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THE LEGAL ADOPTION OF UNRELATED CHILDREN

A GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH TO THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES OF BLACK SOUTH AFRICANS

Priscilla A. Gerrand

Student No. 396228

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SUPERVISED BY: Professor G. Stevens and Professor S. van Zyl

Johannesburg, 2017

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this submission is my own original work and that all the fieldwork was undertaken by me. Any part of this study that does not reflect my own ideas has been fully acknowledged in the form of citations. No part of this thesis has been submitted in the past, or is being submitted, or is to be submitted for a degree at any other university.

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Priscilla Gerrand

University of the Witwatersrand

Johannesburg

South Africa

Signed this: 31st May 2017

There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul

than the way in which it treats its children.

(Nelson Mandela, 1995)

ABSTRACT

In South Africa, there are thousands of children who cannot be raised by their parents or relatives and consequently unrelated, legal adoption is usually considered to be in their best interests. South Africa has ratified international agreements, which emphasise that adoptable children have a right to grow up in their country of origin and intercountry adoption should be considered 'a last resort'. The Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005) legally entrenches several innovations to facilitate adoptable children being raised in South Africa. Accredited adoption agencies have made ongoing efforts to make adoption more accessible to South Africans, but the number of South Africans legally adopting unrelated children adoption is small and continues to decline. To help address this pressing child welfare problem, the main aim of this research was to develop a grounded theory explaining what factors affect the decision-making processes of urban black South Africans regarding legally adopting unrelated child. This population group was focused on because they presented as a promising pool of prospective adopters. It was reasoned that to facilitate domestic adoption, policy makers and practitioners need to gain a clearer understanding of what factors dissuade black South Africans from legally adopting unrelated children. A qualitative inquiry was conducted using the Corbin and Strauss approach to the grounded theory method. Personal interviews were conducted with 39 purposively selected black participants that were divided into five cohorts, namely i) adopters ii) adoption applicants in the process of being assessed as prospective adopters iii) adoption applicants who did not to enter the assessment process iv) social workers specialising in the field of adoption and v) South African citizens who have some knowledge of legal adoption practice. The grounded theory emerging was 'Tensions surrounding adoption policy and practice and perceptions and experiences of adoption.' Essentially this grounded theory is based on five categories: Meanings of Kinship; Information and Support; Cultural and Material Mobility; Parenthood, Gender and Identity and Perceptions of Parenting and Childhood. It is recommended that adoption policy and practice be shaped to reflect a balanced child-centred and adult-centred approach. Furthermore, recruitment strategies should be based on findings at a grassroots level.

Key words: legal adoption; adoptable children; Africanisation; decision-making processes, adoption assessment process and grounded theory.

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DEDICATION

To a mother who showed me another side of reality

Thanks for your energy, resilience

and unwavering love

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 RATIONALE AND SCOPE OF STUDY 1

1. INTRODUCTION 1

2. RATIONALE FOR CONDUCTING THE STUDY 4

3. FOCUS OF THE STUDY 11

4. STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT 13

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW 15

1. INTRODUCTION 15

2. ADOPTION IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE 16

2.1. General historical overview of adoption 16

2.2. Historical overview of adoption law and practice in South Africa 19

3. DOMESTIC ADOPTION IN SOUTH AFRICA 24

3.1. Accreditation of adoption social workers 24

3.2. Determining the adoptability of a child 26

3.3. Eligibility for prospective adopters to adopt a child 30

3.4. Screening of prospective adoptive parents 31

3. RESEARCH PATTERNS AND TRENDS REGARDING UNRELATED ADOPTION 44

3.1. Motives for people choosing to adopt an unrelated child 45

3.2. Transracial adoption 49

3.3. Intercountry adoption 53

3.4. Child abandonment 55

3.5. Adoption assessment process 56

3.6. Research focusing on children adopted by non-biological parents 57

4. THEORETICAL RESOURCES..... 59

4.1. Adoption and implications for child well-being..... 60

4.2. Best interests of the child principle 63

4.3. Theoretical approaches to adoption intervention strategies..... 65

4.4. Adoption and implications for relatedness 66

4.5. Understanding the imperatives to 'Africanise' adoption..... 75

4.4. Adoption and Involuntary Childlessness..... 81

4.5. Infertility and coping strategies 86

4.6. Adoption and socio-economic status..... 88

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS 91

CHAPTER 3..... 92

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY..... 92

1. INTRODUCTION..... 92

2. CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION AND SUB-QUESTIONS STEERING THE SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY..... 92

3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF GROUNDED THEORY METHODOLOGY..... 93

4. RESEARCH PARADIGM FORMING THE BASIS OF THIS STUDY 96

5. REASONS FOR SELECTING THE GROUNDED THEORY METHOD..... 98

6. METHOD OF GROUNDED THEORY 99

6.1. Development of research problem..... 100

6.2. Construction of research tool 101

6.3. Contextualising the sample..... 103

6.4. Constant Comparative Method..... 111

6.5. Reflexivity..... 116

7. TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY 117

7.1. Credibility 118

7.2. Dependability 120

7.3. Confirmability 120

7.4. Transferability 120

7. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS 121

8. CONCLUSION 123

CHAPTER 4 PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS 124

1. INTRODUCTION 124

2. STRUCTURE OF FINDINGS 124

3. CATEGORY ONE: MEANINGS OF KINSHIP 126

3.1. Subcategory One: Perpetuating paternal lineage is vital for married couples. 126

3.2. Subcategory Two: Staunch ancestral beliefs nullify legal adoption 130

3.3. Subcategory Three: Creating a relatedness through physical matching. ... 137

3.4. Subcategory Four: Prioritising related children's needs 140

3.5. Summary of Category One 141

4. CATEGORY TWO: INFORMATION AND SUPPORT 143

4.1. Subcategory One: Information promoting adoption is lacking 143

4.2. Subcategory Two: Conflicting Christian beliefs 145

4.3. Subcategory Three: Personal contact with people who have adopted an unrelated child makes all the difference. 148

7.1. Subcategory Four: Group cohesion has motivational elements 150

4.5. Subcategory Five: Quality of client-worker relationship affects applicants being assessed. 153

4.6. Summary of Category Two 154

5. CATEGORY THREE: CULTURAL AND MATERIAL MOBILITY 156

5.1. Subcategory One: Education and socio-economic status shape perceptions of adoption 156

5.2. Subcategory Two: Empowered, single women are exercising free agency 158

5.3. Subcategory Three: Adoption has racial connotations 161

5.6. Summary of Category Three 162

6. CATEGORY FOUR: PARENTHOOD, GENDER AND IDENTITY 163

6.1. Subcategory One: The trauma of infertility 163

6.2. Subcategory Two: Informal adopters are not 'real' parents 165

6.3. Subcategory Three: Motherhood Equals Womanhood 172

6.4. Subcategory Four: Fatherhood equals manhood 175

6.5. Summary of Category Four 179

7. CATEGORY FIVE: PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTING AND CHILDHOOD 181

7.1. Subcategory One: Nature versus Nurture. 181

7.2. Subcategory Two: Implementing rigorous screening process 183

7.3. Subcategory Three: Medical assessments proving controversial 185

7.4. Subcategory Four: Relevance and reliability of psychometric testing debatable 189

7.5. Subcategory Five: Screening process costly 191

7.6. Subcategory Six: Disclosing is difficult, but essential 193

7.7. Summary of Category Five 197

8. GENERATION OF GROUNDED THEORY 198

8.1. Meanings of Kinship 198

8.2. Information and Support 200

8.3. Cultural and Material Mobility 201

8.4. Parenthood, Gender and Identity 202
8.5. Perceptions of Parenting and Childhood 203
8.6. The Core Category 204
9. CONCLUSION 205
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS 206
1. INTRODUCTION 206
2. MEANINGS OF KINSHIP 207
3. INFORMATION AND SUPPORT 213
4. MATERIAL AND CULTURAL MOBILITY 216
5. PARENTHOOD, gender and identity 222
6. PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTING AND CHILDHOOD 225
7. THE CORE CATEGORY 231
8. CONCLUSION 237
CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 238
1. INTRODUCTION 238
2. KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS 239
3. LIMITATIONS OF STUDY 242
4. RECOMMENDATIONS 244
5. CONCLUSION 245
REFERENCES 247

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: PROFILES OF ADOPTERS ……107

TABLE 2: PROFILES OF ADOPTION APPLICANTS IN THE SCREENING PROCESS…….. 108

TABLE 3: PROFILES OF PARTICIPANTS NOT ENTERING THE SCREENING PROCESS AFTER ADOPTION ORIENTATION …… 109

TABLE 4: PROFILES OF ADOPTION SOCIAL WORKER PARTICIPANTS….. 110

TABLE 5: PROFILES OF CITIZEN PARTICIPANTS……..111

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: NUMBER OF BLACK CHILDREN ADOPTED BY BLACK ADULTS DURING PERIOD APRIL 2009-MARCH 2016……..7

FIGURE 2: OVERVIEW OF CORBIN AND STRUASS MODEL OF DATA ANALYSIS ……..114

FIGURE 3: EXAMPLE OF FLOW CHART USED DURING DATA ANALYSIS..115

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET …….. 302

APPENDIX 2: INFORMED CONSENT FORM……304

APPENDIX 3: CONSENT FOR AUDIO-TAPING OF INTERVIEW……. 305

APPENDIX 4: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWING GUIDE: ADOPTERS … 307

APPENDIX 5: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWING GUIDE: PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS IN THE SCREENING PROCESS…… 310

APPENDIX 6: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWING GUIDE: PARTICIPANTS NOT ENTERING THE ADOPITON ASSESSMENT PROCESS ……313

APPENDIX 7: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWING GUIDE: SOCIAL WORKERS SPECIALISING IN ADOPTION……326

APPENDIX 8: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWING GUIDE: BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN CITIZENS FAMILIAR WITH ADOPTION…… 328

CHAPTER 1
RATIONALE AND SCOPE OF STUDY

1. INTRODUCTION

A pressing child welfare challenge currently facing South Africa involves the securing of a sufficient number of black[1] South African citizens who are willing to legally adopt biologically unrelated children. These are children without parental or family care and consequently in need of permanent alternative care. In principle, adoption is preferable to other forms of alternative care for children in need of care and protection who cannot be cared for by their parents or relatives (Doubell, 2014; Johnson, 2002; Mezmur, 2009; Mokomane & Rochat, 2010). The purpose of adoption is to protect and nurture a child by providing a safe, healthy environment with positive support. Furthermore, adoption promotes the goals of permanency planning by connecting a child to other safe and nurturing 'family' relationships intended to last a lifetime (Children's Act, 2005; African Charter, 1990; s. 28 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996).

Legal adoption in South Africa is based on a 'children's rights' perspective. The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) was the first legally binding international convention to affirm human rights for all children. One of the four core provisions of the CRC, is the principle of the 'best interests of the child'. Zermatten (2010) explains that the 'best interests of the child' refers to the process of systematically considering the needs and interests of the child in all decisions that affect the child. This principle is enunciated in Article 3.1. of the CRC, which states that the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration in all actions, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies (United Nations Children's Fund, 1989). In addition, article 21(b) of the CRC requires any adoption system to ensure that the best interests of

[1] A note on terminology: The term 'black' is sometimes used as a generic term to refer to those groups of people who were systematically disadvantaged during the Apartheid era in South Africa, namely black African, Coloured and Indian categories of people (Stevens, Swart & Franchi, 2006). However, in this report I use the term 'black' to refer specifically to the black African population group.

the child are paramount when considering adoption as a placement option (Bonthuys, 2006; UNICEF, 1989). Section 28(2) of South Africa's Constitution refers to a child's best interests as being 'of paramount importance' in every matter concerning the child (Skelton, 2009).

Domestic adoption (also referred to as national adoption) is considered an essential means of ensuring that an adoptable child's right to be raised in a loving home environment in his or her country of origin is adequately met. South Africa has ratified international and regional commitments, such as those pledged by the CRC and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (AFCRW), to emphasise that domestic adoption be "…developed, resourced and made accessible to adoptable children" (Groza & Bunkers, 2014, p. 160).

Particularly relevant to this study are international child rights instruments, which emphasise that priority should be given to the placement of an adoptable child in domestic adoption. Intercountry adoption should only be considered if the child cannot, in any suitable manner, be cared for in the child's country of origin (CRC, 1989; Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, 1993 [Hague Convention of Intercountry Adoption]).

At the time of the establishment of the CRC, and closer to home, objections arose around the convention's assumptions that there were universally applicable standards regarding what is right and proper for children. African countries insisted that the virtues of African cultural heritage, historical background and the values of African civilization should inspire and characterise the concept of the rights and welfare of the African child (Kaime, 2009, p.3). This resulted in the founding of a special charter, namely the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children (African Charter) that came into effect on 29 November 1999. The African Charter aims to give voice to African values, and compares these with the values of the CRC. It makes a convincing argument for taking account of the ways that African practices and values regard children as integral members of their community, and not as isolated individuals (Howell, 2007). It emphasizes the need to prioritise domestic adoption, rather than readily promoting intercountry adoptions.

Skelton (2009, p. 492) highlighted that article 24 of the African Charter includes "the principle of subsidiarity", which is similar to the code of the CRC, but stated more forcefully, in that it describes intercountry adoption as 'a last resort'. This is linked to the reality that African countries, including South Africa, are 'sending or donor' countries in the context of intercountry adoption. The implementation of the subsidiarity principle usefully assists by enabling as many children as possible to grow up in their original cultural and national environment. It is rooted in the premise that continuity in the religious, cultural and linguistic aspects of children's upbringing will generally be in their best interests (Couzens & Zaal, 2009). Having ratified the CRC on 16 June 1995, and the African Charter on 7 January 2000, South Africa is ethically bound to promote domestic adoption.

A special commission conducted to review the practical operation of The Hague Convention of Intercountry Adoption met in The Hague from 8th to 12th June 2015. The special commission reaffirmed that the "subsidiarity principle is central to the success of the Convention, and that an intercountry adoption should take place 'in the best interests' of the child and with respect for his or her fundamental rights" (Hague Conference on Private International Law, 2015). Thus, intercountry adoption must be treated as subsidiary to domestic care options, if the child's best interests can be met within his or her country of origin (Davel & Skelton, 2007; Mezmur, 2009; Sloth-Nielsen, 2011; Mezmur & van Heerden, 2010).

Academics and policy makers within the South African context also emphasise the subsidiarity principle when it comes to intercountry adoption. For example, Nicholson (2010, p. 376), who specifically focused on intercountry adoption pertaining to child law in South Africa, pointed out that "feelings run high regarding the adoption of African [black] children by adoptive parents from Western nations. The reasons for this controversy relate to the dislocation of the child from his or her cultural heritage and his or her country of origin". She added that "...it has even been argued that intercountry adoption is a new form of imperialism that undermines African cultural identity." Triseliotis (1993, p. 51, cited by Mosikatsana, 2000), reiterated similar sentiments in this regard:

> *The altruism claimed on behalf of intercountry adoptions represents the continued exploitation of the poorer by the richer nations … the main motive is the provision of children to mostly childless, wealthy couples in the West. … [the] exercise of influence and control by the more powerful nations who are seen as 'robbing' Third World countries of their children while confirming their inferiority and inadequacy, thus politicising the whole issue.*

In 2010, the Child, Youth, Family and Social Development Programme (CYFSD) of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in South Africa conducted a national study focusing on adoption. A pertinent conclusion reached regarding South Africa's involvement in intercountry adoption was:

> *…outside of family networks, it is strongly believed that children should be raised within their own country and their culture, even if they are not able to be raised by their kin. This perspective was most evident in the clear preference for national over intercountry adoption* (Mokomane & Rochat, 2010, p. 61).

Unfortunately, even though the need to prioritise domestic adoption has been reiterated for many years, Africa has become "the new frontier for intercountry adoption" (African Child Policy Forum, 2012, p. ii). Between 2003 and 2010, the number of children adopted from Africa increased three-fold (African Child Policy Forum, 2012), which led to the African Child Policy Forum report (2012) advocating for intercountry adoption to be a measure of last resort for children in need of a family environment, and to take place only in exceptional circumstances, guided by the best interests of the child.

The Department of Social Development (DSD) in South Africa has developed an adoption policy framework and strategy to promote adoption services in South Africa, and this strategy prioritises domestic over intercountry placements. Regrettably, as in other African countries, efforts to promote domestic adoption in South Africa have not proved effective to date.

2. RATIONALE FOR CONDUCTING THE STUDY

There are thousands of black children in South Africa who are legally adoptable in terms of s. 230 (3) of the Children's Act, No. 38 of 2005 (Children's Act) because they present as children in need of care and protection in terms of s. 150 of the said Act. The number of black children becoming available for adoption is significantly higher than

those of Coloured, White and Indian/Asian children. One of the main reasons for this is probably because black children comprise 85% of the child population in South Africa (South African Human Rights Commission & UNICEF South Africa, 2011).

Adoptable children include orphaned children that have no parents, guardian or caregiver willing to adopt them; abused and deliberately neglected children; abandoned children whose parents or guardians cannot be traced, and children that are in need of permanent alternative placements.

Children who have been abused or deliberately neglected are usually not made available for adoption because reunification of children with their parents, or family members, is regarded as a critical element in child welfare services (Perumal & Kasiram, 2008).

Most orphaned children (mainly orphaned due to high levels of AIDS-related mortality), although eligible for adoption, are being legally fostered by kin due to poor socio-economic circumstances and socio-cultural influences. The State does not offer financial assistance or subsidies for adopted children and although the Child Support Grant (CSG) becomes available to children's primary caregivers who are impoverished, the Foster Care Grant (FCG) issued by the South Africa Social Security Agency (SASSA), is more sought after in black communities as the FCG is larger than the amount paid in terms of the CSG (Hall & Sibanda, 2016; Mokomane & Rochat, 2010; Mokomane, Rochat & Mitchell, 2016). Furthermore, many African cultural belief systems discourage termination of parental rights, which takes place when children are legally adopted (Mokomane & Rochat, 2010; Mokomane, Rochat & Mitchell, 2016).

For these reasons, it is predominantly young black, abandoned children that are made available for adoption. The influx of abandoned children entering the legal child care system and becoming eligible for adoption, is taking place in the context of a variety of social, economic, political and material circumstances in South Africa (Amoateng & Richter, 2007; Blackie, 2014; Fritz, 2015; Hefer et al.,2004; Kgole, 2007; Maree & Crous, 2012; Nicholson, 2009; Saclier, 2000; Wilson, 1999). Unfortunately, the exact number of black children abandoned in South Africa is unknown because there are no comprehensive government statistics available. Furthermore, the statistics received from

non-governmental child welfare organisations managing cases of child abandonment are not always reliable. However, credible sources confirm that the number of children being abandoned in South Africa is rising at alarming rates (Blackie, 2014; Doubell, 2014; Maree & Crous, 2012).

Child Welfare South Africa (CWSA)[2] has stated that approximately 2 600 black children were abandoned in South Africa in 2011. Taking into consideration that in 2010 approximately 1 900 children were reportedly abandoned, these statistics indicate that there has been an increase of 27 percent. Mrs. U. Rhodes, the national programme manager for CWSA, reiterated that that the growing number of child abandonment cases in South Africa is of grave concern (personal communication, July 18, 2014).

Statistics obtained from the National Register of Adoption (2016) and reflected in Figure 1, clearly indicate that the number of same-race, black adoptions taking place in South Africa on an annual basis is declining significantly.

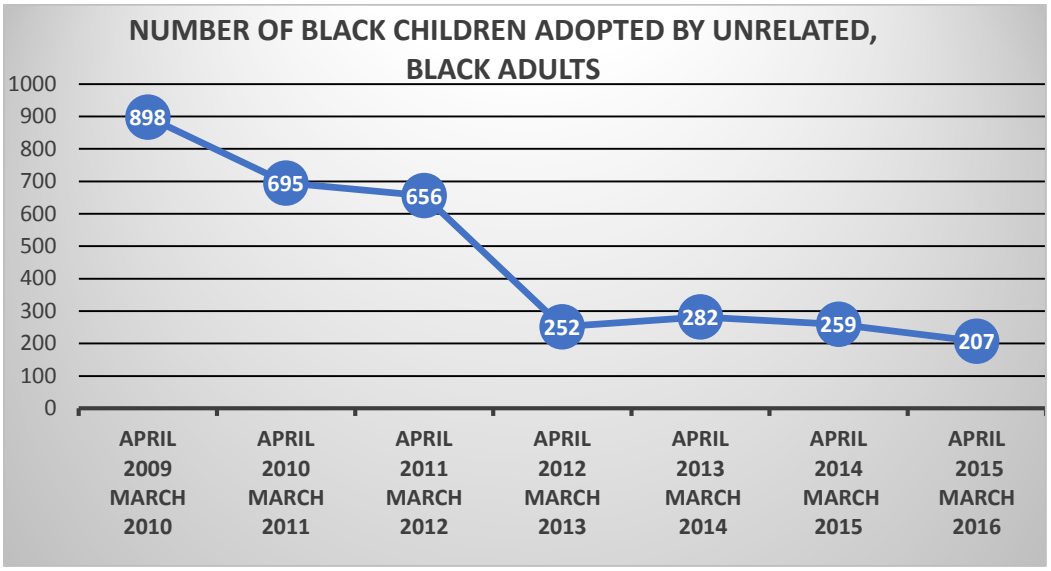

Figure 1: Number of black children adopted by unrelated black adults during the period April 2009 to March 2016. (Source: National Registrar of Adoptions)

[2] CWSA is the largest non-profit, non-government organization in South Africa in the field of child protection, and family care and development. It is an umbrella body that represents more than 263 member organisations and outreach projects in communities throughout South Africa.

A review of statistics in the Register on Adoptable Children and Prospective Adoptive Parents (RACAP) in 2014 makes the shortage of black prospective adopters even more apparent. RACAP is a national data base system managed by the DSD, which all accredited adoption agencies and adoption social workers in private practice have access to for child matching purposes. If eligible for adoption, the particulars of the child are placed on RACAP so that they can be matched with single adults or couples who have been screened and found 'fit and proper' to adopt a child.

Same-race and transracial adoption are both forms of domestic adoption that can be promoted in South Africa to help abandoned children realise their right to permanency in their country of origin. So, the big question arising is: "Why the need for this study to focus specifically on same-race adoption involving black people adopting black children?" A number of issues shaped the researcher's decision in this regard:

i) Same-race adoption is initially prioritised when seeking to match adoptable children with prospective adopters. This defensive position is supported by research studies conducted in countries such as the USA, Britain and Europe, which have revealed that same-race adoption serves to promote healthy identity development and facilitate psychological adjustment of the adoptee (Evan, B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2009; Hollingsworth, 1998).

ii) Statistical records in RACAP indicate that prospective adopters probably have racial preferences when it comes to the child-adoption matching process. In November 2013, RACAP showed that of 297 screened adoption applicants waiting to be matched with adoptable children, 190 were white, 43 were Indian and 14 were black. However, most applicants wanted to be matched with children of the same race (Blackie, 2014). Unfortunately, there was no research evidence explaining why there was such a small number of black prospective adopters on RACAP.

iii) Another reason for deciding to focus on the black population as potential adopters in this study is that even if racial preferences can be discouraged, the white population forms only 8.1% of the total population, whereas black South Africans form 80.7% of the population (Statistics South Africa, 2016). Although it is well documented that South Africa has high levels of poverty

and income inequality (Gaventa & Runciman, 2016; Kelly, 2017; McLennan, Noble & Wright, 2016), urban, educated black South African citizens present as a possible pool of potential domestic adopters for the following reasons:

- *The size and socio-economic status of the urban black population:*
  Although the unemployment rate in South Africa is particularly high (27.1 percent in the third quarter of 2016), there has been a significant increase in the earning share of the South African middle-class (Burger, Steenkamp, van der Berg & Zoch, 2015; Donaldson, Mehlomakhulu, Darkey Dyssel & Siyongwana, 2013; Seekings, 2015; Statistics South Africa, 2016; Venter, 2011).

  By 2008 the number of middle-class black South Africans out-numbered middle-class whites by roughly two to one (Visagie, 2015). This is a complete reversal of the demographic profile of the middle-class from 1993. Although parenting capacity should not be directly linked to employment and income, one assumes that employed people would have the financial means to meet the basic and educational needs of an adoptable child.

- *Black women are fast becoming economically empowered:*
  Economic empowerment is affecting traditional gender roles and decision-making in black women households (Babu, 2015; van Loggerenberg, 2009; Department of Women, Republic of South Africa, 2015). Many single, well-educated older women, who are self-sufficient, present as an important reserve of potential adopters because in terms of the Children's Act, single people are entitled to adopt.

On 17th March 2011, NACSA was formed. One of their fundamental aims was to promote child adoption in South Africa by building awareness and understanding of adoption, and by unifying and empowering black South African communities to create positive and permanent change in the lives of adoptable children.

In October 2012, the second annual conference of NACSA took place. Recognising the great challenge that South Africa faces regarding the recruitment of prospective black adopters, a key topic focused on during a break-away workshop session was 'Africanising' adoptions, by exploring a culturally relevant solution in South Africa.

The need to 'Africanise' adoptions had been emphasised on several occasions prior to the NACSA conferences. For example, submissions made by adoption experts on the Child Care Act Discussion Paper in 2002 raised the issue of 'Africanising' adoption. Furthermore, although the Children's Act legally entrenches innovations to facilitate domestic adoption, in the study report submitted by the HSRC in 2010, the need to 'Africanise' the adoption model was recommended, implying that adoption practice still needed to be moulded or transformed to become culturally relevant (Mokomane & Rochat, 2010).

The National Plan of Action for Children in South Africa (2012-2017), approved by cabinet on 29 May 2013, is a comprehensive overarching plan that brings together government's obligations towards the realisation of the rights of children in the country. One of the key strategies to address the rights of children is to strengthen and expand existing adoption and foster care mechanisms, and support measures to ensure rapid family placement of abandoned infants (Abrahams & Wakefield, 2012).

It is important to note that Burge and Jamieson (2009) highlighted that the study of adoptive applicants' decision-making processes has been largely disregarded by all the social science disciplines. The urgent need to research this topic in South Africa was made apparent by Mokomane and Rochet (2010), who emphasised that if policy-makers in South Africa are going to be able to facilitate domestic adoptions, it is important that they gain a clearer understanding of the barriers that may prevent them from doing so.

Based on extensive searches of professional literature using multiple search engines and key words, the researcher became aware of the fact that no grounded theory existed regarding black South Africans' perceptions and experiences of unrelated adoption, and the impact these perceptions and experiences have on their decision-making processes. The researcher reasoned that if social workers are to lead the way in facilitating

domestic adoption, an enhanced theoretical understanding of the decision-making processes of black South Africans regarding the adoption of unrelated children is essential.

On a personal note, the researcher was motivated to research the topic for a number of reasons:

- From 1996 – 2008 she was in the employ of one of the largest child protection agencies in South Africa. She supervised the Soweto team of social workers in the Child Protection Unit, which manages cases of child abandonment. Ongoing efforts to place these children with suitable black South African adopters proved challenging because black adoption applicants were not readily forthcoming, even when various recruitment drives were implemented.

- In 1997 she researched the attitude of black South Africans concerning the concept of legally adopting biologically unrelated children. She conducted a survey using a Likert scale as a research tool, to focus on the attitudes of both younger and older generations of black South Africans. Although most research participants presented as having positive attitudes towards legal adoption, this positive sentiment was not being reflected in action, as was evident in the low number of black adoption applicants. Thus, when the opportunity arose to investigate this matter further, the researcher decided to conduct qualitative research to investigate, in depth, what perceptions and experiences shape the decision-making processes of black South Africans regarding the legal adoption of unrelated children.

- In 2011, the Executive Management Committee of NACSA invited the researcher to become their research consultant. She felt committed to offer valuable knowledge in the field of adoption related to meeting the best interests of adoptable black children.

3. FOCUS OF THE STUDY

The central purpose of this study has been to generate knowledge around factors affecting the decision-making processes of black South Africans regarding the legal adoption of unrelated children. This insight could make a meaningful contribution to addressing the pressing challenge of promoting domestic adoption in South Africa, especially in facilitating the recruitment and retention of potential adopters from this target population. In other words, the main research question was: 'What factors affect the decision-making processes of black South Africans regarding legally adopting unrelated children?'

The main aim of this research study was to develop a grounded theory to explain what factors affect the decision-making processes of black South Africans regarding legally adopting unrelated children. The following objectives were set to realise this aim:

1. Explore the perceptions of black South Africans regarding the legal adoption of unrelated children as a means of family formation;

2. Establish how black South Africans become familiar with the practice of legally adopting an unrelated child, and what influences their perceptions and experiences in this regard;

3. Investigate the motives for black South Africans deciding to legally adopt an unrelated child;

4. Research how the adoption assessment process is implemented by adoption social workers, and how the assessment process is experienced by adoption applicants.

To meet these objectives, a qualitative inquiry based on the grounded theory method of research was conducted. Grounded theory presented as an applicable research method because it is usually implemented when there is a paucity of theory, focus and empirical data associated with the primary aim and objectives of a study (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Furthermore, the intent of a grounded theory study is to move beyond

exploration or description, and to generate a general explanation (a substantive theory) of a process, action, or interaction shaped by the views of participants (Levers, 2013; Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss; 2015).

The researcher deemed that a broad sample of black participants would enhance the development of a grounded theory. Consequently, purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method, was applied to select five cohorts of participants that could probably make meaningful contributions. Since the adoption assessment process (also referred to as the screening process) is a key component of unrelated adoption, three of the five cohorts of participants in this study were selected because they had personally experienced various levels of the adoption assessment process. The first of these three cohorts comprised participants who had successfully completed the assessment process and legally adopted an unrelated child. The second cohort included prospective adopters who were in the process of being assessed and the third cohort was made up of adoption applicants who did not enter the adoption screening process after orientation around taking on the role of an adoptive parent, and what this would entail. The fourth cohort consisted of accredited adoption social workers who had personally conducted the assessment of prospective adopters. The fifth cohort of participants included black South African citizens who had insight into the practice of legal adoption. This cohort of participants was selected because the researcher deemed it necessary to gain insight into why black people do not consider adopting a biologically unrelated child. The researcher reasoned that by exploring their perceptions of adoption, she could gain a better understanding of generalised possible barriers that discourage legal adoption of an unrelated child in the public domain and make recommendations of how to recruit and retain prospective adopters.

Qualitative data were gathered by means of in-depth, semi-structured, personal interviews. Initially 43 black participants were interviewed, but subsequently four interviews with South Africans citizens were jettisoned because these participants did not have much understanding of the practice of legal adoption and consequently their input was not sufficiently productive.

4. STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

Chapter Two, the literature review, begins by setting the stage for the research and provides a context for the research inquiry. It outlines the history of adoption practice, both globally and locally. The focus then shifts to a critical discussion of current adoption policy and practice in South Africa. It also identifies relevant research patterns and findings, reiterating that the research topic is an under-researched domain of inquiry in South Africa. Finally, it engages with theoretical resources relevant to the research topic.

Chapter Three formally introduces the qualitative research method adopted in the study, namely grounded theory. It addresses how grounded theory has developed as a qualitative research method, and the controversies resulting because of the different versions developed since its origin. It describes in detail the Corbin and Strauss approach to data analysis in grounded theory, which underpins this study. This is followed by an account of the research procedures followed in the study, the participants who took part in the study, the data collection tool and the method of data analysis. Finally, it summarises the ethical issues taken into consideration when conducting the study.

Chapter Four presents research findings based on the Corbin and Strauss approach to data analysis. Findings are structured around the three levels of coding promoted by Corbin and Strauss, namely open-coding, axial coding and selective coding. Five categories, which emerged from data analysis, and wh subcategories are linked to them, are described. The core category (grounded theory) that emerged based on selective coding is then focused on.

Chapter Five critically discusses research findings. It focuses on how research findings link with, or detract from, previous research. It deliberates ways in which the findings augment our understanding of factors affecting the decision-making processes of black South Africans regarding legally adopting unrelated children.

Chapter Six, the closing chapter, provides a conclusion to the study by presenting a summary of key research findings and study limitations. Recommendations are explored and proposed concerning adoption policy and practice, and the recruitment and retention of prospective domestic adopters.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

1. INTRODUCTION

A thorough engagement with existing research literature prior to primary data collection is characteristic of most strategies of inquiry. It is believed that the researcher needs to know what research has focused on the topic before, the strength and weaknesses of existing studies and what they might mean (Boote & Beil, 2005, p. 3). However, for researchers employing grounded theory as a research methodology, the issue of how and when to engage with existing literature to facilitate development of a grounded theory continues to spark debate. Glaser and Strauss (1967), the founders of grounded theory, originally argued explicitly against this (Cutciffe, 2000; Dunne, 2011). They reasoned that an early literature review in the specific area of study could potentially stifle the process of developing a grounded theory, and in fact could become something that "…could detract from the quality and originality of the research" (Dunne, p. 114). This is because the fundamental purpose of grounded theory is to develop a theoretical explanatory framework (Charmaz, 2015; Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

However, in the ensuing decades, Strauss' position changed significantly. Together with Corbin, Strauss came to advocate an early review of relevant literature, as long as an objective stance was maintained. They recognized that "… a researcher brings to the research not only his/her personal and professional experience, but also knowledge acquired from literature that may include the area of inquiry. Furthermore, a literature review can help identify what is important to the developing theory" (Ramalho, Adams, Huggard & Hoare.2015, citing Corbin and Strauss, 2015*).* Because this study has Corbin and Straussian leanings, the researcher considered an extensive literature review well-justified.

To set the context for this study, the history of adoption is summarised, and adoption laws and practices from ancient to present times are covered broadly. The research focus then narrows to laws pertaining to adoption in South Africa, since these laws have moulded adoption policy and practice over time. Against this backdrop, current

domestic adoption policy and practice, challenges being faced by adoption social workers, and attempts that have been made to address these challenges, are critically evaluated. The concepts regarding black family formation and child care arrangements in South Africa are also discussed. Relevant adoption research patterns and findings are then explored. Finally, theoretical resources relevant to this study are identified and deliberated.

2. ADOPTION IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

2.1. General historical overview of adoption

Different forms of adoption practice are among the oldest models of child care, utilised in all human societies (Boswell, 1998; Campion, 1995; Cole & Donley, 1990; O'Halloran, 2015; Owusu-Bempah, 2010; Triseliotis, Shireman & Hundleby, 1997; van der Walt, 2014). Sources related to legal adoption indicate that adoption laws date back approximately four thousand years. Unfortunately, these sources are fragmented, making it difficult to construct a complete history of such laws in chronological order (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2009; Zainaldin, 1979). Despite this, it becomes clear that adoption laws have changed markedly over time and are directly linked to the motivations for adoption (Quinton, 2012; Triseliotis, Shireman & Hundleby, 1997).

Goody (1969), an expert in analysis of the anthropological literature regarding adoption, reinforced the position that adoption has practiced throughout history when he indicated that adoption played a major part in the traditional laws of ancient civilisations. For example, The Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, the oldest comprehensive set of written laws (around 2285 BC) gives a prominent position to unrelated adoption. This code established adoption as a legal construct, which could only take place with the consent of birth parents. Once adoption was achieved, birth parents ceased to have guardianship over the child. The Code of Hammurabi also granted adopted children rights equal to those of birth children. However, adopted children were exposed to risk, in the sense that they could be severely punished should they attempt to return to their birth parents,

and the adoption order could be annulled if the child's familial duties were not suitably fulfilled.

In Ancient Rome, the practice of unrelated adoption is well recorded in Codex Justianus (Goody, 1969; Halsall, 2006; Van der Walt, 2014). Adoption practice also received attention in the ancient laws of Greece, and was the traditional law of many Eurasian societies. Furthermore, adoption law was recorded in Mayne's Treatise on Hindu Law and Usage (van der Walt, 2014).

Zainaldin (1979, p. 1041) summarized the history and purpose of adoption law in ancient times succinctly:

> *Adoption in history ordinarily served one or more purposes: preventing the extinction of a bloodline; preserving a sacred descent group; facilitating the generational transfer of patrimony; providing for ancestral worship or mending the ties between factious clans or tribes. In each case, the adoption of an individual, most often an adult male, fulfilled some kin, religious or communal requirement.*

In many societies during the early Middle Ages, the legal practice of adoption was largely abandoned, being preserved only in some parts of Europe. However, in the late Middle Ages, jurists in Western Europe began instituting and reconstructing laws related to adoptive filiation, as outlined in Roman law. It is interesting to note that during this period of history, jurists started to place emphasis on the fact that adoptions should copy nature. This led to the perception that adoptive filiation was inferior to natural filiation (UN, 2009), a perception still apparent in society today (Bartholet, 2014).

In the early modern era, legal adoption declined in the West and instead institutions (orphanages) began to play a prominent role in caring for children who could not be raised by their parents. The number of children admitted to institutions rose significantly over the years, reaching a peak in the first half of the 1800s. Children admitted to institutions were generally not adopted. (Carp, 2000, cited in United Nations, 2009; Kociumbas, 1997; Shanley, 1989). However, as economic and social conditions changed, so did perceptions of institutions as a childcare system for destitute children. Support of orphanages declined due to factors such as high mortality rates, the

social stigma related to placing children in institutions, and the cost of running such facilities.

Consequently, placing a child in the family system became more popular, as it was regarded as being a better environment in which to raise a child. Parents taking on responsibility for the care of these children also benefitted from financial assistance. Informal arrangements, named ‘baby farms’, where children were taken care of for a fee, became common in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom (Carp, 2000, as cited in United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2009 [UN, 2009]; Kociumbas, 1997; Shanley, 1989). Large numbers of children in the United Kingdom were also forcibly removed from institutions without their parents’ consent and relocated to various British colonies, including South Africa.

It is at this stage of history that the ideology of society playing a more proactive role in promoting the welfare of children took a commanding role, and legal adoption became considered a means of meeting the best interests of the child. For example, the Massachusetts Adoption of Children Act, which was enacted in 1851, is widely recognised as the first modern adoption law (UN, 2009, p. 13). According to this law, birth parents had to give their consent in writing for their child to be adopted, only married couples could apply to adopt a child, and there was a complete severance of legal ties from the family of origin when the adoption was finalized.

In line with current policies and practices, prospective adopters were assessed to determine if they had sufficient capacity to raise the child with love and provide for the child’s education. If found fit and proper, adoptive parents took over the same rights and responsibilities as biological parents. It is important to note that this law was striking, in the sense that it broke away from an adult-centred approach. Instead, the welfare of the adoptable child was prioritized (Goody, 1969, cited in Askeland, 2006; Carp, 1998; Sokoloff, 1993).

During much of the twentieth century, matching of adopter with adoptee was the paradigm that governed unrelated adoptions (Herman, 2003). The goal of this practice was to make the adoptive families more socially acceptable, namely, that the family

would look like a ‘natural’ family. Physical resemblance, intellectual similarity, and racial and religious continuity between the adopters and adoptee were considered. Matching was considered essential for successful adoptions because it was a means of avoiding stigmatization and offered the adoptive parents a sense of security. The adoptee only had the right to access records of his or her biological parents when he or she became an adult. However, in the 1970s, movements emerged opposing confidentiality and sealed records, and open adoption (where there is some form of contact between the adoptee and his or her biological parent) was advocated.

Furthermore, as the number of white adoptable infants declined over the years, and the number of adoptable infants became far less than the number of adults desiring to adopt white infants, adoption applicants had to meet very rigid screening criteria. For example, only married couples who were financially well-off were selected. People desiring to adopt consequently looked at wider sources of adoptable children. This is when intercountry and transracial adoption materialized in the West and subsequently became a global phenomenon.

Modern western adoption models, which arose during the 20th century, tended to be governed by comprehensive statutes and regulations which emphasised the best interests of the child. Today, children are viewed as vulnerable individuals in need of a family, and adoption is a primary vehicle serving the needs of adoptable children (Zagrebelsky, 2012).

In summary, historically, adoption law did not focus on the best interests of the child; rather, adoption existed to prevent the extinction of families. However, since its advent in the West, adoption law has evolved to meet a new goal, namely, protecting the best interests of the child (Testerman, 2016, p. 6).

2.2. Historical overview of adoption law and practice in South Africa

South African law is based on Roman Dutch legal principles, and has also been influenced by English law. Before 1923, the year adoption was first legally regulated in South Africa, South Africa did not recognise adoption as a means to create the legal

relationship of parent and child. Ferreira (2009, pp. 4-5) pointed out that the absence of adoption in the early history of South Africa may be explained by the fact that formal adoption did not exist in Roman Dutch law, and in England the first adoption legislation, the Adoption of Children Act, No. 44, was enacted only in 1926.

Currently, the South African legal system consists of a conglomeration of legal systems, in the sense that it has constitutional law, criminal law, civil law (inherited from the Dutch), a customary law system (inherited from indigenous Africans) and the Common Law system (inherited mainly from the British). In South Africa, legal adoption is not governed by common law but by customary and civil law (Rautenbach, 2010; Hawthorne, 2008).

2.2.1. Customary law and adoption

Customary law in South Africa is defined as relating to the customs and practices observed among the black people of South Africa (Bekker & Koyana, 2012, p.268). The importance of customary law in general - and of customary adoption in particular - cannot be denied. Whereas indigenous races in most countries are in the minority, in South Africa the black population is in the majority, and thus customary law is extremely important here. Under customary law, 'adoption' is akin to the early Roman law concept of adoption, the purpose of which was simply to perpetuate the adopters' bloodline.

Thus the 'inheritance motive' suggested by O'Halloran (2009) comes into play. Adoption is regarded as the solution sought by a man who has no sons, or no heir, to inherit property and carry on the deceased's family name. He will usually try to obtain the son of a closely-related family head within his own tribe or family grouping. The child concerned becomes a full member of the adoptive family on a permanent basis, and loses any rights within his natal unit. It is a private arrangement because the validity of an act of adoption in terms of customary law largely depends on agreement between the two families and is usually marked by formal rituals (Bennett, 2004). The status of customary law in South Africa is now constitutionally entrenched in terms of s. 211(3) of the Constitution, and South African courts are constitutionally obliged to apply

customary law, although still subject to the Constitution and other relevant legislation (Bennett, 2004).

2.2.3 Civil law and adoption

The Western theory and practice of legal adoption came into being in the South African context via historical and political forces, such as colonialism. Many years of colonialism and apartheid ideology dominated the South African legal system, thereby imprinting the values of colonial and apartheid rule on it (Rautenbach, 2008). Consequently, the concept of legal adoption did not present as a permanent child-care arrangement that should be made available to the black population.

The adoption of children in South Africa was legally regulated for the first time when the Adoption of Children Act 25 of 1923 became operative on 1st January 1924. The sole aim of this Act was to provide for the adoption of children (Bennett, 2004; van der Walt, 2014), rather than for children's welfare in general. The need to formalize adoption arose in the early twentieth-century because of the increasing number of (white) children in informal care, especially in the Cape Colony. In informal care, the rights of the natural parents remained unaffected, and any possible agreement made between the biological parents and the 'adoptive' parents was not considered binding by the courts. Informal primary caregivers consequently had no legal rights over the unrelated children in their care. Thus, the underlying aim of the Adoption of Children Act of 1923 was to create an institution whereby the existing legal bonds between children and their birth-parents, or guardians, could be severed and a new legal bond created between the adoptive parents and the adopted child. Although there was no explicit ban on transracial adoptions in this Act, views opined are that the racial consciousness of the day (that is, the ideology of racial segregation) was so deeply entrenched that a legislative bar was not necessary (Mosikatsana,1995;1997; van der Walt, 2014).

The Children's Act of 1937 was approved on 13 May 1937 and came into operation on 18 May 1937. The aim of the Act was significantly broader than that of the Adoption of Children Act of 1923, in the sense that it did not only regulate issues related to

adoption, but it addressed all issues relating to children (van der Walt, 2014). Once again, although transracial adoption was not prohibited in this Act, the practice was never undertaken due to racial and political leanings in South Africa at the time, which focused on meeting the needs of the white population (Mosikatsana, 1995; van der Walt, 2014).

The said Act was in turn replaced by the Children's Act of 1960. It is important to note that the qualification of the adopting parent became entrenched in this Act (van der Walt, 2014). In other words, the adoption applicant had to satisfy the Commissioner of Child Welfare that he or she was a South African of good repute, was a fit and proper person to be entrusted with the custody and care of the child concerned and had adequate means to maintain and educate the child. In this regard, the role of the social worker was important in terms of the Act, since he or she was expected to undertake a comprehensive investigation into the background of the biological parents, the child concerned, and the prospective adoptive parents. The social worker's assessment of the suitability of an adoptive applicant heavily influenced the decision-making of the Commissioner of Child Welfare (van der Walt, 2014). By this stage, various legislative interventions aimed at racial segregation had been introduced, but this Act was the first in which race was introduced regarding the formation of the parent-child relationship (Ferreira, 2009; van der Walt, 2014).

The Child Care Act of 1983 brought about the insertion of a definition of a "Black" (originally defined as "Bantu") person, and more specifically a definition of a "Black Children's Court" (originally defined as a "Bantu Children's Court"). The terms "culture" and "ethnological grouping" came into being in South African adoption legislation. Section 35(2) of the said Act, read as follows:

> *In selecting any person in whose custody a child is to be placed, regard shall be had to the religious and cultural background and ethnological grouping of the child and, in selecting such a person, to the nationality of the child and the relationship between him and such a person.*

When South Africa became a democracy in 1994, the need for a comprehensive, holistic Children's Act was recognized. An important milestone in initiating the overhaul of the

Child Care Act of 1983 was a conference conducted in 1996, co-hosted by the Children's Rights Project of the Community Law Centre and the Portfolio Committee on Welfare and Population Development. Factors justifying the reformulation of all laws affecting children included:

i) Child laws in South Africa were basically fragmented and unequally implemented as a result of apartheid policies;
ii) There was deep-rooted poverty and unemployment;
iii) Poor or non-existent schooling;
iv) The breakdown of family life;
v) The strains on a society in transition meant that the majority of South African children were at risk;
vi) Concerns about 'Africanising' South African child law (Children's Institute Review of the Child Care, April 1998).

The Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005), as amended by the Children's Amendment Act of 2007 (current child care and protection legislation), was enacted in June 2007. However, adoption-related provisions only came into force in April 2010. This Act makes it clear that the main purpose of adoption is to protect and nurture children by providing a safe, healthy environment with positive support and to promote the goals of community planning by connecting children to other safe and nurturing family relationships intended to last a lifetime (see 229 of the Children's Act). In this way, adoption becomes much like a biological family, in that it assures children of a continuous relationship with their family members long after their 18th birthday. It is preferred over other forms of alternative care (such as unrelated foster care or placement in a Child and Youth Care Centre) because of the permanency and protection it brings to the relationship between the child and the adoptive family. Research has also repeatedly shown that adoption is an effective intervention in leading to a massive catch-up in a child's development, and can be justified on ethical grounds, if no other solutions are available (Browne, 2005; Van Ijzendoorn & Juffer, 2006).

3. DOMESTIC ADOPTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

With the advent of the Children's Act came new provisions for the adoption of children and these provisions have shaped current domestic adoption policy and practice. Currently, domestic adoption in South Africa is regulated by Chapter 15 of the Children's Act. Adoption is one of the statutory services rendered to children who are in need of care and protection. If there are no prospects of reuniting a child in need of care and protection with his or family or primary caregivers, placing the child concerned in a stable and loving family through adoption can be considered as being in the child's best interests.

3.1. Accreditation of adoption social workers

As far as the creation of families through adoption is concerned, the state assumes the role of guarantor of the child's best interests in the adoption process. The South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) regulates adoption practice. For decades, adoption social workers have, as representatives of the State, been central figures in fulfilling the powerful and complicated role of assessing the suitability of presumptive adoptive parents so that the best interests of the adoptable child can be met (Barker & Branson, 2013; Selwyn, 1994; 2015).The adoption social worker is responsible for compiling a comprehensive assessment report and makes recommendations regarding prospective adoptive parent(s)' suitability to adopt a child to the Commissioner of Child Welfare at the Children's Court.

Adoption is a dedicated field of Social Work practice in which specific activities take place, and thus specialised and in-depth knowledge, skills and expertise are required. Section 250 of the Children's Act provides that no person may provide domestic adoption services except an accredited child protection organisation or an adoption social worker in private practice who has the necessary accreditation (SACSSP).

However, on 23rd September 2015, a public hearing was held at which various bodies and entities associated with child welfare gave public submissions on the Children's Second Amendment Bill. This Bill proposes quite extensive changes to the Children's

Act, including the broadening of the definition of “adoption social worker” to include social workers in the employ of the DSD. Section 1 (c) of the Bill now reads: “a social worker in the employ of the Department, or of a provincial Department of Social Development, including a social worker employed as such on a part-time or contract basis”. This Bill is still in the draft phase and has yet to become an Act of Parliament.

Most bodies and entities welcomed this amendment, as they held the opinion that it would make adoption services more accessible, less complicated and less costly for people interested in adopting a child, especially black South Africans. However, a debate arose as to whether these amendments were likely to increase and encourage adoption, and whether cost was a significant determining factor in the low number of adoptions.

At the said public hearing, emphasis was placed on the fact that South Africa could not afford further compromise on the standard conditions of adoption, because meeting the best interests of the children to be placed permanently in a loving home environment must be paramount. The concern raised was that DSD social workers do not have the necessary skills and work experience at that stage to render adoption services. It was thus proposed that if the amendment were to go ahead, it should be done in a manner which assures the specialisation required to practice in the sphere of adoption. The same accreditation and minimum qualification must be required for State-employed social workers to specialise in adoption as are required for any social worker currently practicing in this sector, in line with current requirements. It was highlighted that this could not be done successfully without the support and skills transfer from both specialists in private practice, and dedicated child protection organisations.

NACSA is currently in the process of presenting training workshops for DSD social workers, to facilitate accreditation rights. It was insisted that these accreditations needed to be assessed independently, as the DSD cannot accredit itself. Adoption training is also considered necessary because, to date, the DSD has rendered generic services rather than specialized services. Training is regarded as relevant because research conducted overseas has reinforced the notion that specialist knowledge and expertise

held by adoption social workers is key to facilitating effective assessments and service provision (Holmes, McDermids & Lushey, 2013; Selwyn, 2015).

The State only covers a percentage of non-government welfare organisations' (NGO's) running costs, expecting them to render comprehensive services on limited subsidies and to supplement these with donations from the public. Research has apparently established that there is "insufficient budget to cover full service costs for NGOs assisting in the delivery of legally mandated services to children and families. There is also insufficient funding to support full implementation of critical pieces of legislation, including the Children's Act" (UCT Children Institute, Centre for Child Law and Child Welfare SA presentations on 6th March 2013, SA Country Report to UN Convention on Rights of the Child).

At this stage, the Director-General of Social Development may prescribe the process to accredit a social worker in private practice as an adoption social worker, and a child protection organization to provide adoption services (Children's Second Amendment Bill [B14-2015]: public hearings 23 September 2015).

3.2. Determining the adoptability of a child

The adoption 'triad' refers to those most intimately involved with adoption, namely the birth parent(s), the child who was adopted and the adoptive parents. Adoption social workers render services to all three members of the triad in the adoption process. However, in this study the researcher's focus is on one member of the triad, namely the (prospective) adopter.

Determining whether a child is eligible for adoption involves establishing that the child is legally adoptable because he or she cannot be cared for by, or reintegrated into, his or her family of origin. The decision must also be made that the child is emotionally, psychologically and medically capable of benefitting from adoption (ISS/IRC, 2006). In terms of s. 230 of the Children's Act the following children are adoptable:

i) Abused and deliberately neglected children:
Although a social worker managing a case of child abuse or deliberate neglect prioritises rendering intensive family reunification services to the primary caregivers (usually parents or relatives), sometimes a conclusion is reached that the child will be placed at risk if ever returned to the primary caregivers, and this is when a child might be regarded as adoptable.

ii) Orphaned children:
As pointed out in Chapter 1, most orphaned children, although legally adoptable, are legally placed in the foster care of relatives, usually their maternal grandmothers or aunts. Based on findings of the national research study conducted in 2009 by Child, Youth, Family and Social Development (a unit of the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa) the recommendation was made that the legal fostering of orphaned children by relatives be considered in their best interests.

iii) Children whose biological parent(s) or guardian(s) have voluntarily relinquished to their adoption:
The adoption of a child can only take place after the required consent to the adoption is obtained from the biological parent(s), that is, one parent or both, whether married or not, or the guardian(s) of the child. A sixty-day cooling-off period for withdrawal of consent needs to be observed before the adoption can be put into effect.

