the adoptive parents should initiate a candid discussion.

The researcher is of the opinion that the advice on preparing the extended family can be used to add depth to frameworks of support such as those provided by Hart and Luckock (2004) and A

guide to adoption practice (1972). The researcher feels that creative examples on including parents and other family could be included in a handbook for adoptive parents or shared at informal information settings.

3.7. A MODEL OF ATTACHMENT TO ENHANCE THE UNDERSTANDING OF BONDING AND NON-BONDING

According to Smith and Sherwin (1988:58), a number of traditional theories on bonding and attachment, such as those proposed by Klaus and Kennel (in Smith & Sherwin, 1988:59), can be used in the circumstances of adoption. One particular model refers specifically to attachment in adoption. Klaus and Kennel state that in the instance of maternal mothers and their biological offspring there are four specific time periods for attachment, namely prior to pregnancy, pregnancy, birth and after birth. In the case of adoption there are three time periods for attachment - prior to entry, entry and after entry. In every phase there are specific objectives and challenges that the adoptive parent faces.

The researcher had tabulated the objectives and challenges for each phase of attachment for ease of reference in Table 3.4. The objectives in the table are those of Klaus and Kennel (in Smith & Sherwin, 1988:60-61). The challenges, however, are a combination of the authors and the researcher's views.

PERIOD	OBJECTIVES	CHALLENGES
PRIOR TO ENTRY	a. Parent attains role identity b. Parent fantasises about infant / child-to-be c. Parent problem solves through fantasy about how she will handle challenges d. Parent problem solves through manipulation environment e. Parent develops a support group f. Parent carries out nesting behaviours	a. Parent delays or avoids fantasising due to uncertainty about when a child may be placed and what to expect b. In the absence of support groups for parents who are considering adoption, the prospective parent may feel isolated c. Parent may avoid nesting behaviours to avoid disappointment
ENTRY	a. Parent is active participant and maintains control b. Parent has opportunity for immediate and prolonged contact with infant / child c. Significant others are present d. Significant others acknowledge the child or infant e. Significant others acknowledge the mother f. Mother begins to nurture g. Other parent interacts and nurtures infant / child h. Attendant professionals give support	a. If unprepared a parent may feel helpless and confused b. The reactions and acceptance of others is crucial to how supported the parent feels, in many instances immediate family may be unsupportive c. What support is available from professionals at the entry period and directly thereafter – are professionals available to offer support
AFTER entry	**PARENT** a. Touches and explores the infant / child b. Engages in non-verbal communication c. Engages in verbal communication d. Allows body contact with infant / child e. Interacts in rhythmic patterns with infant f. Feed, baths, clothes infant / child **INFANT / CHILD** g. Engages in verbal and non-verbal communication with the parent h. Responds to maternal nurturing behaviour i. Elicits physiological response in mother j. Infant meets mother's rhythms	a. The parent is uncertain of how to bond with the child and is overwhelmed by becoming an instant parent b. The parent is anxious and battles to attach c. The infant is anxious and depressed and battles to attach d. Parents are provided with no information about what challenges to expect and how to overcome these challenges e. Parent is unsure of what type of body contact is appropriate with an older child

TABLE 3.4. PERIODS OF ATTACHMENT OBJECTIVES AND CHALLENGES KLAUS AND KENNEL (IN SMITH AND SHERWIN 1988:60-61)

The researcher is of the view that a simple model of attachment, such as that discussed in Table 3.4 and comparative models such as those provided by Ainsworth (in Smith & Sherwin, 1988:65) and Bowlby (in Berk, 1997:405), would provide parents with a sound understanding of what attachment is, challenges with attachment in adoption and an understanding of how to work through these challenges so that anxiety in the adjustment phase is minimised.

Models of attachment could be used to add depth to the preparation and guidance of parents and to add richness to models of support such as model proposed by Hart and Luckock (2004:80). The researcher is of the opinion that prospective adoptive parents must be informed of all manners in which attachment could be enhanced.

3.8. ADVICE ON SUPPORTING A CHILD WHO SEEKS THEIR BIOLOGICAL PARENTS

According to Hayes (in Phillips & McWilliam, 1996:187), significant changes will need to be made in adoption law if post-adoption support is to become ongoing. Hayes states that the availability of a social worker after adoption is necessary because there will always be questions which arise which the child either cannot or will not discuss with their adoptive parents.

