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Cross-Racial Adoptee in South Africa

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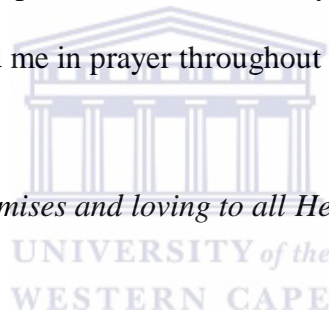
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The Lord is faithful to all His promises and loving to all He has made.



Abstract

Due to the history of Apartheid in South Africa, cross-racial adoption is a fairly recent practice which was only legalised when the law was amended in 1991 so that prospective parents were allowed to adopt a child from a different race to them. As the consequences of the past linger, the most common form of cross-racial adoption is White parents adopting Black children. Studies on cross-racial adoption have been extensively conducted internationally, but research in South Africa is sparse. In this research study an explorative case study of a cross-racially adopted young adult was conducted in order to explore and describe the formation of his identity. The study adopted a Social Constructionist approach to knowledge and transcripts from the interviews with the participant were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA allows for a detailed exploration of the personal lived experience of a research participant and focuses on understanding how people construct their experiences and make meaning. Identity Process Theory (IPT) which is consistent with a social constructionist epistemology, was the theoretical framework used, through which the findings in this study were integrated. Findings indicated that the participant of the case study had challenges forming a coherent self-identity and that his adoption status and ethnicity played an important role in his identity development. Furthermore, findings showed that the social context both promoted and impeded his search for identity. Promotion of identity formation was always associated with a clearer understanding and sensitivity of people regarding the plight of the participant as a cross-racial adoptee. With the knowledge gained, it is hoped that families and psychological and welfare professionals will become better informed and better equipped in so far as empathy, sensitivity and best practice relating to the support for cross-racial adoptees are concerned.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction into the research presented in this study and begins by defining the terminology that will be used. The background of this study briefly describes the context in which cross-racial adoption takes place in South Africa and the controversies surrounding the practice of cross-racial adoption and associated concerns about identity formation of the adoptee. This will lead into an explanation of how the rationale and aims of this study were formulated, followed by an acknowledgement of the limitations of this study. The chapter is concluded by an exposition of the theoretical framework that was utilised to interpret the findings of the study.

1.1 Terminology

According to the amended Child Care Act of 1983, Section 20 (2) (1991), adoption refers to the “termination of all the rights and obligations existing between the child and any person who was his/her parent, immediately prior to such adoption, and the parent’s relatives” and “an adopted child shall, for all purposes deemed in law, be the legitimate child of the adopted parent, as if he/she was born of that parent during the existence of a lawful marriage”.

In this study cross-racial adoption refers to the placement of a child from one race-group with parents from another race resulting in a new family unit that brings together individuals from different races (Finlay, 2006). In the literature, cross-racial adoption may also be referred to as interracial adoption (Ishizawa, Kenney, & Kubo, 2006) or transracial adoption (Mosikatsana, 1997). For the purposes of this study the phrase ‘cross-racial adoption’ will be used.

Under Apartheid, people were categorised into four racial groups: Black, White, Coloured and Asian. These racial categorisations are problematic, particularly when viewed through a social constructionist lens. They were then, and still are somewhat arbitrarily applied, as the basis of categorisation criteria remain ambiguous and elusive (Erasmus & Ellison, 2008). However, racial categorisation currently used in official governmental policy and publications still recognises four population groups: Blacks (people of African descent), Whites (people of European descent), Coloureds (defined as a non-White group of mixed racial descent and is used herein with no derogatory intentions), and Asians (referring to people of Indian descent). Although Apartheid has been abolished, these categorisations still persist in South African society (Bornman, 2010) and will be referred to as such in this study.

Within the major racial groups there are also language, cultural or ethnic differences: Eleven official language groups have been officially recognised, which are isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga, English and Afrikaans.