The number of children voluntarily relinquished for adoption has dropped significantly in the last decade. This is probably related to the fact that women wishing to terminate pregnancy are legally permitted to do so (Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act came into effect on 1 February 1997). Illegal abortions are also still widely practiced (Hodes, 2016).

iv) Abandoned children:
An abandoned child is defined in s. 1 of the Children's Act as a child who has obviously been deserted by the parent, guardian or caregiver; or, for no apparent reason has not had contact with the parent, guardian, or caregiver for a period of at least three months.

As highlighted in Chapter 1, most children in South Africa becoming available for unrelated adoption are young, abandoned children. CWSA has estimated that more than 3500 babies were abandoned in South Africa in 2010 (Blackie, 2014). Unfortunately, there are no official statistics regarding the number of babies abandoned each year and, furthermore, many abandoned children do not enter the child care and protection system because they are found dead (Nxumalo, 2016).

A number of studies focusing on couple infertility in Africa, including South Africa, provide insight into the value of children in African families. For example, children secure marital ties, confer social status on the married couple, secure rights of property and inheritance, maintain the family lineage and satisfy emotional needs (Dyer, Bogopa, 2010; Dyer et al., 2004; 2007; Inhorn & van Balen, 2002; Ombelet, 2011). However, the influx of abandoned children entering the legal child-care system and becoming eligible for adoption suggests that the notion of children being of 'great value' in African communities can be challenged. From the researcher's perspective, rather than generalising findings, one should bear in mind that children seem to be of particular value to black *married* couples seeking infertility treatment and thus they are not the perpetrators of child abandonment. As mentioned in Chapter 1, child abandonment seems to take place in the context of a variety of social, economic, political, and material circumstances in South Africa, where adequate support systems are not available or accessible to the mother of a child. These circumstances, all detrimental to the family system, include HIV/AIDS; widespread poverty and unemployment; lack of education; absence of birth control; migrant labour; constraints on the availability of housing in urban areas; lack of access to services that enable people to maintain family life; marital breakdowns; teenage births; high levels of violence (specifically gender-based violence related to rape); alcohol abuse; unplanned pregnancies; the changing roles of women; restrictive legislation; lack of family support; and expectations that abandonment will secure a better future for the child (Amoateng & Richter, 2007; Blackie, 2014; Fritz, 2015; Hefer et al.,2004; Kgole, 2007; Maree & Crous, 2012; Nicholson, 2009; Saclier, 2000; Wilson, 1999). Moreover, primary caregivers of children who are illegal immigrants or refugees entering South Africa from other regions of sub-Saharan Africa are vulnerable in the light of xenophobia, as well as not

qualifying for State social assistance (Amoateng, Richter, Makiwane & Rama, 2004; Boezaart, 2009; De la Rey, et al., 1997; Naidoo, 2010).

Blackie (2014) researched child abandonment and noted that the decline in child abandonment rates is also influenced by indigenous African ancestral beliefs. This finding confirmed what Gerrand and Nathane-Taulela (2013) had established. Blackie (2014) also determined that, as with abortion, choosing to formally place a child up for adoption amounts to rejecting a gift from the ancestors.

Furthermore, Blackie's (2014) research findings revealed that parties involved in child abandonment have sought to 'medicalise' this social problem. Blackie (2014, citing Conrad, 2007) explained that 'medicalisation' involves defining and treating non-medical problems (such as child abandonment) as a medical problem. The negative repercussions of adopting this perspective shifts attention and blame to the individual (such as a birthmother). She is labelled as having an 'illness' or 'disorder' because she has abandoned her child, rather than allowing her to reflect upon the social and political roots of her affliction. Furthermore, medicalisation of a social problem diverts attention away from interested parties, including the State, which should take responsibility for solving this pressing social issue (Blackie, 2014, pp. 34-35).

In accordance with the South African socio-cultural context, and with legislation relating to the best interests of the child, the National DSD has stipulated that before considering the adoptability of an abandoned child, the adoption social worker should ensure and confirm that a period of three months has lapsed and no-one has claimed responsibility for the child concerned. This entails attempting to trace the child's biological parent(s), guardian(s) or relatives by publishing an advertisement in a local newspaper in the area where the child was found, for a period of at least three months.

Based on the researchers' work experience, it is evident that most adoption social workers contest the issue of abandoned children, only becoming eligible for adoption after a period of three months. This is because the moratorium comes at a critical time of a child's development. Abandoned children are usually infants or young children at the time of abandonment, and thus it is essential that they develop secure attachments as

soon as possible to promote their healthy development (Bowlby, 1969, cited in Cassidy; Browne, 2005; Walker, 2008). Adoption social workers are also familiar with many research findings that indicate how institutional care can adversely affect child development (Bakermans-Kranenburg et al. 2011; Oliveira, Fearon, Belsky, Fachada & Soares, 2015; Sheridan, Fox, Zeanah, McLaughline & Nelson, 2012).

Many NGOs rendering adoption services have stated that a key factor delaying the completion of adoption in respect of abandoned children is that the Department of Home Affairs is reluctant to issue birth certificates in respect of abandoned children. This reluctance reportedly relates to that fact that it is assumed that all abandoned children are non-South African citizens (DSD/NACSA Seminar, 2/11/2016).

As with other children entering the legal child protection system, prospective adoptive children must undergo a comprehensive medical examination so that all decisions made in respect of the child concerned will be in the child's best interests.

Once it has been determined that a child in need of care and protection is adoptable, the adoptable child's identifying particulars must be placed on RACAP. RACAP, which came into effect in April 2010, was implemented to facilitate the matching of adoptable children with adoptive parents in South Africa. Unfortunately, the DSD still uses a manual system to register adoptable children, and prospective adopters on RACAP have to access it through the manual system developed as a temporary measure while waiting for an electronic web-based system to be operationalised (personal communication with a presenter at DSD/NACSA Seminar, November 2, 2016). Adoption service providers, provincial departments of the DSD, and national DSD have access to RACAP.

3.3. Eligibility for prospective adopters to adopt a child

In terms of s. 231(1) the following persons may adopt a child:

a). jointly by:
- a husband and wife,
- partners in a permanent domestic life-partnership, or
- other persons sharing a common household and forming a permanent family unit;

b). by a widower, widow, divorced or unmarried person;

c). by a married person whose spouse is the parent of the child;

d). by the biological father of a child born out of wedlock; or

e). by the foster parent of the child.

This section of the Children's Act is evidence that South African laws on family issues are acknowledging and respecting family diversity in South Africa. Although the traditional model of the nuclear family is widely considered to be a 'normal' family, it is not the most frequently occurring family form in South Africa (Amoateng, Heaton & Kalule-Sabiti, 2007; Morison & Lynch, 2015). However, respecting family diversity is rather controversial when it comes to child adoption. For example, the researcher knows from work experience that some Christian adoption agencies in South Africa oppose same-gendered parenting and consequently will not accept applications made by homosexuals seeking to adopt children.

Furthermore, although s. 231 (1) of the Children's Act sets out a broad and fluid definition of who may apply to adopt a child, adoption agencies usually set their own age criterion, which are rather broad when considering western age criteria. Furthermore, steps taken to assess whether an applicant is fit and proper to adopt an unrelated child involves an intensive, rigorous screening process.

3.4. Screening of prospective adoptive parents

Many researchers, for example, Bevc, Jerman, Ovsenik and Ovsenik (2003, cited by Thabane & Kasiram, 2015), Dyer et al. (2004), Purewal and Van den Akker (2007), Holmes, McDermids & Lushey (2013) and Steele et al. (2003) have emphasised that adoption is a complex, challenging experience. Since the adoption assessment process is a multifaceted, hotly-debated issue, pertinent to this study topic, it is critically discussed below.

Worldwide, and in South Africa, the adoption assessment process is the subject of ongoing debate, and has been criticised from both within and without adoption circles (Alldred, 1999; Campion 1995; Clark, 1998; Lind & Lindgren, 2016, Selwyn, 1997).

There is a lack of scientific tests that can prove adoptive parents' suitability to parent an adoptable child (De Wispelaere & Weinstock, 2012; McLeod & Andrew Botterell, 2014; Modell, 2002 cited in Lind & Lindgren, 2016). In general, guidelines for assessing adoptive applicants are broad and do not consist of variables that can be weighted in the assessment process. In other words, it is based mainly on subjective evaluations of certain factors (Hanna & Mc Roy, 2011).

However, research into adoptive placements suggests a set of key criteria for assessing prospective adopters: i) the ability to make and sustain close relationships; ii) the capacity for emotional openness; iii) the capacity for reflectiveness or 'psychological mindedness'; iv) the successful resolution of earlier losses or traumatic experiences related to involuntary childlessness; v) the quality, stability and permanence of their relationship; vi) support networks; and vii) tolerant social attitudes (Kaniuk, Steele & Hodges, 2004):

In South Africa, accredited adoption agencies' policy and practice is generally based on a rigorous screening of potential adopters. This is deemed justifiable to fulfil the best interests of the child standard. A term repeatedly used in the Children's Act to determine a person's parenting capacity is 'fit and proper'. The term 'fit and proper' does not have a specific definition; rather it is grounded on the subjective evaluation of several components (Hanna & Mc Roy, 2011; Mahery, Jamieson & Scott, 2011).

It has usually been agreed that the assessment of parenting capacity should be designed to determine if the prospective adoptive parent(s), in respect of the child (or children), can provide a stable, safe and predictable environment that will support the child in both his or her physical and psychological development (Choate, 2009; Kaniuk, Steele & Hodges J (2004) and carry out the role of parenting in a manner that is consistent with the child's best interests (Dwyer, 1997). To avoid widely varying assessment practices for determining whether an adoption applicant is fit and proper to adopt a child, DSD has issued practice guidelines on the screening, counselling and preparation of prospective national adoptive parents. The guidelines are based on s. 231 (2) of the Children's Act and on recommendations made by NACSA (2015) and SAASWIPP (2015).

3.4.1. Initial contact and orientation

During this initial stage of contact with the prospective adoptive parents, adoption social workers explore the prospective adopters' motivation, expectations and understanding of adoption. They then orientate prospective adopters about the realities of adoption, to clarify any unrealistic expectations, and assist them in making informed choices. The importance of making informed choices is repeatedly emphasised across health and welfare services because people must understand what the consequences may be of making those choices (Baxter, Glendinning & Clarke, 2008; Evans & McIver, 2009; Petr, 2003).

Some adoption agencies in South Africa currently choose to provide orientation and one-on-one counselling for people interested in adopting an unrelated child, whereas other agencies invite prospective adopters to an information group meeting. For example, adoption agencies such as ABBA Specialist Adoption and Social Services currently offer information about adoption on a personal basis. This is because some adoption applicants in the past expressed that they found it uncomfortable being orientated in a group setting, as this invades their privacy. On the other hand, adoption agencies such as Johannesburg Child Welfare and Durban Child Welfare offer orientation in a group setting, and this introductory group session is open to anyone interested in adopting an unrelated child. Frequently, adoption agencies that present group orientation invite an adopter to be guest speaker at the orientation.

In general, orientation is designed to discuss the categories of children that would benefit from adoption; to explain the agency's policy and procedures regarding the adoption process; and to help people decide whether adoption is appropriate for them. During orientation sessions, social workers may detect unsuitable attitudes towards adoption and suggest that some applicants withdraw, while others will drop out voluntarily.

There are arguments in favour of, and against, these two methods of providing information to potential adopters. For example, it is well recorded in social science research literature that the sharing of information in a group setting can provide social

support (Albercht & Goldsmith, 2008; Corey, Corey & Corey, 2014; Crawford, Price & Price, 2015; Sheafor & Horejsi, 2012). However, all social work clients, including potential adopters, have the right to privacy and confidentiality, and when required to meet in a group setting to obtain information about adoption, the desire for privacy diminishes. Furthermore, confidentiality cannot be assured at any group meeting (Dolgoff, Harrington & Loewenberg, 2012; Millstein, 2000; Reamer, 2013). One-on-one counselling has the benefit of providing potential adopters with the opportunity to explore their concerns and questions in more detail, and an opportunity to receive direct explanations (Gwilt, et al., 2006).

Unfortunately, most potential adopters who are informed about adoptions choose not to enter the adoption assessment process. After undertaking a comprehensive empirical literature search, the researcher established that no inclusive research studies have been conducted in South Africa to explore why many black adoptive applicants do not continue the adoption process after receiving detailed information about the adoption of an unrelated child.

Research studies conducted internationally have attributed the high attrition rate of prospective adopters to factors such as reconsidering after being informed about what needs to be taken into account when adopting a child, dissatisfaction with adoption agencies (for example, stringent assessment process, perceived discrimination) and a change in personal circumstances, which could include loss of employment or becoming ill (Geen, Malm & Katz, 2004; Hollingsworth, 2002; Hussain, 2016; Selwyn, 2015, cited by Alper & Howe, 2015; Villenueve-Gokalp, 2007; Weissinger, 2013; Wilson, Kahn & Weiner, 2005).

Research outcomes have also indicated that levels of support, as well as mismatching between the type of children eligible for adoption and the needs expressed by potential adopters, affect their decision not to adopt (Ward, 2011).

3.4.2. Character traits of prospective adoptive parents

In an overview of the adoption process, NACSA (2013) highlighted that to be entrusted with the care and protection of a child, adoption applicants must be weighed against the criteria of honesty, integrity, reputation, competence and capability. The assessment should also weigh up the person's level of emotional maturity, moral values and personality traits (Sebopela, 2013). These character traits are now reflected in the Practical Guidelines for National Adoptions. It is interesting to note that overseas adoption agencies have also included an assessment of various parenting characteristics, such as a capacity to reflect on problems and their origins, child-centeredness, tenacity and reflexivity. However, as Rushton (2003, cited in Selwyn, 2015) aptly pointed out, no evidence has been gathered that a possession of any of these characteristics independently predicts a successful placement outcome.

Other broad selection criteria are contained in the Practice Guidelines regarding the assessment of adoption applicants' suitability to adopt, such as the ability and willingness to undertake, exercise, and maintain full parental responsibilities and rights in respect of the child. This includes taking care of the child, maintaining contact with the child, acting as a guardian of the child, and contributing to the maintenance of the child.

3.4.3. Different steps in the adoption assessment process

International research has validated that home studies/assessments can be an effective way of predicting the success of an adoption between potential parents and a child (Crea, 2009; Crea, Barth & Chintapalli, 2007, cited in Nichting, 2015). A comprehensive empirical literature search suggested that no research on this topic has been conducted in South Africa.

If prospective adopters choose to enter the adoption assessment process after orientation, the assessment process is initiated, which involves a multidisciplinary approach.

- *Personal interviews*

Adoption social workers conduct personal interviews with adoption applicants. Issues explored during the process include motives for applying to adopt a child; background information (e.g. their own childhood experiences and upbringing); family relations; attitude of relatives towards the prospective adoptive parent(s); social and religious aspects; and their expectations regarding the child they would like to adopt (such as the child's age, race, religion, health).

Conducting interviews with significant others identified by the adoption applicant also forms an integral part of the screening process. Usually, interviews are conducted with three personal referees, of whom not more than one may be a relative. Permitting adoption applicants to personally identify significant others who can provide character references recognizes applicants' right to confidentiality about the decision to adopt an unrelated child. Interviewing significant others is deemed essential because they will probably play an important role in facilitating the healthy adjustment of both adopter and adoptee by providing support and care.

- *Medical assessments*

In terms of the Practice Guidelines on National Adoption, the adoption social worker should assess the prospective adoptive parent(s) in relation to their physical and psychological fitness and ability to raise a child, and the impact of any health-related condition or status on their ability to parent a child. The guidelines suggest that, as in Europe, Britain and the United States, accredited adoption agencies in South Africa feel they have a responsibility to satisfy themselves that prospective adopters have a reasonable expectation of continuing in good health to meet the best interests of the child (Adoption Statutory Procedures, 2013; Selwyn, 2015). In other words, adoption social workers need to be satisfied that prospective adopters will are able to take on the responsibility of raising an adopted child through childhood and into adulthood.

It is relevant to note that should there be any serious health/medical condition or any form of disability that the person might have, which would prevent him or her from being able to take care of the child, such a person may be considered medically unfit to adopt a child and would be counselled accordingly. Should a person suffer from any

chronic illness or have any kind of special need, the person may still be suitable to adopt a child, but the social worker must ensure the person has the necessary support structure in place (for example, family and friends, life style and health consciousness).

Although the nature of tests included in medical assessments are not standard, most adoption agencies in South Africa require prospective adopters to undergo comprehensive medical assessments, including identifying any signs of a chronic illness. These are conducted by medical practitioners working in conjunction with specific adoption agencies.

Prospective adopters applying to adopt unrelated children are obliged to undergo HIV testing if results from a previous test are unavailable. Pre-test counselling services are rendered to adoptive applicants who undergo HIV testing, and post-counselling services come into play if an applicant is found to be HIV-positive. The Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution stipulates that people are not required to undergo HIV tests without their written consent. Of course, adoption applicants wanting to be screened as prospective adopters of an unrelated child must give their consent because this agency policy and practice are deemed to be in the child's best interests, and the assessment process is child-centred.

- *Psychological Assessments*

The psychological assessment of prospective adopters is implemented by many accredited adoption agencies worldwide to ensure that prospective parents are emotionally stable individuals (Barth, Gibbs, & Siebenaler, 2001; Bifulco, Jacobs, Thomas & Irving, 2008; Dickerson & Allen, 2007; Leinaweaver, 2009; Nichting, 2015). In the Practice Guidelines of National Adoption (p. 38), it states that "psychological assessment is another important aspect that needs to be done before approving a person's suitability to adopt. The emotional stability and behaviour of the person play an important role in the upbringing of a child. Information will be gathered during the screening process, character references may be obtained from significant others, or the person may be referred to a psychologist if there are issues of concern."

Currently, there are no written recommendations on a national level for a specific battery of psychological instruments to implement when assessing prospective adopters. However, the South African version of the 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire, namely the fifth version (16PF5), which measures an individual's personality traits in order to understand and predict an individual's behaviour, is usually implemented by experienced psychologists affiliated to accredited adoption agencies.

The final South African version of the 16PF questionnaire was created in 2009 and can be used for all race groups. However, as pointed out by Eeden, Taylor and Prinsloo (2013, p. 215), "… research on the 16PF in South Africa has had a largely narrow and superficial focus. The focus should shift towards more substantive studies on the integrity of factor structures across groups, predicative validity and other criterion-related validity studies, to ensure the continued relevance of the 16PF in a multicultural South African context." Laher and Cockroft (2015) and Laher (2016) reiterate the need for further research in this regard, so that the tests would be useful within sectors of the population for whom Western methods of testing may not be appropriate.

It is significant to note that one of the psychologists responsible for assessing prospective adopters informed the researcher that she finds it difficult to implement the 16PF5 with adoption applicants who are not well-educated (personal communication on 21/07/2016). For this reason, she has personally adapted the Thematic Appreciation Test (TAT). The TAT is a projective psychological test that provides the psychologist with information regarding how individuals view themselves and the world in their own way (Aronow, Weiss & Rezinikoff, (2001). Unfortunately, it is less effective as a psychometric procedure because it is not idiographic. The psychologist also informed the researcher that she charges fees of approximately R1 600.00 per applicant when providing her psychological assessments. She pointed out that this is a reduced fee, and the fee is considered appropriate as it includes administration as well as the tests in which she observes the applicants and conducts interviews with them. She subsequently submits a detailed report to the relevant adoption agency.

- *Employment and Financial Circumstances*

The Practical Guidelines of National Adoptions (p. 38) states that "… the persons' work record and occupation, as well as financial ability to provide for the child, should be assessed to ensure that the child will grow up in a stable family environment, which will be able to cater for the child's needs."

As far as maintenance of the child is concerned, it is stipulated in s. 231(4) of the Children's Act that a person may not be disqualified from adopting a child because of his or her financial status. This means that the adoptive parents(s) may apply for means-tested social assistance to financially care for the child. Based on the researcher's work experience, this process is never implemented.

- *Accommodation and living environment*

According to the Practice Guidelines on National Adoption (p. 39), it is important to verify and assess the physical home environment of the prospective parents by conducting a home visit. This is to confirm that the applicant is staying at the given address, as well as to check whether the home and surroundings are conducive and safe for the proper upbringing of the child. If an adoption applicant does not live in the same service area as the NGO conducting the assessment process, a DSD or NGO social worker is usually requested to conduct the home visit.

- *Socio-cultural aspects*

The section of the Practice Guidelines on National Adoption (p. 39) that is particularly relevant to the researcher's study states that "Adoptive parents of a different culture, who would like to adopt a child of another culture, should only be given the opportunity to adopt any child once it is established that there are no parents sharing the same culture with the child, who are able and willing to adopt the child." However, as pointed out in Chapter 1, not many black children are being placed with adoptive parents of the same culture.

Culture refers to the identification of people into groups based on various sets of beliefs, values, norms and practices that are learnt and shared generation by generation. In South Africa, cross-cultural adoption is directly associated with transracial adoption. Transracial adoptions in South Africa usually involve white persons adopting black children. This is a controversial adoption type because there is still prominent race dissonance within the complex South African socio-political context, both individually and institutionally (Msomi & Shilaho, 2016; Roux & Becker, 2016; Sayed, Badroodien, Salmon & McDonald, 2016; Vincent, 2008).

Racism in any form can negatively impact on the adopted child's identity development. Research studies have found that children develop awareness about racial stereotypes early, and that those biases can be damaging (McKown & Strambler, (2009). Finley (2006, p. 86), who conducted adoption research in South Africa, states that "If cross-racial adoptions are not handled appropriately because 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." One of the challenges, which [white] parents who have cross-racially adopted [black] children face, includes the different history of origin of their adopted child.

- *Relationship Assessments*

In terms of the Practice Guidelines on National Adoptions, social workers are required to determine whether a prospective adoptive couple is engaged in a stable, healthy relationship and that both are committed to the adoption process. Factors that should be explored include communication, roles and responsibilities being fulfilled, conflict management and resolution etc. Although the said guidelines do not specify any specific steps to be conducted, many accredited adoption NGOs require married couples and non-marital partners entering the adoption screening process to complete a relationship assessment. The first component of the relationship assessment programme is known as the Prepare/Enrich Programme. The assessment tool is used in many countries around the world, and the Prepare-Enrich scales have been validated in over 10 countries (Li, Olson & Solheim, 2015).

The said assessment tool basically measures "the personality of each person, the couple's interpersonal dynamics, the couple's family system, and their relationship strengths and stressors" (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011, p. 1). Although the assessment can be completed online, adoption social workers expect adoption applicants to complete the assessment separately, to minimize couple collaboration. Unfortunately, there has been no research to date to determine the success of the programme in South Africa (Swart, 2013). At the time of compiling this report, the researcher did not identify any efforts made to create a culturally-sensitive South African version of the Prepare/Enrich Programme, as has been done in other countries, such as Japan (Olson, Olson & Larson, 2012). However, overseas evaluation of the adapted programme to other cultures demonstrates a high level of validity and reliability (Li, 2013).

Although the rigorous adoption assessment process is generally regarded as being in the child's best interests, criticism of the adoption assessment process suggests that such a differential treatment of adoptive and biological parents is not justified (De Wispelaere & Weinstock, 2012) and that biological parents should also be assessed before taking on the legal rights and responsibilities of parenthood (Dwyer, 1997; Dwyer, 2006, cited in Ferguson, 2015; Herring, Probert & Gilmore, 2015). Mc Leod & Botterell (2014, p. 166) suggest that in their opinion, although the reasons justifying the rigorous screening of adoptive applicants are valid, these reasons are not unique to adoptive parents, and only serve to "… reinforce the belief that biological families are superior to (more natural, less likely to be dysfunctional, than) adoptive families; it promotes, the biological bias…". The authors go on to point out that because only prospective adoptive parents are required to undergo rigorous screening to be found fit and proper to adopt "… this may in fact harm adopted children and their families, given that it expresses, either explicitly or implicitly, the view that these families are normatively suspect."

Furthermore, statutory intervention only takes place when the child presents as needing care and protection in terms of the Children's Act. In other words, an assessment of children's biological parents' capacity to parent adequately takes place on a retrospective basis. La Follette (1980, p. 195, cited by Mc Leod & Botterell, 2014)

emphasise that people arguing in favour of an intensive assessment usually highlight two points:

i) the lack of a biological tie between parent and child in an adoption increases the possibility of harm to the child; and

ii) adopted children have special needs that not everyone is competent to satisfy. These children will be harmed unless the State ensures that their adoptive parents possess the relevant competence to care for them. Parents who are not biologically related to their children have no 'natural affection' for them and so are more likely to harm them.

Concerning point one, Hamilton, Cheng & Powell (2007) note that although contemporary legal and scholarly debates emphasise the importance of biological parents for children's well-being, their research findings indicate that adoptive parents are as invested in their children as biological parents.

Regarding point two, although it is claimed that the adopted child is at heightened risk of abuse, this has not been substantiated, and social science academics do not have a reliable tool for predicting child abuse (Sandmire, M. & Wald, M. (2007). In more recent years, La Follette (2010) noted that adopted children "are less than half as likely to be maltreated compared to children reared by their biological parents" (LaFollette, 2010, p. 336). Unfortunately, in South Africa such data is unrecorded, since neither the National Child Protection Register nor the National Register of Sexual Offenders reflect whether the child concerned is an adoptee or the perpetrator an adoptive parent.

The duration of the adoption assessment process regarding a person adopting an unrelated child varies from one individual case to another, depending on existing circumstances. However, the assessment process and the issuing of the adoption order in respect of domestic adoptions usually takes approximately six to nine months to complete (Noordegraaf, Nijnatten & Elbers, 2008).

- *Matching of adoptable child with prospective adopter*

Once a person has been found fit and proper to adopt a child, their particulars are entered into RACAP to facilitate matching with adoptable children. The matching process must always be in the best interests of the child, and thus there should be no pre-identification of children by any person who wishes to adopt a child because this is not in compliance with provisions of the Children's Act.

The child's needs must be matched with the qualities and preference of the birth parents (if the child is voluntarily relinquished for adoption), and of the prospective adoptive parents and family. It is also necessary for the adoption social worker to adequately analyse the religious and cultural aspects of the child and his or her birth family in relation to those of the prospective adoptive parents

Biological parent(s) should be involved as far as possible in the matching of their children, and participate in selecting the profile of prospective adoptive parent(s). This should be guided by the social worker within the legal framework regarding non-disclosed adoption and the subsidiarity principle.

Traditionally, matching adoptable children with fit and proper prospective adopters is mainly based on physical appearance. This practice was founded on the assumption that adoptions will be more successful if children could 'pass' as being biologically related to their adoptive parents (Modell, 2002; Wrobel, Kohler, Grotevant & Mc Roy, 2008). As Herman (2000, p. 57) pointed out, matching "... relied on the paradoxical theory that differences are managed best by denying their existence." Although internationally matching no longer dominates adoption policy (Jacobson, 2014), this is not the case in South Africa, where physical matching in same race adoptions still prevails.

When it comes to matching fit and proper black prospective adopters with black abandoned children, physical matching is prioritised. This is because most black prospective adopters express the desire to adopt a child who resembles them and/or members of their extended families as closely as possible. Consequently, abandoned

children whose facial features depict that they were born to foreigners are usually made available for transracial or intercountry adoption.

Social workers who manage the matching process hope that the best interests of the child will be served within the adoptive placement (Hanna & Mc Roy, 2011). However, opponents of the matching process regard physical matching as a form of denial; a way to make it easier for the adoptive family to pretend the child is their biological child (Adamec & Miller, 2007).

- Post-adoption services

In terms of the Children's Act, post-adoption services must be rendered for at least two years. Although adoptions in general are highly successful, some families do experience challenges, disappointment and disruption, and negative outcomes may be reduced by the provision of effective post-adoption services (Barth & Miller, 2004; Beesley, 2010; Dhami, Mandel & Sothmann, 2007; Palacios & Sanchéz-Sandoval, 2005). Although universal problems are faced by adults in their transition to parenthood, the transition to adoptive parenthood is characterized by many unique challenges. More recent researchers, such as Selwyn, Wijedasa & Meaking (2014), Baker, Ford and Canfied (2016) and Mashamba (2009) have reiterated the particular challenges faced by adopters. Thus, it is important to assist adoptive families and adopted children with adjustment and bonding issues that may arise after the adoption has been finalized, (Holmes, McDermids & Lushey, 2013; McKay, Ross & Goldberg, 2010). To date, no research in South Africa has focused on experiences of post-adoption services.

3. RESEARCH PATTERNS AND TRENDS REGARDING UNRELATED ADOPTION

Although research concentrating on unrelated adoption is scarce in South Africa, it has attracted considerable attention in Europe and the USA. A broad and interdisciplinary approach, drawing on expertise in the areas of psychology, sociology, education, law and medicine, has provided essential insights into promoting a better understanding of child adoption. (Baccara, Collard-Wexler, Felli & Yariv, 2013; March & Miall, 2000).

Particularly relevant in adoption research is firmly situated within the discipline of social work, since it is a specialized field of child welfare practice. Below, the researcher summarises a traditional research genre related to the topic area of unrelated adoption, and then specifically focuses on research conducted in South Africa around unrelated adoption.

3.1. Motives for people choosing to adopt an unrelated child

Research focusing on reasons why adults make the decision to adopt unrelated children is particularly relevant to this study. Study findings in many developed countries indicate that the primary motive of contemporary Euro-American heterosexual couples in applying for adoption is to remedy their involuntary childlessness, and serve their desire to create a family (Cudmore, 2005; Goldberg, Downing, & Richardson, 2009; Hollingsworth, 2000; Kressierer & Bryant, 1996). Hollingsworth (2000) and Park and Hill (2013) highlighted specifically that women having a history of unsuccessful infertility treatment, of surgical or non-surgical sterility, of physical difficulties in becoming pregnant, and/or having received reproductive technology, primarily seek to adopt. The emotional rewards anticipated are emphasised.

Researchers Van Balen and Trimbos-Kemper (1995) and Dyer (2007) identified that the most frequent motives for wanting a child are happiness and self-fulfilment. Likewise, when Langdridge, Connolly and Sheeran (2000) investigated reasons for wanting to adopt a child, a core category emerging centred on the need to give and receive love and form a family. Scheper-Hughes and Sargent (1998, p.12) succinctly captured this notion when stating "[t]he instrumental value of children has been largely replaced by their expressive value. Children have become relatively worthless (economically) to their parents, but priceless in terms of their psychological worth."

Older people are also motivated to adopt an unrelated child because they are aware of their advancing age limiting their chances of achieving biological parenthood (Goldberg et al., 2009). Furthermore, becoming older would also count against them when applying to adopt at a later stage (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003).

People, both fertile and infertile, may also be interested in adopting a child for altruistic reasons, such as wanting to provide a home for children who are in need (Bausch, 2006).

There are other motivations for adoption, which include having an existing relationship with an unrelated child who is to be adopted, such as through fostering and having had previous experience of adoptive families (Bausch, 2006; Bramlett & Radel, 2016). Howell and Marre (2006, p. 299), when comparing the motives of prospective adoptive parents between Norway and Spain, were surprised to learn that "… despite the fact that humanitarian motives are becoming frowned upon, many Spanish families mention the desire to help poor and abandoned children as the main motivation." These findings break away from the standard motivation based on involuntary childlessness.

Experiences motivating prospective adopters wanting to adopt children with special needs have also been explored. Motives identified include that adoptive parents had previously fostered the child; wanted to expand their family; wanted a sibling for their biological child; were involuntarily infertile; or wanted to provide permanency for special needs' children (McKlindon, Welti, Vandivere, & Malm, 2011; Vandivere, Malm, & Radel, 2009).

Other studies have focused on reasons why men and women choose not to adopt. Findings indicated that individuals who perceive the importance of blood ties within their familial relationships and had concerns about the possible negative outcomes were less likely to consider adopting an unrelated child. For example, they assumed that an adopted child might manifest adjustment problems, behavioural problems and medical problems (Mohanty, 2014). Most infertile couples pursue biological parenthood via fertility treatments because of their concerns about adopting children who may have developmental, psychological and emotional problems due to negative pre-placement experiences (Cudmore, 2005).

Since biological ties are favoured over social relatedness, though another reason why people make the decision not to adopt is because of the potential for stigmatisation (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003; Miall, 1996). Goldberg, Downing and Richardson

(2009) highlight that the process of identity transformation for adoptive couples considering adoption may be difficult because they must challenge internal and social expectations of parenthood.

Involuntary childlessness is especially stigmatised in pronatalist societies worldwide. However, research in Sweden noted that childfree women challenge and resist pronatalist understandings that directly associate being a woman with being a mother. Voluntarily childless women created a positive feminine identity separated from motherhood and the supposed biological urge to reproduce (Peterson & Hall, 2013). Greenway (2016) highlighted that although characterizations of ‘mother’ and ‘womanhood’ perpetuate, the dominant normative definitions of womanhood can be challenged, along with the notion that mothering is an inborn and natural 'essence' (rather than a product of socialization and culture).

Park (2005) shifts focus slightly, to investigate reasons why men and women choose to remain childless. Findings indicated that some women’s images of parenting created feelings of anxiety and concern, and thus did they not want to experience motherhood. They perceived childlessness as a trajectory for enjoying a happier life by avoiding possible negative outcomes. Voluntary childlessness also provided them with the opportunity of realizing career opportunities. Men’s choice to remain childless was directly related to the perceived costs and benefits involved. For men, the benefits of taking over the responsibilities of parenting were outweighed both by the financial costs involved, and the possible loss of career opportunities (Park, 2005).

Slauson-Blevins and Park (2015) explored reasons why Americans decide not to adopt, even though the view of adoption is favourable in the USA. They drew the conclusion that various practical barriers, such as financial income, difficulty with the adoption process, and other concerns, are not the only reason that women choose not to adopt. Rather, cultural expectations of normative family structures persist.

Research focusing on the motives for black South Africans choosing to legally adopt an unrelated child is scarce. However, a few researchers have made meaningful contributions related to this topic. Pakati (1992) underscored a challenge faced by

prospective adopters, namely that to bring a child into the family does not entail simply including the child into a nuclear family, but into a whole new kinship network. She cited as an example the Zulu culture, which emphasises the importance of blood ties, formalising kinship ties through marriage, belonging to the clan, and the sharing of common ancestors. Pakati (1992) also drew attention to the fact that black childless couples find it difficult to accept that adoptive parents should disclose to the adoptee that they have been adopted, because doing so means acknowledging that adoptive parenthood is different from natural parenthood.

Disclosure to the adopted child that he/she has been adopted has been a controversial issue since the early 2000s. Traditionally, and currently, adoptive parents employ non-disclosure to achieve several goals: maintain the appearance of a 'normal' family (i.e. they reject the differences between adoptive families and biological families); avoid distressing the child with the truth of his/her origin'; try to ensure that the adoptee develops as strong a bond with the adoptive parents as would biological parents, and avoid revealing infertility, which has a social stigma attached to it (Mohanty, 2015; Smalley & Schooler, 2015; Wegar, 2000).

Overseas research findings consistently reveal that disclosing to the adopted child that he/she has been adopted is in the child's best interests and is associated with positive outcomes for adoptive families. If disclosure does not take place, the negative consequences for the adopted child far outweigh privacy concerns, or other goals of the adopted parents. Feelings of guilt and rejection are common (Ahn & Lee, 2012; Mohanty, 2015). These are based on this research evidence that social workers in South Africa educate prospective adopters on the benefits of providing the adopted child with information about his/her origins that is developmentally appropriate for his/her age. Promoting disclosure in the best interests of the child has recently been reinforced in the South African context. Although Blackie (2014) only interviewed two black adult adoptees, it was apparent that they had experienced non-disclosure as traumatic. In both cases, extended family members rejected the adopted children outright when their adoptive parents had passed away. Work experience has also made the researcher aware

of the fact that inadvertent and inadequate disclosure to the adoptee is sometimes made by a third party, exposing the child to emotional risk, such as rejection.

A national research study conducted by Mokomane and Rochat (2010) for the National Research Council of South Africa concluded that black South Africans consider it inappropriate and offensive to interfere with lineage and clan connections, issues which emerge when legally adopting an unrelated child. It is reasoned that when the child's legal status and name are changed through adoption, the adoption detaches rather than enhances a child's sense of belonging. Furthermore, there is the belief that legally adopting unrelated children deprives them of their ancestral roots. This results in their losing contact with their own ancestors, which can have unpleasant, punitive consequences for the future happiness of the child.

Blackie's (2014) research findings reinforce the notion that black South Africans view raising a child with an unknown ancestry with great concern. Most research participants in her study believed that children who do not know their ancestors – the descendants of their father's line – could live difficult lives and might not be able to fulfil many of their traditional roles and rituals in their family.

3.2. Transracial adoption

Transracial adoption, a form of unrelated adoption, has been described as the most visible type of adoption because the physical differences between adopter and adoptee are so apparent (Lee, 2003). The majority of transracial adoptive parents are Caucasian/white and have more economic capital than their black counterparts (Raleigh & Kao, 2013).

Transracial adoption has long been a controversial issue: the values and ethics of this practice are debated, with the concepts of racism and racial identity coming into play (Barn & Kirton, 2012; Fogg-Davis, 2002; Mc Roy, Griffin & Mc Ginnis, 2016). Research has tended to thrash out the pros and cons of transracial adoption, and focuses on such issues as policies and practices; adoptees' adjustments; formation of cultural identity by adopted children; and support of and opposition to transracial adoption

(Abbie, Goldberg, Sweeney, Black & Moyer, 2016; Lee, 2003; Morrison, 2004). Simply put, people who support transracial adoption argue that the children are receiving a home that they would otherwise not get. Those who oppose transracial adoption state that the children are deprived of their cultural heritage.

A comprehensive research literature review by Lee (2003, p. 728) indicated that adoptees involved in transracial adoption, on both a domestic and intercountry front, are generally "… psychologically well adjusted, exhibit variability in their racial/ethnic identity development, and along with their parents, engage in a variety of cultural socialisation strategies to overcome the transracial adoption paradox."

However, studies have also identified difficulties faced by transracial adoptees, specifically complex ethnic identity, perceived discrimination, and adoptive parents underestimating their adoptive children's connections to their cultural origins (Ferrari, Rosnati, Manzi & Benet-Martinez, 2015; Reinoso, Juffer & Tieman, 2013). Hoyt-Oliver, Straughan and Schooler (2016, p. 38) capture the challenge of racialisation well:

> *Raising a child who is identified by society as belonging to a different race can bring unique challenges to families, even if the parents, as some parents alleged, "don't see race" when looking at their children, [and]society continues to do so. Even though a sizable number of research studies find few differences between children adopted transracially and those adopted interracially, the reality of navigating a world where race at some level must always be a consideration, means that parents who have been brought up in the privileged world of whiteness must acquire the skills to assist their children in a still racialized society.*

Taking into consideration difficulties faced in transracial adoption, Harris (2014) called into question the proverbial notion that 'love is enough' for successful transracial outcomes, and concluded that a comprehensive range of adoption support services, tailored to the needs of transracially adopted children and adults, their birth and adoptive parents, is needed.

When comparing the placement options of same race foster care and transracial adoption, Haslanger (2009) concluded that the latter was preferable because it provided a better context for the child to develop a strong personal identity, which then forms the basis for negotiating race and other social identities over time.

Rushton and Minnis (2000, p.53), after reviewing a longitudinal research study on the outcomes of transracial placement in North America, reached the conclusion that, similar to their critical and comprehensive review on the outcomes of transracial placements in the UK and USA, "… a placement matching for race (i.e. same race versus transracial) may not be the strongest predictor of outcome, and that transracial placements do not necessarily preclude the achievement of a secure ethnic identity."

In South Africa, the practice of transracial adoption in South Africa involves white adults adopting black children. This situation has arisen because the number of black children needing to be adopted far exceeds the number of black prospective adoptive parents (Doubell, 2014). The topic has received much attention because white adults adopting black children are usually viewed by social workers as a viable permanent placement option. However, transracial adoption is still a complex and controversial issue, in the main due to South Africa's history of racial segregation.

Mosikatsana (1995; 1997) adopted the stance that transracial adoptions are not conducive to the welfare of the child in South Africa because a child who is transracially adopted may suffer racial prejudice. In addition, he maintained that transracial adoptees may also experience identity crises resulting from loss of racial or cultural identity, which is important in a race-conscious society. He expressed this same sentiment in 2002 when presenting a discussion paper for the South African Law Reform Commission, which was reviewing the Child Care Act of 1983.

On the other hand, Ferreira (2009) spoke out strongly in favour of transracial adoption. She emphasised that when an adoption is considered, race should not play any significant role and that culture should not be considered more important than any other relevant factor in the adoption process. She concluded that whether the adoption is within the child's own race/culture does not determine the child's best interests. Other

researchers who have supported transracial adoptions in South Africa are a little more cautious. For example, Zaal (1992) reasoned that, regardless of it not being the ideal condition, transracial adoption is the only alternative to long-term institutionalisation.

Some researchers have argued that transracial adoption will only prove successful if white parents have the abilities and skills to assist the black child in developing both a healthy ethnic identity and the necessary skills to cope with racism. Ajzen, Fishbein, Albarracin, Johnson, & Zanna (2005) made it clear that present attitudes are not necessarily a predictor of future behaviour.

Caminsky (2008) explored the experiences of transracially adopting mothers, and concluded that they can be conflictual, especially should their own mothers and/or fathers reject them after the adoption and if the adopting mothers do not have a strong, separate identity for the family of origin. Fear of racial prejudice outside the family system was also apparent.

Researchers in South Africa (for example, Hall, 2010; Moos & Mwaba, 2007) have explored tertiary education students' beliefs and attitudes toward transracial adoption, and findings have been similar. Although most higher education students supported the practice of transracial adoption and believed it promoted racial tolerance, elements of race, racialisation and identity still came to the fore. It was noted that white students are more likely to support the practice of transracial adoption.

Finlay (2006) researched challenges specific to transracial adoption in Gauteng. Findings indicated that one of the main challenges faced by this cohort of adopters is racial prejudice. Furthermore, transracial adoptions work best when the adoptive family makes a concerted effort to understand racism and deal with it directly, rather than overlooking it or avoiding it. Similarly, Bilodeau (2015) investigated the perspectives of young black adults in the Cape Town area regarding whites adopting black children. From the findings, it became apparent that participants perceived transracial adoption as a positive form of adoption, provided the white adopters are culturally conscious when raising their adopted children. A comprehensive review of research literature indicated

that there are currently no longitudinal studies of outcomes in transracial adoption in South Africa, so definite conclusions cannot be drawn.

Blackie's (2014) study findings implied that government departments (such as DSD and the Departments of Justice and Home Affairs) were intentionally not prioritising the finalisation of transracial adoption cases. This behaviour was deemed 'culturally motivated'. Consequently, some abandoned children matched with white adoptive parents remain in the child welfare system for up to two years.

3.3. Intercountry adoption

Intercountry adoption has been practiced for decades in North America and Europe (receiving countries), mainly because infertility rates in developed countries are on the increase and there is a shortage of infants available through domestic adoptions (Ishizawa & Kubo, 2014).

These adopted children have often been exposed to negative circumstances in their countries of origin prior to their adoption, and adoption is regarded as a means of promoting these children's development, health, well-being and behaviour (Schwarzwald, Collins, Gillespie & Spinks-Franklin (2015). Nonetheless, inter-country adoption is at the centre of controversy. Gibbons & Rotabi (2012, p. 1) highlighted three main standpoints in this regard: "proponents who advocate intercountry adoption, abolitionists who argue for its elimination, and pragmatists who look for ways to improve both the conditions in sending countries and the procedures for intercountry transfer of children." People denouncing intercountry adoption tend to emphasize that it takes place in the context of poverty and human rights abuses, including human trafficking (Alexander, 2014; Fronek & Cuthbert, 2013; Goodno, N. 2015; Rotabi & Bromfield, 2015).

South Africa is the second-highest donor country on the African continent (Selman 2012). As far as outcomes of intercountry adoptions are concerned, the topic has been well researched in receiving countries. Ethnic identity challenges faced by adoptees have frequently identified the need for support services for both adoptee and adoptive

parents (De Graeve, 2014; Quiroz, 2002; Richards, 2014; Scherman & Harré, 2004). For example, Yngvesson (2010) highlighted concerns around the racism adopted children experience in cases of intercountry adoption. They cope in these 'foreign' terrains by denying their ethnic identity and the existence of biological family to 'fit' into a new society.

Research in countries such as Finland (a country that South Africa has contracted with for intercountry adoption), have also identified that intercountry adoptions expose adoptive families to racialization and discrimination. In other words, intercountry adoption denies the "full belonging of the non-biological, black, adoptive child" (De Graeve, 2013 p.13). Dwyer and Gidluck (2010; 2012), who conducted research in Canada, also established that adoptive families are exposed to racial discrimination.

Cheney (2014), who made an executive summary of the International Forum on Intercountry Adoption and Global Surrogacy conducted in August 2014, drew attention to the fact that it is important to acknowledge that intercountry adoption profoundly shapes adoptees' identity in immutable ways. Richards (2014, p. 8) and Cheney (2014, p.19) reinforced the point of view that pre-and post-adoption services could play a larger role in accommodating adoptees' trajectories through identity formation.

Whereas intercountry adoption has been well researched in receiving countries, there is a gap in knowledge regarding the sending countries. However, Högbacka (2011), a researcher from abroad who conducted a study in South Africa, made significant findings regarding birthmothers' experiences of placing their children in adoption. For example, he found that birthmothers in South Africa who voluntarily relinquish their children for unrelated adoption (including intercountry adoption), expected their children to be returned to them when their circumstances had improved. They expressed the desire to have an on-going relationship, despite having permanently signed away parental rights. Decisions to relinquish their child for adoption were rooted in poverty, unplanned pregnancies, lack of support, and/or having HIV-positive status. In many respects, this finding suggested that the pre-adoption and post-adoption services rendered to birthmothers relinquishing their children for adoption are neither effective nor culturally sensitive.

However, it is generally agreed that if a child's right to domestic adoption cannot be met, intercountry adoption should be undertaken. This is because the Constitutional Court has stressed that the best interests of the child outweigh other considerations (South Africa's Periodic Country Report on the UNCRC, 2013). Bartholet, (2010) and Davies (2011) noted that intercountry adoption is far more beneficial than long-term residential care. Rochat, Mokomane and Mitchell (2016), as well as Rotabi and Gibbons (2012) highlighted that, especially in cases where adoptable children's families of origin are unknown, intercountry can present as being in the child's best interests because they are at a disadvantage when being placed in domestic adoption.

3.4. Child abandonment

Unfortunately, research on child abandonment is rather limited in South Africa: the main focus has been on AIDs orphaned children. However, a couple of researchers, such as Brink (2000) and Blackie (2014), have created new insight into this phenomenon. Brink (2000) researched child abandonment in South African hospitals. Her rationale for conducting the research was that hospitals were unsatisfactory places of care for abandoned children due to the risk of exposure to hospital-acquired infections, as well as the financial implications for health services and the extra workload strain placed on health professionals. She concluded that an integrated approach, involving all sectors affected by child abandonment in hospitals, should be promoted to improve the lives of these children and reduce pressure on the health sector. Based on personal work experience in the field of child protection, the researcher is aware that in recent years there has been improvement in the timeous removal of abandoned children from hospitals and their placement in suitable temporary safe care, pending the finalization of Children's Court Enquiries.

Research conducted internationally demonstrates that adoption taking place at an early age enhances the physical, socio-emotional and cognitive development of the child (Johnson, 2002; Osmond & Tilbury, 2012; Van den Dries, Juffer, Van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2009). Unfortunately, abandoned children usually become eligible for adoption only after the age of six months because of the administrative, legal and policy procedures that must be followed. Since at this juncture they have

entered the stage of development of intense attachment-seeking, their placement with parents who care for them on a permanent basis must be prioritized.

3.5. Adoption assessment process

Evaluating whether adoption applicants have the capacity to parent adopted children forms the basis of the assessment process. Assessment of parenting skills related to child care in general has been well researched (Englander-Golden & Golden, Grusec, 2014; Matthews, 2008; Utting, 2007). However, there is limited research-based evidence concentrating on the effectiveness of the adoption screening processes in assessing prospective adopters' capacity to parent unrelated adopted children.

Rushton (2004, cited in Alper & Howe, 2015), who rapidly mapped the key concepts and evidence underpinning research related to assessing parenting capacity, identified specific parenting characteristics that have been associated with successful placement outcomes. These characteristics included child-centredness, warmth, consistency, flexibility, commitment, and the capacity to reflect on problems and their origins. Kriebel and Wentzel (2011) also identified that child-centred parenting was a significant, positive predictor of adopted children's adaptive behaviour.

Choate (2009) challenged certain across-the-board notions of effective parenting by stating that despite the understanding that effective parenting involves, providing predictability, safety and appropriate boundaries, and given that these are useful factors to consider when assessing parenting capacity, it is not clear whether they can be relied on across a variety of cultural, community, or professional standards.

Studies related to assessing adoption applicants' capacity to parent, have targeted intercountry adoption because of the perceived risks of child exploitation, as well as the parenting challenges faced by intercountry adopters. For example, studies in North America and Britain identified variability in the home study assessment practices for prospective intercountry adopters. Implementation of the Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) procedure as a means of standardising the quality of assessment has

presented promising results in addressing such problems (Gibbs, 2011; cited by Rotabi, Monico & McCreedy Bunkers, 2015).

Research findings have indicated that the trusting relationship between the adoption social worker and the prospective adopter is essential to the quality of the assessment process (Alper, 2015). A relevant point is that little research has incorporated the social workers' constructions of parenting capacity and the ways these inform, and are incorporated into, their practice actions (Woodcock, 2003). Ryburn (1991) presented the view that prospective adoptive parents should play an active role in writing their assessment reports, and social workers should facilitate the process rather than assessing it by making judgments in a role of authority.

A salient research finding in South Africa related to the assessment process was the "… lack of access to good quality, efficient and friendly adoptive services. Two key areas of concern were raised: lengthy waiting periods; and the performance, or lack thereof, of the assigned social worker." (Rochat, et al., 2016, para. 25).

3.6. Research focusing on children adopted by non-biological parents

Over the years, adoption research has focused on a broad range of issues related to children who are legally adopted by non-biological parents: a) physical development b) self-esteem and identity c) cognitive outcomes such as IQ, school performance, and specific abilities d) psychological adjustment, including mental health and psychopathology and e) relationships with parents (including attachment), peers, and romantic partners (Grotevant & McDermitt, 2014, para. 3).

Brodzinsky and Palacios (2015) provided a review of adoption research attention since its inception as a field of study. They identified three main historical trends in adoption research, the first focusing on risk factors in adoption, the second being the identifying differences in adjustment between the adopted child and non-adopted child, and the third focusing on biological, psychosocial, and contextual factors and processes underlying variability in adopted children's adjustment and developmental outcomes.

Two different perspectives on adoptee adjustment and development are frequently focused on in research studies, namely, the benefits of a child being raised in an adoptive family, and the risk factors a child is exposed to when adopted (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2008). Although findings related to risk factors are not consistent, research from many countries supports the view that the number of adopted children referred for counselling after placement is significantly higher than for non-adopted children (Behle & Pinquart, 2016; Keyes, Malone, Sharma, Lacono & McGue, 2013; van IJzendoorn, Femmie, & Poelhuis, 2005).

Reasons for this high discrepancy between biological children's and adopted children's need for counselling includes adoptees' tendency to experience more problems. These include behavioural, psychological and psychiatric issues and learning difficulties. However, it is also argued that these statistics are higher because adoptive parents have a propensity to utilise counselling services, since they have been pre-educated regarding the possible challenges that may be faced when adopting a child and which resources are available to them to address these concerns (Bramlett, Radel & Blumberg, 2007; Yoon, Westermeyer, Warwick & Kuskowski, 2012).

Adoptees face unique encounters in dealing with identity issues, and confusing and complicated emotions (Grotevant & Von Korff, 2011; Mohanty, 2013; Smith, 2012). Adoption researchers have established that adoptive parents play a significant role in helping adoptive children construct their identity. This is achieved by being open with adoptees about their adoptive status (Wrobel, Kohler, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2003, cited in Colander & Kranstuber, 2010).