In this regard Schooler (1993:173) comments:

> A recurring comment made by adopted adolescents, especially in later years, is, "Who am I, really?" The identity crisis commonly attributed to the adolescent years is often compounded for adopted teens. Adoption experts give this the label "genealogical bewilderment". It is described as the "feeling of being cut off from your heritage, your religious background, your culture, your race". Unlike their peers, usually thorough knowledge of their genetic roots and identification with a family, adopted children usually lack information about their beginning.

According to Liptak (1993:91) the motivation most often mentioned by adoptees who are searching for their biological parents is a need to connect with their beginnings and to come face-to-face with their ancestry. Gartrell (in Liptak, 1993:91) says adoptees are not searching for parents, they are searching for identity because many adoptees feel alienated from others and even themselves

when they lack knowledge about their biological origins. In the researcher's view if parents can be guided to understand what the search is about they are better able to support their adoptive child.

The questions of heritage, race and culture, among others is often what triggers the desire for adoptees to seek out their biological families. According to Forrest (in Douglas & Philpot, 2003:136), it is essential for both the adopted child and their adoptive parents to receive support from those with experience in the field of adoption when and if the need for reunification arises. The authors claim that:

It is not infrequent for the view held by those working in clinical or therapeutic services to conflict with the practice and philosophy of those involved in post–adoption work. It is often said that a child is emotionally too fragile or vulnerable to consider opening up the issue of contact with birth relatives. Of course it would be foolish to think this is never the case, but some crucial healing opportunities may be missed if the child's need to know is not seen as central.

Forrest (in Douglas & Philpot, 2003:136-137) highlights a number of factors which may come into play and that should be considered by a family when an adopted child decides to seek their birth parents. The researcher has condensed these points below:

- Once contact is opened up, don't go too far too soon. Try to take small steps, not big strides.
- Adoptive parents may need assistance and support to deal with their emotions.
- Support gives everyone the chance to deal with the unexpected and to consider everyone's feelings.
- There is a roller coaster effect with highs of elation and troughs of depression.
- It is vital that the family dictates the pace of the reunification work so that there is time to process information and emotions.
- The involved professional should facilitate the reunification in such a manner that the best interests of all involved parties are considered.
- Adoptees and adoptive parents need to be prepared in the event that a birthparent chooses not to be contacted.

In the researcher's view the need for support around seeking biological parents is of the utmost importance because the emotional implications for an adoptee could be disastrous if the search for biological parents is handled incorrectly. According to A guide to adoption practice (1972:85) searches by adoptees "…would of course need to be handled with the utmost discretion and professional skill by mature and experienced social workers". In the researcher's view the guide, however outdated, indicates that the agencies or organisations that facilitated the adoption are obliged to later provide this final, important service of support around searching for biological parents to the adoptive family and the adoptee. Support cannot ensure that reunification will be successful or easy, but it can minimise trauma and anxiety and facilitate open communication, ensuring the best possible emotional outcome.

Additional advice in literature on seeking biological parents will key in under the elements of **a)** facilitating access to and exchange of recorded information, and **b)** contact planning, mediation and supervision included in the model of support and communication proposed by Hart and Luckock (2004:150).

3.9. ADVICE ON SUPPORTING THE CHILD WHO SEEKS A LINK TO THEIR ORIGINS AND HISTORY

A few authors from the United States, such as Bowie (2004) and Steinberg and Hall (2000), place particular emphasis on the importance of maintaining a link to the adopted child's culture and history. Authors such as the aforementioned also provide examples of how this link can be maintained. .

Steinberg and Hall (2000:15-16) state that the challenge that adoptive parents who cross racially adopt face is that they must realise that they will not be able to provide personally for their child's potential need to belong to their culture of origin. In this regard Melina (2002:214) states that the reality for cross racially or cross culturally adopted adoptees is that they have lost important ways of connecting with their ancestors with whom they share **ethnicity** even though they share an **ethnic identity** with their adoptive family.

However Steinberg and Hall (2000:16-17) have the following thoughts on what the role of the adoptive parent is in supporting their child to explore their history and origins:

- The parent's role is to give their child permission to explore, to learn and to live their birth culture and heritage.
- Initially parents explore and learn with their children until they are confident enough to learn and live the culture and heritage on their own.
- The family unit is the first place that a child learns that they have a rightful place, and once the adopted child knows they have a rightful place in their family they can seek a rightful place in their race.
- Adopted children have dual identity - a birth identity and the identity of their adoptive family.
- Children should be empowered to feel connected to all the worlds they inhabit.
- Parents can be a bridge to the culture their child needs to be part of.