Race, culture and ethnicity are terms that are frequently used interchangeably and in both lay and technical language, these terms evolve in the context in which they are used (Quintana, 2007). While the theoretical premise of this study is based on social constructionism, and therefore these terms are based on the meanings which people ascribe to them, there is not a general consensus about this amongst contemporary scientific thinking across the disciplinary spectrum (Morning, 2007). According to Quintana (2007), the uses and definition of *race* have evolved from being based on genetic and biological denotations to being reflective of the socially constructed meanings. Similarly with *ethnicity*, which was understood in demographic terms such as language, national origin, values and tradition

(culture) for example, now also has become understood as a socially constructed term. So, while attempts are made to differentiate between these terms, the psychological impact of prejudice based on either of these constructs has not been distinct (Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010). In the “Findings” section of the study *race* and *culture* are referred to by the participant as distinct but also similar constructs. These terms are, therefore, used in the study while keeping in mind the shifts of meanings connected to them.

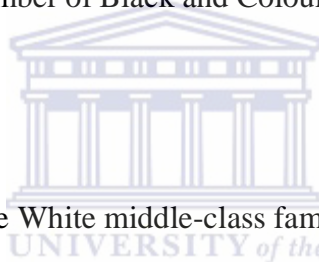
1.2 Background

Cross-racial adoption is a practice in South Africa which was, until recently, prohibited by law enforced racial segregation. Since the early 1990’s many political changes took place in South Africa when a new constitution was drawn up, providing equality for all its citizens and led to the first democratic elections in 1994. Cross-racial adoption became legal a few years before South Africa entered the post-apartheid era when the Child Care Amendment Act of 1991 amended previously legislated prohibitions to adopting children from different racial groups.

Cross-racial adoption has steadily increased in South Africa since 1991 albeit not without its controversies and consequences (Howe, 2008; Mosikatsana, 1997). Concerns in opposition to cross-racial adoption centre on the cultural adaptation and identity formation of the adoptee with the added sensitivities originating from the apartheid era (Louw, 2009).

While cross-racial adoption is legally allowed in South Africa, in-racial child placement is still preferred and regarded as the norm (Zaal, 1994). This, Zaal states, is also in line with the United Nations Bill of Rights of children that recommends that “the child’s language, culture and religion be regarded as a birthright” (Zaal, 1994, p. 383). The problem in South

Africa is that, due to its historical discriminatory policies based on race, which economically disenfranchised Black people and compromised family stability, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic that has led to a significant increase in mortality amongst Black adults, there are more children of colour with inadequate or no parental care than what there are Black adoptive families that can give them a permanent home. Therefore, as is the case in the United States where poverty, classism, sexism and racism are key elements in the disproportionate number of African-American children who are separated from their biological parents (Howe, 2008), these elements play an even greater role in South Africa which is leaving many children without parents or kin to care for them (Mokomane & Rochat, 2012; Townsend & Dawes, 2007). While most of these children are informally fostered and incorporated into their extended families, there is still a sizable number of Black and Coloured children who do not live in a family.



On the other hand there are White middle-class families and financially stable single adults wanting to adopt children for various reasons, some due to not being in a position to have their own biological children. There are families who already have children but want to adopt because of a sense of social responsibility (Mokomane & Rochat, 2012).

Few Black families can afford to legally adopt children and this could be one of the reasons why there is a one-way direction of Black children being adopted into White families. Both Howe (2008) and Mosikatsana (1997) argue that there needs to be a redistribution of resources such that Blacks can afford to raise children, rather than redistributing the children in our society. There also is the contention that there are other reasons why Black families do not readily adopt. Mosikatsana contends that many Black families *do* adopt children, albeit not through the formal route of legal adoption which is by and large applied by social workers who

use 'universalistic' rules and procedures with a White middle class bias, such that Blacks could not meet these rules. He also cites the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Article 20(3) that requires state parties to help ensure that “due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child’s upbringing and to the child’s ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background” and the South African Constitution sections 30 and 31 where it provides for the protection of a person’s cultural, linguistic and religious rights. Taken together he concludes that cross-racial adoption violates the rights of the child to continuity in their upbringing and to their ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background. The Children’s Act 38 of 2005, however, makes the consideration for suitability of adoptive parents by way of their racial or ethnic matching to the child optional: “In the assessment of a prospective adoptive parent, an adoption social worker may take the cultural and community diversity of the adoptable child and the prospective adoptive parent into consideration” S231(3).