Research findings have established that adoptees that have faced pre-adoption stressors, such as exposure to institutional care, maltreatment, neglect, and abuse, are at greater risk of adjustment difficulties (Jiménez-Morago, Leon, & Roman, 2015; Grotevant & Mc Dermitt, 2014; Julian, 2013; Nickman, et al., 2005; Reppold & Hutz, 2009; Sellick, Thoburn & Philpot, 2004; Van den Dries, Juffer, Van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kraneburg, 2009).

The age of the adoptee at the time of his or her placement in adoption has been well-researched. Generally, children adopted at a late age are viewed as being more at risk than children adopted at an early age (Grotevant & McDermitt, 2014; Mc Donald, Propp & Murphy, 2001; Priel, Melamed-Hass, Besser & Kantor, 2000; Sellick, Thoburn & Philpot, 2004). Age at adoption and standard cognitive abilities are the best predictors of cognitive and linguistic catch-up (Katzenstein, LeJeune & Johnson, 2016).

Most empirical literature is overwhelmingly supportive of the value of adoption when using a variety of outcome measures. Research conducted in many countries has established clearly the benefits offered to the adopted child. These include protection, financial and material advantage, security, stimulation and nurturance. Adoption is also an effective intervention leading to meaningful catch-up in the child's overall development (Brodzinksky, 1993; Fagan, 2010; van Ijzendoorn & Juffer, 2006; Triseliotis, 2002). Furthermore, studies comparing long-term foster care with adoption have consistently found that adopted children fare significantly better, in the sense that adoption offers a child a higher level of a sense of belonging, emotional security, and general well-being. This is the rationale for prioritizing permanency planning for adoptable children (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2008; Triseliotis, 2002).

Based on a comprehensive review of research literature, I have concluded that, to date, no adoption studies have been conducted in South Africa that specifically focus on the outcomes of black adoptees who have been adopted by black adopters.

4. THEORETICAL RESOURCES

Although a theoretical framework does not underpin this research, there are theoretical resources pertinent to this study and a discussion of these will provide insight into the different dynamics underlying - and probably affecting - the legal adoption of unrelated children by black South Africans.

4.1. Adoption and implications for child well-being

Adoption policy and practice being implemented in South Africa is basically shaped by Western constructions of childhood, which are depicted in the UNCRC. Simply put, 'childhood' can be described as the 'state of being a child'; in other words, the time of being a child and in the process of becoming an adult (Uprichard, 2008). This notion of childhood has slowly been disseminated from the Western world through globalisation, and is currently the dominant construction of childhood (Cregan & Cuthbert, 2014; Fleer, Heregaard & Tudge, 2008).

The UNCRC and codes of ethics regarding children operate from this 'innocent child' vantage point, stating that in all actions towards children, "the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration" (Sorin, 2005, p. 13). In terms of the Children's Act, children entering the formal child care system are considered innocent and vulnerable and in need of care and protection.

It is interesting to note that when the UNCRC was being drafted, some African countries expressed strong objections to its universalised definition of childhood. As a direct result, the Organisation of African Unity established the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Zagrebelsky (2012, pp. 50-51) drew attention to the fact that, although this charter does not diverge much from the UNCRC, one of the major differences is the definition of children as duty bearers. According to article 31, entitled Responsibility of the Child, every child shall have duties towards his family and society, the State and other legally recognised communities and the international community. The child shall have the duty:

(a) To work for the cohesion of the family, to respect his parents, superiors and elders at all times and assist them in case of need;
(b) To serve the national community by placing his physical and intellectual ability at its service;
(c) To preserve and strengthen social and national solidarity;
(d) To preserve and strengthen the independence and the integrity of his country;

(e) To contribute to the best of his ability, at all times, and at all levels, to the promotion and achievement of African unity.

This perception of childhood confirms that childhood is not a universal notion, but is socially constructed. Personal work experience reflects that social workers do recognize children's role as duty bearers, but reason that children's right to care and protection must be adequately met before they can be expected to fulfil their duties in a responsible manner. Viljoen (2001) highlighted that the African Children's Charter sets a higher level of protection for children than the UNCRC. For example, in the African Children's Charter, the best interest of the child is 'the primary consideration', not merely 'a primary consideration', as provided for in the CRC.

A relatively new image of childhood challenges the notion of the innocent, passive and powerless child. Instead, children are considered social actors who participate in their education and lives by exercising agency (Morss, 2002; Sorin, 2005; Yelland, 2010). However, it is important to note that abandoned children and children voluntarily relinquished for adoption by their birthparents for adoption are not old enough (more specifically, not intellectually and emotionally mature enough) to voice their thoughts and feelings about placement in adoption with selected adopters. Consequently, this heavy responsibility falls onto the professionals involved, especially the adoption social workers responsible for managing adoption cases. For this reason, they need to ensure that persons who have applied to take on parental rights and responsibilities for life are fit and proper to do so and thus quality screening is essential.

In various sections of the Children's Act, an obligation is placed on decision-makers to avoid letting children remain in Child and Youth Care Centres (CYCCs) for unreasonably lengthy periods, considering the negative effects of institutional care on children's development (Bakermans-Kranenburg, et al., 2011; Oliveira, Fearson, Belsky, Fachada & Soares, 2015; Sheridan, Fox, Zeanah, McLaughline & Nelson, 2012). An emphasis is placed on the consideration of the child's need for long-term stability. This is linked to the age and developmental stage of the child: the younger the child, the shorter should be the period in which permanency should be achieved, due to

children's critical developmental needs during this stage of life (Bos et al., 2011; Johnson & Gunnar, 2011; Spurr, 2005).

Comprehensive studies in the western world have focused on the neurological, social and emotional development of institutionalised children, many of whom have been abandoned. Findings consistently identify different psychopathologies associated with institutionalised children and, consequently, they should be avoided at all costs (Nelson, Fox & Zeanhah, 2014 Riddle, 2016). On the other hand, research concentrating on developmental outcomes for young orphaned and abandoned children that have been placed in family environments, such as foster care and adoption, clearly indicate an improvement in child development and, consequently, the push has been to avoid placement of children in institutional settings at all costs.

The western world's perceptions of the negative outcomes of children placed in residential care (such as children's homes) have been challenged, namely that residential consideration still has an important role to play in the developing world. Emphasis is placed on the notion that "…we cannot afford to believe that we know what is right in respect of how best to provide care, education and supervision for children and young people in any culture." (Smith, 2016). However, as already pointed out, South Africa's child care legislation, and child welfare intervention strategies, are based on Western concepts of child development and best interests of the child principles, which regard institutionalisation as a last resort, especially for young children in need of care and protection.

Thabane and Kasiram (2015) explored the context of child abandonment in Lesotho. They concluded that abandonment could increase the more common patterns of maladaptation later in the lives of affected children. An exacerbating factor relates to the fact that people who come forward to provide care for the abandoned children are sometimes not aware of their unique needs. Thabane and Kasiram (2015) highlighted that thorough preparation and counselling of prospective foster or adoptive parents is therefore imperative.

4.2. Best interests of the child principle

The principle of the best interests of the child has longed formed part of South African common law (Bonthuys, 2006) and has been included in s. 28 (2) of the South African Constitution, which determines that 'a child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child.' Cantell (2014, p. vii) commented well on the 'child's best interests' principle related to intercountry adoption:

> *There is universal agreement, embedded in international human rights law, that the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration in any decisions made about a child's future. In the case of adoption, which represents one of the most far-reaching and definitive decisions that could be made about the future of any child – the selection of their parents – international law qualifies the best interests of the child as the paramount consideration. The implications of this obligation are all the greater in the context of the intercountry form of adoption, since this involves in addition the removal of a child to a new country and, usually, a new culture.*

South Africa is obliged to honour the subsidiarity principle regarding intercountry adoption. In other words, priority needs to be given to the possibility of the placement of an adoptable child in domestic adoption before intercountry adoption. All other placement options must have been exhausted before intercountry is considered. This is rooted in the premise that continuity in religious, cultural and linguistic aspects of children's upbringing will generally be in their best interests (Couzens & Zaal, 2009; The Hague Convention on Private International Law, 2008; Hague Convention of1993; UNCRC, 1989; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2009).

Furthermore, Article 24 of the African Charter "includes the principle of subsidiarity, which is like that of UNCRC, but with stronger emphasis, because it describes intercountry adoption as 'a last resort'." This principle was stressed by most African countries, including South Africa, which are 'donor' countries.

Tensions emerge when debating at what stage intercountry adoption can justify the best interests of the child. The issue is complicated by the fact that there is no worldwide agreement on who is ultimately responsible for determining what is in a child's 'best interests', nor on what basis the decision should be made. Furthermore, there is general

agreement on the need for flexibility in determining best interests. As pointed out by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2013, para. 34), “flexibility of the concept of the child’s best interests allows it to be responsive to the situation of individual children”, as well as to “evolve knowledge about child development.”

Cantell (2014) undertook a study for UNICEF which responded, in particular, to one key question: “What is it that enables a policy, process, decision or practice to be qualified as either respectful or in violation of the best interests of the child in intercountry adoption?” In other words, the main aim of the study was to determine what role the ‘best interests’ principle should play in intercountry adoption, and the overall conditions required for it to do so in keeping with the rights of the child. Based on research findings, Cantell (2014) built up a ten point/issue checklist for a best interest assessment and determination process on intercountry adoption. All the key issues addressed are based on the subsidiarity principle. The researcher is of the opinion that four of the key questions are relevant because most children available for intercountry adoption are abandoned children:

i) Which care option(s) are likely to offer educational opportunities corresponding to this right, domestically or abroad?

ii) Which care option(s) are likely to ensure the realisation of the child’s right to physical and mental health and/or which options might jeopardize that right, by their nature or by their consequences, domestically or abroad?

iii) Which care setting or arrangements to cater appropriately to the special developmental needs of the child are related to: a) a physical or mental disability b) other characteristics or circumstances that create vulnerability?

iv) Do the selection of the arrangements, settings and other conditions best preserve key elements of the child’s identity, including providing continuity with the child’s ethnic, religious, cultural and/or linguistic background?

The case-by-case application of the best interests principle is probably the most ethical process to abide by when it comes to intercountry adoption. This approach, which is frequently implemented by the Court in South Africa, stresses the fact that the best interests of each child would depend on the surrounding circumstances, and that each case should be decided on its own merits (Bronthuys, 2006, p. 24). Finally, as pointed out by Cantell (2014, p. 54), decision-making in respect of intercountry adoptions must be timely, and evaluation based on subjective and selective criteria. It requires a thorough review of the child's overall situation and needs, and of the likely impact of the measure on virtually all the rights of the child.

4.3. Theoretical approaches to adoption intervention strategies

Social work practice has been heavily influenced by theories and models of practice in the social sciences, particularly the disciplines of psychology and sociology. Although academic literature does not identify specific theories that form the framework for adoption per se, from the researcher's perspective, the ecological systems theory and ethological attachment theory present as most pronounced. Both the ecological systems theory formulated by Urie Bronfenbrenner, and the ethological attachment theory (initially formulated by Bowlby, 1969), tend to focus primarily on child development. However, they also serve as a guideline when assessing whether adoption applicants are fit-and-proper to meet adoptable children's developmental needs.

Basically, in terms of the ecological systems theory, there are five interlocking levels of influence on current human functioning and long-term development, namely the micro, meso, exo, macro and (more recently) the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Neil & Neil, 2013). Both Härkönen (2007) and Palacios (2009) emphasised that the core features of Bronfenbrenner's theory is that it proposes that, in any given context and time, an individual's development is primarily shaped by the interactions and relationships between the individual adopter and adopted child, and the different layers of the surroundings.

In terms of attachment theory, the (adoptive) parent fulfils the crucial role of the attachment figure and the quality of parental care is a major factor for building a nurturing, safe and stable environment and developing a strong bond between a (adoptive) parent and a (adopted) child (Benoit, 2004; Bowlby, 1969; Pace & Zavattini, 2011; Van Wormer, 2017). Children in need of care and protection are vulnerable to emotional problems stemming from difficulties with attachment, while separation and loss increases with their age at placement (Sellick, Thoburn & Philpot, 2004). Many attachment theorists have also emphasised that our early social experience has profound effects on our cognitive, emotional and social development, and thus finding permanent placement for young adoptable children is prioritised to avoid disruption (Keenan, Evans & Crowley, 2016; Morrow, 2011; Payne, 2014).

4.4. Adoption and implications for relatedness

In social science, the adoption of the unrelated child raises questions regarding the meaning of 'kinship' or 'relatedness'. This construct is complex and open to many different interpretations, but is generally predicated upon a model of biological connectedness between parents and children (Howell, & Marre, 2006; Logan, 2013). Bloch (2013, p. 236) highlighted that 'kinship' is generally described as a biological and genealogical phenomenon, "... a matter of closeness created by parenthood and sex, in other words, blood ties."

However, there are tensions between biological and sociological ideas of what constitutes 'kinship'. In the West, the biological, genealogical basis of kinship is challenged and categorized as a rather simple, restrictive definition (Bloch, 2013; Faubian, 2001; Read, 2001). For example, Sahlins (2011, pp. 2-3) identified that an underlying foundation for all understandings of kinship is, "... a mutuality of being; people who are intrinsic to one another's existence – thus 'mutual person(s)', 'life itself', 'inter-subjective belonging' … kinship is locally constituted, whether by procreation, social construction, or some combination of these".

The family, a form of kinship, is regarded as a complex and controversial concept, and a standard, universal definition has proven elusive (Bogenschnieder, 2014; Harris, 2008;

Levine, 1990; Miller, 2016). To capture all these different forms of created families, broad definitions of 'the family' have emerged. For example, Bogenschnieder (2014, p. 39) perceived the family as socially constructed, and defined the family as "… a collection of people (two or more) that can be identified by its structural connection (blood relationships, legalities or residence) or by its functional connection (for example, sharing economic resources or caring for its members who are young, elderly, ill or have disabilities." Levine (1990, p. 35), when discussing what counts as a family, stated that in terms of her interpretation "… family members are individuals who by birth, adoption, marriage, or declared commitment share deep, personal connections and are mutually entitled to receive and obligated to provide support of various kinds to the extent possible, especially in time of need."

The South African definition of the family was selected as most appropriate for this study because it has biological, legal, cultural and social connotations. This definition of the family is generally endorsed in the South African context because it is inclusive in character and the resultant emphasis is on non-nuclear family constellations (Sherriff & Seedat, 2010). The White Paper of Families in South Africa (2012, p.11) defines the family as "… a societal group that is related by blood (kinship), adoption, foster care or the ties of marriage (civil, customary or religious), civil union or cohabitation, and go beyond a particular physical residence." It is significant to note, though, that by placing the word 'kinship' in inverted commas directly after the word 'blood' this definition implies that kinship is synonymous with blood ties.

Adoption of an unrelated child creates a 'family' that differs from the traditional concept of 'the family', which is based on blood ties between parent and child. In unrelated adoptive families, there are no blood connections between parent and child. Instead parent and child are connected through legal procedures. Although worldwide (including South Africa) blood ties are still considered the basis of family formation (Ambert, 2003; Dos Santos; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2012; Strong & Cohen, 2014), this perception of the family is being challenged (Oris, Oris, Widmer & Jallinoja, 2008, cited by Palakel, 2013).

Basically, it is apparent that family construction in the 21st century has become fluid in Westernised societies; and the adoption of the unrelated child is just one example (Casper & Bianchi, 2002; Stephens, 2013; Sussman, Steinmetz & Peterson, 1999; Walsh, 2012; Zastrow, 2008). A sense of belonging is regarded as the most critical element of a family (Schofield, Thoburn, Howell & Dickens, 2007). Most western family scholars are uncomfortable with the notion that one kind of family structure could be "… deemed the most natural, effective, or divinely dictated form of kinship" (Harris, 2008, p. 1407).

For decades, the family structure has been in transformation in most cultures worldwide, and the nuclear family (married couple with children) should no longer be considered as the 'normal' concept of a family (Walsh, 2012). There are now expanded options for constructing families and creating original arrangements for raising children, for example, transracial families, or gay and lesbian families (Braithwaite, et al., 2010; Corbett, 2004; Erera, 2002; Harris, 2008; Van Ewyk & Kruger, 2014).

Families constructed by the adoption of an unrelated child are also in transition. Traditionally, legally adopted children formed part of the nuclear family structure. However, there are now single-parent adoptive families, different degrees of open adoption families, transracial and intercountry adoptive families, and same-gender adoptive families (Logan, 2013; Miall, 2000, p. 359).

Researchers have brought to our attention that patterns of marriage and family formation have changed in South Africa since the democratic elections of 1994. Urban black South African households favour greater support for the married family by rejecting traditional domestic practices such as polygamy, absent fatherhood and multi-generation households (Russell, 2003). Russell (2003) suggests that black urban family structures are shifting towards the nuclear family set-up.

Moore and Govender (2013) and Posel and Rudwick (2012) pointed out that the values of a monogamous, gender-equal partnership is becoming the type of marriage desired by black women. However, Viljoen and Steyn (1997, cited in Browning, 2003) emphasised that monogamous marriage is not necessarily a stable institution, especially

considering the empowerment of black women where male dominance is threatened by the influence of modernization and globalization. Hosegood, McGrath and Moultrie (2009) highlighted the decline in marriage and in the fertility rates of black South Africans, probably because migration, urbanization, modernization and globalization of the family have led to the decline of tribal authority and elements of communalism in the traditional family system.

From another perspective, the characterization of the many African family systems still tends towards long-term commitment and security, even though there has been a shift from the traditional co-resident extended families to nuclear families. As Mathambo and Gibbs (2009) and Hunter (2006) point out, black families in South Africa survive challenges such as the HIV crisis because relatives continue to maintain close ties among each other in the extended family system, and may jointly make decisions regarding where and how families live, what priorities families have, how they distribute their resources, and how they deal with major life events such as marriage, childbirth, naming and death. Chikovore et al. (2013) have also noted these developments.

However, an important aspect of black culture is that the boundaries of kinship are usually rigidly drawn to biological connectedness, and more extensively so than in western societies (Mkize, 2004, cited by Hall, 2010). In many African cultures, the interpretations of kinship include “both the living and the dead” (Preston-Whyte, 1994, cited in Harber, 1999, p. 10; Siegel, 1996). Other researchers such as Mokomane & Rochat (2010), Hlatswayo (2004); Mabasa (2002) and Mkhize (2006) also emphasised the importance of blood ties, belonging to the clan and sharing common ancestors in traditional African culture.

Pakati (1992) highlighted that in the African context, the traditional symbols of kinship - namely blood, birth, and nature - are paramount; a child can never be severed or extinguished from his or her origins. Knowing one’s patrilineal lineage and identity is considered imperative, as is performing certain rituals according to the paternal clan. If rituals like ‘imbeleko’ (introducing the new-born baby to the ancestors) are not performed according to the customs of the paternal clan, misfortune and bad luck are

said to follow a person for the rest of their life. Consequently, bringing a biologically unrelated child - an outsider- into the family system is not readily condoned (Harber, 1999; Howell 2007; Melhuus & Howell (2009, cited in Nordqvist, 2014).

Mokomane and Rochat (2010) stressed that black South Africans consider it inappropriate and offensive to interfere with lineage and clan connections. It is reasoned that when the child's legal status and name are changed through adoption, the adoption detaches rather than enhances a child's sense of belonging. In a subsequent journal article, Mokomane and Rochat (2011) highlight that many black South Africans regard 'continuity' as the fundamental basis of the family system. For heritage to be continued, blood ties are valued; legal bonds hold no respected status.

Alyward (1975, cited by Kanu, 2014, p. 2) captured the meaning of traditional African kinship well when pointing out:

> *The family is where life is generated, a basic unit of life which represents in miniature the life of the entire people; it is in the family that the values of the clan, the tribe and of Africa are transmitted. The family unit is a centre of learning. The family embraces grandparents and grandchildren; the living; the dead; the in-laws and the intermediaries, which include their ancestors. The African concept of the family also includes the unborn members who are still in the loins of the living. They are, for the African, the buds of hope and expectation.*

Children are a basis for the creation and continuation of family kinship systems (Russell, 2003). Sewpaul (1999, pp. 743 – 744) drew attention to the fact that in traditional African culture, children are not referred to simply as children but as 'izizukulwane', a respected term meaning 'generation'. It implies that "one does not produce just a child but a generation that ensures the propagation of the species." Thornton (2008, p. 206) explained that:

> *When sex results in the conception of a child, the child's blood is also the ancestors' blood, which the child will ultimately pass on to subsequent generations. Children constitute a flow of value across generations and can be thought of as a kind of currency that is exchanged across generations … They are the wealth of the nation (amli ya sechaba) that enables people not only to survive, but also to understand their survival as part of an ongoing exchange across time that links generations in a permanent and enduring way"*

Lobola - usually referred to as bride wealth or dowry in English - is a traditional African custom that emphasises that the primary purpose of marriage - and the value of children - is related to the perpetuation of the patriarchal lineage. One of the original functions of bridewealth payments was to compensate parents for the loss of their daughter's productive and reproductive labour power (Posel & Rudwick, 2012). It involves an agreement between two extended family systems: the husband (or his family on his behalf) promises to deliver to the father (or his family) of the wife, assets. This is in consideration of which the legal custody of the children born of the marriage is vested in their father (or his family) to the exclusion of any member of the mother's family (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010). Researchers have explained that lobola ensures that the paternal family has certain rights; one of the most important of these rights is that the children of marriage belong to the father's lineage group, and that boy children extend the paternal lineage. (Bhana & Inkani, 2014; Bogopa, 2010; Clark, Cotton & Madhaven, 2015; Parker, 2015; Sewpaul, 1999).

Bennett (2004) highlighted that lobola symbolizes traditional African cultural identity and religion. It is used to express deep changes in terms of emotional realities, values, and concepts. The idea that a woman should feel that lobola lowers her human dignity is a European impression which does not reflect the views of black people themselves. Should a man not marry the mother of his child prior to her conception of the child, he is required to pay inhlawulo ('damages') to her family, which is less expensive than lobola. Hunter (2006) suggested that men often choose the second option to avoid the costs and obligations of marriage, whilst still claiming paternity which takes precedence because of the high value placed on children. Preston-Whyte and Zondi (1992, cited in Hosegood, McGrath & Moultrie, 2009, p.285) noted that:

> *There is a sense in which the value placed upon children is so high for many people that marriage is, in some contexts, quite irrelevant to the bearing of a child. This is not to suggest that in general marriage is not regarded as the appropriate arena for birth. It is. But failing marriage, children have a value in themselves which cannot be gainsaid.*

Ngema (2012) stressed that lobola is still widely practiced in South Africa because it guarantees women dignity (her sense of womanhood), and consequently South Africa is unlikely to follow the advocacy for the abolition of lobola. She highlighted that although it may appear that lobola "signifies the transfer of wealth", lobola is a blood contract, and a mandatory and imperative *sine qua non* for any marriage within an indigenous African community. Furthermore, despite disparagement over several decades by non-Africans, the popularity of lobola and its widespread social acceptance by black South Africans has persisted because it holds considerable appeal as a symbol of traditional African cultural identity and religion.

Nauck and Klaus (2007) researched the value of (biological) children for their parents across cultures for different age groups in 11 countries, including South Africa. The researchers established that countries with patrilineal kinship systems showed higher scores on social esteem than other social systems, as the emphasis of the descent lineage offers incentives for social esteem through parenthood. Mokomane and Rochat (2010), who conducted adoption research on a national basis, reported that black South Africans consider it inappropriate to adopt an unrelated child because they value their lineage and clan connections.

In February 2014, the Kwazulu-Natal Commissioner for Traditional Leadership Disputes and Crimes, Jabulani Mphalala stated that:

> "*…it would take years before there was a flexibility of mind about adoption among most South Africans. We would have to have a big indaba [meeting] before it could be accepted. Ancestral spirits look after their relatives and no-one else. In our religion, in our culture, this thing is ring-fenced."*
> (Dardagan, 2014 in IOL 21/02/2014).

White (2015) had a conflicting view in this regard. He pointed out that we "know from historical and ethnographic sources that there were many cases of people being incorporated into other people's households in precolonial African communities. For this reason, this insistence on 'biological' kinship as true kinship seems to be a distinctly modern invention. The most obvious example is the old African adage that paternity comes primarily from the payment of cattle, so that even children born to an

adulterous relationship would be claimed as lineal offspring by their mothers' husbands, as long as they were the ones who had paid bride wealth.

Apart from blood ties creating a vertical interconnectedness for Africans (that is, ties between the living and the dead), interpretations of kinship also broaden the concept of kinship from a linear perspective. In other words, the traditional African extended family is very broad. This interpretation of kin is based on the traditional African paradigm of communalism (Broodryk, 2006; Kollmer, 1995; Letsekha, Wiebesiek-Pienaar, & Meyiwa, 2013; Lassiter, 2000; Louw, 2009; Mabovula, 2011; Sewpaul, 1999, pp. 743 – 744). Venter (2004, p.151) defines communalism "as an awareness of the fundamental interdependence of people, whereby duty to one's social group is more important than individual rights and privileges."

For generations, the extended family system, based on communalism, has been a source of support for its members (Makiwane, Makoae, Botsis &Vawda, 2012; Martin, Mbambo & Mulenga, 2011; Sewpaul, 1999). The practice of 'communalism' is apparent when noting the common practice of informal kinship care in sub-Saharan Africa, including South Africa (Meintjes & Hall, 2010, cited in Ratele, Shefer & Clowes, 2012).

Informal kinship care is a private arrangement whereby the child is looked after on an ongoing or indefinite basis by relatives. It is basically any private arrangement provided in a family environment, at the initiative of the child, his or her parents, or another person. This form of child care (also referred to as informal adoption or informal foster care) is considered the most prevalent traditional form of out-of-home care globally for children, and is practised in most African countries (Foster & Williamson, 2000; Green, 2004). This traditional form of child care is an abiding practice, even in contemporary times.

There are significant reasons why this private arrangement is made, such as to give the child access to a better education, and to help parents overcome a period of financial difficulty (Assim, 2013; Bennett, 2004). This arrangement is made without an order by an administrative or judicial authority or a duly accredited body (Gordhan, 2006).

Although childless couples frequently request that a related child be placed in their care so they can fulfil their desire to parent, this child care arrangement is usually not done on a permanent basis. Roby (2011, p. 16) highlighted the many benefits of kinship care:

> *[I]t is believed to preserve continuing contact with family, if desirable, siblings and the extended family network; to help maintain identity; to decrease trauma and distress of relocation and grief of separation from parents; to reduce the likelihood of multiple placements and to expand capacity for self-sufficiency; ongoing support throughout life, and that children and relatives provide mutual care and support.*

The importance of blood ties in informal kinship care was identified by Case, Paxson, and Ableidinger (2004, cited by Dos Santos, 2012), who researched child care arrangements in 10 African countries. Findings indicated that an orphaned child is more likely to be discriminated against when living with an unrelated or distantly related caregiver, suggesting that non-genetic family forms are equally as 'abnormal' - or at least unusual - in African communities.

However, the nuclear family remains "…a powerful normative ideal in much of the Western world and people who do not follow this pattern may be considered deviant, or not even families at all" (Sagger & Sims, 2005 p. citing Bittman and Pixley 1997). The modern family is socially diverse (Weisberg & Appleton, 2015). South African law acknowledges this diversity because it has no single definition of a 'family'. This is probably because the traditional nuclear family form, based on a husband and wife and their biological children, does not reflect the reality of South African society. The different types of family forms currently existing in South Africa include: same-sex parented families, interracial families, single-parent families, extended families, customary polygamous-parent families, grandparent-headed families, cohabiting partnerships, childless families, child-headed families, stepfamilies and foster-care and adoptive families. In fact, adoptive families are also diverse: apart from the traditional nuclear adoptive family, there are now same-sex, transracial and single-parent adoptive families. It is important to note that many detailed Euro-American assessments on the quality of family relationships and children's well-being have produced evidence that a child's development is directly related to the quality of parent-child relationships, irrespective of family types (Tasker & Figueroa, 2016, citing Golombok, 2015).

4.5. Understanding the imperatives to 'Africanise' adoption

When South Africa became a democracy in 1994, the need for a comprehensive, holistic Children's Act - a piece of Africanised legislation - was recognized. Recommendations at conference of the Community Law Centre and the Portfolio Committee on Welfare and Population Development took steps to initiate this process in 1996. Factors justifying the reformulation of all laws affecting children included: i) child laws in South Africa were basically fragmented and unequally implemented due to apartheid policies; ii) deep-rooted poverty and unemployment; iii) poor or non-existent schooling; iv) the breakdown of family life and v) the strains on a society in transition meant that most South African children were at risk (Children's Institute Review of the Child Care, April 1998).

Scholars have various conceptions of the notion of 'Africanisation', and contentious debates regarding what 'Africanisation' entails have been ongoing in many disciplines, such as psychology, education, law and the like (Dawes, 1998; De Vos, 2009; Maas & Jones, 2015; Msila, 2007). Makgoba (1997, p. 203, cited in Botha, 2010) defined Africanisation as:

> *… the process or vehicle for defining, interpreting, promoting and transmitting African thought, philosophy, identity, and culture. It encompasses an African mind-set shift from the European to an African paradigm…It is not a process of exclusion, but inclusion… [I]t is a learning process and a way of life for Africans. It involves incorporating, adapting and integrating other cultures into and through African visions to provide the dynamism, evolution and flexibility so essential in the global village. Africanisation is the process of defining or interpreting African identity and culture.*

In the field of child protection, debates ensue following the paradoxical question of how to Africanize a child care model 'imported' from the West. For example, Graham (1999, p. 255) holds the opinion that adapting existing models to include ethnic realities can become a form of cultural oppression. However, Gray and Coates (2010, p. 620) adopt a more constructive perspective:

> *The challenge to find a balance between dedication to a particular culture, while being open to incorporating knowledge and practices that can be effective and culturally relevant is not easy. It requires that culture be understood as dynamic, complex and emerging, and while historical beliefs, values and practices are highly valued, culture is not seen as fixed and singular.*

Adoption social workers tend to define 'Africanisation' as the process of making a practice culturally relevant and accessible to all population groups. Rendering culturally sensitive services is emphasised. There are some core concepts of 'Africanisation' that the researcher considers relevant, such as those set out by Letsekha, Wiebesiek-Pienaar and Meyiwa (2013), namely: "the need to seek out our commonalities; affirm African culture, traditions and value systems; foster an understanding of African consciousness; and find[…]ways of blending Western and African methodologies."

Over the past years, the country's welfare system has attempted to move away from 'Westernized' patterns of service delivery to meet the needs of population groups exposed to socio-economic deprivation and other under-development during the apartheid era (Lombard, 2008; Patel, 2005).

In transforming adoption practice into a more accessible 'responsibilities and rights' model in terms of a developmental approach, the Children's Act (2005) has legally entrenched certain innovations to facilitate domestic adoption. Adoption applicants cannot, as was previously the case, be disqualified from adopting a child purely on the grounds of their employment and financial status, marital status, sexual orientation or HIV status. The financial test that previously applied to prospective adoptive parents, which prevented persons with little income from adopting a child, was discarded; and the Children's Act removed the legal requirements regarding the age of the adoptive parent(s), or the age difference between the adoptive parent(s) and the child. This is left to the discretion of the adoption agencies and the Children's Court. The said Act allows for adoption by married couples and by "partners in a permanent domestic life-partnership", regardless of gender. In the interim, same-sex marriage became legal in November 2006, and is legally equivalent to opposite-sex marriage for all purposes, including adoption.

From a practical point of view, adoption agencies have looked at different ways of making adoption services more accessible and culturally friendly. Wilson (2006, pp. 370-372; 2014) explained that changes in circumstances have necessitated change in selection criteria and screening procedures. The issue necessitating change was related to supply and demand. For example, in the 1980s the focus was on placing healthy, new-born white babies in adoption with white couples who had been married for over three years. At the time, there were more adopters than adoptable children and consequently strict selection criteria could be implemented. However, in the early 1990s, an increasing number of black babies started to be abandoned in hospitals and clinics, and the numbers of adoptable children began to far outweigh the number of adoption applicants.

Wilson (2006) reported on how one of the largest child welfare NGOs in South Africa addressed the need for flexibility in terms of screening criteria, due to the growing number of black children being abandoned in urban areas. She described the change as an adaptation from a primarily First World to a Third World model of adoption screening. Initial changes focused on the age and marital status of potential adopters. Whereas the previous age limit was 35 years for females and 37 for males, it appeared that many black applicants were older when approaching adoption agencies, mostly over 40 years. The age limit was therefore raised to 55 years, although older adoption applicants were encouraged to adopt older children.

In addition, consideration was given to the positives for children, such as the good support networks which might exist in a polygamous marriage. Although encouraging openness in adoption (i.e. disclosing to the child that he or she has been adopted), social workers also respected adopters' desire to maintain secrecy. Regarding health issues in developing a model relevant to the South African context of adoption practice, the agency needed to include some flexibility and to assess the medical problem as part of the whole family system. For example, a healthy woman married to a man with uncontrolled diabetes would be assessed in terms of her ability to cope on her own. This woman was not to be discriminated against, provided she could cope with the care of a child on her own and could manage financially. Furthermore, to reduce travel costs for

adoption applicants living outside Johannesburg, orientation and training meetings were combined, at the beginning of the screening process.

Wilson (2006) highlights other areas where flexibility was introduced, such as accommodation and proof of income. In terms of accommodation, the emphasis changed from ownership to considerations of whether the accommodation was safe, hygienic and not overcrowded, with sufficient space for a child. Many applicants worked in the informal sector, were self-employed and running a small home-based business or selling fruit and vegetables on the street, and consequently not able to provide a salary advice. For this reason, a bank statement was accepted as proof of income.

Although it is evident that efforts have been made to render adoption more accessible to all South Africans, the current fees charged for the adoption assessment process is still highly contested. In a media statement in September 2015, the DSD stated that accredited NGOs and social workers in private practice charge excessive adoption fees, and that amendment of the Children's Act, which will legalise DSD social workers to manage adoption cases, will radically reduce the cost of the adoption process. In defence, NACSA responded by emphasizing that this comment was irresponsible and inaccurate. NACSA pointed out that the Children's Act makes provision for the payment of fees to an adoption agency, and that these fees are regulated in terms of Regulation 107 of the Children's Act. The spokesperson for NACSA also emphasized that:

> *The Department of Social Development's recent media statement that it wants its social workers to provide adoption services in a bid to "curb the high cost of adoptions and make it easier for ordinary families to adopt children" is deeply concerning at its core…. Most Child Protection Organizations work on a sliding scale and accept applicants from all walks of life, including people from rural areas, domestic workers and cleaners. In fact, the fee paid in these instances is minimal and does not preclude anyone who has a genuine desire to adopt a child, and who is found to be wholly competent. Fees vary between adoption social workers and CPO's, ranging between R5000 to R20 000 for a national adoption. These fees are dependent on how much is subsidized by the DSD and the amount of work required to finalize an adoption in South Africa. It is an intensive process that requires skilled and experienced people. The fees are derived from the costs of detailed assessments, pre-adoption workshops and*

> *preparation, counselling, administrative fees (often involving months of work), court preparation, legal documentation and court reports, ongoing consultation with DSD at both a provincial and national level, medical fees. NACSA is constantly trying to recruit adoptive parents in what is a national crisis.*

It is worth noting that neither NACSA nor the DSD specifically highlighted the costs involved in the implementation of other screening instruments, such as medical and psychological assessments, and completion of marital enrichment programmes. However, NACSA did draw attention to the fact that fees are not legislated in respect of accredited adoption social workers in private practice, and thus NACSA has been consistently lobbying the DSD to give attention to the regulation of the fees in respect of adoption social workers in private practice, to bring it in line with those of Child Protection Organizations.

When exploring the impact of fees charged for the adoption screening process, it is relevant to bear in mind that within South African society - and globally - social stratification usually occurs across social classes. It is difficult to categorise people by such restrictive factors as level of education, place of residence, employment or other economic factors. When South Africa became a democracy in 1994, this coincided with economic, political, and social engagement with the rest of the world (Ballard, Habib, Valodia & Zuern, 2005). However, the "rewards of South Africa's modest economic growth are being restricted to small sections of society, and punishing costs are being imposed on the poor" (Marais, 2011, p. 2). Marais (2011) drew attention to the fact that close to half of South Africa's population (the majority being black South Africans) could reasonably be said to be living 'in poverty', and income inequality is now wider than ever before. The distribution of wealth and income in South Africa is recorded as among the most unequal in the world (Centre for Socio-Legal Studies, 2005, cited in Chikazi & Pretorius, 2014; Terre Blanche, 2006). Bray et al. (2010, p. 22, cited by Gwatirisa, 2013, captured these circumstances well:

> *…many features of the apartheid era persist, as the legacy of apartheid shapes everyday life after apartheid itself has died. Material inequalities persist and the distribution of income has probably become even more unequal after apartheid than during it. Just as interracial inequality has declined, by many measures intra-racial inequality has increased. Massive unemployment sentences many to chronic poverty, mitigated only to the extent that people receive financial*

> *support from the State through old-age pensions, child-support grants or other social assistance programmes. In many respects, class has replaced race as the foundation of deep social cleavages in post-apartheid society.*

Although the Children's Act does not discriminate against adoptive applicants by setting out minimum levels of education and income, my personal experience in the work setting has indicated that it is predominantly the middle-class to upper middle-class black South Africans who approach adoption agencies. Although there are currently no records in South Africa regarding the social class of people who apply to adopt, outcomes of a research study that explored African-American perceptions of adoption noted that most black people who apply to adopt, and are approved for adoption, have, at minimum, a middle-class income (Powell, 1997).

Gerrand and Motlalepule Nathane-Taulela (2013) and Blackie (2014) highlight the important role that traditional healers can perhaps play in addressing infertility for black South Africans, and the possibility of their contributing to adoption recruitment efforts. As Ruther (2004, p. 65) pointed out, traditional healers are "specialists in their people's customs" and see "their role as promoters and collaborators of social change and the Africanisation of values, attitudes and practice". Unfortunately, to date, traditional healers have not played a prominent role either in recruitment strategies or in the adoption screening process. An effort was made to engage traditional healers by inviting one traditional healer be a guest speaker at NACSA Conference in 2014. Unfortunately, he did not arrive at the conference and no apologies were sent beforehand.

Based on the researcher's work experience in the field of child welfare, she is aware that radio, newspapers, magazines and websites are the main channels of communication used by South African adoption agencies in their recruitment drives. South Africa's Adoption Assistance Centre (promotions referred to as 'Addoption' or 'add adoption as an option') also has two brief YouTube videos on the NACSA website. These promotions take an altruistic approach in the sense that they make the viewer (not any specific racial group) aware of the desperate need of thousands of orphaned and abandoned children in South Africa to grow up in a loving home environment. Adoption posters titled "… imagine being love" also emphasize a philanthropic notion.

Unfortunately, social marketing strategies aiming at adoption recruitment have not garnered much success, which is evident by the ever-declining black domestic adoption rates. One of the biggest challenges facing NACSA and NGOs trying to promote adoption is a constrained budget. The DSD does not fund social marketing campaigns, and thus organisations are usually dependent on free publicity and donations from the private sector. In 2013, NACSA launched its first social media promotion of adoption via YouTube. NACSA is also adopting a primary prevention intervention approach by running a community campaign and training programme (which it makes freely available for download from the website), which focuses on educating community members about unplanned pregnancy. For example, the 'Choose to Care' campaign focuses on options that a person experiencing a crisis pregnancy could consider. This form of primary intervention is aimed at facilitating healthy decision-making and deterring child abandonment.

4.4. Adoption and Involuntary Childlessness

Parenthood and children are unquestionably among the most desired goals in adulthood universally, and are regarded as an essential milestone in life (Begun & Hassan, 2014; Khodakarami, Hashemi, Seddigh, Hamdiyeh & Taheripanah, 2010; Phillips, Elander & Montague, 2014). The experience of permanent involuntary childlessness is said to strike at the very core of self-identity, values, social roles and relationships with others. This is because the ability to procreate and regenerate is considered the most basic of all human drives.

Parenthood, which essentially involves fulfilling the role of mother and father in the family system, is an important life goal for most adults (Dyer, et al., 2008; Shanley & Asch, 2009; Thomson, Woodward & Stanton, 2011). There are many several reasons why people want to parent children, but these reasons are usually inextricably bound to the diverse values attached to children in different societies (Bequele, et al., 2011).

In the western, industrialized world, men and women typically desire to parent because children are deemed to be a means of finding happiness and self-fulfilment in life (Bhargava, Kassam & Loewenstein, 2013; Purewal & Van den Akker, 2007; Rizzo,

Schiffrin & Liss, 2013). People believe that parenthood is central to a meaningful and fulfilling life, and that the lives of childless people are emptier, less rewarding and lonelier than the lives of parents (Hansen, 2012). Thus "children have become relatively worthless (economically) to their parents, but priceless in terms of their psychological worth" (Scheper-Hughes and Sargent, 1998, p.12). For involuntary childless people, legal adoption is a means of finding this kind of emotional satisfaction.

However, for African families, the value of children has deeper connotations. Fledderjohann (2012) drew attention to the fact that a body of research focusing on Africa has identified childbearing as crucial to obtaining adult status, attaining emotional fulfilment, and securing socio-economic stability. Qualitative social science research from sub-Saharan Africa describes children as meeting several needs: a) to complete a marriage; b) provide continuity by maintaining family lineage; c) confer social status d) protect rights of property and inheritance; e) assist with labour and f) offer social security in old age (Bogopa, 2010; Dyer et al., 2004; 2007; Inhorn & van Balen, 2002; Ombelet, 2011).

Matthews et al. (2013), who conducted research in South Africa, made similar findings. Women described the importance of having children to meet marital or other responsibilities to the partner's family; to avoid abandonment by a spouse; to fulfil responsibilities to her own family; for emotional gratification and as an important manifestation of womanhood.

The value of children can be derived from studies on infertility, because the negative repercussions of involuntary childlessness reflect the value of children to parents and the community (Greil, Slauson-Blevins & Mc Quillan, 2010). Although the negative psychological and social implications of infertility have received much attention worldwide, Dyer (2004) highlighted that in Africa, infertility seems to carry additional negative consequences due to the value of children within this socio-cultural context. Stigmatization, ostracism, isolation, marital instability and abuse appear to occur more frequently. Infertility in Africa is associated with marital instability; loss of social security; loss of gender identity; loss of continuity; and loss of social status (Dyer, 2007; Ombelet, 2011).

Many authors have emphasized that the ‘value’ of children is directly interwoven with the purpose of marriage in traditional African society (Dyer et al., 2002; 2004; 2007; Fledderjohann, 2012; Ombelet et al., 2008; 2011; Bogopa, 2010; Buhler, 2008; Inhorn & van Balen, 2002). It stands to reason that for black married couples in South Africa, the adopted child does not carry this same value or worth, and every effort is made to meet socio-cultural expectations before considering legally adopting an unrelated child.

Since children are highly valued in traditional African culture, infertile couples usually approach traditional healers, as well as medical doctors, for treatment. It is generally accepted that traditional healers play a particularly key role in South Africa (Blackie, 2014; Dyer et al., 2004; Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013; Ross, 2008). Research that explored traditional healers’ perceptions of infertility established that black South Africans usually attribute infertility to three major factors, namely biomedical, traditional and supernatural (Mashamba, 2009).

Worldwide the concept of parenthood is also directly linked to the concepts of ‘womanhood’ and ‘manhood’. In other words, “both manhood and womanhood are socially constructed, and thus people must perform their gender role as expected (or nearly so) to maintain their gender status” (Chrisler, 2013, p. 219). Most people ordinarily think that there is no distinction between the terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’: they are coextensive. However, feminist theories emphasize that ‘sex’ denotes men and women on biological features (for example, sex organs) and ‘gender’ denotes women and men depending on social factors (for example, social role, behaviour or identity). It is directly related to self-identification.

Socio-cultural norms and values (especially for married couples) still root the concepts ‘womanhood’ and ‘manhood’ in the physical ability to procreate (Jenkins, 2015). For example, Letherby (2016) found that involuntarily infertile heterosexual couples, who are aware of the cultural pressures that married couples “should” have children, perceive themselves as failures, namely as incomplete men and women if they could not procreate. In other words, the ability to procreate is a symbol of manhood, whereas the state of being pregnant is a hallmark of womanhood.

There is much empirical literature that focuses on how motherhood is intrinsic to womanhood and defines feminine gender identity and social status (Ambrose, 2016; Choi, Henshaw, Baker & Tree, 2007; Frizelle & Kell, 2000; Gillespie, 2003; Malacruida & Boulton, 2012; Kruger, 2006 cited by Mamabolo, Langa & Kiguwa, 2009; Nicholson, 1993). Sives (2016) reiterated that many other researchers have established that involuntary childless has a profound effect on a woman's identity and sense of purpose, which can last a lifetime. Ulrich & Weatherall (2000) emphasized that motherhood is regarded as a 'natural instinct', as 'a stage in the development of a relationship' and as 'social expectation'. She concluded from her study on infertility that these terms were used to construct motherhood as physical, psychological and social completeness and fulfilment for women, and for this reason, inability to achieve motherhood is experienced as guilt, inadequacy and failure (Ulrich & Weatherall, 2000, pp. 327-329).

Gillespie, (1999, p. 44) captured this point well: "If being a mother is synonymous with being a woman, then failure to become a mother constitutes not fully achieving the status of 'women'." Adoption of a child is usually considered second-best or "not perceived as 'real' children and therefore their mothers are not real mothers…women may feel they are failing at femininity if they adopt" (Park & Hill, 2014, p.604).

Batool & de Visser (2016) conducted a cross-cultural study of the psychosocial impact of infertility and concluded that, although the effects of infertility may vary between societies as well as among individuals within the same society, the impact is affected by cultural factors, and so the psychosocial impact of infertility may be greater in non-western countries. Mogoble (2013) pointed out that in traditional African culture, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (including South Africa), for black married women, conceiving children is seen both as an essential part of being a woman and of achieving success as a woman. Many researchers have explored the experiences of infertile black South African women. For example, Mabasa (2009) and Sewpaul (1999), have concluded that African women experience infertility or involuntary childlessness as a particularly painful challenge. Black women are usually stigmatized by the community if they fail to reproduce (Dyer, Abrahams, Hoffman & van der Spuy (2002); Sewpaul, 1999). According to Sewpaul (1999), they are labelled inyumba, an extremely

derogatory term meaning barren or empty, and Mabasa (2009) highlighted the derogatory name of mumba/nyumba/moapa which means a cow that is unable to reproduce.

Society blames women for infertility, and women also blame themselves (Inhorn & Patrizio, 2015; Kothari, 2013; Ombelet, 2011; Raque-Bogdan & Hoffman, 2015; Ross, 2008). Daniluk (1997) and Mabasa (2009) found that women frequently attribute infertility to their own biological failure or past behaviours, such as abortion or extramarital affairs, even when the male partner has been diagnosed with infertility. In cases where the cause of infertility is undetermined, women are more likely than men to attribute the infertility to themselves than to their partners (Robinson & Stewart, 1996).

McLeod and Ponesse (2008) argue that this self-blame stems from the concept of pronatalism that targets women, and that self-blame is intimately connected with the oppression of women. This is a stance which should be borne in mind when considering women's (especially black women's) experiences of infertility in the South African context. For example, prominent political leaders such as Jacob Zuma and Julius Malema, have sought to valorise a traditional African masculinity that is race-specific and predicated on the notion of male superiority (Morrell, Jewkes & Lindegger, 2012). Although male infertility contributes to more than fifty percent of cases of childlessness worldwide, infertility remains a woman's social problem. In a country like South Africa, where hegemonic masculinities are competitive, sexually troubled men in childless marriages do not routinely seek treatment from male physicians, leaving their wives to seek infertility treatment (Inhorn & Van Balen, 2002).

Fatherhood can also be regarded as a social practice shaped by its social context, and fatherhood means different things to different men, given their race, class, ethnicity or sexual orientation. This in turn informs different ideologies and perspectives on what fatherhood is, and who is a man (O'Connor et al., 2004; Morrell 2001). Hunter (2006, p. 104) makes it clear that for black men in South Africa, "fathering a child symbolizes virility and propels forward the status of a young man." Inhorn and van Balen (2002) point out that for a black man in Africa, sexual dysfunction is profoundly emasculating: it deprives him of a male role or identity. In pronatalist, patriarchal societies - such as

South Africa - fertility is typically tied to manhood, and failing to father a child undermines a man's social status of manhood (Hunter, 2006; Makusha & Richter, 2015). Dyer, Abrahams, Mokoena and van der Spuy (2004) also emphasise the notion that fatherhood is synonymous with manhood and that infertile men also suffered from stigmatization, verbal abuse and loss of social status. Because male infidelity is a stigmatized condition associated with a lack of virility and masculinity, many men do not disclose their diagnosis, sometimes to the point where the female partner takes blame for the couple's inability to conceive (Wischmann & Thorn, 2013).

4.5.Infertility and coping strategies

Infertility is usually experienced as a crisis, precipitating a multifaceted sense of loss (Bhat & Byatt, 2016; Letherby, 2012). The most frequently mentioned effects are distress, raised depression and anxiety levels, lowered self-esteem, feelings of blame and guilt, somatic complaints, reduced sexual interest, and breakdown in marriage/intimate partnerships (Goldberg Downing & Richardson, 2009; Khodakarami, Hashemi, Seddigh, Hamdiyeh and Taheripanah (2010); van Balen & Bos, 2009)

Coping strategies implemented by adults diagnosed with permanent involuntary childlessness has been well-researched on a global basis. Researchers have identified both healthy and unhealthy coping mechanisms. Healthy methods of coping include strengthening intimate relationships; changing life goals; successfully (re)constructing identities as infertile individuals and as members of an infertile couple; relying on social support structures such as family, friends and other people who have also experienced infertility; or trying to move on by focusing on the future and participating in the lives and activities of the children of friends and family.

Unhealthy coping strategies include hoping for miracles; social withdrawal; the lack of a mourning period; and avoidance of having contact with pregnant women and children (Benyamini, Gefen-Bardarian, Gozlan, Tabiv, Shiloh & Kokia, 2008; Daniluk, 2001; Karaca, & Unsal, 2015; Schmidt, Holstein, Christensen & Boivin 2005).

Some researchers have narrowed the focus of research down by focusing on meaning-making coping. More educated people have usually blamed nutritional, marital and psychosexual factors for their infertility (Fido & Zahid, 2004). Positive outcomes of constructive meaning-making, included couples who reasoned that the difficulties around their infertility had strengthened their intimate relationship, and they experienced their partnership/marriage as more valuable (Schmidt, Christensen and Holstein, 2005).

Spirituality and religion have also been recognised as meaning-making frameworks (Karaca & Unsal, 2015; Donkor & Sandall (2009), Roudsari, Allan & Smith, 2007; 2014; Tabong & Adongo, 2013). Meaning-making coping from a negative perspective (especially in developing African countries) has included the belief in supernatural causes, such as a curse by evil spirits; witchcraft; and God's retribution (Fido & Zahid, 2004). Unwillingness to adopt was related to the belief that adopting a child translates into a lack of faith in God (Adewunmi et al., 2012). Research outcomes have also identified that a belief in a higher power, or God, can provide involuntarily childless people with the ability to cope with negative emotions and experience more of a sense of calm or peace; the acceptance of their condition as a God-given phenomenon (that is, their infertile condition is God’s will and God is an all-knowing being); and leaving self in the trust of God, the higher being.

Researchers such as Juries (2005), Sewpaul (1999), Dyer et al. (2004) van Balen and Inhorn (2002), and van Balen and Bos (2009) have specifically focused on coping strategies for infertility as applied within South Africa and have identified religious support systems as a positive factor. For example, Dyer et al. (2002) found religious belief to be an important source of support for coping with infertility for black women in South Africa. Sewpaul (1999) similarly established that infertile black couples’ level of involvement with religion and their personal conception of God influence the managing of infertility. Those with elevated levels of religiosity had better adjustment outcomes.

4.6. Adoption and socio-economic status

A comprehensive research literature review indicated that there appears to be no research to date conducted in South Africa that focuses on possible links between black South African's level of education and/or income, and their decisions around adopting an unrelated child. However, international research studies have told us that socio-economic status and levels of income are directly correlated to adoption applicants. In other words, the socio-economic status and level of education of prospective adopters is usually significantly higher than the general population (Beckett, 2009; Modell, 2002; Hoffman, 2013; Triseliotis, 2000 van den Akker, 2007).