Steinberg and Hall (2000:161) also state that comfort in a child's language of origin is an extremely powerful tool and is a valued mark of membership to a race or culture. The authors claim that for children who are already less confident about their membership to a race group, language can create a sense of belonging and increase acceptance by members of that race group. The importance of language should for not be overlooked.

In the context of international adoption Steinberg and Hall (2000:163) recommend that parents may consider making a trip to the adoptive child's country or place of origin. The researcher is of the opinion that this could be adapted to meet the needs of the cross racially adopted children in South African. Parents could initiate visits to the child's place of birth, for example Soweto or Alexandra, and visit culturally significant places with their child. In the instance where parents know the culture of the child, for example whether their child is of Zulu, Xhosa or Sotho descent, the specifics of this particular culture may be explored.

Schooler (1993:189) recommends a number of questions parents can ask themselves to establish what opportunities there are for cultural and racial awareness in the adoptive family's life.

- What is the racial composition of your neighbourhood, school and church.
- Will your child usually be "the different one" at family and social functions.
- Can you identify attitudes in your community concerning the child's culture and race.
- Are same race role models and peers available to your child on a daily basis.

- Are you comfortable around others who are of a different race.

Schooler (1993:189) further suggests that parents also ask themselves the following questions about their parenting skills with regard to connecting to their child's cultural or racial needs:

- What do you already know about the child's dietary, skin, hair and health care needs.
- Where can you go to learn about the personal care of the child.
- How will you teach the child about his or her own culture and race.
- How will you involve the same race people in the child's life.
- How do you think the child will feel about growing up in a family of a different race or culture.

The researcher is of the opinion that a link to history and origin begins from the day an adopted child is placed with their parents. While each parent will ultimately decide on the best path for themselves and their child, the researcher believes information and guidance on how to support a link to history and origins can foster a healthy and supportive environment within adoptive families.

3.10. A PROPOSED SOUTH AFRICAN FRAMEWORK

A guide to adoption practice', published in 1972 by the South African National Council for Child Welfare, outlines clearly and concisely what the procedure and processes of adoption should have entailed in 1972. The researcher notes that the guide includes a number of the aspects included in Hart and Luckock's (2004:150) model of communication and support in terms of work with the biological parents, the adoptive parents and the adopted child. The broad chapter headings and sub-headings included in A guide to adoption practice are:

Chapter 2: **Services to the biological parents**. This chapter includes details on casework with the biological parents regarding their rights and responsibilities and their decision to place their child for adoption. Services to the biological parents also include working with the father of the child and the natural grandparents, and discussing the mother's proposed plans on finalisation of the adoption. At the time of the birth the biological parents are guided through signing consent to adoption and separating from the child, and are then provided with continued support after the separation.

In the researcher's view the abovementioned services should be mandatory because they are crucial to ensure that the mental and emotional wellbeing of all involved parties are protected.

Chapter 3: **The child: pre-placement services**. This chapter includes guidelines on pre-placement casework with the child where the infant or child is studied and has their needs evaluated. Through these services the ideal prospective parents are identified for the child or infant.

The researcher notes that these services focus specifically on the rights of the chid to ensure the best possible placement.

Chapter 4: **Adoptive parents: pre-placement services**. This chapter discusses guidelines on the thorough and complete screening and preparation of prospective adoptive parents. This chapter also includes ascertaining what the attitudes of close family members are to the adoption.

At present, due to time constraints and limited personnel, it would appear that thorough pre-placement services are not facilitated. Furthermore, there is no standardised format for screening to ensure consistency.

Chapter 5: **The new family: placement and post-placement services to the child and to the adoptive parents**. This chapter includes guidelines on final preparation of the prospective parents and their existing children and the child to be placed for adoption when the child is an older child. Furthermore this chapter elaborates on guidelines for continued support and finalisation of the adoption as well as circumstances under which an adoption may not be finalised.

As stated by Pam Wilson of Johannesburg Child Welfare (2006), limited resources and personnel mean that parents cannot be assisted with placement and post-placement support services.

Chapter 6: **The organisation and administration of agencies offering adoption services**. This chapter outlines effective organisation and administration within agencies and guidelines which should govern all areas of their service delivery. This chapter also outlines how agencies should be structured in terms of screening committees and social workers.