Nevertheless, the concerns voiced by many is that when a child is not raised within his or her birth culture, it may not be in the best interest of that child (Park & Evans Green, 2000; Samuels, 2009; Smith, Juarez, & Jacobson, 2011), which is the first principle in law when considering adoption as an institution (Joubert, 1993). Cross-racial adoption is considered to be potentially harmful to an adopted child because of one or more of the following: The child may experience loss of racial or ethnic identity which in South Africa is regarded as very important; the child may find it difficult to identify with the racial or ethnic group of his or her birth heritage or adopted parents; a Black child raised in a White family setting may not learn coping skills necessary to live in a society that is still reeling from residual apartheid racism and other inherent difficulties with living in an interracial family (Joubert, 1993). As a result of these concerns, the question is raised as to whether a child growing up in family of people who

are different from him or her in terms of physical appearance and cultural background, will grow up to be well adjusted and able to develop a positive self-identity.

Proponents of cross-racial adoption believe that the practice *is* in the best interest of the child and that a loving family is by far preferable to residential care (Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010; Roby & Shaw, 2006). Studies have shown that institutionalisation is harmful to the development of children. In a meta-analysis of more than 270 studies, Van IJzendoorn and Juffer (2006) concluded that adoption is an effective intervention for institutionalised, relinquished or maltreated children, both domestically and internationally and that depending on the age of the child when adopted, a full or partial recovery occurred in terms physical growth, attachment security and developing basic trust, cognitive development and self-esteem. Those in favour of cross-racial adoptions would argue that Black children adopted by White families do in actual fact develop a positive Black identity (Reinoso, Juffer, & Tieman, 2013; Vroegh, 1997). Joubert (1993) listed a number of advantages of cross-racial adoption in South Africa in particular: One of these is that cross-racial adoptees learn skills to move in two different worlds, that of their birth culture and that of their adoptive culture. Furthermore, cross-racial adoption could foster racial tolerance within the family, the extended family and also in the wider society (Moos & Mwaba, 2007). In a South African study, Moos and Mwaba (2007) found that most Black participants supported cross-racial adoption and suggested that to Black South Africans, cross-racial adoption represents a rejection of historical racist practices among Whites and evidence of a change in race relationships in South Africa.

Joubert (1993) also pointed out that cross-racial adoption gives a child all the advantages of growing up in a loving family in contrast to residential or foster care. It diminishes long waiting periods for Black children awaiting adoption and to be placed. The

longer the delay for children to be adopted, the more likely that they will develop problems that make them more difficult to place. Generally prospective adoptive parents prefer to adopt infants or very young children because it is assumed that they have been less exposed to and harmed by adversity, and attachment between the child and parents is more easily achieved (Mokomane & Rochat, 2012).

1.3 Rationale

Research of cross-racial adoption is limited in South Africa. A few South African studies have examined the experience and challenges of adoptive parents and the reasons why parents choose to adopt cross-racially (for example Attwell, 2004; Finlay, 2006) and the perceptions of cross-racial adoption in South Africa (Hall, 2010; Moos & Mwaba, 2007), but no studies could be found that examine the identity formation of a cross-racial adoptee. International studies abound but more research is needed to ascertain whether the knowledge gained from international research is applicable to the South African context. Various studies conducted in the United States of America indicate that there are challenges that are specific to children that have been cross-racially adopted (Park & Evans Green, 2000; Samuels, 2009). These challenges often centre on the formation of an identity (Butler-Sweet, 2011a). Because cross-racial adoption has been legal for a relatively short period of time in South Africa, longitudinal studies have not yet been feasible to examine the experience of the cross-racial adopted child over the various developmental stages. Individuals who were adopted as infants soon after the law was amended in 1991 would now be young adults. There seems to be a gap in the research investigating the experiences of and the formation of identity of cross-racial adoptees in South Africa. It is the aim of this research to identify and conduct a case study of such an individual and explore his or her identity formation. The importance of such knowledge would help inform adoptive parents and adoptees of potential challenges and

difficulties that could be expected in order that these may be dealt with more effectively or possibly avoided. Furthermore, if any significant findings are identified, these could form the foundation for further research.