Since the end of the apartheid era in 1994, many previously marginalized black South African citizens have become increasingly integrated into the 'middle class' and 'upper class' groups, who participate meaningfully in the economy. In other words, there has been upward socio-economic mobility. This is an outcome of a wide range of policies, including broad-based black economic empowerment (B-BBEE), and employment equity programmes such as affirmative action (Alexander, 2014; Mattes, 2015). Kahn, 2015; Tonheim & Matose, 2013

However, the term 'middle class' is open to debate (Steenkamp, van der Berg & Zoch, 2015). Visagie and Potel (2013) and Ravallion (2010) made it clear that western notions of the middle class have little relevance to developing countries, such as South Africa. This is due to western countries having higher criteria when classifying standards of living for people falling between the lower and upper middle class, and in the West this middle class is usually in the majority. In addition, the extreme inequality of income in South African society is one of the highest in the world (Bureau of Market Research [BMR] of the University of South Africa [Unisa], 2011).

Most black South Africans have inadequate incomes, and households who have achieved merely a modest standard of living are, in fact, close to the top of the country's income ladder. Visagie (2015), referring to a study conducted in 2008, stated that it should be better appreciated that the middle group in South Africa - comprising 4.2 million households - is quite poor, receiving between R1,520 and R4,560 [in 2008

monetary terms] as their total household income per month for a family unit of four. The relatively affluent middle class lies in the upper ranges of income distribution, but still includes, in its lower range, households with a very moderate level of income, that is, total income of R5 600 per household per month. Only a small top end – less than 4% of all South African households – receive a total household income of more than R40 000 per month for a family unit of four.

Although black South Africans who do not benefit from a good standard of living are in the majority, there has been considerable growth in the number of blacks with a moderate standard of living, as well as a significant increase in the number of black South Africans maintaining a high standard of living - a section of the population referred to as affluent or 'upper class' (Olivier, 2007). They have also been labelled Black Diamonds by the UCT Unilever Institute of Strategic Marketing and TNS Research Surveys (Jones, 2007; Olivier, 2007; de Waal, 2008). The Unilever Institute of Strategic Marketing study conducted by the University of Cape Town classified South Africa's middle-class as households earning between R15 000 and R50 000, with their own transport, a tertiary education, employment in a white-collar job and owning their home or spending more than R4 000 a month on rent. Findings indicated that South Africa's black middle class has more than doubled over the past eight years, growing by 250% from 1.7 million South Africans in 2004 to an estimated 4.2 million in 2013 (Simpson, 2013).

In a report compiled by the South African Institute for Race Relations (IRR) in 2015, it was highlighted that approximately 1 in 10 South Africans experience a middle-class standard of living. Socio-economic mobility in South Africa has been directly linked to tertiary educational mobility for all racial groups in South Africa (der Berg & Yu, 2007; Frame, de Lannoy & Murray, 2016; Girdwood & Leibbrandt, (2009) and Keswell and Poswell (2004).

Contemporary legal adoption of unrelated children stems from a westernized cultural notion of family formation and, as mentioned above, is strongly enmeshed with socio-economic class status (Beckett, et al., 2008; Sweeney, 2012). Since there are some black South Africans who legally adopt biologically unrelated children, the question that

arises here is: “Have some socio-economically advantaged black South Africans become acculturated to the ‘white’ westernized practice of adoption?” The concept ‘acculturation’ has anthropological connotations and is difficult to conceptualise in the South African context. Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936, p. 149) define acculturation as “…processes ensuing when groups of individuals from diverse cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups.” When ‘acculturation’ is researched, Western studies usually examine processes accompanying the migration of ethnic minority groups to societies with a large, usually white, mainstream group. However, the South African context is different: the constitution recognises 11 official languages, leaving no single ethnic grouping with the exclusive claim to be the dominant (Jackson, van de Vijver & Biela, p. 608).

Perhaps the best explanation for this phenomenon falls under the concept of ‘cultural mobility’. Many authors, including Emmison (2003), Greenblatt (2010), Gjerde (2004) and Chuang (2004), have clarified that cultures, even traditional cultures, are rarely stable or fixed. Cultural mobility is not an occurrence specific to the 21st century, but has been a key component of human life in virtually all eras. The concept of cultural mobility is open to different interpretations, but within the context of this study the researcher advocated Emmison’s (2003, p. 213) description:

> *The concept of cultural mobility refers to the differential capacity to engage with or consume cultural goods and services [adoption services in this study] across the entire spectrum of cultural life, an ability which is itself premised upon an unequal, class related distribution in cultural competence. Cultural mobility…is the ability to move at will between cultural realms, a freedom to choose where one is positioned in the cultural landscape. … The culturally mobile are more likely to engage with a far greater variety of cultural forms than the culturally sedentary, but what is important to note about their choice is that they are context specific.*

Emmison (2003) also emphasised that diverse cultures coexist and should not be seen in hierarchical terms (that is, one culture higher or better than the other); but people who are culturally mobile are those best equipped to move between different cultures and select practices best meeting their needs. Thus, the factor of choice is central to the notion of choice and economic resources generate competence in this regard.

Another key point to bear in mind when contemplating the relevance of the notion of 'cultural mobility' in South Africa, is that research studies have established that currently most of the black middle class maintain close contact with their working-class family and friends. Ndletyana (2014, p. 14), referring to Moshida's research study (2007), indicated that most emerging, black, corporate, middle-class individuals need to constantly negotiate and re-negotiate their roles and identities, and the different choices they make are often informed by their social backgrounds. When 'going home' over long holidays, they are normally going to ancestral homes where extended families and clans gather. In other words, the black middle and working classes are not cut off from one another, but still share some cultural values and practices.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Relevant academic literature from various sources has set the background for this study. Initially a general historical overview of adoption practice was presented, and then the discussion focused on adoption practice in South Africa. Adoption policies and legislation on a global basis and within South African law - specifically the Children's Act, 2005 - were discussed. Different forms of adoption were also highlighted. The draft adoption guidelines provided by the DSD and NACSA for adoption social workers managing cases of domestic adoption were explained. Finally, the general patterns and trends of research that concentrate on topic areas associated with unrelated adoption, as well as theoretical resources relevant to this study were discussed. The following chapter will take the reader through the research design and methodology implemented to actualise the research study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1. INTRODUCTION

This research study was qualitative in nature and adopted the grounded theory research method, specifically the version of Corbin and Strauss. This chapter presents the central research question and sub-questions that steered the scope and purpose of the study since these questions guide the research process and justify the selection of a research method.

The researcher initially provides a brief history of grounded theory and the controversies regarding the ways in which it should be operationalised. Leanings towards the constructivist research paradigm recently adopted by Corbin and Strauss is described by focusing on the ontological, epistemological and methodological bases underpinning their research model. The core principles and procedures of the grounded theory method are discussed in detail. In closing, the researcher highlights the steps taken to facilitate meeting the criterion of 'trustworthiness' for this qualitative inquiry, and the ethical aspects taken into consideration when conducting this study, are covered.

2. CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION AND SUB-QUESTIONS STEERING THE SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Developing effective qualitative research questions involves reflective and interrogative processes (Agee, 2009). Creswell (2014) advised that the central question in qualitative research should be broad, open-ended, and ask for an exploration of the central phenomenon in a study. Associated sub-questions narrow down the focus of the study. Generally, in grounded theory, the research question orientates the researchers toward process and action (Charmaz, 2014; Willig, 2013). The central research question developed for this study was: What factors affect the decision-making processes of black South Africans regarding legally adopting unrelated children? Typical of

qualitative research questions, it was broad and provided the starting point to explore the research phenomenon.

The sub-questions listed below are linked to this central research question. However, they were not this specific at the outset of the investigation. Rather, their development depended on data gathered when interviewing the five different cohorts of black participants, namely i) adopters; ii) prospective adopters in the process of being assessed; iii) potential adopters who did not enter the adoption screening process after receiving detailed information regarding what the process of the legal adoption an unrelated child entails; iv) social workers specialising in the field of adoption and v) general South African citizens who have some knowledge of legal adoption of an unrelated child.

1. What perceptions do black South Africans have of legal adoption of an unrelated child as a means of family formation, and why is this so?
2. How do black South Africans become familiar with the practice of the legal adoption of an unrelated child, and what influences their responses in this regard?
3. What are the motives for black South Africans deciding to legally adopt an unrelated child or deciding not to do so?
4. How is the adoption screening process being implemented by adoption social workers and how is this process being experienced by prospective adopters?

3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF GROUNDED THEORY METHODOLOGY

According to Suddaby (2006, p. 633), "like most difficult subjects, grounded theory is best understood historically. That is, the historic context from which it emerged is central to appreciating its fundamental distinctive character." Glaser and Strauss were co-founders of grounded theory, and most authors place the establishment of this research approach with their publication *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967). However, the first published account of grounded theory was in 1965, in Glaser's article *The Constant Comparative Method of Qualitative Analysis*. This article contained all the basic elements of grounded theory, and the article was reprinted verbatim as Chapter

Five of the above-mentioned book, which was published in 1967. This was the major methods component of the book (Charmaz, 2006; Hernandez, 2008; Holton, 2008).

Grounded theory methodology was developed as a response to two principal factors. Firstly, it represented a revolt against the dominance of the quantitative ideology that pervaded social science research during the 1960s (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Quantitative researchers use a dominant logical-deductive way of theorizing, which demands the development of precise and clear-cut theories or hypotheses before data collection takes place (Black, 2009; Kelle, 2005). Conversely, qualitative research was often disparaged as 'impressionistic, anecdotal, unsystematic and biased' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 5), thereby occupying a subordinate status within social science research. Mc Ghee, Marland and Atkinson (2007, pp. 334–335) explained that grounded theory offered a way of "challenging the status quo in social research, as contemporary studies were dominated by the testing of 'grand theory' and were deductive in nature".

Glaser's and Strauss' frustration with quantitative methods constituted a stimulus for the development of a method that could instead generate theory from data obtained in the 'real' world. Glaser's and Strauss' research stance was based on the pragmatism of Charles Pierce (1839-1914) and early symbolic interactionists, particularly George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) and Charles Cooley (1864-1929), each of whom rejected the idea that scientific truth reflects an independent, external reality (Suddaby, 2006, citing Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss reasoned that researchers could combine "the depth and richness of qualitative interpretive traditions with the logic, rigor and systematic analysis inherent in quantitative survey research" (Walker & Myrick, 2006, p. 548).

Rather than developing a theory and then systematically seeking out evidence to verify it, Glaser and Strauss gathered data and systematically developed the theory derived directly from data. The goal of grounded theory is thus to discover an emerging theory that explains a process and is comprehensible to those people experiencing the process. They held the opinion that grounded theory had equivalent status to the quantitative research of the time, because it offered "…a foundation for rendering the processes and

procedures of qualitative investigation visible, comprehensible and replicable" (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 33).

While the promotion of grounded theory as a preferred research methodology was initially slow, over the last two decades grounded theory has become one of the most unique and widespread research methods used by qualitative researchers in a wide variety of disciplines. For example, grounded theory research methods are used in Psychology, Sociology; Health; Nursing; Communication; Social Policy; Economics and Marketing (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). Grounded theory methodology has also been utilized in the social work profession (the field from which this study emanates) when researchers aim to develop a theory (Oktay, 2012; Oliver, 2012).

In the 1990s, Glaser and Strauss diverged after their initial collaboration, and each took their research methodology theories in distinctly different directions. This led to the evolution of two models of grounded theory, which are referred to as the Straussian and the Glaserian (or traditional grounded theory) models of grounded theory (Kelle, 2005). Corbin pointed out that this divergence could be expected since both Glaser and Strauss both had different life and research experiences, as well as different educational and philosophical backgrounds (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Strauss began to collaborate with Corbin, and they published *Grounded Theory Research: Procedures, Canons and Evaluative Criteria* in the journal *Qualitative Sociology* (Hernadez, 2008). In the article, they stated that "...while grounded theory has not changed in form since it was first introduced in 1967, the specificity of its procedures has been elaborated in some detail as the method has evolved in practice" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 5). Charmaz' models of constructivist grounded theory and feminist grounded theory have become two established versions of grounded theory (Fernandez, 2012, cited in Evans, 2013).

4. RESEARCH PARADIGM FORMING THE BASIS OF THIS STUDY

Several accredited researchers have stressed that to ensure a strong research design and methodology, researchers must choose a research paradigm that is congruent with their philosophical assumptions from both an ontological and an epistemological perspective, because these concepts are interrelated (Birks & Mills, 2011; Creswell, 2012; Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Gray, 2014; Staller, 2013). The ontological perspective refers to a set of beliefs and ideas about the nature of being [ontology], reality and truth. Epistemology refers to the study of knowledge, and an epistemological perspective reflects a belief about a way of understanding and explaining 'how I know what I know' (Crotty, 1998, p. 3).

The research paradigm of Corbin and Strauss has evolved over time and their current model of grounded theory is in line with constructivism (Cooney, 2010; Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006). At the time of initiating grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss did not articulate the philosophical foundation of this design. As Corbin explained (cited in Charmaz, 2008; Corbin & Strauss, 2015), when Glaser and Strauss wrote *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, which initiated the grounded theory model of qualitative research, they were not considering the formulation of a methodology based on a specific theoretical foundation.

Grounded theory has its roots in pragmatist philosophy and symbolic interactionist sociology (Bryant, 2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Stern & Porr, 2011) When Glaser and Strauss diverged in their research approaches, Glaser's position regarding grounded theory defined him as fitting into the post-positivist research paradigm (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Levers, 2013). The post-positivist paradigm is conceptualized as having the slant of objectivist epistemology and critical realist ontology (Annells, 1997). Researchers adopting this objectivist epistemology claim that researchers can remove most contextual factors when conducting research to remove human bias, and this leads to the discovery of knowledge.

Charmaz (2008; 2011) asserted that the original position of Strauss and Corbin was the same as that of an objective researcher attempting to represent an external reality as

accurately as possible. This fits with ontological critical realism and epistemological objectivity; thus, the original publications would have been consistent with the post-positive paradigm. This is evident in Strauss' and Corbin's foundation book *Basics of Qualitative Research*, first published in 1990. However, Corbin's and Strauss' paradigm shift to the constructivist paradigm is particularly evident in the later editions of the same book, namely the 3rd edition published in 2008 and the 4th edition published in 2015 (Charmaz, 2011; 2015; Levers, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Mills, Bronner and Francis (2006, p. 1) stated that "Strauss' and Corbin's texts on grounded theory … possess a discernible thread of constructivism in their approach to inquiry."

The constructivist research paradigm is theorised as having relativist ontology with a subjectivist epistemology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Staller, 2013). Reality from a relativist perspective is not distinguishable from the subjective experience of it (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). With multiple interpretations of experience come multiple realities; in other words, there are as many different realities as there are people, since no two people are identical. A subjective epistemology from the constructivist research paradigm entails assessing and understanding the actual meanings and interpretations that research participants ascribe to phenomena to describe and explain how they sustain, articulate and share with others their socially constructed everyday activities (Duberley, Johnson & Cassel, 2012, p. 21). Furthermore, universal knowledge of an external reality is not possible beyond individual reflections and interpretations.

A distinguishing characteristic of constructivism is "the centrality of the interaction between the researcher and the participant and it is only through this interaction that deeper meaning can be uncovered. The researcher and his or her participants jointly create (co-construct) findings from their interactive dialogue and interpretation." (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 26). The research paradigm of constructivism is congruent with the researcher's beliefs about the nature of reality. There is also a link between the epistemological perspective of constructivism and the social work frame of reference (Rodwell, 2015).

5. REASONS FOR SELECTING THE GROUNDED THEORY METHOD

Although grounded theory methodology is a qualitative approach to research, it moves beyond exploration and/or description to generate a general explanation (a substantive theory) of a process, action or interaction shaped by the views of participants. The intent is to construct theory grounded in data (Charmaz, 2006; Hussein, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In other words, it aims to neither test nor fit data into any theoretical concepts, but to build theory specific to the context from which it developed, enabling an understanding of the social construction of reality (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Given the paucity of theory, focus and empirical data associated with the central that this study sought to answer, the considered the grounded theory method the most appropriate qualitative methodology for this study.

A key idea in grounded theory methodology is that this theory-development is generated or "grounded" in data from participants who have experienced the process (Creswell, 2012). For this reason, the use of theoretical frameworks to guide grounded theories studies is considered inappropriate; it would contradict the purpose of the research method. However, once analysis has been completed, researchers can compare their theories within the larger body of theoretical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

As far as "grounded data" and this study is concerned, one needs to bear in mind that all five cohorts of research participants had different life experiences on which to base their perceptions and experiences regarding the central research question. For example, all the adoptive participants (namely adopters, potential adopters in the screening process and adoption applicants that did not enter the screening process) had experiences that influenced their decision to contact an adoption agency because they were considering adopting an unrelated child. They could all share their experiences around why they had considered adopting a child, the challenges and support (both internal and external) affecting their decision-making, and how gaining a full understanding of what the adoption assessment process entails affected their thoughts and feelings in this regard.

Furthermore, adoptive participants in the screening process and those participants who had already adopted an unrelated child could provide rich information regarding their personal experiences of the process of being assessed as prospective adoptive parents.

The adoption social workers had expert knowledge in the field of adoption, and personal work experience in orientating and assessing prospective adopters. Black citizen participants, who had some knowledge of the practice of legally adopting unrelated children, had created their perceptions of legal adoption through observation and interaction with others, including black people who had considered adopting or had adopted an unrelated child. Consequently, the researcher reasoned that all five cohorts of participants could make a meaningful contribution to the development of a substantive theory of the research topic.

Other pertinent reasons for implementing grounded theory methodology included:

a) the method of data collection and analysis of data occur concurrently and at higher levels as the process progresses, thereby helping to ensure meaningful results (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

b) Although this method is time consuming in the sense that it requires detailed and systematic procedures for data collection, analysis and theorising, the emergent theory is usually of a high standard and helps to generate future investigation of the phenomenon. More knowledge is desperately needed in the field of adoption in South Africa.

6. METHOD OF GROUNDED THEORY

The research method based on the Corbin and Strauss version of grounded theory will be covered by focusing on the following matters: the development of the research problem and preliminary literature review; the sampling procedure and demographic profiles of the participants; simultaneous data generation and analysis based on the constant comparison method; and the development of a theory.

6.1. Development of research problem

Unlike classic grounded theory that seeks to 'discover' the research problem while gathering data, the researcher's social work experience was central to the formulation and justification of addressing this specific research problem. This *modus operandi* is apparent in later approaches to grounded theory, including the Corbin and Strauss version. The research problem that the researcher developed was based on the challenges she and her work colleagues had faced while working in the Child Protection Unit of one of the largest child welfare organizations in South Africa. Although thousands of black children are adoptable (mainly abandoned children), we repeatedly failed to recruit sufficient numbers of prospective adopters to facilitate domestic adoption.

As explained at the outset of this chapter, Corbin and Strauss have come to advocate an early review of relevant literature. Extending this perspective, Mc Callin (2015) and Birks and Mills (2011) emphasized that it is necessary to undertake a literature review prior to commencement of data collection to identify deficits in literature. This is because the primary purpose of undertaking research is to add new knowledge to a field of enquiry. Thus, in the researcher's preliminary review of the literature, she explored information and documents about current adoption legislation, policies, and practices in South Africa, and attended regular committee meetings organized by NACSA. At the three NACSA conferences conducted to date (2012; 2014; 2016), the problem South Africa is facing regarding placing black adoptable children in domestic adoption is consistently brought under the spotlight.

To avoid bias, the researcher decided not to examine any research findings that were specifically connected to the adoption of unrelated children. She entered the research with some conjectures based on work experience in the field of adoption. An aspect in her favour when beginning her study was that, although she had supervised social workers working with abandoned babies in Soweto and was familiar with the screening process that adoption applicants must complete, she had never personally screened black adoptive applicants.

Based on the first phase of literature review, it became apparent to the researcher that there was no record of a substantive-level theory in South Africa of factors affecting the decision-making processes of black South Africans regarding adopting biologically unrelated children. There were still high levels of uncertainty and ignorance regarding this subject, and the researcher felt it necessary to take a holistic and comprehensive approach in researching the topic to gain insight into what meaning black South Africans attach to the practice of legally adopting unrelated children, and what experiences influence this meaning formation.

6.2. Construction of research tool

Data were gathered by conducting in-depth, personal interviews with research participants, and these interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the research participants. The research tools, namely a semi-structured interview schedule for each of the five cohorts of participants, were created and initially used to guide the conversation towards the topic. Although these semi-structured interview schedules were somewhat detailed when submitting the research protocol to the University of Witwatersrand's Human Research Ethics Committee for ethical clearance, the interview questions guiding the collection of data became less detailed after the first few interviews with participants. This is because, in the grounded theory methodology, other questions are explored as new data are gathered and analysed.

Because the research tools could be used flexibly, there was no limit to the extent of feedback from the participants (Fylan, Miles & Gilbert, 2005). Overall, questions put to participants focused on uncovering perceptions and experiences which influenced decision-making processes related to black South Africans adopting biologically unrelated children.

The researcher pre-tested the research tool with three different individuals, namely one adopter, one citizen, and one adoption social worker. She did not include an individual who was in the screening process, or a potential adopter not entering the adoption screening process, mainly because of the difficulties experienced by adoption social workers when trying to recruit prospective adoptive research participants for the

researcher; especially individuals in the process of being screened. However, it should be noted that the questions eventually put to the individuals within these two cohorts of participants were similar to those asked of the adopters participating in this study.

Although researchers are usually expected not to include volunteers when pilot-testing the research tool, the researcher adopted a different perspective. One volunteer was a black adopter, who not only assured the researcher that the questions presented were understandable and relevant, but she also provided rich, meaningful data when the researcher presented the different questions recorded on the interview schedule to her. Due to the few black adoption social workers available in Gauteng province, the researcher also pilot-tested the interview schedule with a white adoption social worker who had over 20 years' work experience screening both white and black prospective adopters.

As with other types of qualitative researchers, Corbin and Strauss acknowledge that power imbalances between researcher and research participant are inevitable. Thus, researchers need to modify these imbalances by respecting the input provided by participants, and emphasising that their input is meaningful (Hays & Singh, 2012). The researcher did so by expressing interest in the meaning they shared and stressed to them that their knowledge was valuable, and would be of great benefit to adoptable black children.

Furthermore, the researcher took into cognisance Corbin's and Strauss' (2015) reasoning that another researcher could take the same data, and by placing a different emphasis on it, construct a different theory. However, this does not negate the validity of the theory, because the most important thing is that whatever theory is produced is grounded in data, it gives another insight and understanding of human behaviour. Corbin and Strauss also hold the opinion that the accumulation of knowledge over time is the significant factor here, and the more theories that professionals and laypersons can access to explain what is going on around them, the better able they are to shape lives (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, pp. 28-19).

After the researcher introduced herself, explained the purpose of the study, and gained consent from participants to contribute to the study, she began her series of interviews with broad questions that allowed for multiple probes into the area of interest (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These broad questions initiated the interviews, although if a given topic seemed to be of more interest to an interviewee or herself, extra attention was paid to it. As already mentioned, most of the questions on the semi-structured interview schedule were open-ended, providing participants with the opportunity to elaborate on their answers and to pursue their own line of thinking. This facilitated gathering 'rich' data, that is, to "understand what is being investigated as deeply as possible and to situate it within the context of time and space rather than in isolation" (Given, 2008, p.1; de Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2012). The interview process was smoothed by the fact that as a professional social worker, the researcher is familiar with implementing effective communication skills; a basic tenet of qualitative research.

6.3. Contextualising the sample

Purposive sampling was conducted when recruiting prospective research participants. Rubin and Babbie (2010, p. 147) regard purposive sampling as a judgmental sampling method because the screening criteria selected for recruitment is based on the researcher's own knowledge of the population, its elements and the nature of the research aims. Three main factors came into play when the researcher conducted purposive, non-probability sampling:

1) Her social work experience in the field of adoption at an accredited adoption agency;

2) A multi-disciplinary team of professionals from the School of Human Community Development who attended the presentation of her research proposal prior to submission to the non-medical HREC;

3) Informal personal interviews that the researcher had conducted with three social workers specializing in the field of adoption prior to commencing the research study: one white and two black social workers. All three endorsed her decision to focus on the black racial group when investigating the research phenomenon.

The researcher selected five different cohorts of black, adult research participants: i) adopters, ii) prospective adopters in the screening process; iii) adoption applicants not entering the screening process after being informed what adoption entails; iv) adoption social workers and v) general South African citizens. This decision was to develop comprehensive insight into, and theoretical explanation of the central research question. Inclusion criteria used for selecting the last cohort of participants, namely citizen participants, was that they should have some knowledge of the research topic. Marital status, ethnicity and religious affiliation were not aspects of the selection criteria for any of the cohorts of participants. The researcher selected citizens as a cohort of participants in order to understand what perceptions the general public domain has of legal adoption of unrelated children. She also reasoned that for social workers to formulate and implement effective recruitment strategies, they need to understand what factors facilitate and/or inhibit the general publics' positive perceptions of legal adoption.

Initially, the researcher considered interviewing approximately 50 participants to support claims of achieving either informational redundancy or theoretical saturation. However, theoretical saturation was reached after interviewing 39 participants. It is important to note that although 43 participants in total were interviewed, interview material from four of the 43 interviews was discarded prior to data analysis because these participants had not provided 'rich', relevant information for data analysis.

The purposive sampling procedure involved gaining written permission from the directors of accredited adoption agencies in the Gauteng Province to interview their black adoption social workers. The directors of these agencies also granted permission for their adoption social work employees to contact adoptive participants, and if they voluntarily agreed to participate in the study, their contact details were provided to the researcher.

Convenience sampling also came into play in the study when the researcher personally recruited the category of black South African citizens by approaching people of different educational levels. She subsequently decided to exclude from this sample of prospective participants those people who could not express themselves clearly in English. This decision was based on the researcher requiring a translator during the

initial interviewing phase of data gathering, as two prospective participants did not have a good command of the English language. (They had stated that they would express themselves better when using their home language). Unfortunately, data gathered with the assistance of the translator was not 'rich'. The researcher consequently decided that she did not have the necessary skills to pursue this method of gathering data and did not analyse data.

The demographic profiles of individual participants of the five different cohorts are summarised in table format. The demographic details of the interviewees indicated in the tables are their ages, genders, levels of education and marital statuses.

6.3.1. Adopters

The researcher interviewed six single women and two married couples who had legally adopted an unrelated child. These participants had successfully completed the adoption assessment process and had been found fit and proper to adopt. They had subsequently been matched with adoptable children, and the children concerned had been legally been placed in their permanent care with the issuing of an adoption order in terms of the Children's Act. They thus had full rights and responsibilities in respect of the adopted children awarded to them.

Seven of these participants had been caring for their adopted children for over a year at the time of being interviewed, whereas three of the participants had recently completed the screening process and had each been matched with a child eligible for adoption. The Children's Court Enquiry had been finalised and an adoption order issued. The children had been in their custody for less than three months prior to being interviewed by the researcher. One single woman was in the process of adopting a second child. All the participants in this cohort readily shared with the researcher their thoughts, feelings and experiences related to adopting an unrelated child.

Table 1. Profiles of adopters

No.	Sex	Age	Marital status	Level of education	Phase of the screening process
1	Woman	34	Married	Diploma	Completed
2	Man	± 36	Married	Diploma	Completed
3	Woman	43	Single	Post-graduate degree	Completed
4	Woman	42	Single	Post-graduate degree	Completed
5	Woman	40	Single	Post-graduate degree	Completed
6	Woman	40	Single	Post-graduate degree	Completed
7	Woman	43	Single	Diploma	Completed
8	Woman	31	Married	Diploma	Recent completion
9	Man	± 38	Married	Diploma	Recent completion
10	Woman	34	Single	Under-graduate degree	Recent completion

6.3.2. Prospective adopters in the screening process

The researcher interviewed two married couples. Although the researcher's initial intention was to interview more married couples in the process of being screened as prospective adopters, adoption social workers at various accredited adoption agencies found it difficult to recruit volunteer participants falling into this category of participants. The researcher's impression here was that applicants in the process of being screened did not want the screening process to be disrupted in any way, even though they had received the verbal assurance that any information shared with the researcher during personal interviews would be privileged and presented as anonymous when she submitted the research findings.

One of the married couples had just entered the assessment process. They had completed only one interview with the adoption social worker responsible for their screening when the researcher made personal contact with them. The wife did not have

a good command of the English language and consequently her husband tended to dominate the conversation. When the researcher tried to explore their thoughts and feelings about adopting an unrelated child, their responses were frequently brief and closed. However, some of the information coming to the fore was meaningful so the researcher did not discard data gathered.

Conversely, the second married couple that the researcher interviewed were nearing the end of the adoption assessment process. Their approval as suitable adoptive parents who would be placed on an adoption waiting list to be matched with a child eligible for adoption was imminent. This couple felt far more relaxed discussing the matter of adopting an unrelated child with the researcher. Although they did not elaborate much on how they were experiencing the screening process they were undergoing at the time of the interview, some meaningful 'codes' emerged from the researcher's discussion with them.

Table 2. Profiles of adoption applicants in the adoption screening process

No.	Sex	Age	Marital status	Level of education	Phase of the screening process
1	Man	54	Married	Diploma	Beginning
2	Woman	55	Married	Diploma	Beginning o
3	Man	49	Married	Post-graduate	Near end
4	Woman	47	Married	Post-graduate	Near end

6.3.3. Adoption applicants not entering the assessment process

The researcher interviewed eight women who had decided not to enter the adoption screening process after orientation; four of the participants were married; four were single (one was a divorcée). All participants had contacted an accredited adoption agency to inquire about adopting an unrelated child. They had subsequently received comprehensive information regarding what the legal adoption of children entailed. All

participants openly shared with the researcher their personal experiences and perspectives around the legal adoption process regarding adopting an unrelated child. All except one married participant made it clear during the interview that although they had put their decision to adopt a child on hold, they intended to pursue the adoption screening process sometime in the future when they felt better equipped to meet requisites of the adoption assessment process.

Table 3. Profiles of participants not entering the adoption screening process after orientation

No.	Sex	Age	Marital status	Level of education
1	Woman	35	Married	Post-graduate degree
2	Woman	37	Married	Grade 12
3	Woman	33	Single	Graduate
4	Woman	30	Single	Diploma
5	Woman	38	Single	Grade 12
6	Woman	43	Married	Grade 12
7	Woman	50	Married	Diploma
8	Woman	50	Married	Diploma

Of the above three cohorts of adoptive participants - namely adopters, prospective adopters in the process of being assessed, and participants that did not complete the assessment process, the following facts were common to all: they were of the Christian faith; their ages ranged from 30 years to 55 years; the single adoptive participants were younger than the married participants; they had completed Grade 12 and most had pursued higher levels of education; they spoke various home languages, for example,

Sesotho, Xitsonga, Xhosa, IsiZulu, siSwati, and Venda; and they lived in desegregated urban areas.

6.3.4. Social workers specializing in the field of adoption

The researcher interviewed seven social workers accredited to conduct adoptions. Six of these women were employees at child welfare NGOs in the Johannesburg and Tshwane districts, and one adoption social worker was in private practice in Kwa-Zulu Natal. (The said social worker had spent approximately ten years working at an accredited adoption agency in Johannesburg). These social workers' level of work experience in the adoption field ranged from approximately four months to ten years. They readily conversed with the researcher about the issues related to the research topic, deeming these issues to be relevant to the adoption challenges faced in South Africa.

Table 4 summarises the demographic profiles of the adoption social worker participants.

Table 4. Profiles of adoption social worker participants

No.	Sex	Age	Time period specialising in adoption	Location of adoption agency
1	Woman	48	10 years	Kwa-Zulu Natal
2	Woman	31	8 months	Johannesburg
3	Woman	54	10 years	Johannesburg
4	Woman	30	2.5 years	Tshwane
5	Woman	34	5.5 years	Tshwane
6	Woman	± 34	5 years	Tshwane
7	Woman	31	5 years	Tshwane

6.3.5. South African citizens

The researcher interviewed 11 citizen participants. Understandably, because this cohort of participants had not personally completed any phase of the adoption assessment process, only two participants could provide rich information about the adoption screening process. Consequently, the interviews were shorter in duration than those held with the other four cohorts of participants. Generally, the interviews proved meaningful, because the participants shared with the researcher how they had come to learn about legal adoption, and what experiences had shaped their attitudes towards adoption. Table 5 depicts the demographic profiles of the citizen cohort of participants.

Table 5. Profiles of Black South African citizens

No.	Sex	Age	Marital status	Level of Education
1	Woman	38	Single	Grade 12
2	Woman	50	Widow	Grade 12
3	Woman	54	Married	Grade 12
4	Woman	31	Single	Graduate
5	Woman	40	Married	Grade 12
6	Woman	40	Single	Grade 12
7	Man	35	Married	Grade 12
8	Man	46	Married	Diploma
9	Woman	25	Single	Post-graduate
10	Woman	59	Single	Post-graduate
11	Woman	38	Single	Post-graduate

It is important to note that the researcher's gathering of data was not linear. In other words, she did not interview all participants from one cohort and then proceed to interview all participants from another cohort. Instead, the constant comparison method

unique to grounded theory came into play, and the researcher frequently moved from one cohort to another.

6.4. Constant Comparative Method

The constant comparative analysis of data (CCA) is a fundamental element of grounded theory. It is identified as the primary strategy for the coding and analysing stages of grounded theory, regardless of the researcher's philosophical or research orientation (Charmaz, 2011; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Whereas grounded theory methodology shares certain characteristics with other qualitative methods (i.e., it also focuses on everyday life experiences of participants, values their perspectives, and the inquiry is an interactive process between researcher and respondents), grounded theory consists of a systematic inductive, comparative and interactive approach with several key strategies for conducting inquiry (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008).

The process of constant comparison in the grounded theory facilitates a rigorous analysis because the researcher must continually self-question regarding whether the analysis of new data provides categories to previous data, or whether other patterns emerge (Gasson 2003, p. 84). As Gasson (2003) and Bluff (2005) explained, the researcher basically explores what ‘shape’ or ‘pattern’ the data is taking, such as similarities and differences; the contexts in which these are occurring; and the commonality, association and implied causality of the incident. In other words it is an ongoing process which avoids forcing data (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 94; Kelle, 2007).

Although it impossible to free the research process from the intrusion of biases and assumptions, the constant comparison (checking and rechecking the meanings assigned to data against incoming data) is a means of limiting these intrusions (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Corbin and Strauss (2015) focus on three main phases of the analysis in the grounded theory method, namely open-coding, axial coding and selective coding. These will be explained in the following points.

Phase 1: Open-coding

The continuous process of data analysis begins with the *open-coding phase* (also referred to as 'initial coding'). Gibbs (2010) described open-coding as the initial process of data analysis where textual data is broken down by interpreting the meaning of the information that participants shared when being interviewed. It commences by reading though the research data several times and developing initial codes (Saldaña, 2012). In other words, data are split or fractured into individually coded segments.

During the open-coding phase, the researcher summarized, paraphrased and quoted participants' statements and actions. Frequently, she used the interviewee's own words, known as *in vivo* coding. Charmaz (2006, p.51), suggested that depicting meaningful experiences in this way reduces the likelihood of the researcher superimposing their personal preconceived notions on data.

Phase 2: Axial coding

Axial coding involves extending the analytic work from the open/initial coding phase of data analysis. Saldaña (2009, p. 159) pointed out that "The axis of axial coding is a *category* (like the axis of a wooden wheel with extended spokes). In other words, it is a process whereby the researcher identifies some central characteristic (the axis) around which differences or dimensions exist (Wicks, 2010, pp. 154-156). Charmaz (2006, cited by Saldaña, p. 159) clarified that the axial coding phase involves linking categories to subcategories.

When the researcher begins axial coding, he or she looks for causal conditions, contextual factors, and actions and interactions in response to a phenomenon; as well as intervening conditions that help or hinder actions and interactions; and the consequences of actions and interactions. Hutchinson, 1988 (cited in Sherman & Webb, 2004) aptly captured the process by stating that it "forces the researcher to 'tease out' the emerging category by searching for its structure, temporality, cause, context, dimensions, consequences… ". Initially axes/categories can be rather descriptive in nature, but as data analysis progresses they become analytical in nature.

The Corbin and Strauss paradigm of data analysis acknowledges that conditions/consequences do not exist in a vacuum. Most situations are a combination of micro and macro conditions and thus a full range of possible interrelationships between micro/macro conditions are hidden rather than visible. Furthermore, conditions and consequences exist in clusters; as do action/interaction and emotional responses (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

When conducting the axial phase of data analysis, constant comparative data analysis helps link subcategories to respective categories.

Phase 3: Selective Coding

Corbin and Strauss (2015) refer to the third and final phase of data analysis as *selective coding* (usually referred to as 'theoretical coding' in qualitative research methods). As coding progresses conceptual categories are constructed, and certain hypotheses emerge as being more significant in integrating key concepts related to the research phenomenon. Focus becomes more refined as some concepts are re-conceptualized and assimilated into more abstract categories. Figure 2 outlines the three phases of Corbin's and Strauss' data analysis.

Connections among categories, subcategories and associated concepts begin to solidify, and a core category becomes constructed (Benaquisto, 2008). According to Strauss and Corbin, the core category "consists of all the products of analysis condensed into a few words that seem to explain what this research is all about'" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, cited by Saldaña, 2012, p.163)

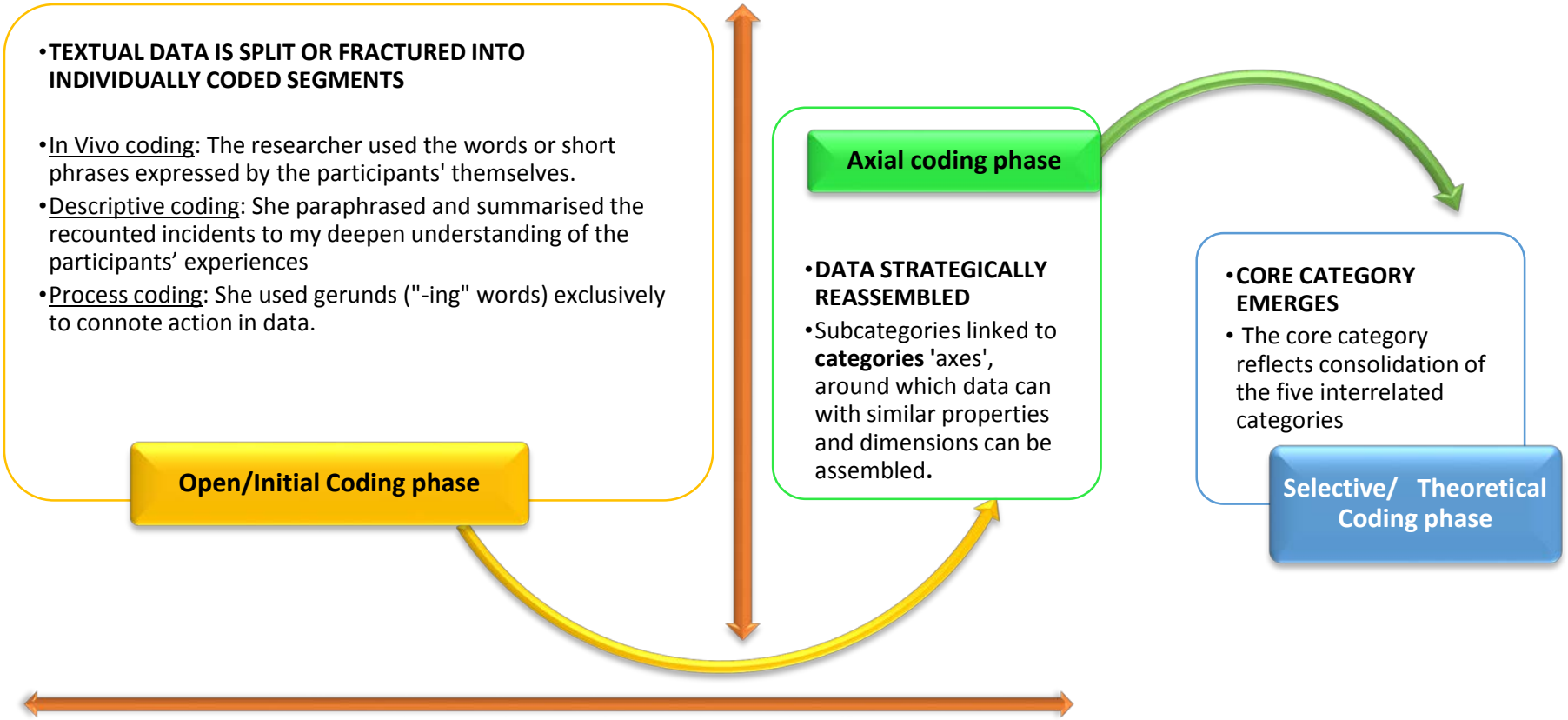

Figure 2. Overview of the Corbin and Strauss model of data analysis

The researcher used diagrams during constant comparison process. She found that the use of diagrams enabled her to organize data, raise her thinking beyond the level of description, identify relationships, and integrate data. The use of diagrams is highlighted positively by many theorists regarding this type of research methodology. For example, Corbin and Strauss (2008) regarded diagrams as effective visual devices to illustrate relationships or links between analytic concepts. Gibbs (2015), pointed out that diagrams can both lay out data in such a way that patterns may be discovered, and develop ideas about processes.

Although Charmaz (2006, p. 218) initially suggested that diagrams or conceptual maps detract from grounded theory, it is interesting to note that by 2014 she commented that diagrams "… provide a visual representation of the different categories and their relationships……enable you to see the relative power, scope and direction of the categories in your analysis…You may find that diagrams can serve useful and diverse purposes at all stages of the analysis process." Bluff (2005) also highlighted that diagrams in grounded theory provide a visual form of the data that is clear and concise. One of the flow charts that I used while analysing data is reflected in Figure 3.

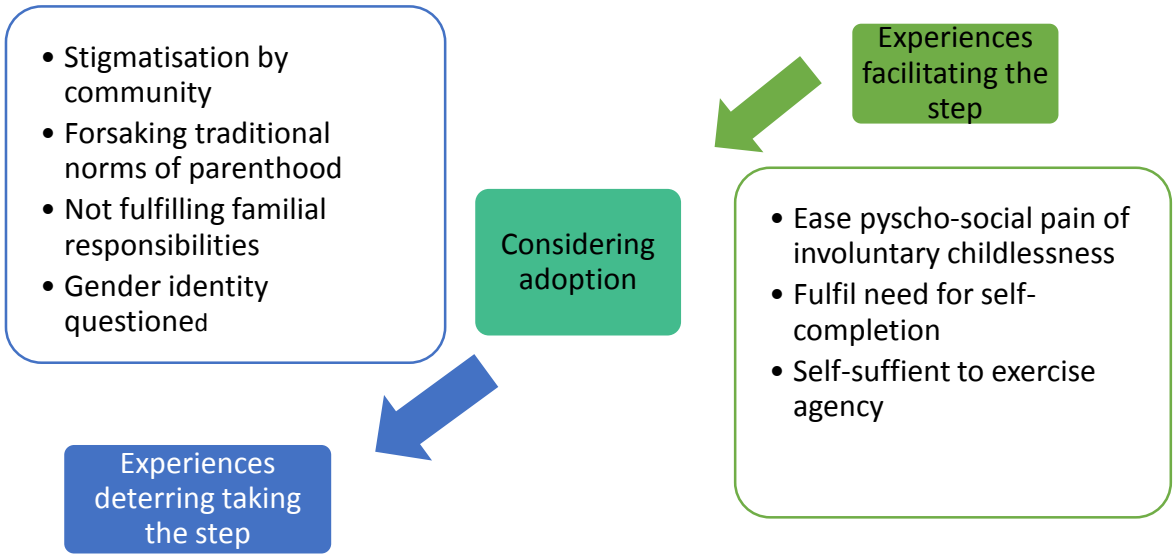

Figure 3. Example of flow chart used during data analysis

Analytic memo writing was used in conjunction with diagramming. Memos were written while constantly comparing and analysing the data gathered, to expand on the concepts and patterns that began to emerge. Corbin and Strauss (2015, p. 120) emphasised that writing analytic memos is a critical aspect of effective qualitative analysis. They pointed out that "…they force the analyst to work with concepts rather than raw data. Also, they enable analysts to use creativity and imagination; often stimulating new insights into data… they are reflections of analytic thought."

The researcher stopped concurrent data gathering and analysis when she felt saturation had been reached. Charmaz (2006) explained that once categories are saturated, they are theoretically abstract, yet substantively grounded. Saturation denotes that the main categories have been fully developed in terms of their properties, and this includes showing dimensional variation and integration. In many senses, saturated categories lose their specificity and become a blend of detail and abstraction (Corbin and Strauss, 2015).

6.5. Reflexivity

Sandelowski and Barroso (2002, p. 222, cited in Ryan, 2005) explained that reflexivity implies "the ability to reflect inward toward oneself as an inquirer; outward to the cultural, historical, linguistic, political, and other forces that shape everything about the inquiry; and, in between researcher and participant to the social interaction they share."

The researcher initially thought that any power dynamics or imbalances between the researcher and social work participants would not affect the interviews, as she no longer occupied the status of social work 'supervisor' (which involves overseeing management of social work cases to ensure quality service delivery). Unfortunately, as characteristic of qualitative research, not all the researcher's reasoning held ground. Although fulfilling the role of lecturer in a tertiary education institution had changed her role status, in some cases her new role created feelings of trepidation in this cohort of participants.

Power imbalances also materialized when interviewing adoptive participants, especially those in the process of being screened or still considering adopting a child. The researcher perceived the participants as wanting to provide the 'right' answers to any questions, to ensure that completion of the assessment process would not be negatively affected in any way.

Furthermore, the researcher did not take into consideration that being a white researcher engaging with black research participants might affect the interaction process. It emerged during interviews that different race presented an unexpected barrier despite the researcher's attempts to develop trusting relationships with all participants. The researcher's identity is that of white, English-speaking South African and this serves to position the researcher within a specific arena of South Africa's political history. She acknowledges that this had some bearing around the shaping of both her interpretation of data (throughout concurrent data analysis), as well as the responses by participants. However, being reflexive also provided the researcher with the opportunity for revising questions put to participants and, to some extent, reframing the research specific focus as the investigation unfolded.

7. TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

Here, trustworthiness concerns the researcher's rigor or soundness in supporting the argument that the inquiry's findings are of worth (Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste et al., 2014). Steps to improve trustworthiness in qualitative research regarding grounded theory have been highlighted by several professionals (for example, Burge & Jamieson, 2009; Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Sikolia, Biros, Mason & Weiser, 2013). However, the researcher chose to base her evaluation of trustworthiness predominantly on five components as suggested by Guba and Lincoln (2005), because their guidelines have won considerable favour (Cope, 2014; Higginbottom, Pillay, & Boadu, 2013; Shenton, 2004). These components are credibility; dependability; conformability; transferability and authenticity.

7.1. Credibility

Credibility is a trustworthiness concept that refers to how much the data collected accurately reflects the multiple realities of the phenomenon.

- *Before commencing the study,* the researcher interviewed an accredited white adoption social worker who had many years of experience screening black adoptive applicants. She confirmed that the research was pertinent, and that the questions to be explored focused on significant issues related to the research topic. She added a few points that the researcher included in the semi-structured interview schedules.

- The researcher spent a *prolonged period in the field* gathering data; approximately 3 years. Social workers specializing in the field of adoption nominated potential research participants that met selection criteria. The researcher is also familiar with the specialised field of adoption based on her lengthy work experience as social work supervisor at one of the largest child welfare agencies in South Africa.

  When she commenced the research study, she was familiar with the relevance of the topic to be researched because, as mentioned before, she had been responsible for supervising social workers managing cases of child abandonment at one of largest child welfare agencies in South Africa. Her professional work experience enabled the researcher to clarify questions presented to the research participants, and to better understand the contexts in which their experiences were taking place. Although the researcher had supervised in the field of child protection, she had never assessed a prospective adopter herself. She deemed this as beneficial in that it would assist diminishing distorted subjectivity. Furthermore, having entered the world of academia before commencing with the research study, the researcher had the advantage of having learnt to combine theory with practice.
- *Memo writing and diagramming* are a crucial part of grounded theory because these research tools help ensure quality; they provide the researcher with the

opportunity to delve deeper into the codes and categories that are developing in the analysis process (Birks & Mills, 2011, pp. 40-48). In her research, when making notes and diagrams, the researcher reminisced on the ways the participants had responded verbally and non-verbally to the interview questions.

- *Personal reflectivity* (as discussed above) also came into play throughout the investigation and enhanced the trustworthiness of the study.
- Another means of improving the trustworthiness of this study was by the *triangulation of data sources.* By focusing on the personal experiences of five different cohorts of research participants regarding the research topic, data were obtained during the conducting of personal interviews with the participants. All five cohorts of research participants were derived from different circumstantial contexts in terms of gathering data. For example, adoption social workers shared their perspectives from the educational status of 'professionals' specializing in the field of adoption in an institutional set-up, which has certain policies and procedures. The citizens shared their views as members of an urbanised community looking at the concept of legal adoption of unrelated children being presented to them for inquiry purposes. The contexts of the other three categories of adoptive participants were also distinct. Many had faced, or were still facing, coming to terms with involuntary childlessness. They had personally stepped into the legal adoption system at some stage and consequently been exposed to the 'responses of different systems and sub-systems' in this regard. As well, each participant shared his or her perspective from within greater contexts, such as cultural orientation, level of education, and religious perspectives.
- *Thick descriptions of data:* The semi-structured interview schedules comprised mainly open-ended questions. This provided participants with the opportunity to openly express themselves and focus on matters they deemed significant. This helped to ensure that the account was rich, robust, comprehensive and well-developed. *In vivo* quotes of participants were used to reflect emerging theory.
- *Constant comparative method* (as discussed earlier) was conducted throughout data gathering and analysis to explain and explicate emerging ideas. This process continued until saturation was reached.

- The researcher presented *some of the preliminary research findin*gs at the NACSA's National Conference in 2014. Social workers in the field of adoption remarked that her findings were pertinent, confirmed that the findings made a valuable contribution to the knowledge system of unrelated adoption in South Africa and made the researcher aware that they had drawn similar conclusions based on their practical work experience.
- *Audio taping:* All interviews conducted were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim.
- *Ethical considerations were upheld* (discussed comprehensively below in point No. 8)

7.2. Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability or consistency of the inquiry processes used over time and under different conditions (Elo. et al., 2014). The constant comparison grounded theory method of data gathering and analysis enhanced the dependability of the research. In Chapter 5, the researcher validates her research findings by comparing her findings with researchers specialising in adoption research, both nationally and globally.

7.3. Confirmability

Confirmability describes the potential for congruence between two or more independent people about data accuracy, relevance, or meaning. Both the researcher's supervisors, who are well renowned experts in the qualitative approach to data gathering and analysis, provided constructive criticism and guidelines in this regard.

7.4. Transferability

Transferability requires sufficient detail around the context of the fieldwork for a reader to decide whether the prevailing environment is comparable to another situation with which he or she is familiar, and whether the findings can justifiably be applied to other settings.

To enhance transferability of the findings, the researcher provided comprehensive information about the problem-statement and her rationale for conducting the study. She stated the main purpose of the study and listed the central research question and sub-questions. She also furnished copies of the semi-structured interview schedule that initially shaped the focus of data gathering and analysis. Furthermore, she presented a dense description of the participants' profiles.

Moreover, the researcher explained background information to establish the context of the experiences described. Rather than seeking descriptive transferability, the researcher discussed conceptual meanings. This was done so that her findings will have relevance both to the accredited adoption social workers at specific adoption agencies in Gauteng, adoption agencies in the other provinces of South Africa. and for organisations serving more widely, such as NACSA.

7. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

For research to be considered ethical, the welfare and rights of research participants are first and foremost protected, regardless of the needs of the researcher (Webster, Lewis, Brown, 2014). Wassenaar, 2006, p. 67) pointed out that "… there are four widely accepted philosophical principles that can be applied in various ways to determine whether research is ethical." These principles are autonomy and respect for the dignity of persons, non-maleficence, beneficence and justice. To embed these principles into this study, the researcher took the following steps:

- *Adhering to a code of ethics*: the study did not commence until the researcher received ethical clearance for the study by the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC Non-Medical). (Appendix 1).