The feedback from respondents would indicate that the organisation and administration of agencies offering adoption services is not regulated.

Chapter 7: **Adoption and the law**. This chapter provides guidelines on all legalities pertaining to adoption.

The guide indicates, in the researcher's view, that it was intended that the adoption process be standardised and regulated and that a consistent set of criteria and standards be used in all instances of adoption. In 2006, however, it is evident from empirical findings that the guide has not been adhered to. The researcher is of the opinion that a need exists for a revised version of 'A guide to adoption practice' in order to meet the current expectations of all parties who facilitate or enter into an adoption process.

The successful implementation of a revised and appropriate set of guidelines which could be adhered to and supported by a team of professionals would have the potential to address all of the challenges raised in the empirical findings.

3.11. CONCLUSION

In the researcher's opinion there is information in the form of formal models of support and advice in literature that address almost every identified challenge in the empirical findings of this research. The only challenges which were not addressed by the literature that was reviewed were discussing a history of apartheid with cross racially adopted children, and managing the cross racially adopted child's hair.

In the researcher's view the definite presence of models of support in adoption agencies and advice in literature would undoubtedly alleviate a number of the uncertainties and anxieties of adoptive parents and better equip them to function optimally. In the researcher's opinion adoption is a legal process facilitated by social services and the system therefore has an obligation to develop and ensure models of support for parents who cross racially adopt.

The researcher holds the opinion that sufficient literature exists on existing models of support and advice for a comprehensive South African model of support to be designed. The researcher further proffers that the existing models of support and advice would be appropriate to use in a South African context with only minor adjustments.

CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The empirical findings presented in chapter 2 have shown that parents who cross racially adopt do experience challenges specific to cross racial adoption. The aim of this chapter is to revisit the proposed aims and objectives of the study and to establish if these were met in such a way that the research question was adequately answered. The researcher will also provide conclusions and recommendations on the research findings and make suggestions on future research.

4.2. AIM OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The broad aim of the research study was to **conduct applied, exploratory, descriptive research to establish challenges specific to cross racial adoption in Gauteng, South Africa**.

The aim of the study was fulfilled by carrying out the following procedures. The researcher, through personal experience and through consultations with experts, established focus group questions that were formulated and combined in an unstructured discussion guide. The discussion guide was used in three different focus groups in order to collect qualitative empirical data to establish challenges specific to cross racial adoption in Gauteng, South Africa.

The empirical study was successful in identifying, exploring and describing challenges experienced by parents who cross racially adopt in Gauteng.

4.3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The researcher defined four key objectives for the research in order to meet the overall aim of the study:

- To conduct an empirical study by collecting data through the use of focus groups in order to explore challenges specific to cross racial adoptions.

The researcher, through snowball sampling, recruited 21 parents who had cross racially adopted and invited them to attend focus groups. In the focus groups the researcher explored what challenges parents who cross racially adopt experience in order to establish if there are challenges specific to cross racial adoption. The researcher utilised a discussion guide to facilitate the discussion (refer to appendix III). Data was collected by means of field notes and audio and video recording. This objective was achieved in that the identified challenges put forward by parents who had cross racially adopted were presented and explored in chapter 2.

- To conduct analysis in order to describe the findings of the empirical data

The researcher used Creswell's (in de Vos, 2002:340) spiral of analysis to analyse the raw data which was presented and discussed in chapter 2. This objective was achieved through the fact that the analysed data described the challenges experienced by parents who cross racially adopt experience.

- To conduct a thorough literature review on available literature pertaining to cross racial adoption.

The researcher conducted a thorough literature review in chapter 3 on the challenges of adoption and cross racial adoption to support the empirical findings in chapter 2.

- To draw conclusions on the completion of the aforementioned objectives and to make recommendations for health professionals who assist families who cross racially adopt.

The fourth aim is discussed in this chapter, where the researcher will draw conclusions and make recommendations based on the empirical findings.

The aim and objectives set for this study were thus successfully achieved.

4.4. RESEARCH QUESTION

In light of the fact that the research was qualitative, exploratory and descriptive in nature, the following research question was formulated: **What challenges specific to cross racial adoptions do adoptive parents face in Gauteng, South Africa?**

The research question was answered through the processes of collecting empirical evidence and sourcing literature which supported the empirical findings. The empirical findings, gathered through focus groups with respondents who had cross racially adopted, indicated that parents who cross racially adopt do experience challenges. The researcher reviewed the challenges identified by respondents in the context of extensive literature on same race adoption and cross racial adoption in other countries to further explore which challenges, if any, were unique to cross racial adoption in Gauteng.

The empirical findings supported by the literature that was reviewed indicate that while a number of the challenges that respondents experienced were general to adoption, certain challenges were specific to cross racial adoption.

The researcher was able to identify the following challenges through the research study.

THEME 1: THE DECISION TO ADOPT

1. Exploring the circumstances under which parents decide to adopt.
2. The choice to adopt cross racially
3. Choosing to adopt a younger or older child

THEME 2: THE ADOPTION PROCESS

1. Adoption agencies and the start of the adoption process
2. The role of agencies and organisations in the adoption process
3. The screening process
4. Information and guidance

THEME 3: ADJUSTING TO ADOPTION AND BECOMING AN INSTANT FAMILY

1. The adjustment period within the instant family
2. Attachment

THEME 4: SUPPORT AND ACCEPTANCE

1. The extended family
2. Friends
3. Colleagues
4. Community and Society

THEME 5: CURRENT CHALLENGES THAT RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCE

1. Living with racism
2. Answering questions from people
3. Religious identity
4. Acknowledging similarities and differences
5. Racial awareness

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6. Identity formation
7. Behavioural challenges
8. The issue of teaching a child a second language
9. Management of hair
10. Inappropriate comments

THEME 6: ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES

1. Seeking biological parents and a link to culture and history
2. Seeking biological parents
3. Seeking a biological parent who is deceased
4. The abandoned child who seeks a biological parent
5. The child who seeks biological parents and siblings
6. The child who seeks a biological parent from a different social sector
7. Seeking a link to history and culture
8. A history of apartheid

THEME 7: COMMUNICATION WITH CHILDREN

1. Age appropriate communication
2. Non-verbal communication

TABLE 4.1 DEFINING 7 MAJOR THEMES AND 32 SUB-THEMES TO BE PRESENTED IN THE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS.

The researcher is of the opinion that the research has been successful in identifying challenges experienced by parents who have cross racially adopted experience.

4.5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The researcher will present the summation in a way which illustrates clearly which challenges are general adoption challenges and which challenges are specific to cross racial adoption.

4.5.1. THE DECISION TO ADOPT

The empirical findings indicate that the decision to adopt is a challenge. The decision to adopt requires that parents consider the age, race, and cultural background of the child they would be wiling to adopt. The challenges of deciding to adopt and whether to adopt a younger or older child are decisions which must be made by all prospective adoptive parents. The decision to adopt a child of a different race is a decision that only prospective parents who are open to the idea of cross racial adoption must consider.

The empirical findings show that the support around the decision to adopt is fraught with inconsistencies and shortcomings. In the researcher's view challenges arise around the decision to

adopt because there is a distinct gap between what support should exist around the decision to adopt and what support does currently exist around the decision making process.

4.5.2. THE ADOPTION PROCESS

The empirical findings indicated that parents who have cross racially adopted often feel isolated and ill guided in terms of their cross racial adoption and how to handle challenges which may or may not present themselves. The literature reviewed by the researcher implies that parents, regardless of the race of the child they adopt, more often then not feel isolated and ill supported and that this experience of a lack of support is not specific to parents who cross racially adopt.

The empirical findings highlighted that a set process or framework for support of the adoption process does not exist and that parents feel the burden of the absence of such a framework. The researcher believes that the empirical findings indicate that there are fundamental flaws in South Africa's social services systems and that these issues are likely to persist because funding and resources to address these flaws is lacking. Respondents bore testimony to the fact that even in instances where models of support were in existence they were poorly and inconsistently implemented.

4.5.3. ADJUSTING TO ADOPTION AND BECOMING AN INSTANT FAMILY

The empirical findings clearly indicate that there is an adjustment period for the entire family post the placement of the child. This adjustment period and the challenges it presents are often compounded because parents have not been prepared adequately and because the adoptions often occur over a short space of time. Furthermore the vast majority of parents reported that there was no support post the adoption. In the researcher's view the overriding theme of absent support is apparent in all stages of the adoption.

In the researcher's opinion it is therefore essential that the family receive intermittent follow-up support post the adoption so that they are enabled to deal with the challenges that arise. Literature has highlighted that the adjustment to adoption is a challenge for all families who adopt and not a challenge specific to parents who cross racially adopt.