- *Autonomy and self-determination*: The researcher provided all potential participants with the following information in an honest and open manner: the purpose and procedures of the study; the approximate time commitment involved; the voluntary nature of participation and the fact that they could either refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time, without negative

consequences. They were also informed that they may refuse to answer any questions about which they feel uncomfortable (Appendix 2). Furthermore, the researcher sought consent for the audio-taping of interviews from the potential participants (See Appendix 3). To avoid claims regarding the use of coercion or undue influence, the researcher provided no incentives for participation in the study.

- If willingly agreeing to participate in the study, the required that all participants sign the *Letter of Consent* (Appendix 4). In respect of the social work participants, this entailed obtaining written permission from the management of the accredited adoption agencies, which employed them.

- The *confidential* nature of the research study was emphasized to all participants, and it was explained to them that their names or identifying details would not be included in the final report. The names of participants were replaced with codes. The agencies responsible for recruiting participants for this study were named, but their link to specific research findings are known only to the researcher and her supervisors.

  Unfortunately, there was only a small number of black social workers specialising in the field of adoption in Gauteng at the time data were gathered Therefore, their confidentiality and anonymity could not be guaranteed. However, on Table 4 (i.e. demographic characteristics of adoption social workers), the researcher does not align the codes assigned to social work participants with the adoption agency they were employed at when she interviewed them.

- Raw data, which the researcher kept on Onedrive (i.e. file hosting service that allows users to upload and sync files to cloud storage), could only be opened with a secret password. Data are to be destroyed two years after any publications emanating from the research report, or six years after completion of the study if there are no resulting publications.

- This study *did not necessitate or involve any deception* whatsoever, and therefore full and truthful information was stated on the information sheets.

- Possible *emotional harm and the ethic of non-maleficence*: although this study did not expose participants to physical risk, it did touch on sensitive issues and had the potential to evoke feelings of emotional distress in participants. All interviewees were treated with sensitivity, empathy, respect and unconditional positive regard. No significant distress was displayed during the interviews, except by one participant who longed to nurture a child, but her husband was opposed to her wish to legally adopt an unrelated child. She cried bitterly during parts of the interview. As a trained social worker, the showed empathy and provided guidelines on how best she could address her challenges in this regard.

The findings of the study were summarised and given to participants on request. NACSA board members will be notified when and where the research will be published.

8. CONCLUSION

This chapter covered the Corbin and Strauss model of grounded theory, which was the qualitative research method used to answer the research questions driving this study. The essential grounded theory methods and how they were implemented in this study were discussed in detail. There was an account of how trustworthiness of the study was addressed and the ethical considerations to indicate that they were contemplated before and during the process, and were addressed in as best a way as possible. The believed the research process generated rich findings, which are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4
PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher describes the findings of her study, which are based on the grounded theory method of data analysis formulated by Corbin and Strauss (2008), namely the open-coding, axial coding and selective coding levels of data analysis. The researcher presents findings around this levelled coding because it serves to portray how the grounded theory emerged during the coding processes.

2. STRUCTURE OF FINDINGS

In the first section of this chapter, the researcher focuses on findings related to the first two levels of coding, namely open coding and axial coding. In the second section of the chapter, she presents findings related to the final phase of data analysis (selective or theoretical coding), which involved systematic integration of all findings to develop a central category or grounded theory.

Five categories emerged as axes during the axial coding level of data analysis. As pointed out in Chapter 3, the term ‘category’ in grounded theory refers to the “axis”, or centre, around which all coded data revolve or focus when taking into consideration their various “dimensions” and “properties”. Each of the five categories that emerged captured succinctly a possible explanation of perceptions and experiences that affected the decision-making processes of black South Africans related to adopting an unrelated child. It is important to note that the titles of these five categories are categories developed at a higher level of abstraction, when data analysis progressed through constant comparative analysis.

Under each category, the researcher presents interconnected subcategories. Subcategories emerged when refocusing on differences *within* respective categories. Once again, these particular subcategories are the result of higher level axial coding.

Finally, under each of the subcategories, the researcher presents clusters of substantive codes that emerged during initial or open coding phase of data analysis. To depict certain clusters of substantive codes the researcher uses gerund phrases because, as Charmaz (2011) pointed out:

> *I also advise researchers to code in gerunds, the noun forms of verbs, to the extent possible. Gerunds build action right into the codes. Hence, coding in gerunds allows us to see processes that otherwise might remain invisible. Most qualitative researchers code for topics and themes. Grounded theorists code for actions and meanings and do so in gerunds, as much as possible.*

In vivo codes are presented under the different clusters of substantive codes. Although the verbatim quotes used in the open-coding phase may seem anecdotal in nature, this research specifically investigates individuals' perceptions and experiences around adoption that affected their decision-making in this regard. The researcher also uses descriptive coding; that is, she summarises and paraphrases substantive codes.

To ensure the confidentiality of research participants, and to indicate which of the five cohorts of participants the contributing individual represents, the researcher uses the following abbreviations:

A = Adopters

IS = Potential adopters in the screening/assessment process

NE = Potential adopters not entering the assessment process after being familiarized with adoption policy and practice.

(Please note that when the researcher refers to these three categories simultaneously [i.e. A; IS and NE], she uses the term 'adoptive participants').

SW = Adoption social workers

C = Citizens

The researcher also assigns a number to each interviewed member of each cohort of participants. For example, (A1) refers to the first Adopter that she interviewed, and that individual retains that abbreviation throughout the study.

Apart from making quantitative claims in verbal form by using statements such as ‘many’, ‘often’, ‘sometimes’, ‘most’, ‘several’ and ‘some’, the researcher has made certain claims more defined by indicating specific numbers to identify number of participants expressing a certain issue or point of view within different cohorts of participants. Whilst the use of numerical data in qualitative research is contested, supporters argue that the qualitative approach does allow for the use of numbers to supplement the presentation of findings, and this has certain potential advantages. These include providing a clear and more precise understanding of individual experiences within particular settings; describing the occurrence and distribution of these claims or actions in those settings and enabling generalisations between the collection of participants as a whole (Maxwell, 2010, pp. 1-8). Sandelowski (2001) also insisted that numbers are integral to qualitative research, since meaning in part depends on a number.

Steered by the main aim and secondary objectives of the study, five salient categories emerged, namely i) Meanings of Kinship; ii) Information and Support; iii) Cultural and Material Mobility; iv) Parenthood, Gender and Identity and v) Perceptions of Parenting and Childhood. A number of subcategories are linked to each category, as well as clusters of substantive codes.

3. CATEGORY ONE: MEANINGS OF KINSHIP

Four subcategories and 13 related clusters of substantive codes were linked to Category One, which describes how different meanings of kinship affect the decision-making processes of black South Africans concerning the adoption of unrelated children.

3.1. Subcategory One: Perpetuating paternal lineage is vital for married couples.

Three interrelated clusters of substantive codes underpin Subcategory One. Some participants in all five cohorts emphasised that the main purpose of marriage in traditional African culture is generally considered to be the conception of a boy child to perpetuate the paternal lineage. Evidence suggested that because married couples find it difficult to deal with being unable to meet these socio-cultural expectations, adoption of an unrelated child is considered only after all efforts to conceive have failed. The

pressure to perpetuate the paternal lineage is so strong that the wife is stigmatised if she cannot conceive. Infertility can also lead to breakdown in marriages.

***Cluster One*: Conceiving a boy child**

Four of the seven social workers expressed the view that it is invariably members of the paternal family who are difficult to persuade in favour of the married couple's adopting an unrelated child. This is because the traditional black family system is patrilineal in nature and consequently family members want a boy child to continue the paternal lineage. If a child is not blood-related, they consider this process unachievable:

> *Mostly it's the husband's family, the paternal family … You have to explain. (SW 2)*

Some citizen participants also emphasised that perpetuating paternal lineage is important for married couples:

> *Especially, when you're married, the mother-in-law will say she wants a grandchild, you know, 'I want to extend the family'. Especially a boy child, a man child, they want, so for you to go to adopt again, it will be pressure of not having your own child … and again going to get a child, that is not part of ... that is not the same blood of the family. (C 4)*

> *Because how a woman comes to the new household is through lobola … she has been paid lobola and the expectation is that you are going to come and reproduce a family ... there are expectations that come with that … to multiply the family. (C 10)*

Some adoptive participants also focused on this topic. For example, a married adopter in the final phase of the screening process shared a personal experience with the researcher, which reinforced the point that often the members of the paternal family do not support the practice of legally adopting an unrelated child. She explained that her husband was concerned that his parents would respond negatively, and this made him resist adoption for many years:

> *I suggested to him that maybe we should try adoption, and then he said no. But then he wasn't just saying no because he didn't want to, but then he was worried about his parents, what would his parents say. They won't accept her [the adopted child]. (IS 4)*

A married man in the early phase of the screening process disclosed that as he suffers from diabetes, he was the infertile partner. He expressed gratitude for the support he and his wife were receiving from their parents. His wife reinforced this:

> *We have a lot of support … they don't judge us. Even my mother-in-law supports our decision … Like any mother-in-law, she expected that [we would bear children] … I know, but when she sees there is nothing coming, she said I must go for an adoption, there is no problem. (IS 2)*

However, when this couple shared their feelings with the researcher, her impression was that the support from the paternal mother-in-law probably related to her awareness of the fact that her son had infertility problems; not her daughter-in-law.

An adopter emphasised that adopting an unrelated child, especially a boy, is not condoned in the traditional African culture because it means breaking away from a family system where a boy child perpetuates the paternal family lineage:

> *Now I know that in African culture that's an even bigger taboo because the boy carries the surname. (A 3)*

A married woman, although finally choosing not to enter the adoption screening process, emphasised that the support of her husband had been essential before she could contact the adoption agency. She pointed out that one reason that he had approved of her decision to explore adoption was because he already had biological children from a previous relationship:

> *I thank God that when I married this man he already had two children outside of marriage and that kind of made things easier for us. 'Cos now the family already had their grandchildren and they weren't asking me to have kids. (NE 5)*

Social worker No. 2 highlighted that single women are allowed more latitude regarding the adoption of unrelated children. For example, should a single woman be involved with a man, and the man does not support her decision to adopt an unrelated child, the support offered by her family carries more weight than the boyfriend's attitude:

> *You will find that the person who wants to adopt has a boyfriend, but lacks the support of her boyfriend. However, as long as she has her family's backing, she will*

be supported and she will most likely go ahead with the decision to adopt without waiting to hear approval from the boyfriend. It no longer matters whether the boyfriend is supportive or not, as long as the family allows her to go forward with the adoption. (SW 2)

Cluster Two: Applying to adopt when older

Several participants from all five cohorts emphasised that married couples resist legally adopting a child until rather late in their years: For example, a married couple in the process of being screened for adoption at the time the researcher interviewed them, had spent approximately ten years attempting to address their infertility. The husband explained:

We kept on trying, but only to find that we now we have grown fifty years. (IS 2)

An adoptive participant not entering the assessment process, informed the researcher that she had a married friend who is Zulu. She pointed out that her friend tried for many years to conceive a child, but when this proved unsuccessful, her friend's parents finally supported the couple's decision to adopt an unrelated child:

My friend who adopted, she is from a very Zulu background … but after eleven years of no children it was only fair that they give them the opportunity to do what they want to do, and they went ahead. (NE 3)

Many social workers reiterated that married couples spend many years undergoing infertility treatment before considering adopting an unrelated child:

They don't want to give up Priscilla...it's like … let's keep on trying ... a miracle can happen ... we've not infertile. It's like maybe they hear a story of someone who conceived at a late stage ... maybe that person was just lucky ... they will think ... look at so-and-so, let's keep on trying ... admitting to yourself that we are unable to have children ... coming to terms with their inability to have children ... and you know they do attend those infertility clinics ... until they see ... you know what ... how many years have we been this clinic ... nothing has happened. (SW 1).

They've gone through all this. The married couple will come after ten years of marriage. We tried … we thought it would just happen to us. And when it didn't happen, then we consulted doctors. Then we started the infertility treatment and it didn't work. Or we kept on conceiving and losing, conceiving and losing. (SW4).

Medical doctors, traditional healers, everything until all their resources are exhausted. By the time they get here, they are already quite far along in their lives in terms of age, like late forties, early fifties. (SW5)

Cluster Three: Experiencing stigma if cannot conceive

A woman who had adopted a child focused on how a woman is stigmatised if she is unable to continue the paternal lineage:

I know that in our culture, if you can't conceive, then either the husband's family would say he must take a second wife [to carry on the family name] or you'll just be called names until you get divorced, or the husband will have a baby [with another woman]. (A 7).

Some participants from all five cohorts, explained to the researcher that even if a married couple share a loving, stable relationship, members of the extended family put pressure on the husband to 'use' another woman to fulfil the family's need to perpetuate paternal lineage.

3.2.Subcategory Two: Staunch ancestral beliefs nullify legal adoption

Six interwoven clusters of substantive codes illustrate the ways in which ancestral beliefs held by blacks South Africans can create barriers to the adoption of unrelated children, especially boys. Participants implied that one of the main stumbling blocks relates to the fact that abandoned children's ancestral roots are unknown. Consequently, the child will not be accepted as a family member by either the living or the dead (ancestors).

Other participants adopted less rigid viewpoints. They expressed the notion that ancestors will accept an adopted child into the family if the ritual procedures of introducing the child into the family are conducted in a respectful manner.

For Christian adoptive participants, their strong belief system challenged the notions of the existence of ancestors, and that linkage by blood ties is the only means of family formation.

Cluster One: Introducing child to ancestors

All the adoptive participants and social workers pointed out that most blacks who worship their ancestors stress the significance of communication between the living and the dead. When a baby is born, rituals are performed to introduce the baby to his or her ancestors. These participants emphasised that under most circumstances, strong ancestral beliefs are deemed incompatible with legal adoption, since legal adoption would involve attempting to introduce a child to ancestors where there is no connection through blood ties.

An adoptive participant mentioned that she could take the adoption trajectory towards family formation because she did not believe in ancestor worship. However, she made it clear that many other blacks do:

> *I know people who believe especially in ancestors. They always say that: "Ja, but this kid you know might have an attachment to their ancestors, and your ancestors will not recognise the kid … but I don't believe in that. (NE 3)*

An adopter reiterated this point:

> *Ninety-nine per cent of people in our culture, they believe in ancestors. … The traditional belief is that one cannot adopt a biologically unrelated child because if one does not know the child's origin, one cannot introduce the child to the ancestors and they will not accept him. (A 4)*

A social worker echoed a similar sentiment, and highlighted that many blacks reason that rituals cannot be performed to introduce an unrelated child to ancestors:

> *Do you know the clan of the child? Who's going to perform the rituals? ... you know that stuff … the rights and everything ... who's going to perform those things? On what grounds are they going to perform such things? (SW 2)*

Some citizen participants also held the opinion that family ancestors will not approve of accepting an unrelated child into the family because blood ties are crucial regarding family formation. It was underlined that members of the extended family generally do not support potential adopters considering adopting a child (especially an abandoned

child), because the child's cultural and tribal roots (i.e. his or her lineage lines) are unknown, making it difficult to introduce the adopted child into the family system:

> *It's very difficult because you don't know the surname (C3)*

> *There's cultural things. There's this thing when a child is born here at home, there will be a slaughtering of a goat so the ancestors accept the child…I don't know how they handle it… (C1)*

Cluster Two: Misbehaving because ancestors did not accept

A matter repeatedly emphasised by research participants, especially by citizen participants, was that many black people are reluctant to adopt an unrelated child because they anticipate the child will be difficult to parent. This misbehaviour would be attributed to the fact that the adopted child has no blood ties with the family, in other words, he or she does not share the same ancestors:

> *You'll find we're quick to point a finger. You'll find that whenever a child does something wrong that's because you're not part of the family ... the ancestors have not accepted you. (C 4)*

Another citizen also highlighted that blacks are quick to relate the misbehaviour of an adopted child to the fact that no blood ties exist. She expressed frustration that they usually do not take into consideration that related children misbehave too. The participant was adamant that black people need to move beyond this restricted line of thought:

> *People will keep bringing it up, "You know [name of participant], this child maybe there is something that the child needs. Maybe we should try and find the original parents of the child". But I just feel like we are sometimes lazy to think … because actually 80% of the children who misbehave live with their biological parents where they had rituals done in their homes in the right way. (C 11)*

Cluster Three: Slaughtering facilitates acceptance

It became apparent that, although staunch ancestral beliefs probably present as a barrier to family formation through legal adoption, ancestral beliefs are permeable. Several social workers explained that some adopters go through traditional rituals to introduce the adopted child to the ancestors:

Those that believe in their ancestors, they believe if we slaughter something the ancestors will accept the child. It's like when they celebrate marriage. If they don't slaughter the cow, this makoti is not seen as part of the family. It's like a covenant. If we're making a covenant, we're saying this child no longer belongs to another family, it belongs here. (SW3).

Well for them [adopters] they just see a child is a child. Once a child is here and we introduce the child to the rest of the family … and we say to our ancestors: "this is the child", and they accept the child. (SW 4)

Some single adoptive applicants reasoned that it was a respectful act to introduce an unrelated child to their ancestors. In other words, the child would not be rejected by family members who had passed on merely because the child's origins were unknown.

Five of the eleven citizen participants believed traditional ancestral rituals can, and should be, conducted with unrelated adopted children, since this would help the adopted child feel part of the family. For example, one citizen, who was an employee of a child welfare agency and thus had daily contact with children in need of care and protection, felt strongly that it is possible to bring an unrelated child into a family without offending the ancestors. She explained that she included her unrelated, legally fostered child in her family's rituals when communications were to take place with ancestors:

There's this thing when a child is born here at home, there will be a slaughtering of a goat ... so the ancestors accept the child ... I'm fostering a child. Whatever we are doing at home with the ancestors ... whatever. If we sit down, we burn impepo … she's a part of our family. We just sit down and we mention everyone who's here while the elder person is talking to ancestors. Then you say there's Dudu, there's ... you call all of us by names … I don't think there's a wrong way. ... So, they can do that even to adoption child to let the child be accepted by the family ancestors, that there's now this child here at home. (C 1)

Cluster Four: Believing in ancestors is ridiculous

Some adoptive participants regarded denying adoptable children the opportunity to enter a loving family by holding fast to staunch ancestral beliefs as ridiculous. For instance, an adopter expressed frustration when considering that some black people do not condone adoption because the origins of most adoptable children (i.e. abandoned children) are unknown, and thus they cannot be introduced to their ancestors:

I mean how could a dead person hear you? If you are dead, you are dead … just bones. So, it doesn't matter if your child is a Shona or a Nguni … that's the belief that is in our culture because it is that the ancestors, when the child is growing, is going to have problems, maybe sick, and want to go to the ancestors, to the grave … stuff like that. But that is all within your belief. If you believe that, it is all in the mind. (A5)

Other adoptive participants also made it clear that they do not identify with traditional African practices because they interact with people of a similar social standing (middle-class) from many diverse cultural backgrounds, and consequently traditional practices feel foreign to them. A participant not entering the adoption assessment process affirmed:

Well they go crazy [referring to Blacks practicing traditional ceremonies], but for me it doesn't make sense 'cos I don't know that world. I'm not familiar with that world and I wanna bring my child into a world that I know, that I'm familiar with … but I think the world is changing from that … or more in the circle of friends that I have. It's different … I don't know, because I think maybe we have this western … we have this western kind of world surrounding around us. (NE4)

Cluster Five: Circumcising boy child is a debatable issue

Another issue centring on the meaningful role fulfilled by ancestors related to the initiation ceremony, which is a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood in traditional African culture.

Some adopters indicated that they did not support male initiation ceremonies. An adopter commented:

I don't know his parents' cultures and traditions so it's going to be mine … because then we're talking about circumcision, to have him go up to the mountain and do mitha. I said, "No. When he is one year old, I am going to do it [have him circumcised]." If he complains when he grows up and says "No, you shouldn't have done this." I'll tell him why I had to do it at that time … he's going to grow up in an environment where we accept that people die and they are our ancestors, but we don't slaughter cows to go talk to the ancestors. (A 1)

Another adopter was adamant that her adopted son would not undergo traditional initiation. She believed the initiation process is dangerous because it usually involves boys being circumcised by men who do not have any medical training.

Some social workers pointed out that adoption applicants frequently prefer to adopt girls because they anticipate facing fewer complications. They explained that participating in the male initiation ceremony would prove complex because the adopted boy would not know the name of his clan when going through the process:

> *They have questions ... like the clan name ... they would want to know those things because we've got some ... okay ... let me talk about myself as a Xhosa. We've got what we call circumcision when a child has to go to a mountain and everything. They'll want to meet those questions before the child could come. (SW 1)*

> *I think it becomes a problem ... more, more, more ... if the child is going to be a boy. Because at some point the boy is supposed to go to a mountain and then who'll know the clan name of the child? I think it goes back to that unknown fear. What will happen? ... So, for a girl it is easier. (SW 2).*

***Cluster Six*: Believing in Christ**

It became clear the researcher that most adoptive participants had moved away from the unwavering traditional beliefs that ancestors have the power to influence events, and that their approval must be sought when making such important decisions as adopting a child. 'Westernized' concepts of Christianity, especially born-again Christian values and beliefs, do not endorse ancestral worship and this has facilitated mobility towards family formation based on love rather than on blood ties and ancestral lineage.

Five of the nine adopters highlighted that it was their Christian beliefs that aided their decision to explore another option of family formation, namely legal adoption. This is because they do not believe in ancestor worship, which in their cultural heritages was the most dominant influence regarding family formation:

> *I am sorry to say that ancestors to me are dead people, what can they do for you, what do they hear? You know if really you don't communicate with a person while they are still alive then when they are dead what are you saying to them? You know I think you know God is really a centre of everything. (A 6)*

They emphasised that from a Christian perspective, the notion of unconditional love for children should override not knowing a child's origins. For instance, an adoptive participant believed that God can positively influence a loved one's attitude towards adoption. She explained that if her husband had not been a Christian, he would not have

supported her decision to adopt a child because he is Shangaani, an African cultural group holding rigid beliefs and customs. She is Southern Sotho, which she explained is not as inflexible regarding ancestral beliefs:

> *But I think mostly what controls us is Christianity … every time I read the Bible I can see he did a good thing ... he did a good thing … Yes, it's a changing process ... and some people that are Christians believe that it's about love ... if you can't love your own ... I mean as a Christian you can love ... and so they can love an adopted child you know ... unlike people who believe in traditions. (A5).*

Most adoption social workers also expressed the view that Christian beliefs strongly influence black people who are considering adoption. For example, a social worker remarked that when she and other adoption social workers assess prospective adopters that are Christians, they usually emphasize that they do not worship ancestors and consequently do not foresee complications in this regard:

> *We will ask them how they feel about that, considering all the ancestral things that black people believe in. They are open-minded about that and most of them say that they are Christians so they don't practice those traditional things. A baby is a baby. (SW 8)*

Another social worker also highlighted how Christianity shapes the perspectives of prospective adopters regarding legal adoption of an unrelated child:

> *And some people that are Christians believe that it's about love ... if you can't love your own ... I mean as a Christian you can love ... and so they can love an adopted child you know ... unlike people who believe in traditions that this is not my blood and I can't love a child that's not my blood because this child will inherit all my things … my fortune ... this is not my blood. (SW 1)*

A married couple in the screening process emphasised they had no need to approach ancestors to condone their proposed adoption because of their Christian beliefs.

An adoptive participant, although not entering the adoption process, also highlighted that she had moved away from a traditional belief in ancestors because of her Christian beliefs:

Personally, I don't believe in this whole ancestral thing ... My family, they're Christians. I grew up in a Christian family. Christians have different thinking. (NE 3)

A participant in the screening process also emphasised this point:

I believe in God too much. You know. Tradition, those things that they do we don't do as Christians. You know once the child has been introduced in church, baptized that is all you can do. The only thing that you can do is just pray for the child, that's it … people have adopted a Christian way of reasoning. We don't believe in ancestors. (IS 1)

A social worker highlighted that for Christian adopters, Christian rituals have taken the place of traditional ancestor rituals to introduce the adopted child into the family:

And in Christian families, they will say we need to bless this child, and each and every one must know we are blessed with this child, and they speak blessings on the child and the child is accepted. And we see more and more families and churches throwing baby showers for the children showing that this child is accepted. (SW 5)

3.3.Subcategory Three: Creating a relatedness through physical matching.

Two interrelated clusters of substantive codes emerged during the open-coding phase, which were subsequently reduced to Subcategory Three. It became apparent to the researcher that most potential adopters, and all adoption social workers, held the opinion that physical matching of adoptable child with the screened adoptive parents, or other members of their extended family, plays a prominent role in successfully incorporating the unrelated child into the family system. This is because appearance leads others to assume that the adopted child is related to family members through blood ties. Emphasis is also placed on physical attributes of the adoptable child; the lighter the skin tone of the adopted child, the more readily he or she will be accepted into the family.

Cluster One: Seeking resemblances

Seven of the nine adopters and all the social workers either directly, or indirectly, expressed the opinion that physical resemblances between adopter and adoptee play a significant role in making adoption placements successful. They emphasised that

physical matching reinforces the notion that blood ties are important when it comes to family formation. If the adoptable child resembles the adopters or family members, then the child is more readily accepted as part of the family.

For example, an adopter stated that she was initially surprised to learn about the child adoption matching process, but when the adoptee was finally placed in her care she realised that physical matching is a positive process:

> *At first, I didn't know they were going to match me because you must bring photos. I said: "What are photos for? I thought we have to go to where the kids are, the [children's] home and then just look around and choose - …well I like this one". But I find it very nice because they are good matches those people [referring to social workers]. They can choose very well. Everyone was so surprised. This one looks like you, this is God's miracle. Look at the eyes, look at the what, this child looks like the family. (A 7)*

Another adopter expressed a similar sentiment. She described her feelings of anxiety when waiting at the place of temporary safe care (in this case a children's home pending finalization of the Children's Court Enquiry), to meet the child she had been matched with. Feelings of anxiety became feelings of relief and elation when seeing the child's resemblance to family members:

> *They asked one of the ladies to go and fetch the baby. So, while they were fetching the baby, that was when they first told me about the mother of the child and how the child came to be there for the first five months of her life. "Sweet child. You'll love her!" they said, and my stomach was just turning and turning. I remember I was sitting, like how I'm facing you, and there were windows. I saw this woman walking with the baby. I was so scared, I couldn't look. This was it. It had all boiled down to this moment. As she walked in with the baby, because I was sitting so that the door was behind me, I heard my other sister saying, "Oh she looks like my niece". Both of them just went for the baby and that is when I turned and looked and she was just perfect. It was like; this is it! (A 3)*

Some adopters reasoned that if the adopted child looks like them, or a relative, members of the community at large will assume that the child is their biological child, and so the family would not 'stick out' and be scrutinised for taking an uncommon route of family formation:

Matching of facial and body tone with that of the adopters is important so the child can be identified as her own child. If the adoptee looks too different from adopter, people tend to ask too many questions about the child. (A1).

Cluster Two: Wanting a 'beautiful' child

Most social workers stressed that many prospective adopters reason that if the adoptee looks beautiful, members of the extended family will readily accept her as part of the family. A social worker pointed out that virtually all applicants want to be matched with a baby they consider beautiful, and the lighter the complexion of the child, the more beautiful the child is deemed to be:

I remember this one couple ... a highly-educated couple ... err...that was allocated a young baby … a beautiful girl ... but the child had some eczema ... they said: "No ... no!" Despite trying to tell them that eczema is not something serious ... as long as it gets treated, and you look well after the child and follow the doctor's orders you won't have a problem. They said: "No, no!" … Their own needs ... their own personal needs ... it must be a perfect baby so when I bring the child to my family they will just say … oooh!! What a beautiful baby! Skin tone must be light. (SW1).

Another social worker reiterated that the baby's appearance does count, and that a fair complexion is regarded as an attractive trait:

The tone mainly ... I think it is the wish of every parent not to have ... especially in the Black communities ... not to have a very pitch black child. Although they're pitch black, somehow, they feel a medium child … is fair … is attractive and will be accepted in the community. So, they wouldn't want to have a very, very pitch black, although we try to discourage them. (SW 3)

A single woman, who had adopted twins, was the only adopter who pointed out to the researcher that the children's skin tone did not affect the matching process for her:

They don't really look like me. I know they do the matching thing, but I just thought that, maybe because mine were two twins you couldn't match. They don't even look the same. Here they are. [She showed the researcher a picture of the twins]. I remember she [the adoption social worker] said to me, "We don't have light children, and you are light" and I was like, "Hey, if I had a boyfriend that was pitch black, what would have been the problem? (A 2)

A social work participant explained me that she has observed that when applicants are applying to adopt a child for the first time, they are very conscious of the adopted

child's facial features. However, when black people adopt a second child this is not necessarily so:

> *I think it can be changed when they are coming for second adoptions you know ... because they are more relaxed the second time around ... like you say ... "remember the first time you had to wait and wait because you were waiting for one, two, three... [referring to facial features] … finally you got your child after so many months of waiting" Yes, they are more relaxed when they come for second adoptions ... unlike the first time they're scared ... the child must be perfect. (SW1)*

Some social workers informed the researcher that adoption social workers in general are conscious that facial structure and tone of complexion play an important role when matching a child with prospective adoptive parents. For this reason, if the child eligible for adoption has non-South African facial features and a dark complexion, the child concerned is usually made available for transracial or intercountry adoption.

3.4.Subcategory Four: Prioritising related children's needs

Two clusters of substantive codes emerged during the open-coding level of data analysis, which were grouped in a fourth subcategory.

Most participants emphasised that meeting the needs of related children usually takes precedence over taking care of unrelated children. They pointed out that informal foster care is prioritised over legal adoption because members of the extended family frequently experience financial hardships.

Cluster One: Meeting related children's needs is prioritised

Some citizen participants voiced that they did not have the financial means to take the humanitarian stance of adopting an unrelated child. Rather, their priorities lay in meeting the needs of family members first because some family members are facing trying circumstances and in desperate need of child care support. For this reason, informal foster care is frequently practised. (As already mentioned, informal foster care is a private child care arrangement involving members of an extended family).

One citizen stated that many blacks prioritise taking care of related children on a long-term basis, especially when the children are orphans.

> *I would look after the family member's child because the family comes first. Many parents in the family are passing away and we owe it to these children to take care of them. (C 9)*

Another citizen agreed:

> *So, to be able to extend yourself, and present yourself, and say here I am willing to bring up somebody else economically … my children who expect me to be able to support them … also your parents want to be supported. So economically, in the extended family, there is a huge need of helping somebody else [in the family] … So, you don't think about children who are babies somewhere else; you think about what you see all the time [in one's own family]. (C10)*

Cluster Two: Forfeiting financial support

Quite a few of the adoptive participants clarified that one important reason for relatives not approving of unrelated adoption is because they anticipate forfeiting the financial assistance they might ordinarily receive from the adoptive parents to meet their own children's needs:

> *Like myself, I am single and I didn't have kids … they look at you to look after their kids … like to educate them, to help them with clothes, stuff like that, feeding them … look at you with that eye. So, if you go to adoption they don't like it because once you adopt the kids, you are going to look after your own kids and then, what about them? They're not going to get that benefit they used to get from you … they won't like it; they won't encourage it. They will start to criticise you because you know what, they're not going to get those same benefits that they used to get. (A7).*

3.5.Summary of Category One

Findings suggest that for many black South Africans, the notion of what constitutes kinship is tightly restricted to consanguineal ties (blood ties) and affinal ties (ties through marriage). In other words, kinship is predicated on biological connectedness and marriage. These two elements are the core markers of kinship.

Since perpetuation of paternal lineage is regarded as the primary purpose of marriage, married adoptive participants felt much more obliged than single adoptive participants

to meet socio-cultural expectations to continue the paternal lineage. It was highlighted that the paternal family does not condone legal adoption because they expect a related boy child to further their lineage because lobola has been paid in this regard. For this reason, married couples usually consider adopting an unrelated child only after an extended period of unsuccessful infertility treatment.

Resolute ancestral beliefs presented as a probable barrier to legal adoption as a means of family formation because in terms of ancestral beliefs, family systems have rigid boundaries based on blood ties. Descent is continuous between the living and dead (ancestors), and children who are not biologically related to the family, and whose ancestral origins are unknown, are usually not considered kin. In addition, notions around the morality of uprooting a child from his or her ancestral connections was questioned, and the consequences were regarded with trepidation.

Adopting a boy was assumed to be more challenging than adopting a girl because a boy child is expected to complete the traditional initiation ceremony: a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood. A boy needs to know details about his clan to complete this process.

Some participants adopted the stance that ancestral beliefs are permeable. Christianity emerged as a significant spiritual resource enabling adoptive participants to embrace a different definition of family, namely that kinship need not be based solely on the natural process of human conception. Instead, connectedness through love is the essence of family formation. Furthermore, traditional rituals of introducing new children to their ancestors are replaced by Christian rituals to welcome the child into his or her ‘new’ family.

Many adoptive participants believed that if the adoptable child’s physical features are considered aesthetically pleasing, or beautiful, by members of the extended family, this will facilitate integration of the child into the family system. In other words, physical attractiveness will break down resistance to acceptance.

Most adoptive and social work participants regarded the physical matching process as a means of developing kinship because it creates an observable sense of connectedness between parent and child. To share the same blood means to share certain physical resemblances, and when adoptees resemble screened adopters, or members of the extended family, this is observed and may aid in initiating the process of family formation. This can be either through the adoptive parents' own deep feelings of relatedness to a child who is physically like themselves; or through the positive responses they anticipate from members of their extended family and community members. Physical resemblance was perceived as substantiating kinship and in effect it mimics or impersonates the family system. This serves to normalise family relationships.

Finally, some participants (particularly) held the view that the child care needs of related children should take precedence over a prospective adoptive parent(s) investing their time and finances in a child not related to the family. A traditional communalistic approach is thus warranted.

4. CATEGORY TWO: INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

Category Two is linked to five subcategories and 12 clusters of substantive codes. The five subcategories denote how information regarding unrelated adoption is being distributed to the public; Christian beliefs are not homogenous concerning legal adoption; the impact of personal contact between adopter and prospective adopter; the motivational elements of group cohesion and the quality of the worker-client relationship during the screening process.

4.1.Subcategory One: Information promoting adoption is lacking

Owing to the urgent need for black families who are willing and able to adopt unrelated children, social workers have made ongoing awareness and recruitment efforts through the media. Much of the focus has been on promoting same-race adoptions. Although social work participants assumed that information regarding adoption was being received by the public, it became apparent throughout the interviews that social

marketing efforts must improve to become truly effective. Most citizen participants presented as being unaware of adoption media campaigns.

Two clusters of substantive codes emerged in initial coding phase of data analysis.

Cluster One: Promoting adoption through media

All the social work participants felt confident that their awareness-building campaigns through the media of radio and newspaper were making community members aware of unrelated adoption. One social work participant mentioned:

> *I think they're heard us ... we spoke on the radio … the radio that reaches Gauteng and Mpumalanga. So, most of the people that came from there will say "We heard you on radio and we didn't know where you were ... then all of a sudden we could find you." (SW 3)*

Another social worker pointed out that articles in newspapers and magazines also encourage people to consider adoption:

> *There are some cases where they say … "I've read an article in a magazine about adoption and they said contact your local child welfare agency." (SW 1)*

However, six of the 11 citizen participants pointed out that most black people in South Africa don't know much about legal adoption. A citizen asserted that social marketing campaigns focusing on adoption are not as effective as they could be when comparing them with many other social issues that are brought to the public's attention:

> *I think they should advertise for it. They should speak about it. Honestly speaking I've never seen adverts on adoption. Do they ever flag them on TV, on radio, on posters? I mean we see billboards about gender-based violence about 'Stop this. Stop that' about rape and about HIV. There are other social challenges that we are dealing with. We see billboards about don't buy illegal cigarettes. Why can't we have a billboard about, "There are children waiting to be adopted, if you want to consider adoption, call this number." (C 11)*

Cluster Two: Requiring knowledge in rural areas

A point made by several participants was that in under-developed areas (especially rural areas), residents have little knowledge about adoption, and information is required there. A citizen suggested implementing recruitment strategies on a macro (community) level:

> *If there will be more people who will go out and teach the community about adoption … Knowledge ... that's still the problem. Because some of the people ... more especially the rural people ... It's like they don't know they can go to child welfare and adopt a child... ja ... If they know about adoption ... another way they can solve this ... I think that will help. (C 1)*

An adoption social worker also raised the issue that recruitment strategies should target rural areas on a community level. She suggested that educational projects in rural areas are the answer and emphasised that social workers need to enter rural areas via key role players who are respected by community members:

> *Let's talk about villages, rural villages in the Eastern Cape and Kwa-zulu Natal, Limpopo. You know the traditional leader is so much ... much respected. So, I think if the education can go to those traditional people ... usually have what is called chiefs, and then there's Sibonda ... I don't know what that is in English, but those are the people you must first make contact with. Even if you are going to do research ... those are the people … you'll have this small meeting with the chief or the Spondas … So, whatever they put on the table ... because they're going to ask questions and everything … so you must have all these answers for them. (SW 2).*

4.2. Subcategory Two: Conflicting Christian beliefs

Some adoptive participants suggested that Christian people can be a promising source to tap into regarding adoption recruitment drives because the notion of altruism is a central tenant of Christianity. Quite a few involuntary childlessness participants perceived adoption as a calling from God, and this strengthened their decision to adopt a child. On the other hand, findings also suggest that turning to adoption can be construed by other Christians as showing a lack of faith in God, and consequently adoption is not condoned.

Three clusters of substantive codes emerged during the open-coding phase of data analysis.

Cluster One: Defending adoption with Christian beliefs

An adopter suggested that social workers can encourage Christians to adopt a child by raising awareness among the priests about the many adoptable children in need of loving families. She pointed out that priests can validate adoption by citing verses in the Bible:

> *The priests should pick up something in the Bible that would mention that for God so loved the world, you must love the kid, even if he's not your biological one … don't have to wait for your own one. God will still do miracles, but in His own time ... just imagine, God will bless you with this [an adopted child] because that's showing us love. (A7).*

Cluster Two: Believing God has other plans

Five of the ten adopters stressed how their Christian faith had positively influenced their decision to adopt a child. They explained that they have faith in an all-knowing God who loves them and believe that He wanted them to go ahead and adopt an unrelated child at this stage of their lives. They also believed God was fully aware of their experience of involuntary childlessness and supported their decision to take the adoption trajectory in life to form a family.

Adoptive participants in the assessment process also highlighted that their faith in God had shaped their decision-making process. For example, a married Christian man in the screening process expressed that he and his wife recognised God's omnipotence:

> *…. we felt God's plan was otherwise. We have accepted our fate. (IS 3)*

Two adoption applicants who decided not to enter the screening process indicated that they had considered adoption because they felt God wanted them to adopt a child. For example:

> *When I was in my mid-twenties … about 27 years, I became a born-again Christian. I thought adoption is the way God is answering my prayers ... I started thinking. (NE 2)*

An adopter clarified that she had decided to adopt a child because she had faith that God will bless her with the ability to conceive a child if that is His intention for her, even if it is to be much later in her life:

So, I decided rather than stressing myself, going through emotional stress looking for a baby [trying to conceive], I should just go through adoption. And then if God wants to bless me with a child, its fine. God can still bless me with a child in His own time. (A 4)

Cluster Three: Portraying lack of faith

It became evident to the researcher that Christian beliefs do not necessarily encourage or promote adoption. Participants highlighted that many Christians perceive the legal adoption of unrelated children as demonstrating a lack of faith in God. For example, one of the adopters voiced her experience that many people who don't condone adoption believe that if one has faith, God can perform miracles regarding the conception of a child:

One colleague asked me: "I heard you were on maternity [leave], but you were not pregnant". So, I had to explain to her that I adopted a child. And she asked why I adopted a child. So, I told her: "I cannot have children.' Then she just said: "Rubbish! Pray hard about it!" I didn't want to argue. What I have decided, and what I've come to terms with is that if God is going to give me a child, it will happen. But I am going to do what I can do now … there are some people who say, "Don't believe the doctors, just believe with everything that you have" ... It's their beliefs, I guess. (A 5)

This pertinent point was also raised by one of the adoption social workers. She explained to the researcher that many blacks believe that a woman going ahead with adoption indicates her lack of faith in a Supreme Being. Adopters find this response by their Christian community members disheartening, especially when medical complications have indicated that there is no chance of conceiving a child, and that faith will not work miracles. This sentiment was confirmed by a social worker:

Some Christian families think if you go for adoption, you've lost faith in God. So, if you're a person of faith, you should wait upon the Lord. The Lord will give you a biological child … I had a family that the woman was injured during the accident and her womb was taken out. The family kept on saying: "But God can do miracles. You can fall pregnant." So, they were like denying. (SW 4)

4.3. Subcategory Three: Personal contact with people who have adopted an unrelated child makes all the difference.

When delving into how adoptive applicants learnt about legal adoption, most of them emphasised that making personal contact with other adopters was far more persuasive than learning about adoption via media. It boosted their confidence around adoption being an achievable goal, and allayed fears related to raising an unrelated child, for example, how attachment between adopter and adoptee develops.

However, although personal contact between prospective adopters and adopters presented as being convincing, it is important to note that this did not guarantee that potential adopters will enter the adoption assessment process. For example, all eight participants who did not enter the adoption assessment process had experienced personal contact with adopters before deciding not to proceed. However, perceived challenges became more real when learning in detail what challenges adoption entails. Two clusters of substantive codes emerged during initial coding phase.

Cluster One: Experiencing personal contact is persuasive

Many of the adoptive participants emphasised that having personal contact with someone who has adopted a child, and is content and fulfilled in their adoptive parental role, encourages people considering adoption to initiate contact with an adoption agency. For instance, an adoptive participant who ultimately did not enter the adoption process after gaining insight into what the adoption process entails, emphasised how her friend had initially motivated her to adopt a child:

> *My friend, uGugu, …she adopted and she told me about it. I was so excited. She was my only opening to say this is how I've done it. Because you know it's always an idea, and when I'm ready I'll do it. But when she did it, it was like "Wow! This is real and I can do it too!" (NE 3)*

Most adoption social workers reiterated the constructive influence personal contact with an adopter usually has on potential adopters:

> *Most of the time it is that assurance or confirmation of what they already intended to do in the first place … Remember there are myths and perceptions that only*

certain people can adopt, or people have fears that their past will be judged when they come to adopt … or misconceptions that if you already have a biological child you won't be considered. So, when they see other people in their situations who are adopting and successfully doing so, then they have that sense of hope. (SW 6).

We have a couple from Limpopo who adopted and we placed the child with them … I think sometime in July. So, someone called after that saying that they were referred by the couple. So, when people see that adoption is possible and that it is normal, then they get motivated. (SW 7)

When adoption orientation is presented in a group setting, an adopter is usually invited as guest speaker to share with potential adopters her experiences of adopting a child. All adoptive participants who had attended orientation sessions where an adopter presented her thoughts and feelings about her decision to adopt, felt uplifted and reassured that they were making the right decision to adopt an unrelated child. Even one adoptive participant that subsequently decided not to enter the adoption assessment process when what the assessment process entailed, expressed:

Oh, my God! I think that was the most special moment. The child actually ... [tears swelled in her eyes]. My tears sometimes they come …. it was special hey … They had a few minutes with us … like they let us play with the child and they were just explaining what they went through the whole process; how long it's been and how their family reacted; the challenges they went through and how they overcame them…. obviously, you get into a community, you've never been pregnant and all of a sudden there's a child in the house … It was quite special. They made me feel the decision I had made was right for me. (NE 3).

A prospective adopter in the screening process stated that she had experienced the orientation workshop as meaningful because it supported her hope that legally adopting an unrelated child can lead to a life of happiness. The guest speaker at the workshop was a black social worker who had adopted an unrelated child:

She was talking positive things… she was so positive and you know, how happy she was having a child. (IS 2)

Cluster Two: Allaying concerns about being able to bond

Many adoptive participants indicated that having personal contact with people who had adopted children was not only informative and inspiring, but allayed certain fears about not becoming attached to the child.

An adoptive participant not entering the assessment process explained to the researcher that she was initially concerned that she might not be able to establish a mother-child bond with an adopted child. She felt that this would be daunting if the child had been legally placed in her care, since adoption is a permanent arrangement. However, a friend at work who had adopted a child shared with her that she too had experienced similar concerns when adopting her child. Her friend confirmed that even if attachment between the adopter and her child does not necessarily occur immediately, it will happen:

> *My friend helped me deal with it at work ... but will I really love this kid like my own? … She basically related a story to me that happened when she adopted. She said the first day they gave her her own child she felt a gap between her and the child. And she felt like that for two months or so. She felt that she couldn't connect with this kid. Until one day, she says the child fell I think from the bed or something. She said: "I dropped"; she dropped a kettle of boiling water or something … because she rushed to save the kid. And she says from that moment she knew she had connected. (NE 1)*

7.1. Subcategory Four: Group cohesion has motivational elements

Most of the adoptive participants highlighted the benefits of attending adoption orientation in groups. Often group cohesiveness developed based on personal interaction where they could relate to one another, and mutually encourage one another to complete a challenging screening process. Men, especially, felt encouraged when learning first-hand that other men were also considering adoption. A few social workers did not recognise the benefits of conducting orientation in a group setting. They pointed out that many adoptive participants experience meeting in a group set-up as an invasion of their privacy.

Two clusters of substantive codes emerged during the open-coding level of data analysis.

Cluster One: Learning you're not alone

Five of the seven social workers concurred that meeting in groups usually has a positive influence on the potential adopters' decision to proceed. Prospective adopters tend to

feel strengthened when learning that there are other people they can identify with; and that there are other people who have effectively confronted their personal inabilities to conceive children, despite this traditionally being considered a fundamental life-purpose for men and women.

Two adoption social workers commented that group interaction eases the social pressure often placed on applicants by their families and communities to refrain from adoption. This is because it helps reduce feelings of isolation and self-doubt, and offers encouragement, affirmation and hope:

> *They will say: "You know we didn't expect to find so many people here in this meeting". Because we ask them ... and they say, "we thought it would just be a meeting between me and the social worker ... so many people ..." No, the grouping really motivates them and they consider they're not alone … and they get motivated ... they make friends in the group and will keep on phoning each other ... some of them will say that 'You know [name of social worker], I never knew there were other black couples adopting. Others will see old men, priests adopting, so that gives them a boost of confidence. "But we are not alone in this" ... they form links with one another for support. (SW 1)*

> *What we find is that most prospective adopters gain their self-confidence and self-respect after that meeting because most of them think that they are the only ones going through that experience. After sharing their experiences, we get really positive results. (SW 8)*

Similarly, five adoptive participants affirmed this point of view. They expressed that when attending orientation in a group setting, a sense of comfort and belonging developed when realising that they were not the only people experiencing the challenge of involuntary childlessness and considering unrelated adoption as a means of meeting this need. Two adoptive participants stated:

> *And the other thing I really liked about it ... we managed to see how many people are in our situation ... we managed to interact with other couples. We ended up saying we are not alone ... we are not alone … Oh ... we ended up exchanging contacts. (A 1)*

> *We were open to each other; that we can't have children. Adoption was the best … You know, each one came with his own story. Ja … so most of us, especially us ladies, we were open … we can't have children. (IS 2)*

A single adopter also made mention that she had received support in the group set-up:

> *So, they don't frown upon you… you know other people would frown upon a single person saying, "I want to adopt." I guess they have seen it all, so they were very nice I'd say. (A 2)*

A Zulu adopter, although speaking English fluently, found the experience of being able to relate to others from her ethnic group particularly reassuring. She was scheduled to attend an English orientation session, but had decided to attend an earlier scheduled orientation meeting, which was to be conducted in Zulu, because she wanted to speed the screening process up. This was a positive experience in an unexpected way for her. She remarked:

> *I was like, wow! I felt if I went to an English orientation thing, I could have felt not even appreciated for what I am going through. (A 5)*

She also indicated that in her opinion, blacks face more social discrimination than whites do when choosing to adopt an unrelated child.

However, a couple of social workers expressed a different point of view regarding orientating potential adopters in a group setting. They explained that the adoption agency where they work had initially conducted orientation sessions in group settings, but found this approach unsuccessful:

> *At … [name of adoption agency] in the past, they used to do the black same race adoption orientation in groups and lost everyone and they didn't understand why. But when we started calling people individually, we realized that to them they come to this first meeting with certain expectations. They did not expect or realize that there would be so many other people in the orientation and there was that fear of sharing to a whole group of unknown people, rather than just to the social worker. (SW 5)*

Cluster Two: Raising confidence of men

A social worker emphasised that men often become more relaxed about proceeding with the adoption screening process after meeting in the group context where other men are present:

Especially with the men … when they come into that meeting they realise there are other couples … and somehow it gives them confidence that this is the correct decision. It's not just them. There are other people that are in the same situation that they are in. (SW 3)

4.5. Subcategory Five: Quality of client-worker relationship affects applicants being assessed.

Two clusters of substantive codes relate to how the quality of the working relationship between the social worker and the prospective adopter can have a positive or negative influence on the adopter's experience of the assessment process. On a positive note, most adopters highlighted how supportive and encouraging their social workers (all adoption specialists) had been during the screening phase, which is usually a time of anxiety for them.

However, a concerning issue arising from the findings is that it cannot be assumed that all professional social workers support the practice of legally adopting an unrelated child. Any discriminatory attitude on the part of the social worker around legal adoption can probably have a negative impact on applicants in the process of being screened because they are emotionally vulnerable at that time.

Cluster One: Appreciating social worker's support

Most adopters spoke highly of the quality of the relationship they had shared with the adoption social workers managing their cases. To illustrate this point, one of these adopters explained to the researcher that she did not reside in Johannesburg at the time she underwent screening, but the social worker showed flexibility in addressing her needs by speeding up the screening process:

I don't know if it was only her or what ... but she was so lovely and sweet, and she would give one person enough time to talk ... and somehow, we were treated like people who came very far ... what do you call it? We would perform two sessions in one day. (A 1)

Another adopter pointed out that, when adopting her first child, she had built up a trusting relationship with the adoption social worker responsible for screening her.

Subsequently, when applying at the adoption agency to adopt her second child, she requested that the same adoption social worker conduct her screening process.

Cluster Two: Disrespecting adoption applicants

From a negative perspective regarding the role of social workers, another adopter focused on how the social worker-client relationship can exacerbate stress experienced in the screening process if that social worker does not support adoption in principle. Although most of her screening process had been successfully completed by an adoption social worker in the employ of an adoption agency, a social worker rendering services in her home town, had to conduct a home visit to assess her living conditions before the screening process could be finalised by a presiding officer at the Children's Court in her area of residence. A social worker employed by the Department of Social Development conducted the home visit. The adopter felt that the social worker who had conducted the home visit was unprofessional in the sense that she adopted a discriminatory point of view. She did not take into consideration the prospective adopters' feelings of exposure and threat because the adoption process had not been finalised:

> *It could be at that stage that this person's [referring to a prospective adopter in the assessment process] insecurities and uncertainties are confirmed, and that person might have cold feet and stop [i.e. not complete the screening process]. It irritated me; that's all I know. I felt I should go visit her and tell her that, "I want to educate you for the benefit of others and those like you." (A 3)*

This adopter raised the point that some black social workers who do not specialise in rendering adoption services might not support the practice of the legal adoption of an unrelated child.

4.6. Summary of Category Two

When uncovering ways black South African citizens become familiar with legal adoption, the researcher noted that adoption awareness campaigns are not proving as effective as assumed by social workers. Generally, media is reportedly not drawing

much attention to the crisis of child abandonment and the need for adults to meet these to children's need to be raised in a loving family environment.

Making personal contact with people who have adopted unrelated children, and who openly express the joy they have experienced in this regard, offered encouragement, support and reassurance to prospective adopters. This is because they learnt first-hand that other black people had made this life-changing decision without regret. However, although personal contact reinforced the decision to adopt, it did not guarantee that persons inquiring about adoption would enter the screening process.