4.5.4. SUPPORT AND ACCEPTANCE

The consulted literature findings clearly indicate that ensuring support and acceptance from friends and family for an adoption is a challenge that all prospective adoptive parents face. Support and acceptance for a cross racial adoption, however, may be more challenging when friends and families have resistance to the idea of adoption in addition to issues with race.

The empirical findings indicate that respondents experienced tremendous challenges with support and acceptance from their parents and siblings.

4.5.5. CURRENT CHALLENGES

Current challenges which parents who have cross racially adopted face include answering questions at school from peers, choosing a religious identity, acknowledging similarities and differences, behavioural challenges, teaching a child a second language and management of hair. All these challenges can be dealt with if parents have a framework of reference and continued support through information and guidance.

Current challenges of choosing a religious identity, teaching a child a second language and management of hair are challenges specific to parents who cross racially adopt. In light of the fact that the cross racially adopted child has a different history of origin to their parents, these parents have additional challenges to face.

4.5.6. ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES

The empirical findings highlighted three key anticipated challenges, namely; seeking biological parents and other family, seeking a link to culture and history, and discussing the role of race in South Africa's history of apartheid. Seeking biological parents and a link to culture and history is a challenge all adoptive parents must face, whereas discussing the history of apartheid and the role of race is a challenge specific to parents who cross racially adopt.

4.5.7. COMMUNICATION WITH CHILDREN

In the researcher's view communication with children is generally challenging for all parents if they are not equipped to communicate honestly and appropriately. Adoptive parents in general have the added challenge of communicating appropriately and honestly about adoption.

The researcher believes that parents should be 'groomed' to communicate effectively with their adopted children from the time they decide to adopt and the continued guidance, and support should be available post-adoption by a qualified professional.

4.6. ADDITIONAL CONCLUSIONS

The researcher has noted two points of interest through the research study that **a)** there is an increase in cross racial adoption in South Africa, as was identified by consulting the register of adoption at the Department of Social Development, and **b)** that there is a increasing concern around the apparently inconsistently regulated processing of cross racial adoptions.

The researcher is aware that for many individuals cross racial adoption is a contentious issue. The resistance and objections toward cross racial adoption from members of society may be further compounded by the fact that there are inconsistencies in the way in which the adoption process is handled. The researcher is of the opinion that the inconsistent manner in which cross racial adoptions are handled may create future social and political controversies. If cross racial adoptions are not handled appropriately, as a result of the haste to place children and the lack of resources, it may result in the creation of a legacy in history that the best interests of black children were not taken into consideration when these children were placed for adoption.

Through the empirical findings and literature review it became clear that there are a number of pertinent issues that must be explored prior to the adoption process with prospective parents. The researcher is therefore of the opinion that ideally a mandatory, comprehensive training course should be completed prior to prospective parents adopting. This training should combine elements of academic theory and real life case studies that are explored with parents.

In the researcher's opinion the research has been successful in identifying that parents who cross racially adopt do experience challenges. Exploring these challenges in relation to existing literature has shown that the majority of challenges can be addressed through guidance and support by appropriate professionals.

The researcher's view is that cross racial adoption presents parents with the same issues the world over, therefore existing or proposed models of support or information could be used as a foundation for building a South African model of support. It is the researcher's belief that access to existing or proposed models of support or information means that costs and efforts for preliminary research and formation of a South African model can be greatly reduced.

In the researcher's opinion in the absence of a structured framework which guides the adoption process, the best interests of the child and the prospective adopting family are not being taken into full account. If a parent is inadequately prepared to raise an adopted child optimally then both the adoptive parents and the adopted child have been failed.

The researcher is of the opinion that to propose a model of support in the absence of a body or organisation that can monitor or regulate this model is futile. A guide to adoption practice (1972) is a proposed model which has failed to be delivered on because the proposed process is not mandatory and is not regulated.

The researcher is of the opinion that this masters' research study has value to add in terms of exploring the process of cross racial adoption. The study can furthermore form the basis of a more in-depth doctoral study which could explore the role of supportive intervention in cross racial adoption.

4.7. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the researcher's view there is significant evidence to suggest that the challenges parents of cross racial adoption face cannot go ignored if the best interests of children and families are to be protected. In light of the empirical findings and the literature review it becomes apparent that consistent and regulated support of the adoption process is crucial.

The researcher is of the opinion that the adoption process must be standardised and regulated. The empirical findings indicate that there is a great deal of uncertainty for adoptive parents about what the adoption process entails in terms of procedures, requirements and legalities. Uncertainty, in the researcher's view, results once more in prospective parents feeling disempowered. Respondents on numerous occasions stated that they were uncertain about how the adoption process would run its course and spoke of countless inconsistencies.

In theory there should at present be a direct move to implement a mandatory framework which outlines the adoption process and support of the process for all agencies and organisations facilitating adoptions. It is the researcher's view that this mandatory framework should, where possible, be facilitated in-house by agencies and organisations which facilitate adoptions. However, with the current challenges around personnel and resources which have resulted in the current lack of regulation and support, it is foreseeable that these support functions may have to be outsourced to external organisations which can implement and regulate the framework.

The researcher is of the opinion that based on the challenges that were identified and the reviewed literature, a comprehensive model of support would include the following elements:

PRIOR TO ADOPTION

    a. A comprehensive orientation programme entailing an overview of adoption and the factors for consideration

    b. An objective, regulated and comprehensive screening and selection process which ensures that selected parents are viable candidates for adoption

    c. A detailed and thorough series of workshops to empower parents with knowledge on a variety of topics including: adoption studies, child development, problem solving, attachment, effective communication and family systems

    d. A series of meetings where prospective parents meet people who have personally been involved in the adoption process

    e. A series of meetings where parents and siblings of prospective adoptive parents can gather to ask questions and explore challenges

    f. Home visits and guidance around final preparation for the placement of a child

POST-ADOPTION

    a. Weekly contact for the first three months where any immediate challenges can be addressed

    b. Monthly contact for the remainder of the first year so that challenges can be detected and worked with

    c. Contact quarterly for the following two years

    d. Contact bi-annually thereafter until the adopted child reaches the age of 18 with the option for parents to

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	initiate additional contact for any challenges they may experience
e.	Workshops and/or presentations which address specific challenges to be held on set dates throughout the year
f.	Lists of resources and professionals who can be consulted over and above the support process

THE ADULT ADOPTEE

a.	Support around seeking biological parents for the adoptee and their adoptive parents
b.	Continued support for challenges the adoptee may encounter as a result of their adoption in later life

TABLE 4.2. A RECOMMENDED MODEL OF SUPPORT

The researcher does not intimate that acknowledging existing models of support and advice provide an instant solution for working with the complex challenges of cross racial adoption. In the researcher's view acknowledging existing models of support and advice is merely a starting point.

The researcher is also of the view that the preparation of information packs with information based on the models and theory above would make a significant contribution to parents feeling both guided and supported in the adoption process. In the researcher's view parents could also be encouraged to play a more active role towards working with welfare organisations and adoption agencies to improve the present circumstance.

4.8. FUTURE RESEARCH

The researcher is of the opinion that the empirical findings of this study indicate that there is a need for further research and the following might be considered:

Design a framework of support and guidance which could be used with a test group of parents who are entering the adoption process

- To identify a test group of willing prospective parents who believe they would benefit from a formal model of support.
- To introduce the support model and facilitate the support process.
- To monitor the progress of parents in managing the adoption process up until placement and for 12 or 24 months post placement.

The researcher's view is that a study identifying the direct advantages of a framework of support and information could provide further evidence to support the lobbying of a mandatory framework of support for all adoptions.

4.9 CONCLUSION

In the researcher's opinion the empirical work has been successful in establishing that parents who cross racially adopt do experience a host of challenges. In light of the empirical findings the researcher is of the view that the proposed ideas for future research should be further investigated and formalised in a bid to address the challenges of cross racial adoption.

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CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Parents,

I would like to once again extend a thank you to those of you who have agreed to give of your time to assist me with my masters thesis on cross racial adoption.

I include all the details for the research process in this letter for your records and hope that it will give you a very clear indiaction of the proceedings for the sessions. If there are any additional questions or concerns please feel free to contact me at any point.

I confirm that the schedule for the groups remains as was originally indicated in my earlier correspondence in the general invitation.

GROUP NUMBER	DATE	DAY	TIME
1. 8 Single parents	08 July	Saturday	10H00
2 4 Same-sex couples	08 July	Saturday	13H30
3. 4 Heterosexual couples	09 July	Sunday	10H30

I have allocated a maximum of 2.5 hours for each group as I believe that this should be sufficient time for us to cover the ground we need to.