Christianity was identified as a significant potential value system within which to promote the adoption of an unrelated child. Christian prospective adopters considered that caring for a child in need of a loving family environment would be a way of expressing Christ-like love. On the other hand, it became apparent that turning to adoption as a route to family formation was perceived by some others in the Christian community as showing a lack of faith in God as an omnipotent force that can bring about miracles, such as helping women to conceive if they exercise patience and sufficient faith in His will.

Group cohesiveness was an important source of support for most prospective adopters, and they frequently motivated each other to realise their decision to adopt a child.

The quality of the working relationship between social worker and prospective adopter also had a significant impact on the completion of the adoption screening process. Social workers specialising in the field of adoption had a positive attitude toward adoption and played a supportive role throughout the stressful assessment process. However, it also became evident that not all social workers approve of the legal adoption of an unrelated child, and this negative attitude poses further stress on prospective adopters in the process of completing the assessment process.

5. CATEGORY THREE: CULTURAL AND MATERIAL MOBILITY

Three subcategories and eleven clusters of substantive codes are linked to Category Three. Subcategory One probes how level of education, and its associated socio-economic status, moulds attitudes around adoption. The second subcategory notes that single women that enjoy financial independence feel confident making personal choices. The third subcategory reviews the seemingly-common perception that adoption is a white custom.

5.1. Subcategory One: Education and socio-economic status shape perceptions of adoption

All the adoptive participants were familiar with the practice of legal adoption prior to approaching adoption agencies. They attributed this familiarity to their educational status; that this had given them the opportunity to interact with people from other cultures who understood legal adoption as a means of family formation. Their perceptions around legal adoption were not related so much to ethnicity, as most adoptive participants self-identified as belonging to a westernised culture.

It is important to note that the profiles of the adoptive participants reinforce this finding. In Chapter Three, the researcher highlighted that all the adopters and participants in the assessment process have tertiary education. Five of the eight participants not entering the screening process had tertiary education and three had completed Grade 12. As a direct result of their levels of education they were all financially stable. When the researcher visited them at their homes to conduct personal interviews with them, she observed that they lived in middle- to upper middle-class residential areas.

Three clusters of substantive codes emerged that are linked to this subcategory.

Cluster One: Experiencing diverse cultural beliefs

Most adoptive participants were of the point of view that the level of education achieved by an individual, influences his or her perceptions of legal adoption. For example, an adopter with an honours degree affirmed the essential role that education plays when

breaking away from traditional black socio-cultural norms. She indicated that this occurs since better-educated blacks usually interact more with white people, especially in the work environment, and develop a broader perspective of the options available if wanting to raise a child:

> *I think the more educated you are, the more open-minded you are ... because education plays a very vital part you know in this whole thing. When you're educated … you're exposed to office life or corporate world ... You come across different kinds of people and you pick up things from them. You start to see the whole world in a new way. (A 7)*

Another adopter pointed out that the adoption model being implemented in South Africa is a 'Westernized' model, which is unfamiliar in the traditional African context. However, she felt that due to her higher level of education, she was better-informed around other ways of forming a family, and felt comfortable in accepting the adoption route:

> *The model is Western; it doesn't follow your traditional cultural ways. But it wasn't foreign [for me]. It didn't make me feel like I was doing something that I didn't know. (A 5)*

A participant, although not entering the adoption assessment process, made this point:

> *I want to bring my child into a world that I know, that I'm familiar with … I think the world is changing from that [traditional culture] … or more in the circle of friends that I have. It's different … I don't know, because I think maybe we have this western … we have this western kind of world surrounding around us. (NE 4)*

As with the adoptive participants above, some citizen participants also drew attention to the fact that better education directly influences an individual's perceptions of adoption:

> *As people become more educated, they are more accepting of legal adoption. (C 7)*

Cluster Two: Understanding little, if not well-educated

The point made clear to the researcher was that culturally traditional people living in underdeveloped and/or rural areas are less likely to feel positive about the notion of adopting an unrelated child. This is because people in rural areas usually are not well-

educated and thus not familiar with legal adoption. An adoptive participant affirmed that she felt comfortable applying to legally adopt a child because she had not grown up in an underdeveloped urban area, or in a rural area. She expressed that formal adoption is an unfamiliar practice in these areas. The practice of legal adoption is more familiar to people of higher socio-economic status:

> *You know in our communities, people normally adopt children from their siblings or family members. Not a lot of people [legally] adopt … like a child you don't know … a stranger … To a certain extent, I think it's still foreign … especially those in the townships areas … But the middle-class they're really getting into the whole thing of adopting. (NE 3)*

Cluster Three: Misconstruing ethnic relatedness

Some citizen participants were also of the opinion that an individual's educational and socio-economic circumstances, rather than ethnicity, primarily shape the decision to approach an adoption agency to inquire about legally adopting an unrelated child:

> *I don't think there is a big difference being a Tswana and being a Xhosa and being a Zulu and so on. I mean as much as people make that out to be … But I think that people move from different perceptions and beliefs more easily because they have moved up in the social, economic and educational ladder … what really determines the difference is the economic level, and the economic level has a lot to do with educational levels. (C 10)*

5.2. Subcategory Two: Empowered, single women are exercising free agency

Six of the nine adopters that the researcher interviewed were single, well-educated women who occupied permanent jobs and earned stable incomes. Single adoptive woman participants claimed that they did not feel subservient to either men or members of the extended family, when it came to make the decision to adopt. If they wanted to parent a child, and this decision was not supported by their boyfriend or family members, they felt confident enough to make the decision independently.

Some single, woman participants felt that the move towards independent decision-making is characteristic of the younger generation of women in South Africa. The implication is that these women exercise 'individualism', rather than being dominated

by the traditional practice of communalism, where a form of consensus decision-making is required.

Most of the single adoptive participants identified that financially empowered women are not readily supported by black men, as this undermines traditional male roles. Furthermore, they did not foresee themselves entering a permanent intimate relationship soon and did not want to become too old for their application to adopt a child to be turned down because they did not meet age criteria.

Another interesting point coming to the fore was that some participants suggested that many black, single women are intentionally putting motherhood on hold because they are prioritising furthering their careers.

Cluster One: Making independent choices

Several single adoptive participants explained that they had made the decision to adopt independently, in other words they did not first seek the consent of their parents, or members of the extended family. They stated that first seeking consent of family members when making important life decisions is characteristic behaviour of generations of traditionally-orientated young black people.

One of the adopters pointed out that older generations had a 'communal' mind-set and thus the first step towards making a crucial decision involved meeting with significant others to discuss the way forward. She regarded herself as a member of the 'new' generation, that is, an educated generation, which regards personal decision-making as a right:

> *As much as we are still family, we are no longer connected in that way; that your decisions are always communal. We should remember that we are entitled to make our own choice whether or not to adopt ... moving on an individualistic front … You can hear remarks, but some people could have felt like that not having the guts to say … this is how I want to do it. It's your choice really. (A 3)*

An adopter who had post-graduate training and had resided in the United States for several years before returning to South Africa, explained that she had been financially

independent for many years, and made her own life decisions. She was confident enough to initiate contact with an adoption agency without waiting for the consent of her family members:

> *… It was an independent decision. It was my decision. (A 2)*

Cluster Two: Challenging men's traditional supremacy

Some single adopters commented that the more empowered single black women become, the less likely they are to become involved in long-term, intimate relationships with men. Their reasoning here was that most black men still uphold the traditional notion of patriarchy in the home environment, and that the man should fulfil the role of the primary income generator and principal decision-maker.

> *I think that makes it easier now for single women to adopt, and being [financially] independent as well makes more men run away … so that shows that the more and more we get single and we get educated and we don't have men, the more we're going to adopt. (A 4)*

Cluster Three: Adopting before too old

For single adoptive participants, a key factor setting in motion the process of adopting an unrelated child was the realisation of their own biological ageing. They were uncertain as to a future in a long-term, intimate relationship or marriage. They reasoned that their taking on a maternal role need not necessarily take place within a marriage situation.

> *I've never been married … I am still hoping to get married, but as I was growing older, then I thought, you know, I love. I have always loved children and I thought if I'm going to wait for a husband and to have my own kids, time, you know, time is not on my side ... that let's, you go … let's go and adopt, because we are not going to hold, you know … hold back our lives, hoping that someone will come, because we don't know when that someone will come. (A 7)*

Cluster Four: Prioritising socio-economic opportunities

Some of the single citizen participants that were interviewed were childless, but not involuntarily so. An interesting cluster of substantive codes emerged when the

researcher explored why they had not considered adopting an unrelated child. A single woman pointed out that middle-class, black citizens - especially single, well-educated women - are focusing on improving their career and financial circumstances, as these opportunities had not been available to them during Apartheid rule. Consequently, they do not have time to address humanitarian issues, such as raising unrelated children in need of permanent care. Rather the focus is climbing up the economic ladder:

> *I want to think, relating to my own personal circumstances, that most black people at this particular age who might be considered to be middle-class, didn't grow up middle-class. So, first of all you start in life at a very, very low base … So, it's a battle climbing up ... it's been a battle … (C 10)*

5.3. Subcategory Three: Adoption has racial connotations

Most participants suggested that legal adoption tends to be categorised as a practice for whites; people that enjoy financial advantages, and consequently can provide their children with a good education and comfortable lifestyle. One cluster of substantive codes is connected to a third subcategory.

Cluster One: Becoming 'coconuts'

Four adopters pointed out to the researcher that adopting an unrelated child is generally regarded by the black community as a practice followed by wealthy white people. Consequently, many blacks don't want to be associated with legal adoption because it presents as a self-indulgent, costly practice for the privileged in society, especially white people.

One male adopter indicated that when he and his wife adopted an unrelated child they were labelled as acting like whites, as their family and community members anticipated that they would raise their adopted child in the same way as whites raise their children. For example, they would be provided with a good education, a privilege usually only afforded white children. He remembered having a conversation with his mother about adopting an unrelated child, and she remarked:

> *Most of the time they [adopted children] become snobbish, or they become coconuts if they are Black people you know. Coconuts in the sense that coconuts are brown*

outside, white inside, meaning they would go to the best schools, they speak top English, if I can put queen's language. They are normally spoilt you know; they are sort of spoilt children … I mean in the society that I lived in … we've always been told that you need to struggle in order for you to be someone. (A 9)

5.6. Summary of Category Three

All the adoptive participants in this study had high levels of education and as a result, had been exposed to the multiplicity and heterogeneity of values, customs and beliefs that co-exist in contemporary South Africa. They felt comfortable in this interactive environment, and familiar with their own families' traditional beliefs and practices regarding family formation. However, they maintained that they had chosen to self-identify more with the western lifestyle of individualism and ways of thinking since this stance enabled them realise their desire to parent.

Each single adoptive participant felt confident in their decision to adopt an unrelated child without first seeking the approval of significant others. It was implied that women empowerment is not fully supported by black men because it undermines their role of breadwinner and decision-maker that men have traditionally played in the family system.

Several adoptive participants and citizens commented that the practice of adoption is perceived as a practice of family formation to suit the wealthy, and so the practice has racial connotations. Only whites, or blacks entering the 'white material and cultural paradigm', will consider legally adopting unrelated children.

The single adoptive women in this study reflected a postmodern feminist attitude - a feature of western thought - in that they were prepared to circumvent the traditional South African institution of patriarchy. They felt self-reliant enough to ignore the male-dominated, often oppressive norms and values that are still held in contemporary traditional society. They believed they have the right to experience motherhood outside of marriage since, due to their elevated socio-economic status; they were unlikely to marry in time to conceive a child. They reasoned that the growing gender equity and social development within the South African work environment, where educated black

women are being empowered to climb the socio-economic ladder, is antagonistic to the traditional model of black marriage.

Single adoptive participants and citizen participants also made the point that gender equality seems to threaten the hegemony of black men. One of the most important traditional social roles a man is expected to fulfil is that of the primary income generator within his family system. This group equally emphasised that many childless, single women in South Africa are intentionally postponing motherhood to capitalize on the socio-economic opportunities not afforded them in the Apartheid era. These desired goals are being prioritised. Consequently, it would be difficult to recruit this category of single women.

6. CATEGORY FOUR: PARENTHOOD, GENDER AND IDENTITY

Category Four focuses on the emotional and cultural implications of infertility and non-parenthood. Four subcategories and 11 clusters of substantive codes are linked to this category. The subcategories refer to infertility being a significant form of loss, not only due to the inability to parent, but also owing to cultural definitions around gender roles and identities. Subcategories also reflect that informal adopters of related children do not enjoy the same rights and responsibilities as do biological parents and this was experienced as frustrating and unfulfilling.

6.1. Subcategory One: The trauma of infertility

Infertile adoptive participants experienced infertility both as a deep psychological and emotional pain, and as a form of loss: the loss of expectations around womanhood; of life possibilities; and of realising their need to nurture a child. Some of these women explained that it was only after coming to terms with their situation that they had considered legally adopting an unrelated child.

Cluster One: Paining when infertile

Four of the eight woman adopters disclosed to the researcher that they had considered adopting a child because they hoped that this step would relieve the overwhelming

psycho-social pain they felt owing to their inability to bear a child. This sense of trauma was also expressed by the women in the process of being screened as prospective adopters, as well as some of the women who did not enter the screening process after receiving the adoption orientation.

A married adopter who had experienced repeated miscarriages expressed:

> *That is the worst pain ever. … you know I have experienced other pains, but this one was just something else ...You have all your friends with kids … they always talk about their kids and your mind always goes back to your experiences … and you know how did they feel when they got pregnant … and what I felt when I got pregnant was pain … and at the end of the day the baby didn't survive you know ... So, I don't want to talk about that you know … they [referring to mothers of children] didn't experience the same thing … for them it is joy. (A 8)*

Another adopter with infertility pointed out:

> *So, it will come up every now and then, but I always think for me it's like a death that you will mourn, over and over again, every now and then. But other days it's okay. I can live with it. (A 3)*

An adopter explained that when she finally reached the point of acceptance, she could consider other options of addressing her need to mother a child. She also emphasized that the pain of infertility never goes away:

> *I had to go through the process of acceptance and forgiving myself, and saying, "You know what, there's another way of doing it." But, I had to go through that process of acceptance and move on. I just came to a point of saying: "This is what it is; you cannot change it, so what are you going to do?" I just accepted it. If it's not meant to happen, it's not meant to happen and just move on. It's not easy. It wasn't easy. It's still not easy to live with. (A 5)*

All seven adoption social workers verified that many women interested in adopting an unrelated child have been exposed to the psychological and emotional pain of infertility, and that it requires a process of grieving to come to terms with the condition. Usually it is only once this process has taken place that they contact an adoption agency to inquire about adopting a child.

6.2. Subcategory Two: Informal adopters are not 'real' parents

Most of the adoptive participants had personally experienced informally fostering a relative's child and rejected it as an option of parenting prior to approaching an adoption agency. This was because they had experienced emotional pain when the child had to be returned to his or her parents because they had formed close bonds with the related child they had cared for. They also felt exposed to negative criticism and judgement regarding their parenting skills.

Other adoptive participants and some citizen participants had observed people involved in this form of 'parenthood' in the black community. They described informal foster care as a negative experience of parenthood because this traditional African child care arrangement exposes one to a sense of insecurity due to the lack of permanency.

Conversely, some citizens regarded informal foster care as having the benefit of being a flexible child care arrangement in that should the foster parents' material circumstances change; other arrangements for the care of the child can be made.

To satisfy their need to nurture, woman adopters expressed the desire to adopt infants because they thought they would be able to develop loving bonds with a young child.

Six clusters of substantive coders are related to this subcategory.

Cluster One: Raising a child permanently

Six of the eight woman adopters had practiced 'informal' foster care, and emphasised that they did not want to care for a relative's child again because they wanted a child to be 'their' child permanently. Each of them highlighted that when informally fostering a related child, she had experienced no sense of security that the child would remain in their care indefinitely. For example,

> *They [biological parents] would want to take the child back, you know, not realizing that she is as she is because of what she has with me. So, you know, I don't want to have to go through that way, where you love a person. [a relative's child] … you*

willingly open your heart to love someone and then it's not easy to close that door again when it's open. So, I didn't want that to happen. (A 6)

Another adopter had taken care of her elder sister's baby for a few years while her elder sister had completed her education. She became closely attached to her niece during this time, and her niece referred to her as 'mama'. However, her sister subsequently insisted that the child be returned to her own care, without taking cognisance of the close bond that had developed between aunt and niece.

A married couple in the screening process also shared that they did not want to take care of a relative's child because they did not want to be subjected to further hurt, inevitable once the biological parents insist that the child be returned to their own care. The wife stressed that she wanted to legally adopt a child because it would provide her with the assurance that she could love the child forever, knowing that the child could not be removed from her care:

… because if you take her child [a relative's child], you know, she can just say, okay take my child, I take that child … You see that the child is growing, the child is everything, but she come and take the child back … she said it's my child. I'm taking my child back and you are left with nothing. So that's why we decided for an adoption because she is going to be our child. (IS 2)

Many adoptive participants, although not entering the screening process, expressed that similar sentiments had encouraged them to consider adoption:

I mean they can come and take the child anytime and they can come and say to you, but this is my baby. You know, and to me I could not do that [informal fostering] … I need this child to be mine forever, to eternity ... and not having to have someone coming in to say, but that's not your biological mother (NE 5)

It is like losing a child that you have 'mothered' as your own. I did take this child when she was two months. When the child is ten years they come with everything, and he knows me, I am his mum. Even now he just calls me "mum". (NE 4)

I tried it, it doesn't work … in African culture it doesn't work. I said [to the elder brother] "No bring your daughter to me, then I will send her to school, I will look after her; buy her clothing, send her to school, good educations and all I can afford" … Immediately when the child is starting to progress, they will say no, no, no, bring my child back … Guess what happened? … the mother came and took the boy away from us. (NE1).

Several adoption social worker participants also highlighted that most adoption applicants who approach agencies have experienced informally fostering a relative's child. They underlined that the adoption applicants do not want to continue to experience parenthood this way because it lacks permanency and exposes them to emotional loss:

> *Some of them [adoption applicants] find out that they have been let down by the family. They've tried to raise a child of the relative ... and when the child has grown up, the family has taken the child away from them. Then the people realize all along that we've been used by the family. "We've tried to be kind to this family, look after this child; raise this child; educate this child; invest our love in this child, but look it now ... we've lost ... we've lost ..." (SW 2)*

Six of the nine citizen participants reiterated these claims around informal foster care. They pointed out that they had personally observed that childless people find taking care of a relative's child emotionally unrewarding because they are frequently reminded that the child they're caring for is not their own child. One citizen explained:

> *It is a big problem … if someone adopts one of the family's children and then when he's grown up and then you find that this person says: 'No this is my child. Remember you don't have a child. This is my child and I want my child. (C 1)*

This participant continued that because childless couples need a sense of security, they prefer to care for orphaned children within the extended family. However, even fostering an orphaned child has drawbacks because a foster parent cannot assume the full rights and responsibilities of a biological parent. Furthermore, orphaned children are usually older, and most involuntarily childless adults want to take care of young children.

Cluster Two: Wanting full parental rights and responsibilities

The notion that informal foster care offers no sense of permanency, and does not afford the foster parent full rights and responsibilities in respect of the child was a significant, factor around the belief that when a child's placement is legalised, the permanency of the placement is guaranteed.

All seven adoption social workers emphasized this point of view. For example, a social worker used a Sesotho proverb to aptly describe how adoptive applicants become weary of informal foster care. This is because despite repeatedly requesting for some form of guarantee that the child will not be removed from their care by his or her biological parents, this often happens regardless; and the child's parents become frustrated by these frequent requests for permanency:

> *Mphe, mphe iya laphisa. Motho ogona kesagaye. It just means that if you keep on asking, you get tired and you also tire other people. So, when people finally come for adoption, they realize the protection the law offers them upon adoption. Legally the child is now theirs, and the law says the child is yours as if it was born from you … all the rights and all the responsibilities. I don't ask anyone, and I can do anything I want to do because this is my child. Also, the fact that they change the names and surnames of the child, to stipulate that the child is theirs is very important. That sense of ownership gives them assurance and peace that this is their child." (SW 4)*

The appeal behind legal custodianship was evident in all the adopters. For example, one adopter affirmed this desire for legal 'ownership'. She indicated that if a child has the same surname as his or her parent, this is a form of proof that the child is their child and cannot be removed from their care:

> *I wanted her to be mine … I wanted her to take my surname and to be completely mine. (A 4)*

Some of the citizen participants recognised the benefits of legalising a child's placement. For instance, a citizen commented that legally adopting a child affords the adoptive parent rights and responsibilities in respect of raising that child:

> *The [legally adopted] child is yours so you have every right to do what you want to do with that child, unlike when the child you've taken from the family member… (C 7)*

Another citizen participant also highlighted this point of view:

> *I would say it's actually even safer to go through the adoption way because that way one has got that sense of ownership that this will be legally my child. (C 2)*

***Cluster Four:* Ensuring child doesn't leave to return to her mother**

Although not a dominant discussion point, it is interesting to note that a couple of adopters specifically focused on the 'insecure structure' of informal foster care from another perspective. They explained that it is not only the biological parents who can destabilize a child care placement, but the child as well if he or she is informed by others that the 'parents' caring for him are not his biological parents. Thus, it is a more stable family situation to rear a legally adopted child. One of the adopters described a disturbing experience she had witnessed when her mother had raised a cousin's child:

> *…but the kid when she grew up, at like nine or ten, people told her that my mom was not her mom; she had a mom in Pretoria. And she started saying, "I want to go back to my mom." Then my mom took her back. I don't want to go that route … there is no legally binding anything. The kid can just grow up and say, 'I want my mom'… I didn't want to go through that. (A 2)*

Cluster Five: Wanting no interference

It also became apparent that most of the adoptive participants' felt that when informally fostering a related child, their capacity to parent effectively was frequently challenged by the biological parents of the child or other family members. They explained that the biological parents and/or family members constantly inspect their parenting of the child and try to find 'fault' with them as parents. Adoptive parents stressed that when informally fostering a relative's child, they did not have the opportunity to parent the child independently and felt constantly undermined as parents. The frequent criticism directed at them was perceived as an ongoing reminder that the child they were parenting was not their own child.

Interference in their parenting was a main concern of many adopters who had informally raised a relative's child. One adopter, who was parenting her sister's child at the time the researcher conducted an interview with her, expressed her frustration, and pointed out that unless a child is orphaned, there will always be interference:

> *She is such a sweet child, but you know the mother is constantly interfering … Even one winter she [the biological mother of the child] asked, 'It's winter, does she have shoes? Does she have warm clothes?" … she knows the school fees [are being paid], the child eats, every day. (A 3)*

A married man in the screening process pointed out that he did not want meddling from family members when disciplining a child. He claimed that family members frequently interfered with his disciplinary efforts when he was raising a relative's child:

> *If I'm am staying with my sister's child … then maybe the son does a wrong thing, if I talk to that son that you have done wrong thing, the mother becomes angry … I won't feel well because this child is staying with me. He must listen to me. (IS 1)*

Most adoption social workers pointed out that applicants often disclose during screening interviews that they have experienced caring for a relative's child as frustrating. This was because they were forever being scrutinized by the biological parent(s) and/or members of the extended family regarding their parenting skills. They usually express the desire to raise a child independently, without being accountable to other family members regarding the way they fulfil their parental responsibilities.

Many of the citizen participants had personally observed the practice of informal foster care, and highlighted how difficult it becomes to raise a relative's child since the relatives tend to find fault with the informal foster parents' parenting skills. More importantly, they also tend to sway the child's mind-set against the informal foster parents by reminding the child that they are not the biological parents of the child:

> *When you are staying with somebody else's child you try to correct the wrongs and the right. If the biological parent came they will play around those points and say, "Can't you see you are not like this. This is not your real parent." Then they play with the child's mind." (C4)*

A citizen participant explained that the traditional African principle of Ubuntu endorses informal child care arrangements; that taking care of other community members' children is a way of life in the African community. However, she held the opinion that for involuntarily childless people there has been a shift away from practicing this child care arrangement, as the primary caregiver frequently tends to be undermined, denying their wish to fulfil their parenting responsibilities independently:

> *I think it's safer to adopt a child that's not related to you 'cause then there's no family issues in terms of the family members are telling you how to grow the child … the members have this to say about the child. (C 7)*

Another citizen reiterated this point:

> *People wanting to avoid family's involvement in the raising of the child and have the time, go the route of formal adoption … I think because there has been a shift in terms of how things used to be in the past. There have been a lot of boundaries created ... the actual Ubuntu where you could raise someone else's child ... Even these days you can see you can't actually discipline anybody's child because they then ask: "Who are you?" You are interfering." (C 2)*

Cluster Six: Preferring flexible child care arrangements

Significant is that some citizen participants pointed out why legal adoption does not appeal to some blacks who practice informal foster care. They indicated that these people prefer child care arrangements to be flexible because the financial circumstances of the informal foster parent might deteriorate, and under those circumstances they can return the child to his or her parents or other family members who will take over the responsibility of child care and provision. In this situation, informal foster care is a much more viable option:

> *Anything that has to do with filling out papers, they tend to stay away from it, you know. If there's a paper to be signed and stuff, rather leave it ... most of them don't want to commit themselves. Because once you sign ... just say it's legal adoption, you sign the papers, you sign yourself ... you legally bind yourself to live with that child forever and whatever and whatever ... So, a couple of years when you see that you can't afford to grow that child or whatever, you can't take that child back and say:" I want you to go away". It's yours ... and people don't want to legally bind themselves to that. (C 7)*

Cluster Seven: Longing for infants

Children voluntarily relinquished for adoption, and abandoned children, are usually infants. It became apparent that age is another motive for legally adopting a child. Most woman adopters pointed out that informal foster care usually involves caring for older children, which did not meet their need to nurture and form a close bond with a child. One adopter described how her mother had responded when she said that she intended adopting an unrelated child:

> *"Why don't you take your cousin's children?" The children were orphans, but I said to her no because they are grown up. They were about eleven at the time. I wanted a baby. I wanted someone who I can mould from scratch. We should both start ground*

zero … if one might put it like that. And she was like, "No, because they're struggling, they've been put in a home." It's really sad, and I am sad for them, but if they had been babies I might have considered taking these children (A 5)

All eight adoptive participants who did not enter the screening process also shared their longing to satisfy their need to nurture young children. One expressed this:

… that's what I wanted to feel … seeing a child cry … changing nappies and definitely know that the child is very, very young … and it's easy for you to bond at that early, early age … that was what was on my mind … I kept on feeling that I want to hold my baby. (NE 4)

A married adoptive participant in the screening process reiterated that, as a woman, she longed to 'mother' an infant. For this reason, when she and her husband had approached the adoption agency she had expressed the wish to adopt a baby. This need could not be met if caring for relative's child:

They [an adoption agency] give us from three months … Three months is fine. It won't work if I take my children, my sister's kids. I even tried my own sister, that, why, how come, why don't you give me your smaller boy. She said, "No … my child. No, I can't give you." We want to bond with the child. We want the child to know that when she opens her eyes, she sees us. (IS 2)

Most of the social workers confirmed that potential adopters usually express the desire to adopt infants, especially little girls. A social worker accentuated that applicants usually want to adopt babies even if they are in their late forties or early fifties. They do not encourage older persons to do so because of the anticipated complications arising when the potential adopters' grow older:

They would want small babies … up to about eight, nine months. Although we're trying to bring a change to that … we discourage older people, in their late forties, to adopt a very little baby because that would create problems in the future when the child is a teenager. They will already have pensioned and there might be some behaviour problems to deal with … and if they are quite old, it becomes very difficult. (SW 4)

6.3.Subcategory Three: Motherhood Equals Womanhood

Most woman adoptive participants in the study indicated that motherhood is central to a woman's identity. They also reiterated that they personally valued motherhood so

highly, that no other life achievement could be compared with becoming a mother. Furthermore, participants' responses underlined that to conceive a child is considered an integral part of being a woman, and if she is unable to do so, she is exposed to stigmatisation.

Two clusters of substantive codes are linked to subcategory Three.

Cluster One: Failing as a woman

All woman adopters that were infertile indicated that they did not feel like a 'woman' because they were unable to bear a child. An adopter made a poignant statement when sharing her sense of failure as a woman because she could not conceive a child:

> *I think a woman's core identity is in your womb! That's how we've been brought up. Or the things that make you a woman are your womb, and your breasts and when those things fail to follow what they're supposed to be doing … for me it was like "What's the point? What can you do with them?" The fact that I've got university, I've got work, I've got my own property and all those other things like, I am a sister, a friend. They diminished in comparison to this inability to do the things that a woman should be able to do. (A 4)*

Another adopter reiterated the view that a woman's self-identity is intimately interwoven with her ability to bear a child, and in the black community, married women especially define their womanhood in terms of their reproductive role:

> *… especially in the African community, because we, you know, in the olden days … I think it is still, even now, you know … that even as a woman, to be married and have kids, it's a better achievement than having a degree. And if you're married as a woman and you can't have kids, then what's the point? (A 6)*

A married man in the screening process reinforced the notion that motherhood is interwoven with womanhood when making the comment:

> *… My wife is not a wife because she can bear children for me; in the absence of children that doesn't make her less of a wife.*

One adopter informed the researcher that over the years she has 'mothered' many children, so although she regards herself as a mother figure, this is not the

acknowledged social construct of womanhood. She indicated that a woman is recognized as having the status of 'mother' only when mothering her biological child. She cited as an example a stranger's response when she dialled an incorrect telephone number on 'Mother's Day'. The lady answering the call said:

> *If you are a mother then "Happy Mother's Day! … I said I'm not a [biological] mother, so I went into this long debate with a stranger. So, there is this perception that if you're not a mother, a biological mother, then you are not a mother [real woman]. (A 3)*

A married adoptive participant who did not enter the screening process made a similar point. She had contacted an adoption agency (without informing anyone). Although a staunch Christian who believed one should love all children, members of her congregation did not hold the same belief. She told the researcher that she had learnt from personal experience that church members perceive the primary role of women as being child-bearers. They support a woman who can conceive a child and they admire the mother figure. She was visibly dejected when she explained that Christians frequently do not recognise the woman who is childless; a woman is not worth much if she cannot conceive:

> *In our church, the woman who is pregnant is praised. When they see the baby is growing in her tummy, they praise her all the time. She is someone special. (NE 2)*

***Cluster Two:* Experiencing stigmatisation**

Most adoptive participants emphasised that in black culture, childless women are humiliated and stigmatised if they cannot bear children. If a woman applies to legally adopt an unrelated child, this makes it obvious to community members that she is unable to fulfil society's perceptions around her primary purpose in life as a woman: to bear children.

All the social workers highlighted that women who cannot bear children are usually stigmatised by members of the community:

You know, outside of us, it's a lot of pressure … people just look at you like this [facial expression reflecting disapproval] they think you [women] are useless ...They start talking, you know, ugly words. (SW 4)

The problem is that there is a stigma attached to infertility, especially for women. In our black culture, you are thought of as being useless if you cannot bear children. (SW 8)

Some social work participants added that black women, particularly those living in rural areas, find it difficult to approach an adoption agency since they do not want to reveal their infertility status because of the associated stigma:

They think if they come to an adoption agency somehow, they will be revealing and disclosing their infertility … others feel that the society would not accept the fact that they are raising a child that is not their own. So, this is still prevailing … you find that deeply in rural areas people do not accept adoption of unrelated children. (SW 3)

Another social worker also expressed the opinion that involuntarily childless women often resist contacting an adoption agency because they are anxious about the criticism and stigmatisation they feel they will receive as a result. However, she was adamant that any community always finds fault with one of its members who breaks societal norms and expectations, not only related to the adoption of an unrelated child:

You know in Pedi there is a proverb that says Kgomo ya MoSwathi, uwaigkapa umolatho, uwaytloghela umolatho. That means that when you meet a cow that belongs to your chief … when you leave it they will say that you have done wrong. But also, when you take it back, they say you have done wrong because that was not your place. People [who legally adopt children] end up realising that other people will talk, they will say this and that, but whether you do it or don't do it, people will still talk. (SW 4).

6.4.Subcategory Four: Fatherhood equals manhood

Most adoptive participants stressed that black men don't support legal adoption of unrelated children because it undermines their sense of manhood. The term 'manhood' and 'masculinity' were used interchangeably, but both were associated with virility. Participants also indicated that infertility is socially labelled as a woman's condition, and this assumption is being reinforced on a grassroots level because couples never

disclose the male partner's infertility even if there is medical proof. Furthermore, medical practitioners resist acknowledging that the man is infertile. Physical matching of adoptee and adoptive father is a means of reinforcing his sense of manhood.

Three clusters of substantive codes are linked to Subcategory Four.

Cluster One: Attacking their sense of manhood

Recurring responses from most adoptive participants presented the notion that the main reason men do not support the practice of the legal adoption of an unrelated child is because it might indicate to their community that they are not virile. Examples were cited of men terminating intimate relationships on the basis that significant family members and friends, and members of their society, expect men to prove their worth – or manhood - by fathering a child.

Seven of the ten adopters highlighted this point of view. For example, a single adopter shared that she was astonished to see men attending the orientation workshop for adoptive applicants because:

> *The most resistance you find is from African men. African men view adoption as an attack on their manhood … and people will tend to say something in public and something else in private; where it's a safe place to say it. I think with African men it's almost like an attack on their manhood to actually have to adopt. (A 5)*

An unmarried adopter voiced the opinion that black men generally do not consider unrelated adoption as an option for family formation because they want children of their 'own blood':

> *Males respond differently. Women they don't care. They'll be like, 'Oh my word, I've always wanted to do this.' But the guys, regardless of whether they are married or single, they have kids or they don't have kids, they are so much against it. Men have this thing of blood ... Yes, and they feel that, "I know this is my child when I say this is my child." (A 6)*

Quite a few participants who did not enter the screening process communicated that intimate relationships frequently break down if a woman cannot bear a child. One such participant explained that she had once shared an intimate relationship with a man who

left her because she could not fall pregnant. They were not sure who had the infertility problem, but when he became involved with another woman and that woman fell pregnant, he telephoned her, wanting to know if she had fallen pregnant after their parting. When she responded that she had not, he projected the blame, emphasising that she was the infertile partner, not he. This presented as a relief for him.

A married lady, who did not enter the adoption screening process, wept when discussing her husband's response to her suggestion that they adopt an unrelated child. She believed her husband did not support her decision to adopt a child because this move would disprove his 'manhood':

> *No ... Priscilla … you don't understand. He doesn't want to adopt. I've cried a lot. I've given up crying now. He wouldn't want to go that route. You know Priscilla ... men are men. They want a child that is their own or else they do not feel like men. (NE 4)*

Only one of the four men adoptive participants indicated that he had taken an opposite stance to most men when deciding to support his wife in her desire to adopt a child. He spoke with confidence when sharing his thoughts and feelings regarding what the concept of 'manhood' means to him:

> *In my understanding is that with men I have come across, they are saying for me to be a man my wife needs to bear me children. If there is no children that means I am not going to be a man enough. For me I always thought that, or I always think that, I am a man because of my structure that I have been built in. My mind-set in terms of how I think and also my mind-set in terms of making sure that I do care about people that are around me … I also provide things such as shelter and provide things such as food and so forth. That is me being a man. My manhood does not add, how can put it, my manhood does not say that I need to have a child in order for me to have, to be a man. (A 9)*

Cluster Two: Pronouncing infertility a woman's condition

Several social workers commented that married men are reluctant to go for medical examinations to determine why conception is not taking place. This is because infertility is generally perceived as a woman's condition. If it were determined that the man was infertile, he would find it difficult to cope emotionally because his sense of manhood

would be critically undermined. A couple of statements by social workers reflected this point of view:

> *Most of our clients, you'll find that that it's only women who go for the check-ups. For the man ... the man never goes for check-ups … it's like it's the woman who has the problem … the man has the fear to go for the check-ups. (SW 4)*

> *The pressure is on women to bear children. Even if the problem is not with you but the man, they will blame you as the woman. (SW 1)*

An adopter pointed out that even medical practitioners are reluctant to disclose that the man's medical condition is inhibiting conception:

> *You know even my doctor ... my gynae … said ... I begin to suspect something ... they begin to suspect something about my husband, but they are not saying anything. (A 1).*

An adoption social worker reiterated this point:

> *For a man to not have a child it means I'm not a man … I know many men who'll say: 'Well we went through the testing, but it was just my wife. The doctor decided not to check me. (SW 5)*

Three adoption social workers also revealed that should the man be the infertile partner, the couple are reluctant to disclose this to family members, especially the husband's parents. A social worker explained that this is because male infertility is a distinct mark of social disgrace for black men:

> *… and you know another thing I've noticed in my screening ... they will never tell the family if it is the husband that cannot have children, but if it is the wife they will tell ... but if it is the husband that is always their little secret as the couple. (SW 6)*

Some woman citizen participants confirmed that even if a woman knows that she cannot conceive because of her husband's medical condition, she avoids disclosing this at all costs, and will even attempt to conceive a child through another man to protect her husband's gender identity and meet the cultural expectations of building a family.

> *There's a saying in the African culture that a man can never be fatherless, but it's actually a blasphemy because it's the woman who knows whose child she is bearing, because some woman if they realise they couldn't fall pregnant from their husband,*

they will secretly go out there and get someone … some man who would impregnate them, so the husband would not know Yes ... but it is not openly acknowledged that it is the husband who is infertile. (C 6)

Cluster Three: Proving he is a man

Virtually all the adopters emphasized that they are strongly in favour of the child adoption physical matching procedure, which takes place once the screening process has been completed. This process is especially meaningful when the child matches the male partner's facial features. An adopter recalled that she notices that her husband feels a sense of pride when other people assume that he has fathered their adopted child:

… child's needs to look like the adoptive father ... proof that the father has fathered the child … so matching is essential … And you won't believe ... they look the same ... exactly the same ... I remember when [name of social worker] presented the child she said please don't be offended, but the child looks exactly like your husband ... next time we will consider you. You know I think she helped me because wherever we go they say: "Khosa ... jo ... juniour Khosa ... jooooo ... you look so beautiful ... you look exactly like your father ... so people who don't even know … they don't see the difference. (A 1)

6.5. Summary of Category Four

Both married and single infertile woman participants had experienced their condition as psychologically and emotionally painful. This was because their deep desire to parent a biological child could not be realised given the circumstances in which they found themselves. All the woman adoptive participants longed to nurture a child, and this deep personal need had not been satisfied. It also became apparent that a woman's ability to procreate and take on the role of mother, appears to be considered the most valuable aspect of being a woman.

Many adoptive participants repeatedly emphasized that informal foster care in the black community does not adequately meet the needs of involuntary childless people for several reasons. Informal child care arrangements did not offer them a sense of relationship permanency, which is naturally afforded to biological parents. This is because the placement can be disrupted whenever the biological parents wished. There was a sense that informal foster care exposed them to emotional risk. Most adoptive

participants had formed strong emotional bonds with the related children they had cared for, and the separation that took place when the children returned to the care of their biological parent(s) was extremely distressing. Adoptive participants also highlighted that in this situation, they were repeatedly reminded that they could not claim to be the child's biological parents, which is associated with exercising full rights and responsibilities.

Furthermore, woman adoptive participants stressed that informal foster care did not fulfil their desire to raise infants, or young children, because informally fostered children are usually older.

From a different perspective, findings suggest that some blacks don't support legal adoption because legal adoption is perceived as rigid and irreversible, whereas informal foster care is considered a more realistic child care placement. A legal adopter is legally bound to exercise child care responsibilities even if their financial circumstances change. However, when informally fostering a child and financial circumstances deteriorate, the responsibility of caring for a related child can be shifted to another family member who enjoys better financial circumstances.

Findings indicated that parenthood is rigorously interwoven with socially constructed concepts of manhood and womanhood. Adoptive woman participants who could not conceive, experienced their social gender identity role as being negated. They felt vulnerable to scrutiny and stigmatisation by members of their community because they were unable to fulfil the perceived fundamental role of a woman, namely reproduction.

Similarly, begetting a child was deemed an essential component of manhood and masculinity. It was repeatedly emphasised that most men do not consider adopting an unrelated child because this step would emasculate them by revealing to their communities that they are unable to accomplish one of the fundamental roles of manhood; to beget a child.

Furthermore, it became evident that black couples' infertility tends to be associated with the woman. They become the focus of attention regarding infertility tests and a married

woman sometimes willingly accepts the blame for infertility, even if the medical evidence indicates that the infertility complications lie with their husbands. A woman might even consider conceiving with another man to 'protect' her husband from community ridicule.

The physical matching of adoptable children with adoptive applicants presented as a means of affirming parenthood and gender identity, and gaining the social recognition associated with biological parenthood. For example, if the adopted child's facial features resembled those of the adoptive father, it was assumed that community members would be convinced that blood ties exit; that the wife had fulfilled her primary role as a woman (child-bearer) and that the husband would have the male status of procreator. A sense of the child 'belonging' to parents was also facilitated by physical matching.

7. CATEGORY FIVE: PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTING AND CHILDHOOD

Category Five relates to the concepts of 'parenting' and 'childhood' and how they feature in adoption and the assessment process, which most applicants feel at risk completing. Six subcategories and 16 clusters of substantive codes are linked to this category. The subcategories refer to concerns about the child's background and their future behaviour patterns; anxiety around disclosing the adoption to the child later; and three controversial aspects related to the screening procedure. The three controversial aspects were the rigorous assessment processes, medical assessments that were felt to be invasive of the participants' rights regarding health privacy, and the financial expenses involved in the screening process.

7.1.Subcategory One: Nature versus Nurture.

It became apparent to the researcher that social workers and adoptive participants believe socialisation is the key to a child's development. Although adoptive participants were sometimes anxious about how the child would develop in their care - especially if the child had been abandoned - they reasoned that a healthy parent-child relationship plays a significant role in shaping a child's development.

On the other hand, findings suggested that many blacks do not have a good understanding of child development, and are convinced that a child's development is predisposed in his or her DNA.

Two clusters of substantive codes relate to Subcategory One.

***Cluster One:* Nurturing determines child's developmental outcome**

All seven social work participants projected the notion that a child's characteristics and behaviour are predominantly acquired, rather than being a product of inheritance (i.e. environment rather than genetics). They added that although many adoptive applicants are anxious about adoptable children's' development when entering the adoption assessment process, they tend to have a holistic view of child development; and recognize that both nature and nurture affect children's development. One social worker drew attention to this ongoing debate regarding child development:

> *We tell them that they should raise the child according their beliefs and even if the genes are there, the way they nurture the child will determine how it turns out. Some may have those kinds of concerns … it is down to how you raise the child. (SW 7)*

Most adoptive participants affirmed that they did have some concerns about the development of adopted children, especially in the case of abandoned children because their background circumstances are unknown. However, their fears were allayed when reasoning that the way one raises a child will affect the values, behaviours and beliefs that the child develops. Thus, a loving relationship between adopter and adoptee plays a vital role in shaping the child's identity and development. For example, an adopter emphasised that being a parent has more to do with 'quality of parenting', rather than being a biological parent:

> *I don't think it's only biological, or giving birth to a child that can make you a parent … It's loving a child and nurturing a child, and attachment, because you get biological parents who leave their children for no reason, or don't ever have that connection even though they're the biological parents. (A 5)*

An adoptive participant who did not enter the screening process expressed a similar point of view:

More nature than nature … I think I can tell you upbringing counts a lot. It's not about the culture, it doesn't matter which culture. It is how you actually look after the child." (NE 6)

Cluster Two: Assuming child will be a criminal

Several adoptive participants and adoption social workers were of the opinion that people who are not well-educated, tend to assume that genetics is the sole determinant of child development. An adopter commented:

It's a lack of information. People talk about how maybe if you take the child he will be a killer ... These are very weak arguments because they cannot tell me that all these people who are in jail are all adopted. It's just fear of the unknown. People fear that I don't know what his parents were like. For me, unless they had any like serious diseases that could be inherited … Whether the father was tall or short, it doesn't matter. Whether he smoked or drank it doesn't matter. Sometime environment will determine how a person is going to be like … even the middle-class people they would [have concerns regarding a child's development], but they will ask questions. The lower income class are people … they will accept anything as being truth. (A 2)

Likewise, another adopter thought that people are generally reluctant to adopt a child because they do not have a good understanding of child development, and this can raise fears and feelings of uncertainly about how the adopted child will develop. She pointed out that when she was undergoing a medical assessment as part of the screening process, the receptionist began inquiring why she was adopting a child:

She asked, "Are they going to give you a right child, not a delinquent?" We were talking in Sotho and she's like, "No, you know I want to help [adopt a child], but I'm worried that they'll give me a delinquent." I then told her that unfortunately you can't choose; it's a possibility even with the children that you give birth to … [that they may become delinquents] …like the children from parents who have a family history where there are thugs. I mean, there are children who are born from Christian families, who have parents who are priests, but how many of them tow the line? (A3).

7.2. Subcategory Two: Implementing rigorous screening process

It became evident when examining the adoptive participants' thoughts and feelings concerning the adoption screening process that it is viewed with apprehension. The need to undergo such a rigorous process was called into question, especially by adoptive applicants who already had experience in parenting a relative's child. On the other hand,

all the social workers emphasised that the adoption screening process is child-centred and is done in the best interests of the child. The rigorous screening process was valued as a means offering some security that the child will be well cared for when adopted.

Three clusters of substantive codes are linked to Subcategory Two

Cluster One: Prioritising child's best interests

All the adoption social workers were adamant that a rigorous screening process is essential because children made available for adoption are usually infants and toddlers who are vulnerable and in need of care and protection. They reasoned that, as professionals, they have to accept accountability for placing these vulnerable children in alternative care on a permanent basis.

> *Others feel that the process is too long, little realising that we do this long process in an effort to ensure the child's best interests, because our aim at [name of adoption agency] is to protect children. (SW 3)*

> *No, they seem to think that we are being fussy over nothing. They don't seem to see the importance of looking after themselves well, you know, a good healthy lifestyle. The doctor would say "rather go for a weight management programme..." and they would say "… to lose weight will take me forever." You can see the negative attitude; the importance of looking well after him or herself isn't a priority for them. You would ask, "How are you going to look after the child, if you can't look well after yourself? Your health is very important, you must be healthy for this child" and it's like we're being fussy (SW 2)*

Cluster Two: Questioning necessity of screening

All the adoptive participants questioned why the screening process needs to be so rigorous. Many felt anxious that they might be judged as not having the capacity to adequately parent a child. An adoptive applicant not entering the adoption screening process explained that when she attended an orientation workshop, she acquired detailed information regarding what the screening process would entail. This aroused feeling of anxiety, and she decided not to continue despite the social worker's reassurances. Her feelings of concern focused on the fact that home visits are conducted by social workers to assess applicants' home circumstances. Furthermore, undergoing comprehensive

medical assessments are obligatory. In many senses, she perceived the assessment process as a method of screening prospective adopters out of the process:

> *I think it is scary … will you put me on the grid? It's a scary process … and you don't know even when they come to your house what they want to see. Is it big? Is it comfortable? Your family? What do they want to find out? (NE 3)*

***Cluster Three:* Raising children who have been informally fostered, carries no weight**

Most of the adoptive participants informed the researcher that they had already experienced informal foster care prior to approaching the adoption agency, and questioned why this parental experience is not taken into consideration when applying to adopt an unrelated child. They reasoned that if they had been able to take care of a relative's child, why should their parental competency be brought into question?

However, all the adoption social workers were adamant that raising an adopted child is a far more complex and challenging experience both for the adoptive parent(s) and the adoptee than raising a related child. The adoption social workers explained that their priority is to ensure that the child has the best possible chance of being raised in a loving home environment. Thus, they were convinced that they had solid grounds for conducting a comprehensive assessment process, which included a multi-disciplinary approach.

7.3. Subcategory Three: Medical assessments proving controversial

It became apparent to the researcher that the adoptive participants and the social work participants tend to have opposing views around the need for adoption applicants to undergo comprehensive medical assessments, especially regarding HIV tests. Adoption social workers viewed these as necessary to ensure that the adoptable child will be raised by parents who are conscious of any medical conditions and compensate by living a healthy lifestyle.

However, adoption applicants questioned why they should undergo such strict medical assessments; especially HIV tests. Others adoptive participants claimed that insisting applicants must complete HIV tests negates a person's rights around disclosing his or

her HIV status. Furthermore, an adopter emphasised that medical assessments only identify current medical illness or concerns, but medical conditions can also arise later in life.

Findings also suggested that not all agencies adopt similar approaches to HIV-positive applicants. Some agencies are willing to screen a standby 'guardian', whereas other agencies do not adopt this policy and are thus perceived as discriminating against HIV-positive applicants. It was also noted that HIV-positive prospective adopters might not enter the screening process in agencies who apply the guardian regulation - not because of their diagnosis, but rather because they are expected to select a significant other who will both agree to act as a guardian and who is willing to complete the screening process with them.

Furthermore, it became clear to the researcher that some adoptive participants chose not to enter the screening process because they were anxious about being diagnosed with a medical condition that they were not aware of. Four clusters of substantive codes are linked to Subcategory Three.

Cluster One: Testing for HIV debatable

Many social workers stressed that adoption applicants often both downplay the need to undergo comprehensive medical assessments; and dispute that a medical condition should cancel out the possibility of their being found fit and proper to parent an adopted child. Some social work participants pointed out that adoption applicants usually question why it is necessary that they undergo HIV testing.

All social work participants, except for one, insisted that the HIV test should be conducted because coming to terms with the diagnosis of a chronic illness is the critical factor on suitability to adopt:

> *We put our foot down and say no you've got to go and deal with your issues … you've got to go for long-term counselling ... you can't just test HIV-positive and then say "It's okay, we've come to terms with it. Let's get a baby." and things like that. You*

should know that you're going to be able to look after yourself before we can give you the child". (SW 1)

You tell them we need to test ... we test all the children ... then they think: "What if I'm positive?" Even though we explain being positive does not mean we're not going to give you a child … but we want to know are you the best interests for this child. Are you able to take good care of yourself? (SW 6)

The one social adoption social worker who questioned whether conducting HIV tests are justifiable stated:

Really, I don't think so because there are more diseases that can kill anyone other than HIV. Do you understand? (SW 3)

Only one adopter agreed that HIV testing is an important component of the screening process:

It's better when the welfare know that the child is in a family affected by HIV because whether we like it or not, it does have an effect on the family. Be it longevity of life or the quality of life, depending on when I've found out. If I've just found out, obviously, it might affect me … it affects whether the child will be comfortable or not. If I'm not happy with me, how can I make a child happy? So, I think it's fair (A 4)

Most adoptive participants were of the opinion that undergoing HIV tests should not be obligatory. One adopter interpreted the singling out of HIV-positive applicants as discriminatory and disrespects an individual's right not to disclose his or her HIV status. She added that everyone faces the possibility of contracting life-threatening illnesses, and the way to better address the needs of the child would be to encourage the adopted parents to nominate a guardian to care for the child in the event of the adopted parent's death.

Cluster Two: Discriminating against HIV applicants

Some adoptive participants held view that HIV-positive adoption applicants should not be discriminated against because of their chronic illness. Continuing the above comment, another adopter suggested that adoption applicants should be able to select a guardian for the adopted child:

The basic truth is that we are all going to die and so we should have the guardian as a backup to take care of the adopted child when we pass away. We should not be discriminating against the HIV-positive applicants because disclosure of status is not easy and nominating guardians would be in the child's best interests in all adoption cases … If I nominate you to be my guardian, I invariably have to disclose. Does the fact that I am reluctant to disclose mean that I haven't dealt with my situation and I fall off the rails by default? I don't know … maybe you also don't want children to be back in the system if anything happens to me. The irony is, as HIV-negative as I am, I drive cars, I can be sick, or whatever. What if I die tomorrow? (A 3)

A social worker explained that at her workplace, there are extra requirements for HIV-positive prospective adopters. She explained that some HIV-positive applicants are aware of their HIV status before entering the screening process and they present themselves as having come to terms with their HIV-positive diagnosis, and are leading a healthy lifestyle. However, her agency insists that they cannot adopt a child without nominating a significant other who would not only be willing to take on the role of an informal 'guardian' or primary caregiver should the need arise, but would complete the screening process with them. One of the main reasons why some adoptive applicants do not complete the screening process is because they cannot identify such an individual:

If they decide to go through the screening, it is usually after the medicals [that adoption applicants drop out]. Maybe the person is HIV-positive and they find it very difficult to get a screening partner. Not that they want to stop, it's that they can't find a screening partner. (SW 4)

Cluster Three: Diagnosing other possible medical conditions

Many adoption social workers regarded a thorough medical assessment (not only HIV testing) as an essential step in the screening process, because as well as AIDS, other chronic medical conditions are identified by the doctors responsible for examining adoption applicants. They reasoned that it would be unfair to place a child in need of care and protection in the care of an adult who might not be able to provide the child with permanency unless their medical concerns are responsibly addressed.

It was not only HIV problems; it was also other medical conditions. Like maybe one is suffering from high blood pressure and is not taking regular medication. Others are diabetic and defaulting on treatment. (SW 1)

Some adoptive participants who chose not to enter the screening process after learning about the comprehensive medical assessments involved revealed how anxious they felt about completing this element of the screening process:

> *She [social worker] assured me that it's not that they are saying if you are sick you cannot get a child. But if you are taking the necessary precautions then it's open. Because then you are thinking, "What if I've got something I didn't know I had?" (NE 3)*

Cluster Four: Disrespecting adoption applicants

A critical issue arising is that some medical practitioners responsible for medical assessments, do not show respect for some adoption applicants. However, applicants do not challenge their conduct, probably because they want to present their best front at all stages of the adoption screening process. For example, an adopter shared with the researcher her experience in this regard:

> *I had hoped that they would just give us the forms, but then they have to choose their own doctors. So, I had like a little cough because I have allergies, so I think maybe it was because of that….and he was like, "You need to do chest X-rays." But I knew I could not have T.B. But he didn't even tell me that he was going to test for T.B. … At least he could have told me why he was doing that because it was not part of the tests…I was expecting at least for him to sit down with me and discuss which he didn't. According to them [adoption social worker] he was supposed to discuss with me the results before he sent them to them. Or send the results to my G.P, especially the HIV test results…He didn't even give me that. He just sent them through (A 1).*

7.4. Subcategory Four: Relevance and reliability of psychometric testing debatable

Social work participants considered psychometric testing an important phase of the screening process because the tests are designed to measure applicants' suitability for a role (in this case, the role of adoptive parent). However, they mentioned that adoption applicants experience the process as threatening, assuming that the test results might produce evidence that they are unsuitable to adopt. This was confirmed by the adopters. One social worker was of the opinion that the tests are not culturally sensitive. Two clusters of substantive codes are related to this subcategory.

Cluster One: Testing in either English or Afrikaans

Adoption applicants are required to undergo psychometric tests that are designed by psychologists to measure the cognitive, behavioural and personality constructs of an individual. One social work participant commented that the psychometric tests need to be more user-friendly. She highlighted that apart from their excessive cost, the tests are not culturally sensitive:

> *We have a psychologist that comes here, but it's difficult with my clients because she only assesses in either English or Afrikaans. The language is a bit of a problem. (SW 9).*

Cluster Two: Testing psychological well-being

Some social work participants drew attention to the fact that adoption applicants are often anxious about undergoing psychological assessments and are reluctant to do so. These social workers reasoned that the negative responses relate to the applicants' assuming if any psychological issues are identified, they will no longer be considered suitable to adopt a child. Having to undergo psychometric testing was also perceived as delaying the completion of the screening process:

> *We explained why we had to do it, but they felt that this was threatening the screening more and more … because they now had to and see the psychologist. After seeing the psychologist, they have to go and receive feedback on the psychological assessment. And the fact was that it was taking their time. (SW 6)*

Some social workers also mentioned that it is challenging to persuade prospective adopters that there is a need to undergo psychometric assessment, namely to avoid placing the child at risk:

> *We do explain to them the importance of that test; that we're not just trying to be very strict as an agency, but we are trying to alleviate a situation where the child will be at risk. That's why we have these measures. So, we try convincing per se, so that when the time comes for them to do the psychological assessments, then they know that it's a requirement and in the child's best interests. (SW 3)*

Although virtually all adoption social workers deemed psychometric testing important, many adopters did not. For example, an adopter shared her feelings with the researcher about the psychometric test she underwent:

So, when [name of social worker] gave me feedback, I felt she kept on hammering on the stress level and I said that when the baby comes I'm going to change that … So, I felt it was like a personal attack. I felt that the interpretation of the report did not look beyond the report for me. It should have looked at, this is my position, this is what I do; people in this position are going to get stressed. Yes, not just zone in on the stress. … I remember I phoned my sister and I was crying. I just thought they're going to tell me to wait. (A 5)

7.5. Subcategory Five: Screening process costly

The monetary cost of the screening process was a strongly contested issue. Virtually all adoptive participants questioned why they should be liable for the heavy costs incurred during the screening process, especially when having to undergo comprehensive medical assessments and psychometric testing. They reasoned that they had approached an adoption agency willing to offer their love and attention to a child in need of care and protection, and so to pay for this did not make sense. In other words, some felt it was not morally justifiable. The researcher was also surprised to note that a couple of adoption social workers reasoned that if adoption applicants are willing to invest large sums of money in infertility treatment but are not willing to cover the costs of the screening process, this is indicative of the wrong motives for wanting to adopt a child. Three clusters of substantive codes are associated with Subcategory Five.

Cluster One: 'Purchasing' a child

An adopter expressed that she thought that the heavy costs of the assessment process were immoral. She had initially approached an adoption agency and was informed that the full screening process would cost approximately R30 000. She stated:

From a moral perspective, it's like you're buying a child. You don't want to look at a child all the time and think: "You know I paid R30 000 for you." … that's what I said to [an adoption social worker managing her application]: "You know guys, I'm not saying you must change your rules … it's a wrong way. I know we must pay for things that we do. We pay for our time and whatever ... but don't say if people want to adopt then they can't start the process before they pay you an amount of money you don't necessarily have with adoption … there were people [referring to other potential adopters attending the orientation workshop] who felt it was a bit too much. (A 1)

An interesting point was raised by a citizen participant who indicated that legal adoption is generally regarded as costly, something that only whites can afford. When probing what she knew about adoption it became apparent that she regarded legal adoption as 'purchasing' an item, namely a baby:

> *I know that you go see a social worker if you can't have children and you buy a child." (C 8)*

***Cluster Two:* Charging too much**

A matter repeatedly raised by most adoptive participants was the cost involved in completing the adoption screening process. They regarded it as unreasonably expensive:

> *For me it was a drop in the ocean, but I guess it depends on what you can afford. I remember very clearly at our orientation meeting that there were people who felt it was a bit too much. (A 3)*

Adoptive participants not entering the screening process remarked that, apart from having to pay the adoption agencies for the services rendered by the adoption social workers, they are also expected to cover medical costs and psychometric testing costs. One participant's initial comments related to the fact that although her medical aid was willing to cover the costs, the medical practitioner working for the adoption agency where she applied insisted that she pay the fees upfront in cash:

> *If you and your husband go for tests, you pay R800 for tests. You pay for the doctor to see you … which is something that you could actually pay through your medical aid. But they don't want the medical aid to pay. They [referring to doctors used by a specific adoption agency] want you to give them cash. That's what they told us. (NE 1)*

Some social workers acknowledged that many adoptive applicants find it difficult to complete the assessment process because it is costly:

> *Everything is very costly. Medicals are very costly and the psychological assessment. And if it's a couple, they still have to do the marriage enrich [marital enrichment course] you know ... which they have to pay for. (SW 3)*

> *… and the fees; some clients cannot afford the fees. (SW 9)*

Cluster Three: Questioning motives if not willing to cover costs

It became evident to the researcher that some adoption social workers assume that applicants' willingness to cover assessment costs is a good indicator of whether their motive for adoption is sound. Two social workers pointed out that many married couples approaching an adoption agency have already spent several thousand rand on assisted reproductive treatment. For this reason, they assume that if applicants are not willing to cover the costs of services rendered during the assessment process, they obviously are not really committed to making an investment for a child they have not conceived:

> *If an applicant is reluctant to pay fees for services, one needs to question whether they really want to adopt a child for the right reasons." (SW 5)*

7.6. Subcategory Six: Disclosing is difficult, but essential

All adoption social workers indicated that disclosing to the adoptee that he or she has been legally adopted is encouraged in the field of adoption because it is deemed to be in the best interests of the child. If the child is not informed by the adoptive parents this could have negative effects on the child's sense of self-worth, and he or she can even face rejection by the family. It became apparent that some adopters, especially from rural areas, pretend to family and community members that they are pregnant and do not disclose to anyone that the child has in fact been adopted, including the child. Some adoptive participants had concerns that the adopted child would reject them if they disclosed that he or she had been adopted, but hoped that strong bonds of love would overcome this possibility. Five clusters of substantive codes are related to Subcategory Six.

Cluster One: Insisting on disclosure to child

All social workers indicated that they explain to all prospective adopters why it is in the adopted child's best interests to disclose to him or her that he or she has been adopted. However, many prospective adopters are initially reluctant to disclose this information to their adopted child:

During the first time, we see the parent after they've applied you will hear them say: "I'm not going to tell my child that he is adopted." So, we encourage them that the child must know that he's adopted for a healthy relationship and to build their relationship. (SW 4)

Another social worker emphasised that if one does not disclose to the child that he or she has been adopted, this could undermine the child's sense of self-worth:

… "if you cannot accept me then you must be ashamed of me, that is why you cannot tell me that I was adopted. I am an object of shame in your life; you have not accepted me completely." Already the child emotionally has that feeling of being unwanted because someone gave them up, but if people around whom they are living with now are saying it, how can that child feel like they belong? (SW 5)

Cluster Two: Risking adoptee's well-being if not disclosing

The adopters generally supported the need to disclose the adoption to an adoptee. One adopter expressed that it is important because if the child is not informed by the adoptive parents, the child's perception of their adoption could be negatively influenced by relatives or community members:

They [referring to people not supporting legal adoption] are the ones that will 'poison' the kids …tell them that they are not part of the family. (A 4)

Some social workers also highlighted the negative effects that non-disclosure can have on the adopted child if he or she learns their situation from others and not from their adopted parents. One social worker explained:

It can be very traumatic the way the child could find out from other people because it won't be in a nice way … Maybe someone will be talking to someone else and there are children around, they won't say you are adopted, they say things like, "We heard that you don't belong here." or We heard that you were dumped." Then the child now looks at themselves as 'unworthy'. How do you help a child who is looking at themselves in that way? How do you help them understand that they are worthy? (SW 5)

A married couple in the screening process also mentioned that they had been advised that it would be in the child's best interests to disclose the facts around the adoption to their child as soon as possible, taking into consideration the child's level of development. This is because adoptees need to be protected from the possibility of

harmful effects should he or she learn this truth coldly from other people, rather than from his or her empathetic adoptive parents. The married couple stated that they were accepting of this advice when the social worker explained the reason to them:

> *When he is old enough to understand because you know the neighbours are going to tell him, we know that … you have to be straight to the child; you tell the truth from the start. Outside he will hear another story and then we don't tell him these things the same like that. (IS 2)*

However, it was difficult for the researcher to determine whether the response that they supported disclosure to the child was influenced by their being in the screening process at the time of the interview, and perhaps felt obliged to give the 'right' answer. Based on personal work experience, the researcher is aware that although adoption applicants - especially married adopters - commit to the disclosure to the adoptee, they do not always keep to this commitment.

Cluster Three: Returning adopted child if extended family rejects

Most social workers emphasised why it is also important for adopters to disclose to family members that the child has been adopted. If family members are not willing to love the child, the child might not be accepted as belonging to the family. One social worker highlighted that a child can be exposed to outright rejection if adopters decide not to disclose to family members that the child has been adopted:

> *You know I heard a story from someone who said their sister adopted a child. They [family members] knew, but she didn't tell them. They just watched her. And now she passes away and now they want to know where the child can be put because they want to take back the child. (SW 5)*

Cluster Four: Fearing to disclose because of anticipated loss

Some social workers mentioned that another reason prospective adopters do not favour disclosure to the child is because they are anxious that they could 'lose' the adopted child because he or she might wish to be returned to the biological parents, and leave.

One adopter pointed out that she could identify with potential adopters who expressed these concerns [at the orientation session]. She admitted that she had similar fears, but tried to dispel them by reasoning that love would win the child's commitment to her:.

> *I did think about those fears, but I know if I raise my kids very well and give them love, the love as if they were my own, they'll never turn against me. Even if someone told them this is not your real parents, but I will also tell them as time goes on, that 'you've been adopted'; things like that. They'll [the adopted child] never turn against me. (A 7)*

Cluster Five: Disclosing particularly difficult in rural areas

A few social workers highlighted that adoptive applicants from rural areas are the most reluctant to disclose to the adoptee and significant others, that the child has been adopted. One social worker highlighted this issue when discussing a particular adoption case, she had managed. A married couple from a rural area had not disclosed to members of their family that they had adopted a child, and did not intend disclosing this to the adopted child either. Instead the woman adopter pretended to members of the extended family and the community that she was pregnant and had to go to Johannesburg to have the child delivered at a reputable hospital:

> *One couple even adopted two [children] and the family still doesn't know. The family thought that the woman was pregnant. For some reason, I just find it hard to believe that they could pull it off, because the woman said that after telling her family that she was pregnant, she started to look pregnant. Then she would go back later with the adopted baby. (SW 9)*

Some social workers pointed out that prospective adopters perceive non-disclosure as offering a 'shield of protection' against anticipated negative, judgmental responses from members of the extended family and community. Non-disclosure is deemed necessary to avoid stigma associated with infertility.

> *They think if they come to an adoption agency, somehow, they will be revealing and disclosing their infertility. That is one of the factors. And others feel that the society would not accept the fact that they are raising a child that is not their own. So, there is still this prevailing … you find that deeply in rural areas people do not accept adoption of unrelated children. (SW 3)*

7.7. Summary of Category Five

Adoptive participants and social workers held the view that a child's development can be positively moulded and shaped by the quality of care he or she receives when growing up. However, it became evident that some people might reject the adoption opportunity for fear that the child's behaviour (or misbehaviour) is predisposed in the child's DNA.

Findings clearly indicated that all adoption social workers concentrate the adoption assessment process around the best interests of the child. The child is perceived as vulnerable and in need of care and protection. A rigorous assessment process is deemed essential to ensure that adoptee is not exposed to any form of neglect and/or abuse by the adoptive parent(s). Furthermore, the child has a right to be raised by fit and proper parents who can provide a secure, loving home environment for the child on a permanent basis. To safeguard an adoption applicant's ability to adequately meet the child's rights and needs, the prospective adopter's parenting capacity is examined from a multi-disciplinary perspective, namely through medical, psychological and social work assessments.

However, adoptive participants challenged the way in which their potential parenting capacity is assessed. The morality of the heavy costs incurred in the adoption assessment process - especially the costs of the medical and psychological assessments - was questioned. However, a few social workers perceived that a willingness to pay for the services rendered during the adoption screening process was closely connected to positive motives for adoption. They felt that should an adoption applicant be unwilling to cover the costs of screening, he or she may not necessarily be sufficiently committed to adopting a child. They felt this is especially so should they have previously undergone expensive infertility treatment programs before approaching an adoption agency.

The disregarding of human rights around the mandatory disclosure of their HIV status was challenged by some prospective adopters. In addition, the way that psychometric

testing is conducted was considered culturally insensitive, especially for blacks who don't understand English well.

Although social work participants regarded disclosure as being in the best interests of the child, adoptive participants tended to feel anxious about disclosing to the child that he or she has been adopted, because they feared that the parent-child relationship would be undermined. Social workers insisted that non-disclosure could have negative consequences for the child because it can expose them to emotional abuse from both within and without the family system. Findings suggested that adopters from rural areas usually do not intend to disclose the adoption to their child, family or members of the community.

8. GENERATION OF GROUNDED THEORY

In this section of the chapter, the researcher discusses the outcomes of the selective or theoretical coding phase of data analysis. This phase of data analysis basically involves the systematic integration or condensation of all the interlinked categories and subcategories to develop a core category. As pointed out in Chapter 3, the core category is usually a single concept; an explanatory hypothesis for the phenomenon being researched (Diogo, 2014).

Essentially all five categories described above, and their respective subcategories, contribute to an explanation (or hypothesis) of how blacks South Africans interpret and respond to the current (westernised) adoption model, and the philosophy, policy and practice guidelines on which the model is based.

8.1. Meanings of Kinship

In terms of the legal adoption philosophy, the bonds of love between parent and child are viewed as fundamental to the creation of kinship, and this 'nuclear type' form of kinship is permissible by law. Participants supporting the practice of legal adoption adopted this concept of kinship; one which emphasises emotional ties, rather than the traditional socio-cultural constructs of kinship. Participants supporting the philosophy

and practice of legal adoption also highlighted how the Christian concept of love overrides the traditional notion that biology is the determinant factor of kinship:

However, many participants made it clear that modern society's philosophy of kinship runs contradictory to the concept 'kinship' in traditional and current African culture; where the notion of 'kinship' is based on consanguinity and embraces both the living and the dead. In other words, creating kinship through the judicial system is regarded as not possible, and artificial. It is believed that one cannot build kinship ties through legal procedures, and it is also not in the child's best interests doing so because it attempts to sever a child from his or her own ancestral lineage. It also undermines one of the fundamental purposes of marriage, namely to extend paternal lineage.

Participants in all five cohorts drew attention to the fact that legal adoption is also not condoned for practical reasons; it breaks down the value informal foster care affords kin. Members of the extended family who do not enjoy good financial circumstances usually view informal foster care as a means of ensuring that 'empowered' kin can share their monetary benefits within the extended family system and support them in their difficulties. In other words, they can ensure that related children are provided with a good education and that their basic needs are adequately met. Strong tensions prevail because the practice of legal adoption transfers monetary benefits to systems outside the traditional extended family kinship system.

Interestingly, many adoptive parents highlighted that one of most important drawcards of legal adoption is that it guarantees permanency of emotional ties and confers full parental rights and responsibilities onto 'adoptive' parents'. Adoptive participants emphasised that these needs are not met by informal child care arrangements.

Although adoptive participants made it clear that they are willing to overstep traditional concepts of kinship, that is, they did seek a socio-cultural construct of a characteristic of biological parenthood and kinship, namely physical resemblances. For this reason, the adoption practice of physical matching of child with prospective adopter(s) and/or their kin was strongly supported by adoptive participants.

8.2.Information and Support

Findings suggest that the nature of information and support regarding legal adoption impacts on participants' perceptions of, and responses to, the practice. Adoptive and citizen participants recommended that adoption awareness and recruitment campaigns should be improved because many black South Africans (including those living in urban areas) have limited knowledge of the current adoption model, and as a result make negative assumptions about the practice.

Adoptive participants gained a comprehensive understanding of adoption policy and procedures when attending orientation meetings. They emphasised that it was only after detailed information about adoption, and more specifically what assessment procedures entails, that they made a final decision whether to enter the adoption screening process. They reflected that the information they are provided with regarding the rigorous assessment process is prescriptive and daunting and consequently disconcerting.

However, on a positive note, orientation regarding legal adoption in a group setting was experienced as a source of support for adoptive participants. They implied that they identified with one another in this context; that they all faced involuntary childlessness and perceived legal adoption as a means of fulfilling this need. This built a sense of group cohesion. Members belonging to a group of prospective adopters who decided to enter the screening process motivated and encouraged one another during this challenging process.

Information and support made available to prospective adopters when they personally interacted with black adopters who had adopted an unrelated child, had a lot of influence. It encouraged some adoptive participants to enter the screening process because adopters provided them with reassurance that completion of the assessment process is possible, and that the happiness afforded when taking on the role of adoptive parenthood is well worth the challenges involved in the screening process.

Findings indicated that the quality of the client-worker relationship can facilitate or impede the assessment process. Support came to the fore for prospective adopters if

their cases were managed by social workers specialising in the field of adoption. This is because these social workers were familiar with how the rigorous assessment process is usually experienced by adoption applicants, and they thus offered encouragement throughout the screening process. It is salient that findings suggest that not all black social workers support legal adoption. The negative attitude of a social worker exacerbated the stress experienced by a prospective adopter in the screening process because this prospective adopter felt vulnerable to any judgement that might negatively affect her chance of being found fit and proper to adopt.

It is apparent that some prospective adopters turn to Christianity as a source of support; that there is an all-loving God who can lift their load of feeling empty and inadequate owing to childlessness. Adoptive participants who subscribed to this Christian belief, reasoned that legally adopting an unrelated child was a loving God's calling for them to take on this form of parenthood. However, participants also made it clear that some Christians negatively label people who adopt unrelated children, because this action demonstrates a lack of faith in a God who can perform miracles.

8.3. Cultural and Material Mobility

It is predominantly involuntary childless people, who are upwardly materially and culturally mobile, that approach adoption agencies to inquire about legally adopting an unrelated child. Their cultural and material mobility has usually been boosted by their level of education. All the adoptive participants were well-educated and earned good incomes. They were familiar with a wide variety of cultural practices including legal adoption, which is classified as a westernised model of family formation. Single woman adoptive participants did not feel rigidly bound by any specific cultural norms, and were open to influence and change to address their involuntary childlessness.

Adoptive participants' high level of education and financial status facilitated completion of the adoption screening process, since the completion of all the necessary aspects of the assessment process are costly. It also became clear that the current adoption model has a racial label; a form of family creation practiced by white, wealthy people.

Prospective adopters were also willing to face the challenge of stigmatisation associated with legal adoption. They felt confident about making independent decisions, and were not intimidated by the socio-cultural norms that impact more on the not well-educated black population.

Research findings also indicated that most black men do not readily support black women's upward material mobility in the corporate world. For this reason, single professional black women, aware of their biological aging, were uncertain as to whether they would enter a long-term, intimate relationship in time to conceive. This might have been why there were six single woman adopters – as opposed to two married woman adopters - who participated in this study (The researcher did not stipulate that marital status should be a criterion in the recruiting of research participants).

One the other hand, it also became apparent that many other single women do not consider legally adopting a child because they are prioritising their upward socio-economic mobility; an opportunity denied them in the apartheid era.

8.4. Parenthood, Gender and Identity

For woman adoptive participants, fulfilling the role of mother was deemed an essential part of their self-identity as women. A definite attraction for woman adoptive participants to the current legal adoption model was their longing to nurture a young child. Infertile woman participants obviously experienced deep emotional pain and demonstrated elements of psychological bereavement and identity loss. Legal adoption offered an opportunity to heal and re-establish a sense of identity development.

Social constructs of 'gender' had a significant effect on the perceptions of legal adoption. Adult men and (especially) women who could not take on the role of biological parent were exposed to social stigma and rejection; not only by members of the general community, but also by members of the extended family. The physical matching process definitely eased tensions in this regard.

Woman adoptive participants, and some citizens, emphasised that in many African cultural belief systems, bearing a child defines the essence of womanhood. However, adoptive woman participants reasoned that womanhood does not have to be solely portrayed through fecundity and ties between mother and child. They believed that showing love and care for children can also denote womanhood.

On the other hand, many participants emphasised that most black men do not consider legally adopting an unrelated child because in traditional African culture (biological) fatherhood is a key component of manhood and masculinity. Adopting an unrelated child would reveal to significant others, and members of the community, that they were lacking in machismo.

8.5. Perceptions of Parenting and Childhood

Adoption policy and practice is based on the principle ‘best interests of the child. In line with this fundamental principle, adoption social work participants stressed that the assessment process must be child-centred to be in the best interests of the child. Young, adoptable children are regarded as being both vulnerable, and in a critical and sensitive period of development, and for this reason a multi-disciplinary, rigorous assessment process was considered essential to ensure that the child is raised by ‘fit and proper’ parents in a loving home environment. If prospective adopters questioned or challenged the necessity of completing any sections of the rigorous screening process, they were usually categorised as adults leaning toward an adult-centred paradigm, and in terms of current adoption policy, this stance is disapproved of.

Conversely, prospective adopters often challenged the necessity of undergoing such a comprehensive and costly assessment process. They felt that their willingness to take on the lifelong responsibility of raising a child in need of care and protection in a loving home environment was not given the recognition it deserves. Instead the process leaned towards fulfilling the perceived best interests of the child. Adoption social workers reasoned that in many respects they are at risk of not meeting the best interests of the child if the screening process becomes more superficial and arbitrary. They have checks and balances in place in the form of child legislation, and adoption policy and practice

(based on a multi-disciplinary approach) to help ensure that the child's best interests are met when making decisions regarding permanent placement of the child.

Social work policy emphasises the necessity of adoptive parents to disclose to the adopted child, at an appropriate age, that he or she is not their biological child. Social workers were of the opinion that if adopters personally disclose to the child, this can forestall the child from finding out in an unkind way, or facing possible rejection and emotional abuse from extended family members and members of the community.

8.6. The Core Category

When closely analysing issues coming to the fore in these five categories, it is evident that tensions run high in South Africa between perceptions and experiences of adoption and current adoption policy and practice.

As pointed out, the philosophy of kinship underpinning legal adoption runs contradictory to the traditional African concept of kinship. Whereas the former concept of kinship is constructed on emotional and legal ties, the latter is rigidly constructed on consanguinity and affinity ties.

The nature of information and support also affects the adoption experience. Support comes in the form of personal contact with adopter experiencing joy; group cohesion and quality client-worker relationships. Tensions emerge when professional support is not forthcoming on all fronts.

Cultural and material mobility also impacts on adoption experiences. It is usually well-educated people, of relatively high socio-economic class, that have a more holistic perspective of the practice of legal adoption.

However, tensions are apparent when it comes to completing the rigorous assessment process. Social workers tend to view compliance with adoption legislation, policy and practice as safeguards to ensure the best interests of young, adoptable child are adequately met. On the other hand, current adoption policy and practice are deemed too

rigid, and that there needs to be a better balance between a child-centred and parent-centred approach.

9. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the researcher presented her research findings by aligning them with the three phases of grounded theory data analysis supported by Corbin and Strauss. Five interlinked categories and subcategories that emerged during progressively higher data analysis were described. The core category emerging is: *Tensions surrounding adoption policy and practice and perceptions and experiences of adoption.*

In the following chapter, the researcher critically discusses all five categories, as well as the core category that emerged.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 4 the researcher presents her research findings. These findings relate to the main research question, namely: What factors affect the decision-making processes of black South Africans regarding legally adopting unrelated children? The following sub-questions have guided the concurrent gathering and analysis of data to develop a grounded theory.

- What perceptions do black South Africans have of legal adoption of an unrelated child as a means of family formation, and why is this so?
- How do black South Africans become familiar with the practice of legal adoption of an unrelated child, and what influences their responses in this regard?
- What are the motives for black South Africans deciding to legally adopt an unrelated child, or deciding not to do so?
- How is the adoption assessment process being implemented by adoption social workers and how is this process being experienced by prospective adopters?

By applying the Corbin and Strauss model of grounded theory (see Chapter 3), five key interrelated categories emerged: 1) Meanings of Kinship; 2) Information and Support 3) Material and Cultural Mobility; 4) Parenthood, Gender and Identity and 5) Perceptions of Parenting and Childhood. Essentially, all these categories, to different degrees, provided answers to these sub-questions.

As highlighted in Chapter 3, Strauss and Corbin (1998, cited by Saldaña, 2012, p. 163) explained that the core category "consists of all the products of analysis condensed into a few words that seem to explain what this research is all about" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, cited by Saldaña, 2012, p.163). The core category, or grounded theory, capturing

all five categories was: *Tensions surrounding adoption policy and practice and perceptions and experiences of adoption.*

Simply put, this theory materialised because each of these five categories reflected different forms and dimensions of tension related to perceptions and experiences of adoption, and adoption policy and practice. The researcher will now critically discuss her research findings and compare them with other research evidence associated with the adoption of unrelated adoptions. Initially, she will focus on the five categories separately, and thereafter concentrate on the grounded theory by explaining what tensions affected the decision-making processes of black South Africans when it came to unrelated adoption, and why these tensions existed.

2. MEANINGS OF KINSHIP

Evident in this study's findings is that strong tensions existed because the legal adoption process focuses on the nuclear family/ kinship system, whereas potential adopters were familiar with a more complex family/kinship system. The contemporary Western concept of family/kinship and the traditional African cultural concept of family/kinship are significantly different. Conflicts between the two emerge because the Western concept of kinship has rather broad and 'fluid' boundaries (Beauregard, et al., 2009; Carsten, 2000; Goldberg & Scheid, 2015; Holy 1996; Turner & West, 2006), whereas the boundaries of traditional African notions of kinship are more defined and stable.

Reiterated throughout this study was that, in terms of traditional African culture, creating kinship through a judicial process is regarded as artificial, because one can never sever a child from his or her ancestral lineage. Consanguineal and affinal ties form the foundation of the traditional African concept of kinship, and kinship boundaries are extended by the fact that these kinship ties bind the living and the dead (ancestors).

This evidence confirms Mokomane's and Rochat's (2010) similar findings regarding the importance of ancestry in the black community when it comes to family formation. However, what was not identified by Mokomane and Rochat (2010), probably because

the main focus of their research was on *related* adoption by black South Africans, is that unrelated adoption would probably expose the adopted child to risk. Some adoptive and citizen participants in the study emphasised that in traditional African culture, trying to integrate a 'foreign' child into a kin system can invoke retribution by the ancestors. Furthermore, black community members with staunch ancestral beliefs attribute any form of misbehavior by the child as being directly associated with the fact that the child has not been accepted by the ancestor. Taking this line of reasoning into consideration, it became possible to understand why 'creating kinship' through the legal process of adoption does not gain easy acceptance in traditional African culture.

It has been argued that Africa is now dominated by the Western and European mode of culture, and that black people have 'outgrown' traditional African cultural heritage (Arowolo, 2010, p. 2). Mwakikagile (2008) limited this statement by suggesting that all well-educated black South Africans have adopted a western lifestyle. However, although the findings of this study suggested this might be true in respect of the adoptive participants in this study (all were well-educated and living in middle-class residential areas), lifestyle should not be confused with cultural beliefs. Other research findings have indicated that that many well-educated, black South Africans identify with a traditional African cultural construct of kinship. Thus, Memela's (2011, para. 13) perspective that "…there is very little that is African about this African country [South Africa] must be challenged when it comes to the question of "Who are kin?" Rather, it should be acknowledged that many black South Africans still hold fast to a traditional African concept of kinship. This study's finding concurred with that of Russel (2003), who reported that in matters of family and kinship, black people living in urban areas are still influenced by an African cultural approach to kinship.

Research findings implied that black South Africans exploring adoption, and who identify with ancestral ties, downplayed the role of ancestors in determining who can form part of the kinship system. They might out of respect, introduce a child to their ancestors, but the adopted child would not be rejected by their ancestors because his or her origins are unknown. In other words, their interpretations of kinship were more fluid.

Closely related to this finding, this study revealed that black South Africans applying to adopt unrelated children generally regard the bonds of love between parent and child as fundamental to the creation of kinship. They believed that showing acceptance and love for the adopted child builds a sense of belonging, and this is the most critical element of kinship. Howell (2009, para.3) captured the meaning attached to kinship well when he made the point that adoption focuses "… on the quality of relatedness, to elicit meanings of kinned relations and on processes of kinning".

As pointed out in Chapter 2, the philosophy behind the existing adoption model is that 'unconditional love', rather than only blood ties, can establish kinship. This is also a fundamental Christian principle. This study revealed that black Christian prospective adopters utilise this principle to circumvent the powerful, traditional African social norm of what constitutes kinship. Adoptive participants did not believe that ancestors have the authority to accept or reject adopted children as kin. Instead, God was recognised as the most important 'ancestor' and He endorses the adoption of unrelated children because it is a way of showing love one for another.

Dahl (2009) pointed out that in Botswana, Christian goodwill and charity are being used to reconfigure – or to justify reconfiguring – social relations both within and outside of kinship. In other words, the ideology of "spiritual kinship" is being promoted. However, this study's findings suggested that Christian, involuntary childless prospective adopters are using Christianity to reconfigure family formations and relationships. Their focus was on meeting their personal needs to parent, rather than being driven by altruistic motives alone. They had a deep desire to nurture and love young children to address their personal feelings of emptiness or loss.

Findings suggested that another probable reason why legal adoption is not approved of by members of adoptive parents' extended family, is because it stands to disrupt (primarily financial) kin support, especially financial assistance in the form of informal foster care. If financial resources are directed towards meeting the needs of an unrelated child, this is viewed as disregarding kinship responsibilities – a role expected of a family member who is financially better off.

According to this study's findings, involuntary childless adults viewed the benefits of this traditional child care arrangement as one-sided: it is at the convenience of their needy relatives and they receive little by way of fulfilment from the childcare arrangement. This was because the informally fostered child's biological parent(s) regarded them (the carers) as rendering an expected adjunct function, regardless of the emotional demands or risk for the carer. The benefits of legal adoption came in the form of permanent child care arrangements and full parental rights and responsibilities.

Also evident in the findings was the fact that the practice of physically matching adopters with adoptable children by means of the matching process was well supported by prospective adopters and social workers because it 'visibly' creates kinship. Pretence was deemed necessary because usually people both within and outside the family system look for physical resemblances or characteristics to authenticate the child as part of the family. Prospective adopters believed that physical resemblances improve the likelihood that members of the extended family would identify the child as kin, and this would facilitate the child's own sense of belonging.

An interesting finding that emerged in this study was that some prospective adopters thought that if the adopted child's physical appearance was attractive, this would probably facilitate acceptance of the child by members of the black community. More specifically, a light complexion was regarded as an attractive trait. Although the researcher could not locate any research literature focusing on the connection between light skin tone and attractiveness as far as legal adoption of black children is concerned, much research has confirmed that in many societies and communities (including the black community in South Africa) there is a desire for light skin tone because it is regarded as attractive (Davids, Van Wyk, Khumalo & Jablonski, 2016; Dixon & Telles, 2017; Dlova, Hamed, Tsoka-Gwegweni & Grobler, 2015; Glenn, 2008).

Miall and March (2006) pointed out that implementing the physical matching process reinforces arguments voiced for decades that the practice of 'matching' (including physical matching), illustrates how adoption policy and practice are based on societies' construction of the 'ideal' family. Herman, (2008) referred to the matching process as 'kinship by design' and noted that although social workers try to reduce the stigma and

increase authenticity of kinship made socially/legally by matching an adoptable child with a prospective adopter, by so doing they deny the most obvious thing about legal adoption, namely a very specific way of creating a family. However, study findings implied that the forms of stigma and rejection that both adopter and adoptee are potentially exposed to in South Africa are probably more intense where legal adoption of an unrelated child is not common practice. Research in Africa has indicated that children who are not related to their primary caregivers by blood ties are sometimes exposed to emotional abuse in Africa (Case, Paxson & Ableidinger, 2004).

In many respects, findings regarding the matching process concur with what is evident in practice. Many abandoned children are being made available for inter-country adoption because black South African adoptive participants do not want children who look like non-South Africans, who tend to be dark-skinned. The physical traits of abandoned children often suggest that one or both their birthparents are probably non-South Africans (Personal communication with member of NACSA on 4th March 2016).

Findings proposed that the issue of disclosure to the child that he/she has been adopted is a contested issue. Prospective adopters viewed physical matching and mandatory disclosure as being contradictory notions. On the one hand, physical matching promotes acceptance that the child 'belongs' to a family system based on blood ties, whereas disclosure sends the message to the adopted child that he or she is not part of the family. Prospective adopters also associated disclosure with the risk of 'losing' the child, because the adopted child might want to take the initiative to trace his/her biological kin (particularly his/her birthparents). In this regard, findings concur with those of Pakati (1992), who reported that disclosure is complicated by the fact that adopting an unrelated child entails bringing a child into a whole new kinship system.

Adoption social workers in this study reasoned that disclosure to the child that he/she has been adopted should be mandatory because this is in a child's best interests. This is the worldwide standpoint and there is much evidence supporting their point of view. For example, researchers have found that if adoptive parents do not disclose to a child that he/she has been legally adopted and a child goes on to discover lack of consanguinity, it can threaten that child's identity, a deep-rooted need in most of society's members

(Tarroja, 2015). Smalley and Schooler (2015) identified non-disclosure as emotionally damaging for the adoptee, creating family mistrust and shame. Thus, disclosure is in an adopted child's best interests.

Mandatory disclosure to the adoptee that he or she is not biologically related to the family could probably be challenged in the case of abandoned children. This is because the adoption agency has no information regarding the child's birthparents, and abandonment often takes place under traumatic circumstances. For example, the media often calls attention to the fact that in many cases abandoned children are wrapped in plastic bags and left in dustbins. It is also significant to note that in a report submitted by the Children's Institute in 1998 (p. 165) in respect of a review of the Child Care Act, an accredited adoption agency averred that in many instances disclosure of adoption would not be in the child's best interests. This is because most adopters, particularly in the rural Black community, are more comfortable with non-disclosure in adoption. The said agency also claimed that there is still a tremendous amount of secrecy surrounding adoption in the Black community and adopters go to great lengths to avoid members of the community, and even members of the extended family for that matter, knowing about the adoption. However, it was also pointed out that circumstances meriting non-disclosure might change with time, but that the pool of potential Black adoptive parents would decline if non-disclosure were mandatory.

Even though various levels of disclosure are being implemented worldwide, in cases where the identity of the child's parent(s) is known (as is the case where the child is voluntarily relinquished for adoption), open-adoption sometimes takes place. In other words, the biological parents of the child can have personal contact with their adopted child. However, the researcher's findings suggested that open-adoption is probably not going to materialize in South Africa in the near future. This is because, as already mentioned, most young, adoptable children are abandoned children and, in many respects adoptive parents would probably view it as another form of informal adoption.

3. INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

Not surprisingly, much of my findings concurred with worldwide evidence that the information and support provided to prospective adopters affects their decision-making throughout the adoption process (Belanger, Cheung & Cordova, 2012; Tabuteau-Harrison & Mewse, 2013). For example, information and support influenced potential adopters' decision whether to make personal contact with an adoption agency, how they experienced adoption orientation and decided whether to enter the adoption screening process and, finally, how they experienced the process of being screened.

In the researcher's study, black participants who considered legally adopting a child were usually more influenced to explore adoption by personal connection, than by information presented in different forms of mass media (for example, radio, magazines and newspapers). This finding could be challenged because at the time the researcher was gathering and analysing data, NACSA had not yet presented any well-structured awareness campaigns such as 'Addoption', a programme designed to draw attention to the plight of South Africa's adoptable children and provide accurate information to prospective adoptive parents. Advertising campaigns, such as posters titled "…Imagine being love…and giving it to a child" and "Ubuntu' means a loving home", which carried the 'Addoption' logo, were also presented to the general public subsequent to the researcher's data-gathering phase of research. A viable adoption website and an adoption call centre were only established in 2011. However, an important fact making the researcher's findings reliable is the continuous decline in black adoption rates (Registrar of Adoptions, 2016). These statistics are probably the most convincing indicator that recruitment strategies using media are having a limited effect on recruiting prospective adopters (see Figure 1).

The research findings proposed that one probable reason why the adoption of social marketing campaigns for the recruitment of prospective parents has not been effective to date is because mobilising feelings of 'altruism' has been the main social marketing focus. As highlighted earlier in this report, although some researchers have identified selfless concern for the well-being of children in need of care as a motive prompting people to consider adoption (Clifton & Neil, 2013; Howell & Marre, 2006; Malm &

Welti, 2010; Wallis, 2006), this study's findings indicated that this is not the main reason why adoptive participants approach adoption agencies. Rather, they approached adoption agencies because they were involuntarily childless and wanted to permanently fulfil their personal desire to parent.

Selwyn, Frazer and Fritgerald (2004), who focused on recruitment strategies for adoption in England, emphasised that recruitment teams need to understand the recruitment processes from a potential adopter's perceptions of adoption and adoption should be promoted through high-quality advertising and publicity. It thus stands to reason that there should probably be a shift in focus when it comes to designing and implementing recruitment strategies in South Africa. For example, as already mentioned, the researcher's study findings indicate that the desire for permanent child care arrangements, presented as a strong motive for turning from informal foster care to legal adoption and thus 'permanency' should probably be highlighted as a benefit of legal adoption in social marketing campaigns.

Study findings also indicated that when women adoptive participants had personal contact with an adopter, they felt reassured that their desire to take on the role of mother was achievable. Similarly, Wilson, Kahn and Geen (2005) established that 'word-of-mouth' is more effective than media when it comes to recruiting potential adopters. Guilt, et al. (2006) drew attention to the fact that personal contact reinforces the decision to explore adoption. More specifically, the researcher's findings suggested that adoptive participants' reservations were allayed when they personally learnt that adopting an unrelated child could fill a woman's life with much joy, even though the child has not been personally conceived.

Closely related to this notion of personal connection, this study's findings proposed that orientating potential adopters in groups, rather than individually, provides much emotional and social support. This is because adoption applicants experienced commonality and sense of belonging when attending group orientation. Personal interaction with other prospective adopters meant they no longer felt alone in facing the challenges related to involuntary childlessness and the process of adoption screening. Identifying with one another and working towards the same goal, namely successfully

completing the adoption screening process, provided support and encouragement. Support usually came in the form of effective interpersonal communication after attending an adoption orientation workshop. This finding was surprising because substantial adoption research emphasises the important role support groups can play in post-adoption services, rather than in the beginning of, and during, the adoption screening process (McKay, Ross & Goldberg, 2010; Schwartz, Cody, Ayers-Lopex, McRoy & Fong, 2014; Teska, 2016)

As anticipated, study findings revealed that the quality of support provided by professionals involved in the adoption screening process affected the adoption experience. The researcher's findings indicated that when trusting client-social worker relationships were developed, prospective adopters felt 'safer' and more confident to complete the challenging screening process (Belanger, Cheung & Cordova, 2012; Lee & Ayón, 2004; Moss & Gloviak, 2013; Payne, 2015; Trevithick, 2003).

Of importance to note though, is this study also revealed that the competency and attitudes of some social workers involved in the adoption assessment process (especially social workers not specialising in the field of adoption) exacerbated stress prospective adopters in the screening process experienced. Study findings implied that social workers' negative responses probably take place when there is dissonance between social workers' personal values, beliefs and biases regarding legal adoption, and the professional ethical principles and values they should uphold. This finding was concerning, especially considering the Children's Second Amendment Bill, which proposes broadening the definition of "adoption social worker" to include social workers in the employ of the DSD (which is currently offering generic social work services; not specialised adoption services). This finding was salient because it is generally assumed that social workers managing cases of unrelated adoption need to be skilled in this type of social work. Furthermore, overseas research has indicated that social workers not trained in adoption competency sometimes mismanage key issues in adoption and this adds to the stress experienced by prospective adopters (Siegel, 2013).

Another important finding that came to the fore in this study was that some medical practitioners probably do not understand, or take into consideration, that prospective

adopters in the screening process feel particularly vulnerable. Rather than showing empathy, prospective adopters were regarded by medical practitioners as service consumers only. Adoption social workers probably did not take into consideration that all professionals, not only adoption social workers, need to be mindful of the anxiety usually experienced by prospective adopters being assessed.

To summarise, it is important to note that the main source of tension in this category had to do with the fact that the adoption process is a private affair; each adoption applicant was assessed individually and generally felt alone. This could have exacerbated their feelings of isolation and vulnerability. Tensions seemed to be eased when they had group support and their cases were managed by skilled adoption social workers.

4. MATERIAL AND CULTURAL MOBILITY

Research findings signified that potential adopters tend to be upwardly mobile black South Africans on the material or socio-economic continuum. This socio-economic position most likely stemmed from the elevated level of education they have attained (See demographics presented in Chapter 4). Academics that have explored the effect of education in the South Africa context have reiterated the key role education plays in facilitating socio-economic mobility (Eaton & Louw, 2000; Fullwood, Rowley & Delbridge, 2013; Moss, Kubacki, Price, 2012).

Moreover, the researcher's findings indicated that it is because potential adopters enjoyed relatively high socio-economic status, that they were more readily able to engage with a western concept of family formation though legal adoption. This related to the fact that they were familiar with western culture, especially through globalisation in cultural terms and because, as highlighted in the previous category, prospective adopters personally interacted with westerners in their work settings, or when socialising. It was in this social milieu, or specific context, that they learnt first-hand about western cultural perceptions related to adopting a biologically unrelated child. Adopting Greenblatt's theory of cultural mobility, one could assume that prospective adopters being familiar with the western concept of adoption, could consider legal

adoption as an acceptable and meaningful means of addressing their involuntary childlessness; in other words, they were ‘culturally mobile’.

The fact that the researcher’s repeated efforts to recruit a research sample of black South African citizens who have low levels of education and socio-economic status was in vain, probably reinforces this notion. All low-educated citizens that the researcher approached could not be included in her study sample because the main selection criterium was that participants should have some knowledge of legal adoption.

However, one must be careful not to assume that familiarisation based on education and cultural interaction necessarily lead to marked cultural change in cultural perspectives. Research findings suggested that some people considering adoption do not only identity as being totally westernised. In many respects, it became apparent in this study that most prospective adopters’ cultural mobility could probably be described as ‘fluid’ because their sense of identity was not rigidly based in either traditional African or Western cultures. Rather, they seemed to be able to shift appropriately when engaging with diverse cultural groups. For example, some adopters used traditional rituals to introduce the adopted child into the family system. Adoptive participants were familiar with traditional African beliefs regarding the value of biological children and the purposes of marriage. They understood why black married couples shy away from adoption, even though they have been unable to conceive a child. They also knew why an unrelated child presents as foreign and unacceptable for most members of the black community.

In this regard, research findings concurred somewhat with those of Seekings (2015), who observed that out of the black middle-class, many black middle-class South Africans retain enduring links to, and identities with, the working-class communities from which they originated. Moshida (2007, cited by Ndletyana, 2014) also noted that many middle-class black South Africans take on distinct roles and identities when moving from one cultural group to another.

Some international research studies have established that level of income and educations do not significantly predict consideration of adoption or adoption seeking

behaviours (Bachrach, et al., 1991; Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2002; Van Laningham, Scheuble and Johnson, 2012). On the other hand, the researcher's study findings endorsed overseas findings that have identified that level of education and incomes of potential adopters are positively linked to considering adoption (for example, Cowan, 2004; Langingham & Johnson, 2012). An important implication in this regard must do with the fact that one cannot directly associate level of socio-economic standing with the number of prospective adopters. For example, even though the number of black middle-class has risen considerably in post-apartheid society (Jones, 2007; Olivier, 2007; de Waal, 2008; Southall, 2016), the number of black adopters in South Africa has progressively declined.

A closely related and relevant finding in this study was that black, single women, who are culturally active and materially mobile, in many aspects fall into a category of single women in the white South African population described by Burger, Mc Aravey and Van der Berg (2015). These authors depicted this category of single women as economically secure, empowered and capacitated individuals who are free to pursue their personal goals and aspirations. My findings suggested that single potential adopters are women who have clearly moved up the socio-economic ladder and accrued 'power' to move away from the traditional belief that the fundamental role of women is to bear children. They could exercise free agency when it came to the decision to apply to adopt an unrelated child. As Schalkwyk (2000) pointed out "…women's empowerment can contribute to women's ability to formulate and advocate their own visions for their society's interpretations and changes to cultural norms (in this study, cultural norms in respect of legal adoption). However, this study findings suggested that this 'category' of single, black women would probably only consider adoption if they are involuntary childless and long to mother; rather than only furthering their upward climb of the socio-economic ladder.

Reiterated throughout this study was the notion that completing the adoption process is a costly affair. It is interesting to note that apart from adoptive participants, some adoption social workers in this study acknowledged that expensive fees deterred potential adopters from entering the assessment process. Adoption social workers emphasised that adoption agencies charge fees for services rendered and these fees are

charged on a sliding scale. Nonetheless, because the adoption assessment process is based on a multi-disciplinary approach, other professional role players (such as medical practitioners and psychologists) also render services that must be paid for by prospective adopters in the screening process. Furthermore, adoption agencies insisted that prospective adopters cannot use personal general practitioners to conduct medical assessments, probably because they did not want biased or untrustworthy medical reports.

As already mentioned, in 2015 the DSD recognised the need to make adoption more affordable (National DSD, 2015). The current cost of the adoption process was also questioned at the national adoption seminar conducted on 2nd to 4th November 2016. Dr. Malan of the North-West University (a presenter at the seminar) pointed out that one possible factor contributing to declining adoption rates is the fact that the process is regarded as "…complex, costly and time consuming." Other key role players at the seminar also highlighted that there needs to be consistent lobbying by the DSD to focus on the regulation of the fees in respect of adoption social workers in private practice to bring it in line with those of CPOs.

The expensive fees associated with the adoption process have not only been called into question in South Africa. For example, some American states insist that adoption fees should be eliminated because it discriminates against people who cannot afford the escalating costs of the assessment process (Creedy, 2002; Cowan, 2004; Langingham & Johnson, 2012). Studies have established that potential adopters have benefited from "… having the fee waived, having subsidies made available or receiving information about tax credits (Creedy, 2002; Keen, Malm & Katz, 2004). To date, these monetary incentives have not been properly explored in South Africa. The researcher surmises that this is because the State pays millions for foster care grants in respect of orphaned children that have been placed in related foster care. Furthermore, the researcher's personal work experience has revealed to her that many adoption social workers are of the opinion that if grants are made available for unrelated adoption, one would have to call into questions the true motives for people applying to adopt because adoption of an unrelated child might be only for financial gain.

It is pertinent to note that some adopters in this study indicated that the monetary costs involved in the adoption screening process emerge as having racial connotations. In other words, race is directly linked to class. The white racial group was perceived as the affluent racial group that can 'afford' to 'buy' children. Although not directly related to the overlap between race and class in adoption practice, Boswell (2014, p. 1) pointed out that "… in the post-apartheid context, aversive racism is palpable in spaces still defined as 'white'." In this regard, it is apparent in this study's findings that adoption of an unrelated child through the legal system is a 'space still defined as white' and blacks legally adopting an unrelated child are potentially exposed to aversive racism. This is understandable in light of the deep history of racism in South Africa.

Reinforcing the notion that adoption has racialist meaning was the term 'coconut' used by some participants in this study to describe black adopters. This term refers to well-educated black people ('native elites') who act and behave as 'white' people do (Chigumadzi, 2015). It is interesting to note that in politics, middle-class blacks are labelled materialistic; a negative label associated with white people in South Africa (Iqani, 2017; Xaso, 2015). However, black prospective adopters in this study seemed to be more vocal and challenged this labelling of adoption as being a white man's practice. Their strength to tolerate and manage racial epithets probably relates to their high level of education and social class and, in some respects, they had taken on a 'white' identity' although retaining their 'black identity'. Thus, one can probably assume that in light of the fact that adoption practice is associated with the white race because of the expenses involved, black South Africans would generally be reluctant to explore adoption.

Related to the idea that black prospective adopters are shifting into a white people's culture, study findings suggested that some black community members perceive potential adopters as embracing individualistic values, rather than collectivist values. This is probably because when adopters choose to adopt an unrelated child, they are purposively withdrawing support from family members (mainly provided when informally fostering a related child). Potential adopters seemed to be perceived as attaching more importance to individual interests and pursue personal goals, namely the desire to enter parenthood by adopting unrelated children through the legal system. The traditional collectivist notion is that they should show their loyalty to extended family

members by being willing to share their income, or capitals, by providing for the needs of a related child, including these children's opportunity to receive a good education.

This study found that some potential adopters challenged the moral justification of the costs involved in the adoption assessment process. Prospective adopters perceived the costs involved as reinforcing the notion that one is paying for a child. This sentiment was reflected by some adoptive and citizen participants alike.

This study's findings indicated that adoptive participants felt that their desire to adopt a child was not recognised or encouraged. The expenses involved and invasive testing procedures taxed their motivation. They believed applying to adopt a child should be viewed as willingness to offer parental love and adequately provide for all the material needs of the child. When adopting a child, they were offering a lifetime of time *and* money to ensure that adoptable children's needs are adequately met. An extensive review of research literature indicated that this perspective related to domestic adoption has to date not been focused on in South Africa. However, the morality of having prospective adopters pay fees has been debated in western countries. Many people involved in the adoption process reason that "…no rationale of fees will relieve adoptive parents of the certain knowledge they have bought a human being (Zelizer, 1985, p. 202). Moreover, the financial costs involved in adoption have been raised in respect of intercountry adoptions where anti-trafficking norms receive attention (Alexander, 2014; Fronek & Cuthbert, 2013; Goodno, 2015; Graff, 2000; Rotabi & Bromfield, 2015).