I am holding the focus groups at a research venue called JDI I have chosen this venue for a number of reasons.

- The venue will offer us a quiet, contained and neutral space in whcih to conduct the research
- I am able to record the focus groups for analysis purposes with professional recording equipment because it is not possible for me to take comprehensive notes during our discussions.
- There is ample secure parking

I would also like to take this opportunity to inform you about my ethical obligations.

- While groups are being recorded this material may only be used for my analysis purposes and may not be shown to any other persons without your written consent
- I may not disclose any respondent's name or personal details in my thesis
- All information shared in the groups is treated as confidential and will not be discussed with other persons in a manner that will impinge on your right to confidentiality
- A collegaue will be present to capture field notes, and this colleague is bound by the same code of ethics as the researcher
- If any participant feels that the process of partkaing in the focus groups raises issues or feelings for them that they feel they will require professional assistance, the primary resercher I will ensure that a list of qulaified health professionals is made available.
- All respondents may have accss to the final thesis that is submitted.

The focus groups are going to focus on your experieces of having cross racially adopted in terms of the challenges you have faced, your fears, worries and concerns, if any, for the future, your dreams, hopes and wishes for how you would like to manage information sharing and support for your children and for yourself now and in the future. I am of the opinion that each parent who attends will have their own value and insight to add to the bigger picture, and I would like to therfore encourage every participant to feel comfortable to take the opoortunity to tell their story.

It would be ideal if you, as a parent, could have limited distractions during the course of the focus group. However, I am fully aware that making arrangements for somone to be with your children on the weekend may be a challenge. If you provide me with fair warning I will be glad to make the necesaary arrangements to ensure that your children can be watched over for the duration of the session.

I thank you once again for your agreement to participate and I look most forward to meeting you.

INTRODUCTION

- In the introduction the researcher should explain the purpose of the discussion to respondents as it was outlined in the letter mailed to them.
- Remind respondents of the researcher's ethical obligations.
- Remind respondents that the focus groups are being video and audio recorded to allow a final opportunity for any concerns or objections to be raised.
- Introduce the colleague who is capturing filed notes and clarify the colleague's role.
- Ask respondents to switch off their cellular phones.
- Remind parents that because the session is being recorded, it is necessary to speak loudly and clearly and not to speak over one another.
- Encourage respondents to help themselves to refreshments.
- Remind respondents that there are no incorrect responses.

PARENTS TO INTRODUCE THEMSELVES:

- Family composition.
- Number of children.
- Ages of children.
- How old children were when adopted.

Parents are asked to start by telling their story of adoption. Each parent is given a chance. This initial storytelling is unstructured to allow for challenges to emerge spontaneously. The remainder of this document should be used to guide the discussion if parents do not spontaneously share their experiences and challenges about different aspects of adoption

THE DECISION TO ADOPT

In this section the researcher will aim to establish what the decision to adopt entailed for parents and what challenges, if any, they faced during this process.

- When was the decision made.
- How was the decision made.
- Which organisations were approached.
- What were reactions from friends and family.
- What were the challenges during this decision making process.

THE PROCESS OF ADOPTING

In this section the researcher wants to establish what challenges, if any, parents experienced during the adoption process.

- Explore fears and concerns.
- Levels of support.
- Resistance from friends and family.
- Issues with the screening process.

THE ADJUSTMENT PERIOD

This section will aim to explore if there was an initial adjustment period, and if so what were the challenges that arose.

- Was there an initial adjustment period.
- If respondents feel there was an initial adjustment period what, if anything, made this period easier and what, if anything, made this period more difficult.
- What made this period most challenging.
- Who offered the greatest support during this period.

Explore challenges from adoption agency, family, friends, schools, society and any other identified variables.

COMMUNICATION

How have you or do you intend to tackle the topic of adoption with your child or children?

- Explore if respondents have discussed adoption with their children.
- How has topic been addressed.
- What questions have children raised.
- Which questions or areas of discussion have respondents found the most difficult to address.
- What resources might be useful in helping respondents tackle the topic of adoption with their children.

PROJECTIVE SECTION

- If you knew someone who was considering cross racial adoption and they asked your opinion on the matter, what would you say.
- If you could write a short letter to your child about your wishes and hopes for their future what would your letter say.
- If there is any one person or group of people who you wish you could give a message to regarding your decision to cross racially adopt who would this person or people be and what would you say to them.