When trying to understand why there are so few black people adopting unrelated children, adoption social workers tended to assume that this relates to the fact that adoption practice has not been 'Africanised' (NACSA Conference, 2014). However, the researcher thinks this is an essentialist approach to Africanisation. In other words, it supposes that culture is fixed or static, that is has a rigid classification and that for adoption to become accessible to black South Africans, it must be moulded into a separate African culture. Study findings made it apparent that African culture for prospective is rather fluid and dynamic. Potential adopters approaching adoption agencies were culturally and materially mobile and thus able to integrate into their lives

a westernised way of forming family relationships, namely through legal adoption of an unrelated child.

Basically, findings revealed that tensions exist because although the focus is on recruiting all black South Africans, the current adoption process prohibits this to a large degree. Instead of adoption practice being easily accessible to all classes, it is often viewed as unaffordable. Socio-economic status and cultural mobility tend to be important issues when considering which black South Africans will apply to legally adopt an unrelated child.

5. PARENTHOOD, GENDER AND IDENTITY

Evident in this study was that for potential adopters, parenthood is a central identity. They were willing to explore achieving this valued identity through legal adoption, even though it entailed breaking away from deeply entrenched, socio-cultural norms regarding parenthood and might expose them to sigma. However, because the drive of the adoption process is child-centred, professional sensitivity and support for potential adopters was not always forthcoming in the adoption process, even though the process was daunting.

Authors such as Litosseliti and Sunderland (2002) and Letherby (1999) have described gender identity as fluid and continuing. To the contrary, findings in this study suggested that as far as gender identity is concerned, this social construct is firmly established in the black community. In other words, female identity is associated with motherhood, and male identity with fatherhood. The transition to adoptive parenthood was particularly difficult because it does not hold the same status as biological parenthood.

In this study, it was apparent that potential adopters approaching adoption agencies usually faced many challenges because adoption tended to be linked with possible attributes of failure, both on a personal and socio-cultural level. As repeatedly emphasised in South African research literature, infertile black men and women face ridicule, stigmatisation and exclusion (Dyer, Abrahams, Hoffman & van der Spuy; 2002; Makoba, 2005; van Balen & Bos, 2009). Study findings in this regard are well

captured by Kressierer's and Bryant's (1996, abstract) description of adoption: "...it is 'deviant behaviour' leading to stigmatization because adoptive parenthood is invidiously compared with biological parenthood and labelled a 'disvalued' identity."

As far as male identity was concerned, findings proposed that fatherhood is an integral element in the construction of masculinities and manhood. This finding endorsed research conducted in South Africa (Morrell, 2006) and internationally (Ouzgane 1997; Peterson, Gold & Feingold, 2007; Sylvest, Christensen, Hammarberg & Schmidt, 2014). Their research indicated that fatherhood is a key component of manhood and masculinity in other cultures. Also highlighted in this study, the mere fact of having a child could be used to claim the status of manhood and the social constructs of manhood identity and fatherhood identity could be separated. Hunter (2006) also accentuated that men in South Africa still place a high value on fathering children because a child symbolizes sexual virility and propels forward the status of a young man. Furthermore, this study indicated that a man's desire to demonstrate masculinity and manhood by fathering a biological child is probably the main reason why men shy away from exploring the legal adoption of an unrelated child. Legal adoption might expose to all their impotence.

In this study's findings, it was also evident that motherhood is central to a woman's gender identity. Bearing children fulfilled a significant and defining role - probably more so than for black men - and the inability to reproduce threatened a woman's female identity. Dux and Simic (2008, p. 3, cited by Graham, Smith & Sheild, 2015) capture the sentiments of potential woman adopters well: "…despite changed social circumstances; motherhood continues to be presented as an indispensable rite of passage to female fulfilment. If a woman fails to have children she is somehow incomplete."

Many research studies focusing on motherhood in South Africa have also highlighted that motherhood is a significant mark of being a woman. In other words, a woman only fully becomes a woman when she becomes a mother and the inability of a woman to reproduce could threaten her female identity (Dyer et al., 2002; 2005; Essack & Strode, 2012; Gillespie, 2013; Mogoble, 2013; Park & Hill, 2014; Rochon, 2008; Sewpaul, 1999; Wager, 2000).

Why then did woman adoptive participants in this study consider making the transition to adoptive motherhood? The researcher's findings indicated that women in this study more readily turn to legal adoption than men, probably because they had a nurturant drive that surpassed and overpowered cultural restraints on legal adoption. Some involuntary childless women in this study experienced involuntary childlessness as a state of emotional dispossession; surrounded by feelings of loss and failure.

Study findings supported the notion that motherhood is deeply rooted in most women, and the need to nurture (which is different from simply having the status of a mother) is typically regarded as instinctive (Miall & March, 2006; Noftus & Namaste, 2011; Weatherall, 2000). This finding is probably evidenced when noting that virtually all the adoptive participants in this study were women (see Tables 1, 2 and 3 in Chapter 4). This information probably confirms that involuntary childless women will more readily turn to adoption than men because men appear to be more rigidly entrapped by cultural stereotypes of potency akin to masculinity.

It was also apparent in my findings that stigmatisation associated with not entering parenthood is not restricted to black women living in rural or semi-rural areas; it is also suffered by black women living in urban areas. Quite a few women adoptive and citizen participants (all living in urban areas and enjoy a good education) highlighted that women who have not borne children, can be exposed to stigma. This finding concurs with other studies examining personal and social ramifications of infertility for black South Africans (particularly women) living in urban areas (Hollos & Larsen, 2008). More specifically, Hlatswayo (2004) established that in the black culture in South Africa, because fertility is highly prized, women without children, including those that are highly educated and who are living in urbanised sectors of the community, can suffer social rejection and are made to feel inadequate.

Findings also indicated that infertility is often branded as a woman's condition. Many researchers (for example, Fleetwood & Camp-Engelstein, 2010; Mashamba, 2009; Throsby & Gill, 2004) have noted that infertility remains a woman's social encumbrance. However, a disconcerting finding that emerged in this study was that some medical practitioners reinforced the notion that infertility is woman's condition

by choosing not to examine the man when infertility problems arose; only the woman This is concerning because there is an ever-growing body of biomedical evidence indicating that male infertility contributes to approximately 50% of global childlessness (Agarwal, Mulgund, Hamada & Chyatte, 2015; Inhorn & Parizio, 2015).

Many researchers who have explored the implications of infertility in Sub-Saharan Africa (for example, Chelagat, 2017) Fledderjohann, 2012; Tabong, 2013) established that women shoulder a disproportionately greater share of the blame for infertility than their male partners. However, this study presented a slight paradigm shift in connection with this issue. In this study, it became apparent that some married women readily accept the blame for reproductive failure in order to 'protect' their husbands' or intimate partners' from criticism and stigmatisation. Similarly, Wischmann and Thorn (2013) found that in cases of infertility, women accept the blame since the diagnosis of male infertility is associated with men's lack of virility and masculinity, and men feel particularly vulnerable in this regard because society tends to associate infertility with women.

6. PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTING AND CHILDHOOD

This study found that a particular area of stress related to the fact that the adoption process is essentially child-centric and a parent-centric approach is associated with diverging from the principle that the 'best interests of the child must be paramount'. Adoption social workers were of the opinion that they must take on the role of child 'protector' when assessing prospective adopters. From their perspective, a rigorous assessment process is essential to ensure that the adoptable child is not exposed to any risk when placed in the care of adoptive parents.

Assuming a Western notion of childhood, where a child is perceived as vulnerable, dependent and innocent, they strongly felt that the welfare, needs and best interests of the child must be prioritised throughout the assessment process. Their rationale for conducting a comprehensive assessment process is positively reinforced worldwide. Research findings repeatedly indicate that if an adoption applicant's capacity to make the transition to adoptive parenthood is not adequate, this can have a profound effect on

adopted children's development (Choate, 2009; Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington & Bornstein, 2000; Dickerson & Allen, 2007; Ijzendoorn & Juffer, Perry, 2002; Pinker, 2004; Ward, Brown & Hyde-Dryden, 2014).

Prospective adopters in this study portrayed a strong desire to engage in a vulnerable child's development and upbringing in a loving home environment. However, they made it clear that that they perceived and experienced the adoption assessment process as personally intrusive and oppressive. It is important to note that to date no research in South Africa has focused on black South Africans' experiences of the adoption assessment process. The researcher thinks this is concerning because her findings suggested that it was negative perceptions and experiences of the screening process that lead to a large drop-out rate of black people considering adoption.

International research (mainly in the USA and UK) has established that potential adopters' negative perceptions of the adoption screening process are rather common worldwide (Geen, Malm & Katz, 2004; Wilson, Kahn & Geen, 2005). Costly fees, complexity, rigid application and selection criteria and duration of the screening process are generally highlighted as the most frustrating and biased aspects (Wilson, Kahn & Geen, 2005; Gardino, Russell & Woodruff, 2010).

In particular, findings in this study indicated that adoption social workers are adopting a deficit approach when it comes to the adoption assessment process. Rather than adopting a strengths-based approach, they tended to focus on identifying shortcomings of prospective adopters' capacity to parent. The social work strengths-based approach advocates moving away from focusing on weaknesses or deficits, in order to add strengths to social work assessment and intervention (Grant & Cadell, 2009, cited by Saleebey, 2006). A strengths-based approach also acknowledges the unique set of strengths and challenges of each individual and family. Furthermore, clients are engaged as partners in the planned change process (Huffman, Black & Bianco).

However, adoption social workers in this study seemed to contest this issue. Their line of reasoning presented as being based on the notion that the assessment of parenting capacity is a central child protection task. They wanted to make sure that that

prospective adopters could enhance the adopted child's developmental experiences and this implied that physical and psychological well-being plays a crucial role on adults' capacity to raise an unrelated child. Conversely, it became apparent to the researcher that the principle 'best interests of the child' leads to diverting attention away from the significant needs of prospective adopters for support. Factors affecting their mental health, such as stigmatisation, fertility and femininity and masculinity norms did not seem to form an integral part of the adoption assessment process.

Findings proposed that there are many issues related to the assessment process that are particularly contentious. For example, adoption social workers attributed adoptive applicants' reluctance to undergo HIV testing to fear that if diagnosed HIV positive, they might not be found 'fit and proper' to adopt a child. Extensive research evidence coming to the fore in South Africa reinforces the notion that reluctance to test for HIV has to do with fear of possible negative repercussions (Lambert, Orrell, & Bangsberg, et al., 2017).

Adoption social workers were also concerned that if potential adopters are not aware of any chronic illness, positive diagnosis can be experienced as traumatic. Consequently, it is important that they come to terms with the diagnosis before continuing with the assessment process. Social workers' standpoint regarding the negative impact of a HIV positive diagnosis is endorsed worldwide. For example, Anderson et al. (2010, p. 1493) found that HIV positive people are "…faced with multifaceted loss: of their known self, their present life, their envisioned future and the partner they had expected to play a role in each of these." Hosahally and Padikkal (2015) also noted the negative affect on people's mental wellbeing as a result of an HIV positive diagnosis. Similarly, studies conducted in South Africa determined that an HIV positive diagnosis can undermine quality of life for both patients and their significant others. They can feel a deep sense of grief and loss and be exposed to stigmatisation and discrimination if disclosing their status (Cloete, Strebel, Simbayi, vanWyk, Henda, & Nqeketo, 2010; Mkize, 2009; Prinsloo, Greeff, Kruger & Schweitzer, 2016; Schweitzer, Mizwa, & Ross, 2010).

Probably, even more relevant in relation to findings of this study is the fact that some research findings have identified challenges specifically related to parenting capacity for

families living with AIDS (Antle, Wells, Goldie, DeMatteo & King, 2001; Faithfull, 1999). Murphy, Marelich, Armistead, Herbeck and Payne (2010) found that AIDS stress is negatively associated with a broad range of parenting skills. For example, HIV positive parents (particularly mothers) are more likely to exhibit poorer parenting skills; they engage with children less frequently. Furthermore, there is poorer parent–child communication and less consistent parenting discipline, which in turn have negative impact on a child's development.

Fairly recently, a research study was conducted in South Africa that focused on how an HIV/AIDs diagnosis affects parenting. Findings highlighted that HIV/AIDs "…is associated with less capacity to care, as is the case with many other chronic illnesses, thus affecting parental engagement and nurturance" (Lachman, Cluver, Boyes, Kuo & Casale, 2014, p. 309). Research in developmental psychology has also shown that parents' psychological health is the main factor in children's secure attachment (Whitten, 2008).

However, it is relevant to note that research evidence regarding an HIV diagnosis having a negative impact on children's development is not consistent. Dutra et al. (2000) and Forehand et al. (2002) conducted studies comparing the psychosocial adjustment of non-infected children whose mothers are, and are not, HIV-infected. Parenting variables, such as the mother-child relationship were related to child adjustment in both groups. Findings indicated that good mother-child relationships had positive outcomes for both groups of participants. Dutra et al. (2000) pointed out that monitoring and support outside the home appears to be paramount to the development of child resiliency. This finding implies that one cannot generalise that all parents who have been diagnosed as HIV positive will respond similarly. Rather adoption social workers probably need to take into consideration that necessary emotional support can be provided by significant family and friends.

Findings implied that the ethical aspects of obligatory HIV-testing and disclosure regarding HIV status are being challenged by prospective adopters. This argument carries weight because one can perceive compulsory medical assessments as undermining adult health rights in terms of the South African Constitution. For

example, in terms of constitutional standards, HIV testing must be voluntary and conducted upon individual request (Pillay, 2001). The WHO (2012) reaffirmed its opposition to compulsory or mandatory HIV testing of individuals on public health grounds or for any other purpose. Furthermore, in terms of the Children's Act, any adult is eligible to adopt a child and potential adopters' health status in terms of selection criteria are not mentioned. The South African Commission of Law Reform made a similar recommendation with the purposes of constructing the new Children's Act. The said Commission proposed that joint adoption by two or more members of the extended family be legalised because this was a means of securing the future of a vulnerable child, lest a single caregiver later be affected by HIV/AIDS. However, as was apparent throughout this study, adoption social workers strongly felt that the rights of children surpass the rights of adults.

Closely related to the issue of adopting a deficit approach rather than a strengths-based approach, this study's findings suggested that adoption social workers tend to overemphasise the challenges adoptive parents would probably face when raising an adopted child. They stressed that raising an adopted child involves unique challenges and consequently the need for a rigorous assessment process to determine whether prospective adopters have this parenting capacity. This line of thought is substantiated by multiple research studies on an international basis (Bird, Peterson & Miller, 2002; Children's Bureau, 2015; Pinderhughes, Matthews & Zhang, 2015). Furthermore, post-adoption services are generally recommended by researchers because there is evidence that disruption of adoption placements can be reduced by provision of post-adoption services (Barth & Miller, 2000; Dhami, Mandel & Sothmann, 2007; Reilly & Platz, 2008).

It is important to note that there is overseas research that has established that children adopted in infancy adjust far better than children adopted later in childhood (van IJzendoorn & Juffer, 2006). One could probably assume that because most children being adopted by black South Africans are infants, most adoptions would most likely prove successful. Once again, an extensive review of research literature related to unrelated adoption indicated that, to date, no research evidence is available regarding this issue in South Africa.

This study's findings revealed that prospective adopters experienced undergoing psychological tests as very stressful and some questioned the necessity and validity thereof. As with medical assessments, they felt particularly vulnerable because if any psychological concerns were identified, they might be denied the opportunity to parent a child. It is relevant to note that when exploring means of 'Africanising' the adoption process, neither NACSA nor DSD debated the issue of whether the current psychological assessment model is necessary in the assessment process.

It is important to question whether the psychological tests prospective adopters undergo in fact produce valid findings. The validity of the psychological assessments implemented in South Africa is open to ongoing debate on an academic level. In 2004, a major concern identified by the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) was that most of the tests being used were not culturally appropriate. The views expressed by clinical and educational psychology practitioners was that existing South African tests need to be urgently updated, revised and attention should be paid particularly to issues related to culture and language when adapting tests (Foxcroft, Paterson, le Roux & Herbst, 2004).

More recently, South African experts in the field of psychometric testing pointed out that "gradually there has been recognition that the unquestioning acceptance of, and subscription to Western, Eurocentric theoretical models and paradigms is not suitable for South Africa" (Laher & Cockcroft, 2014, p. 310). The said authors were of the opinion that the South African Personality Inventory (SAPI) project has made the largest contribution towards the development of emic psychological tests for the South African population, but ongoing efforts should be made because developing emic psychological tests is complex and challenging. This must be prioritized because this would be most useful for the sectors of the population for whom Western methods of testing may not apply. Allwood, 2011 (cited in Sher & Long, 2012) highlighted that debates pertaining to "indigenisation" of psychology frequently focus on the extent to which western psychology is appropriate or applicable in South Africa.

Most adoptive participants in this study experienced the adoption assessment process as complicated and stressful. However, they tended to avoid being openly critical thereof,

especially when in the process of being screened, because they thought this would negatively affect the outcome of the assessment process. In many respects, this study suggested that prospective adopters play a rather submissive role in the assessment process. Findings in this study concur with related overseas research evidence. For example, in research conducted by Daniluk and Hurtig-Mitchell (2003) adoptive participants highlighted the compliant role that they had to adopt during the assessment process when approaching adoption personnel.

Adoption social workers in this study presented as authoritarian and adoption applicants were critical thereof. Adoption social workers in this study implied they had been granted 'authority' by international and domestic legislation to adopt a child-centred approach. Moreover, they had the support of written policy advocated by their accredited adoption agencies, which is based on national guidelines and standards regarding the assessment process. Their academic status, as well as being credited as specialists in the field of adoption, also carried weight to defend their standpoint regarding the assessment process. Finally, the principle 'best interests of the child' was paramount.

7. THE CORE CATEGORY

As mentioned, the core category, or grounded theory, that encapsulated all five categories discussed above was *Tensions surrounding adoption policy and practice and perceptions and experiences of adoption.* The researcher now critically discusses the different areas, forms and levels of tension apparent in the categories.

Tensions run high as far as meanings of kinship are concerned. This is because legal adoption policy and practice in South Africa is based on a western construct of kinship, which runs contrary to the traditional African construct of kinship. The traditional African construct of kinship presumes kinship to be biologically based and rooted in blood ties. Legal adoption is thus not recognised as a means of family formation because it involves developing family relationships where no blood ties exist.

Tensions also exist because in traditional African culture the notion of kinship is very broad, but impermeable for a biologically unrelated child. Basically, kin comprise all members that form part of a patrilineal clan, that is, all members born from a single founding ancestor. So, in the case of all adoptable children, including abandoned children's whose ancestors are unknown, their ties to their respective clans can never be terminated by legislation and legal procedures for adoption.

On the other hand, legal adoption policy and practice focuses on creating family/kinship within the nuclear and single-parent family system, which is generally regarded by westerners as being the fundamental unit of society. The legal adoption of unrelated children involves transferring full rights and responsibilities from the parents of one nuclear/single-parent family structure to another, not trying to integrate a child into ancestral lineage. Although worldwide, blood ties generally tend to be viewed as central for kinship, in legal adoption emotional attachments are regarded as a thread of relatedness. Emotional relationships can be developed so if unrelated child is brought into an adoptive family, loving ties can be created so that the adopted child feels part of his or her 'new' family.

Further strains are rooted in the fact that the value of children to parents in Western societies and in traditional African societies, are not well aligned. For example, in many African societies, biological children are viewed as securing conjugal ties and extending paternal lineage. The worth of children is reflected in the payment of lobola; an exchange for a woman's potential to bear children. Only biological children can fulfil these functions and thus the value of biologically unrelated child is subsidiary to that of biological children. It is thus understandable why married couples find it difficult to consider adopting an unrelated child.

The wish of some prospective adopters to be matched with physically attractive children, namely children who have a light skin tone, to promote general acceptance of the child into the kinship system, presents as a source of tension. Tension exists because wanting children with a light skin tone is inconsistent with the physical feature matching process. On the one hand, both prospective adopters and social workers believe that physical resemblances between adoptee and adoptive parents and/or

members of the extended family facilitate integration of adoptee into the adoptive family system. However, prospective adopters seem to be emphasising physical attractiveness (i.e. light skin tone) when it comes to prorating what is necessary to help the child be integrated into the new family system. Furthermore, prospective adopters' desire for children with a light skin tone usually delays finalisation of the adoption process and thereby undermines social workers' efforts to prioritise removing young children from the child welfare system as soon as possible to promote secure attachment for the adoptable child and the benefits thereof.

At this stage, adoption policy and practice seems to be mainly attracting people who are upwardly mobile on a socio-economic level. These people are primarily well-educated, single and involuntary childless women who are personally and economically empowered to exercise free agency when considering adopting a child. However, decisions made by financially well-off people to legally adopt an unrelated child, create strong tensions in the extended family system because legal adoption usually involves redirecting financial support from the extended family to meeting the needs of the adopted child.

Racial tensions surround legal adoption. This is one consequence of the relatively high fees charged for various procedures conducted during the adoption assessment process. Race and class are still somewhat directly linked in South Africa, so it is assumed that it is only white people (who generally enjoy much higher socio-economic standing than black people) that can afford to complete the adoption process. Consequently, black people adopting unrelated children are regarded as following white people's lifestyle patterns.

It is important to note that a striking element of unrelated adoption that motivates black involuntary childless people to explore legal adoption is the perceived benefits it affords. The primary benefit comes in the form of legally guaranteed, permanent relationships between parent and child. It also offers unrelated parents full rights and responsibilities in respect of raising a child. This is a benefit biological parents automatically assume when a child is born to them. Involuntary childless people, especially potential adopters who have personally experienced or observed the negative

outcomes of informal foster care arrangements, feel in desperate need of these benefits. Informal foster care does not offer permanency or the right to individual parenting. Furthermore, informally fostering a related child usually involves raising an older child, whereas abandoned children available for adoption are usually young children and women adopters perceive young children as being able to fulfil their need to nurture.

Prospective adopters' need for permanency basically complements adoption social workers' need to create permanency for the adoptable child. However, motives for achieving permanency come from opposite ends of a continuum. For potential adopters, permanency meets the personal need to parent on a permanent basis, whereas for adoption social workers, permanency is essential for a child's healthy development. They have a right to be raised permanently in a secure, loving home environment.

Potential adopters generally feel vulnerable when approaching an adoption agency because they are experiencing involuntary childless and will be making a decision that has life-long implications. However, rather than their fears or concerns being allayed at the outset by adoption social workers, they generally feel exposed to repeated evaluation and judgement by professionals regarding their capacity to parent a child. Their ability to conduct a form of self-assessment regarding their parental capacity, such as parenting experience gained when informally fostering a related child, does not seem to be recognised or respected. Adoption applicants seem to exercise submissiveness and compliance throughout the process to try ensuring that they are found fit and proper to take on the role of adoptive parent.

Although the adoption assessment process is complicated and full of tension, one area which is positive for the adopters is the physical matching process. The physical matching process is generally criticised in the Western world because it reinforces the notion that biological parenthood is the only 'real' form of parenthood. However, for prospective adopters the matching of physical traits of an adopted child with themselves, or with members of the extended family, reinforces (biological) parenthood identity because family members related by blood usually have similar physical traits. Moreover, physical matching is regarded as a means of avoiding possible rejection by members of the extended family because relatedness can be created through visible

similarities. It also circumvents, to a degree, stigmatisation by members of the community because they will probably assume that the adopted child is a family member. For men, the physical matching process also eases tensions because the apparent similarity in appearance and resulting acceptance by community members that the child is his, affirms his gender identity.

Paradoxically, closely related to the physical matching process is a source of stress; the adoption policy and practice regarding 'disclosure'. The adopter is expected to disclose to the adopted child and significant others, that he or she is not biologically related to the family. Adopters frequently perceive disclosing to the adopted child that he/she has been adopted as running contradictory to the purpose of the physical matching process. Potential adopters deem disclosure as threatening personal emotional and psychological security for both adopted children and themselves. Adoption social workers adopt a different point of view. They emphasise that disclosure is necessary for the child's healthy adjustment. They also highlight the potential breakdown of the adopter-adoptee relationship if disclosure does not take place.

It is pertinent to note that there are areas of support for prospective adopters in some adoption agencies. For example, meaningful support comes in the form of group identification and cohesion. Making personal contact with other prospective adopters provides prospective adopters with the reassurance that they are not the only persons experiencing stress attached to legal adoption and they motivate one another to complete the adoption assessment process step by step.

Prospective adopters are also offered support and encouragement when having personal contact with adopters who have adopted unrelated children and who are experiencing joy. Christian beliefs that accentuate that adoption is a calling of God and/or that an omniscient power endorses the decision to adopt also seems to personally empower potential adopters and ease stress. Furthermore, anxiety is eased when trusting relationships are developed between adoption social workers and adoption applicants. On the other hand, professional conduct and ethics can be called into question when professionals (social workers and medical practitioners alike) do not respect applicants' decision to pursue adoption, or show concern for their adoption applicants worth and

well-being. This area of the adoption assessment process seems to aggravate prospective adopters' feelings of stress and frustration.

In many respects, the child-centred approach promoted by adoption social workers throughout the adoption assessment process is probably a central source of tension. Although both potential adopters and adoption social workers want to achieve the same outcome, namely a child being raised in a loving family, there are conflicting views of how this goal can be achieved. Evidence suggests that adoption social workers do not take a balanced approach; rather a child-centred approach is deemed vital and any paradigm shift towards a parent-centred approach is regarded as undermining the best interests of the child.

Findings suggest that the current legislation related to adoption does, in many respects, facilitate the fundamental aim of Africanising legal adoption; namely to make adoption applications accessible to all diverse cultural groups in South Africa. Current legislation opens the gateway to adoption because all adults have the right to apply to adopt an unrelated child. However, once inquiring about adoption, the screening out process commences and feelings of tension experienced by prospective adopters are exacerbated. When potential adopters approach adoption agencies to inquire about adopting unrelated children, they come filled with hope; hope that raising a child will bring meaning to their lives in diverse ways. However, their hopes seem frustrated when they engage in the adoption process and encounter the many requirements and intrusion into their personal lives.

Unfortunately, there are strong tensions regarding what Africanisation of the adoption assessment process should entail in practice. This is because experts in the field of adoption believe if marked adjustments are made to the rigorous assessment process, this might lead to a lowering of assessment standards and result in placing the adopted child in circumstances where the child might be at risk.

8. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the researcher critically discussed her research findings by focusing on each of the five categories underpinning the grounded theory. It is obvious that each category is filled with different levels of tension that frustrate (or in some cases facilitate) prospective adopters' completion of the adoption process. It is deemed that this problem-situation probably significantly contributes to declining domestic adoption rates.

In the following chapter, the researcher summarises the conclusions reached and makes recommendations in this regard

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

The primary aim of this study was to develop a grounded theory related to factors affecting the decision-making processes of black South Africans regarding legally adopting unrelated children. The researcher chose to research this topic because she is personally and academically familiar with the pressing challenges social workers in South Africa are facing regarding domestic adoption.

South Africa is under obligation to make every effort possible to ensure adoptable children's right to be raised in a loving home environment in his/her country of origin is adequately met. Unfortunately, this obligation is not being satisfactorily met and as a result South Africa makes hundreds of young, black children available for intercountry adoption, when intercountry should in fact be a last resort.

Black South Africans became the focus of this study because this sector of the population presents as a meaningful pool of potential domestic adopters, yet only a very small number legally adopt unrelated children.

To develop a grounded theory, the researcher implemented the grounded theory research method; specifically, the data analysis approach advocated by grounded theorists, Corbin and Strauss. To promote the trustworthiness of this study, the researcher purposively selected a broad sample of black research participants, that were divided into five different cohorts, namely: adopters; prospective adopters in the process of being assessed; potential adopters who did not enter the assessment process; social workers specialising in the field of adoption and South African citizens who have some knowledge of legally adopting an unrelated child.

In the discussion below, the researcher summarises the key findings and conclusions drawn, identifies some research limitations and then makes recommendations regarding the research topic.

2. KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The core category, or grounded theory, that was developed to answer the main research question was: *Tensions surrounding adoption policy and practice and perceptions and experiences of adoption.*

Five main categories underpin this core category: 1) Meanings of Kinship; 2) Information and Support; 3) Parenthood, Gender and Identity; 4) Cultural and Material Mobility and 5). Perceptions of Parenting and Childhood.

As far as the category *Meanings of Kinship* is concerned, there are tensions because the nuclear family/kinship system, which underpins legal adoption, contrasts the more complex concepts of family/kinship in traditional African culture. The current model of legal adoption is based on a western construct of kinship that pronounces family relationships need not only be based on ties of blood and affinity. Rather, kinship can also be created through the bonds of love and legislation. This form of social relationships tends to manifest itself in a nuclear and single-parent family structure. On the other hand, in traditional African culture the construction of kinship is entrenched in genealogical consanguinity. Basically, strong tensions exist because they are two distinct, and mostly oppositional, socio-cultural constructions of kinship.

The category *Information and Support* indicates that tensions exist because the adoption assessment process is essentially private or individualised in nature. This is set against the need of prospective adopters for information and support that can be found outside of this 'private' approach. Information about the complex, rigorous and intrusive nature of the adoption assessment process usually exacerbates potential adopters' feelings of anxiety and stress. Feelings of vulnerability continue throughout the assessment process, and usually aggravated in particular stages of the assessment process (for example, undergoing comprehensive medical assessments and psychological testing).

Furthermore, the unbalanced power and control exercised by adoption social workers and other professionals during the assessment process, contain adoption applicants in

the sense that it ingrains their feelings of defencelessness. For this reason, they need all forms of emotional support while completing the rigorous assessment process.

Although social workers specialising in the field of adoption usually develop trusting relationships with their clients (prospective adopters) to provide emotional support, it is important to note that one cannot assume that all social workers involved in the adoption assessment process play a supportive role. Evidence suggests that tensions are aggravated when social workers that don't specialise in adoption, view black people taking the adoption trajectory to parenthood as doing something deviant and foreign. In other words, there is no respect for client self-determination. This matter will need to be considered when social workers employed by DSD (usually generalist practitioners) become responsible for screening prospective adopters.

A meaningful source of support that eases tension comes in the form of collective orientation. Collective orientation at the outset of the adoption assessment process is a meaningful source of support because it facilitates developing group identity and cohesion. Potential adopters experiencing the screening process together feel more personally empowered and motivated to complete the process when sharing their frustrations and trepidations with one another.

Probably one of the main reasons involuntarily childless black people consider adopting an unrelated child, is because they want to parent on a permanent basis and this is not adequately met through the traditional African child care practice of informal foster care. Potential adopters seek permanent child-parent relationships, as well as full parental rights and responsibilities afforded biological parents. These perceived legal benefits tend to moderate negative perceptions of adoption and act as an incentive to explore adopting a biologically unrelated child. This could be the reason why social marketing strategies focusing mainly on altruistic motives are not proving very effective when trying to recruit black prospective adopters. Rather the issue of word-of-mouth being very influential in drawing potential adopters into the adoption process must be taken into consideration and emphasis should be placed on the legal benefits of adoption.

Tensions related to the category *Cultural and Material Mobility* have to do with the fact that a particular sector of the black community is being drawn to legal adoption and this must be given attention, rather than exploring the essentialist notion of 'Africanising' adoption practice. Involuntary childless black people that choose to explore unrelated adoption are culturally and materially mobile. Black potential adopters that are well-educated and upwardly mobile are exposed to a variety of cultures and adapt and integrate diverse cultural norms and practices to meet their needs. They are familiar with the practice of legal adoption and don't seem to view it as a cultural practice running contradictory to their cultural belief systems. Instead, it is cultural practice that appeals to them because it is a means of addressing involuntary childlessness. They are able integrate diverse cultural norms and practices (such as legal adoption) because culture is dynamic. Thus, rather than seeking to 'Africanise' adoption with the notion of essentialism (i.e. that African culture is a fixed phenomenon with certain properties), adoption social workers need to explore making adoption more accessible. Furthermore, completion of the assessment process should be more fluid to retain potential adopters. Findings suggest that potential adopters experience this feature of the adoption process as disconcerting.

Tensions covered in the category *Parenthood, Gender and Identity,* revolve around the fact that the adoption process focuses on the placement of adoptable children as opposed to the importance of parenthood for gender identity. For involuntarily childless potential adopters, parenthood identity is salient. However, reshaping parenthood identity by making the change to adoptive parenthood is filled with internal and external tensions. Gender identity is challenged when adopting an unrelated child because feminine and masculine identities are traditionally constructed around biological parenthood. Turning to legal adoption as a means of experiencing parenthood, exposes potential adopters to possible stigma and ridicule for failing to conform to dominant social definitions of true womanhood and fatherhood. Furthermore, personal feelings of loss are often experienced by woman potential adopters. Findings suggest that these feelings of inadequacy and helplessness are not appropriately addressed because adoption policy and practice is rather rigidly child-centred.

The category *Perceptions of Parenting and Childhood* reflects tensions that are apparent because adoption social workers seem to have rather fixed perspectives of what procedures need to be implemented in the adoption assessment process to ensure that an adoptable child's best interests are met. Paradoxically, even though black potential adopters are needed to promote domestic adoption, the process basically entails a screening out method. Findings suggest that it is this deficit approach that discourages potential adopters from entering the assessment process.

In summary, there are complex and fluid tensions associated with the legal adoption of unrelated children. Although it is essential to promote domestic adoption, current adoption policy and practice present various barriers to achieving this end.

From a positive point of view, it is important to note that when negative tensions are identified (as done in this research study), this can trigger constructive change. After summarising some limitations of her research, the researcher makes recommendations that can hopefully lead to easing and/or erasing existing tensions.

3. LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

All qualitative research, including grounded theory, is not without its limitations (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The main limitations the researcher identified in this study are as follows:

A grounded theory is considered 'transferable' rather than 'generalizable', as is the case with formal theories. The theory is transferable because elements of the context in which the study was conducted can be transferred to contexts of action with similar characteristics under study. Consequently, the findings in this study will only be transferrable to various urban areas in South Africa where well-educated, black South Africans are legally adopting biologically unrelated children through accredited adoption agencies.

The means of data gathering and analysis implemented in this study has its limitations. For instance, in this study the researcher did not interview participants of a specific

cohort until saturation was reached and then proceed to interview the next cohort of participants. Rather participants were selected depending on their availability. By focusing on each cohort of participants separately, the researcher might have been able to identify specific characteristics and trends in the decision-making processes of each cohort, and then compared findings emerging in each cohort with one another.

Conducting focus groups could have been another method of gathering data. Focus groups could have assisted in circumventing power dynamics between the researcher and research participants.

Furthermore, during the initial stage of data gathering, a couple of interviews had serious gaps in communication, but it was not feasible to conduct another set of interviews. For this reason, the researcher tried to understand why some questions she put to participants fell flat. She realised that she had made inappropriate assumptions and tried to avoid making similar mistakes in ensuing interviews.

As pointed out in the rationale for conducting this study (see Chapter 1), there is limited research focusing on why only a small number of black South Africans legally adopt unrelated children. The grounded theory emerging in this study is a tentative explanation of why this is so. Although this study has revealed findings that can help guide policy development and intervention strategies in respect of prospective black adopters, detailed studies of greater scope are also needed to produce meaningful knowledge on the phenomenon.

The researcher faced numerous ideological issues during this study. Issues of power, relationships between the researcher and research participants, the researcher's style of writing and her assumptions of social reality, were deeply interwoven into all her research activities. She recognises and can articulate several ideologies (for example, pedagogical, political, psychological and spiritual) through which she understands life. Although her core values such as commitment, human agency, social justice and the worth of families have remained constant, in the academic terrain her professional ideologies are in flux. Grounded theory does not advise a theoretical framework to guide the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). However, Foucault's theory regarding people

living in a ‘disciplinary society’ and the systems’ theory underpinned the researcher’s mind-set (be it consciously or unconsciously) during data gathering and analysis.

Finally, a comprehensive review of academic literature indicated that, to date, there is no research evidence in South Africa that same-race adoption is more likely to be successful than trans-racial adoption in the South African context. For this reason, the researcher’s opinion that same-race adoption should be prioritised can of course be challenged and labelled as ‘biased’.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on research findings, the following recommendations are made related to easing and erasing tensions surrounding adoption policy and practice and the perceptions and experiences of adoption.

4.1. *Rigorously review the adoption assessment process.*

- The current adoption assessment process is based on the principle ‘best-interests of the child’ and for this reason the process is child-centred approach. However, this child-centred approach should be balanced with an adult-centred approach. In other words, prospective adoptive parents should be empowered during the assessment process to fulfil parental roles and responsibilities. Applicants should be engaged as partners in the assessment process and be involved in self-assessment to afford them more control of the assessment process outcomes;
- Negative assumptions about the adoption assessment process need to be addressed constructively to promote positive outcomes. Policy makers should consider making efforts to redesign the process, taking into consideration factors such as the affordability of the process, the complexity of the process not being based on research evidence and prospective adopters’ need for appropriate social support throughout the process. The importance and effectiveness of mutual support throughout the process should also be borne in mind.

4.2. *Recruitment drives*

- Recruitment drives should address the perceived barriers to child adoption via appropriate information and social marketing strategies.
- The benefits of legal adoption should be emphasised, in particular for involuntary childless adults,
- Viva voce (oral communication) presentations, on a personal and video level, should be conducted in group and community-based settings to share information about adoption.

4.3. *Recommendations regarding future research:*

- Extend this study to include a greater cross-section of participants;

- Gather data on unrelated adoption using separate focus groups for different cohorts of participants (for example, adopters, prospective adopters in the screening process; prospective adopters not entering the screening process and adoption social workers).

- Conduct an in-depth analysis of the adoption assessment process minutiae;

- Do case study research: focus on different adoption agencies and their strategies for conducting the adoption assessment process

- Do narrative research of adopters' and adoptees' lived experiences of same-race and transracial adoption.

5. CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the key findings established in this study. It also highlighted some limitations of the study. Finally, recommendations were made regarding what

actions could be taken to facilitate domestic adoption, as well as the way forward for future research on domestic adoption.

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APPENDIX 1

8. PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Hello,

My name is Priscilla Gerrand and I am a social work lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand. I have decided to do a research study focusing on the adoption of unrelated children in the South African context. More specifically, I wish to find out what the critical factors are that affect the decision-making processes of black South Africans who choose to adopt children who are biologically unrelated to them.

The reason I have decided to research this interesting phenomenon is because there are currently many thousands of children in South Africa who although suitable to be adopted by adults unrelated to them because they cannot be placed with their parents or relatives, are spending many years, sometimes until they reach adulthood, in the care of unrelated foster parents or in a children's home.

All children have the right to be raised within a warm, loving home environment, but we are finding it difficult in South Africa to meet these children's constitutional rights. Why do some black South Africans choose to adopt biologically unrelated children, but then do not complete the process, while other applicants do? What critical factors influence a prospective adopter's decision-making processes during the different stages of decision-making processes related to the adoption of unrelated children?

To address this social problem constructively, professionals like me recognise that we don't have all the knowledge needed to bring about significant change. The valuable input of people like you, who are on a 'grassroots' level and have personal experience,

is needed. I would appreciate it very much if you would be willing to share your personal thoughts and feelings with me about the adoption of unrelated children. By sharing your knowledge and experiences with me regarding the adoption of biologically unrelated child, we would hopefully start taking steps towards meeting the best interests of children who are 'trapped' in the child protection system and in desperate need of permanent placement in a loving family set-up like yours as soon as possible.

I therefore wish to invite you to participate in my study. Your participation is entirely voluntary and refusal to participate will not be held against you in any way. If you agree to take part, I shall arrange to interview you at a time and place that is suitable for you. The interview will last approximately one to one-and-a-half hours. You may withdraw from the study at any time and you may also refuse to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable with answering. Should you experience feelings of emotional distress arising from the interview, counselling will be provided free of charge by a counsellor from a child welfare agency nearby.

With your permission, the interview will be tape recorded. No one other that my supervisor, Professor Garth Stevens at the University of Witwatersrand, will have access to the audio recordings, and six years after completion of the study, the tapes will be destroyed. Please be assured that your name and personal details will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be included in the final research report.

Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the study. I shall answer them to the best of my ability. I may be contacted at work on this number: 011 717-4475. Alternatively, you can email me at Priscilla.Gerrand@wits.ac.za. Should you wish to receive a summary of the results of the study an abstract will be made available on request.

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in the study.

Yours sincerely

Priscilla Gerrand (Social Work Lecturer)

APPENDIX 2

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I hereby consent to participate in the interview for the research project conducted by Mrs. Priscilla Gerrand, a lecturer in the Social Work Department of the University of the Witwatersrand.

The purpose and procedures of the study have been explained to me. I understand that participation is voluntary and that all my responses will be kept confidential. I also understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time and that I may refuse to answer any questions that I feel uncomfortable with answering.

I am aware that there will be no direct benefits or rewards for my participation in the study.

I hereby consent to audio-recording of the interview. I understand that my confidentiality will be maintained at all times and that the tapes will be destroyed six years after completion of the study.

First Name and Surname of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

APPENDIX 3

CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO-TAPING OF THE INTERVIEW

I hereby consent to tape-recording of the interview. I understand that my confidentiality will be maintained at all times and that the tapes will be destroyed six years after completion of the study.

First Name and Surname of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

APPENDIX 4

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWING GUIDE: ADOPTER

Code No.		Sex	
Age		Marital Status	
Home Language		Level of Education	
Employment		Religion	
Date Interview		Place of Interview	
Agency referring participant			

Initial Open-ended Questions:

Tell me what motivated you to decide to adopt a child not related to you by blood ties.

Were there any factors that helped you to reach a decision to adopt?

Were there any factors that inhibited you in your decision to adopt?

How does your community generally feel about a person legally adopting a child who is not related by blood ties?

What are the traditional beliefs and customs regarding the adoption a child with whom you have no blood ties?

How did family members and/or friends react to your decision to adopt an unrelated child?

What are your thoughts and feelings about this statement: “It is only a biological child that can make one a parent”.

Was a family conference held with members of the extended family before you reached a decision to legally adopt an unrelated child? If so, who was involved in this meeting and who made the final decision?

Did anyone or anything influence your decision to adopt an unrelated child?

If you are married, which partner felt most strongly about adopting a child and why?

What, if anything did you know about the legal adoption of children before deciding to adopt a child? How did you go about gathering information about legally adopting an unrelated child and how did you get to hear about the social welfare agency accredited to manage adoption cases?

Did you inform family members and/or friends of the adoption application? Please explain your answer?

When did you decide to make a formal application to the adoption agency and what influenced you to choose a particular agency?

How did you feel about selecting personal character references when making the adoption application?

How did you find completing the required paperwork?

Tell me about the agency's response to your application to adopt an unrelated child?

How did you experience the orientation and training session/s presented by the social worker at the social welfare agency?

Intermediate Questions:

Let's discuss the relationship you have with the social worker assigned to screen you as a prospective adopter.....

What issues did you discuss with the social worker during office interviews and what thoughts and feelings went through your mind during these interviews?

What kind of child did you want to adopt? Did you want a child of a particular sex or age? Please explain your answer...

Let's discuss the home visits conducted by the social worker during the screening process? How did you feel about the social worker coming into your home? Did you have any concerns?

How did you feel about having to undergo a medical assessment? How soon did you do so and why?

How did you feel about having to undergo an HIV test?

What went through your mind when you were waiting for the HIV test results?

Did you ever feel undecided about continuing with the adoption process.....and if so, why do think this was so?

Looking back at the screening process you completed, what stage or phase of the screening process did you find most challenging, and why do you think so?

Ending Questions

When did you first have personal contact with the child the social work team matched you with?

Where or with whom had this child been placed while waiting to be matched with a suitable adopter?

How did you first feel about the child you were matched with? Did these feelings change in any way as time went by?

How frequently did you have personal contact with the child before the adoption case was finalised?

Did the social worker provide you with any background history of the child?

How long did it take you to complete the adoption screening process? Why do you think it took this particular length of time?

Does anyone in your family know that you have adopted a child?

Have you told the child that he or she has been adopted? If not, will you ever do so? Please explain your answer?

Do you think that the adoption screening process should be changed in any way? Please explain your answer.

Is there anything else you think I should know to understand you as an adoptive parent better?

How do you think social workers should go about recruiting prospective adopters?

Is there anything you would like to ask me?

APPENDIX 5

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWING GUIDE: PROSPECTIVE ADOPTER IN THE SCREENING PROCESS

Code No.		Sex	
Age		Marital Status	
Home Language		Level of Education	
Employment		Religion	
Date Interview		Place of Interview	
Agency referring participant			

Initial Open-ended Questions:

Tell me what motivated you to decide to adopt a child not related to you by blood ties.

Were there any factors that helped you to reach a decision to adopt?

Were there any factors that inhibited you in your decision to adopt?

How does your community generally feel about a person legally adopting a child who is not related by blood ties?

What are the traditional beliefs and customs regarding the adoption a child with whom you have no blood ties?

How did family members and/or friends react to your decision to adopt an unrelated child?

What are your thoughts and feelings about this statement: “It is only a biological child that can make one a parent”.

Was a family conference held with members of the extended family before you reached a decision to legally adopt an unrelated child? If so, who was involved in this meeting and who made the final decision?

Did anyone or anything influence your decision to adopt an unrelated child?

If you are married, which partner felt most strongly about adopting a child and why?

What, if anything did you know about the legal adoption of children before deciding to adopt a child? How did you go about gathering information about legally adopting an unrelated child and how did you get to hear about the social welfare agency accredited to manage adoption cases?

Did you inform family members and/or friends of the adoption application? Please explain your answer.

When did you decide to make a formal application to the adoption agency and what influenced you to choose a particular agency?

How did you feel about selecting personal character references when making the adoption application?

How did you find completing the required paperwork?

Tell me about the agency's response to your application to adopt an unrelated child?

How did you experience the orientation and training session/s presented by the social worker at the social welfare agency?

Intermediate Questions:

Let's discuss the relationship you have with the social worker assigned to screen you as a prospective adopter.....

What issues are you discussing with the social worker during office interviews and what thoughts and feelings are going through your mind during these interviews?

What kind of child do you want to adopt? Do you want a child of a particular sex or age? Please explain your answer...

Let's discuss the home visits the social worker has conducted or will conduct during the screening process? How did or do you feel about the social worker coming into your home? Did or do you have any concerns?

How did you feel about having to undergo a medical assessment? How soon did you do so and why?

How did you feel about having to undergo an HIV test?

What went through your mind when you were waiting for the HIV test results?

Do you ever feel undecided about continuing with the adoption process.....and if so, why do think this is so?

Is there any stage of the screening process that you finding challenging, and why do you think so?

Let's discuss the relationship you have with the social worker assigned to screen you as a prospective adopter.....

What issues did you discuss with the social worker during office interviews and what thoughts and feelings went through your mind during these interviews?

What kind of child did you want to adopt? Did you want a child of a particular sex or age? Please explain your answer.

Let's discuss the home visits conducted by the social worker? How did you feel about the social worker coming into your home? Did you have any concerns?

How did you feel about having to undergo a medical assessment? How soon did you do so and why?

How did you feel about having to undergo an HIV test?

What went through your mind when you were waiting for the HIV test results?

Did you ever feel undecided about continuing with the adoption process.....and if so, why do think this was so?

Looking back at the screening process you have completed to date, what section or phase of the screening process did you find most challenging, and why do you think so?

Ending Questions:

What have you found most challenging about your decision to adopt a biologically, unrelated child?

Do you think that social workers should try to encourage black South Africans to adopt biologically unrelated children? If so, how should we do so?

Who should be involved in the adoption screening process and why

APPENDIX 6

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWING GUIDE: PROSPECTIVE ADOPTER WHO DID NOT ENTER THE ADOPTION SCREENING PROCESS

Code No.		Sex	
Age		Marital Status	
Home Language		Level of Education	
Employment		Religion	
Date Interview		Place of Interview	
Agency referring participant			

Initial Open-ended Questions:

Tell me what motivated you to decide to adopt a child not related to you by blood ties.

Were there any factors that helped you to reach a decision to adopt?

Were there any factors that inhibited you in your decision to adopt?

How does your community generally feel about a person legally adopting a child who is not related by blood ties?

What are the traditional beliefs and customs regarding the adoption a child with whom you have no blood ties?

How did family members and/or friends react to your decision to adopt an unrelated child?

What are your thoughts and feelings about this statement: “It is only a biological child that can make one a parent”.

Was a family conference held with members of the extended family before you reached a decision to legally adopt an unrelated child? If so, who was involved in this meeting and who made the final decision?

Did anyone or anything influence your decision to adopt an unrelated child?

If you are married, which partner felt most strongly about adopting a child and why?

What, if anything did you know about the legal adoption of children before deciding to adopt a child? How did you go about gathering information about legally adopting an unrelated child and how did you get to hear about the social welfare agency accredited to manage adoption cases?

Did you inform family members and/or friends of the adoption application? Please explain your answer.

When did you decide to make a formal application to the adoption agency and what influenced you to choose a particular agency?

How did you feel about selecting personal character references when making the adoption application?

How did you find completing the required paperwork?

Tell me about the agency's response to your application to adopt an unrelated child?

How did you experience the orientation and training session/s presented by the social worker at the social welfare agency?

Intermediate Questions

How long ago did you decide not to go ahead with the adoption screening process?

At what stage of the adoption screening process did you change your mind about proceeding with the process?

What were the main reasons you decided to do so?

Who or what influenced your decision in this regard?

Ending Questions

Under what circumstances would you reconsider applying to adopt a biologically unrelated child?

What could be done to encourage black South Africans to adopt biologically unrelated children?

APPENDIX 7

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWING GUIDE: SOCIAL WORKER SPECIALISING IN ADOPTION

Code No.		Sex	
Age		Marital Status	
Home Language		Level of Education	
Years of work experience in field of adoption			
Date Interview		Place of Interview	

Initial Open-ended Questions:

What motivates most applicants to apply to adopt a biologically unrelated child?

How long does it usually take them to approach an adoption agency to make an application to adopt a child?

Are there any factors that help the applicants to reach a decision to adopt?

Are there any factors that inhibit an applicant's decision to adopt a biologically unrelated child?

Do prospective adopters hold family conferences with members of the extended family before a decision is reached that they should adopt a child? If so, who is involved in this decision-making meeting and who makes the final decision regarding the adoption an unrelated child.

What are the traditional beliefs and customs regarding the adoption of an unrelated child?

Do these traditional beliefs still play an important role in the lives of black South African adoption applicants? Please explain your answer.

What are your thoughts and feelings about this statement: "It is only a biological child that can make one a parent". Please explain your answer.

What, if anything, do prospective adopters know about the legal adoption of children when they first approach your agency for help? How did they go about gathering information about legally adopting an unrelated child and how did they get to hear about the fact that you/your agency are accredited to manage adoption cases?

Did the applicants inform family members and/or friends of their adoption application? Did they explain why they did so?

How did they find completing the required paperwork?

How long after they made their application did you contact the applicant/s in connection with their adoption application?

How did they experience the orientation and training session/s presented by the social worker?

Intermediate Questions:

What issues do you discuss with the applicants during office interviews?

What kind of child did they usually want to adopt? Did the applicants want a child of a particular sex or age? Why do you think so?

Let's discuss the home visit you conduct as part of the screening process? What criteria do you use to decide whether or not the accommodation of the applicant is suitable or not?

How readily do applicants agree to undergo an HIV test?

How do you broach the problem if an applicant presents as HIV positive?

Is there any point in the adoption screening process that you notice that applicants tend to drop out of the screening process? If so, do you know why this is so?

Looking back at the screening processes you have completed to date, what stage or phase of the screening process do applicants find most challenging, and why do you think so?

Ending Questions:

How much support is afforded the adopters of biologically unrelated children during the screening process and once the adoption case has been finalised? Please elaborate.

What would you suggest we do in South Africa to promote the adoption of biologically unrelated children by black South Africans?

Please share any other comments you have on the subject

APPENDIX 8:

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWING GUIDE: SOUTH AFRICAN CITIZENS

Code No.		Sex	
Age		Marital Status	
Home Language		Level of Education	
Employment		Religion	
Date Interview		Place of Interview	

Initial Open-ended Questions:

What do you understand about the legal adoption of unrelated children?

How did you get to know about legal adoption?

Why do you think black South Africans decide to adopt an unrelated child?

Intermediate Questions

Would you consider adopting an unrelated child? Please explain your answer.

What do you think black South African generally feel and think about legally adopting an unrelated child?

Why do you think this is so?

Ending Questions

If social workers want to encourage black South Africans to adopt unrelated children, what do you think they should do?

Why do you think so?