1.4 Research Question

How is the identity of a cross-racial adoptee constructed? What contributes to identity formation and are there challenges to form a positive identity? If there are challenges, are these challenges related to the individual's adoption status or being from a different ethnic group to their adoptive parents, or both - in other words, being cross-racially adopted?

1.5 Aim of the Research.

This research aims to explore identity formation of an individual who was cross-racially adopted in South Africa.



1.6 Significance of the study

Stake (2005) highlights that as a representation of other cross-racial adoptees, the “epistemological opportunity [of a single case study] seems small, but we are optimistic that we can learn some important things from almost any case” (p. 451). This explorative case study introduces readers to the issues around identity formation of a cross-racial adoptee that will be unique to this case, but will also be useful for the body of research as it will highlight areas that need further study. In addition, it could inform adoptive parents and the professionals supporting or guiding them with regards to understanding the challenges of cross-racial adoption from the child's perspective. With this insight, family relationships may be enhanced and some pitfalls may be avoided in order to make cross racial adoption a more rewarding experience for the individuals involved.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Theories of identity

As human beings, we all seek to understand who we are and where we ‘fit’ in society. The concept of ‘identity’ refers to a personal sense of self, something that develops from an internal representation of the self and from our interactions with others (McGinnis, Smith, Ryan, & Howard, 2009). Theories about identity formation are plentiful and there have been debates in the field about what it is that is actually being studied and where personal identity originates, how it develops and what the influences are. Various paradigms and epistemologies have caused divides in our understanding of identity formation and impeded theoretical integration. However, more recent developments have utilised diverse methodological and eclectic approaches to epistemology resulting in the development of more integrated and encompassing theories.



2.1.1 Identity Formation

Earlier theories of identity focussed on individual identity formation, for example Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1959). While he focussed on the individual, he also emphasised that the development of the ego is more than a culmination of intrapsychic desires and energy, and encompasses more than the sum of all the individual’s childhood identifications; it is also formed and shaped by the individual’s social context and social relationships which culminate in the person’s sense of purpose or meaning in the world. He wrote in *Childhood and Society*: “It is the accrued experience of the ego’s ability to integrate these [childhood] identifications with the vicissitudes of the libido, with the aptitudes developed out of endowment, and with the opportunities offered in social roles. The sense of ego identity, then, is the accrued confidence that the inner sameness and continuity of one’s meaning for others, as evidenced in the tangible promise of a ‘career’” (Erikson, 1993, p. 235).

This definition emphasises a sense of stability of being and of purpose. His theory sets eight stages of development, each stage building on the next, starting from infancy and leading up to old age. Erikson theorised that although identity begins to form in infancy, he emphasised that adolescence is the life stage in which the primary task is that of identity achievement and that it is critical to negotiate this stage successfully in order to become an emotionally healthy and productive adult. In his book *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (1971) he identified adolescence as the period where the human being is at his or her most vulnerable; where they can no longer hold onto childhood roles and identifications, but neither are they ready to become an adult. In this stage their developmental task is to negotiate a stable identity, for if they fail at this they will suffer from identity diffusion and role confusion and lack a sense of belonging. He also identified adolescence as a place of heightened potential where they fall in love, projecting a diffused sense of self on the other and as they see themselves reflected in the other their own ego-image becomes clearer (Erikson, 1993). Furthermore, they gradually become aware that the other has their own defined self. They learn about fidelity to the self and others where they can voluntarily commit being loyal and faithful to another and in doing so develop stable companionships (Erikson, 1971).

Paranjpe (1975) used Erikson's theory of personality development to form the basis of his cross cultural studies of personality development and defined psychosocial identity (hereafter referred to as identity) as "the central organising principle of the personality system. It accounts for the unity, self-sameness and continuity of the personality, for the persistence of a pattern throughout the life history of the individual, and for the shared sameness and solidarity of the individual with his community" (p. 36).

Like Erikson, Paranjpe (1975) hypothesised that adolescence and early adulthood are crucial to the development of the identity. The individual's developing personality encounters several subsystems of society and a balance needs to be maintained between the individual and social aspects of the personality. He also maintained that identity does not develop in a vacuum but interacts within the context of the developing individual and therefore the family and wider society influence and are intricately involved in the individual's identity development. Paranjpe (1975) highlighted that identity consists of both private and public aspects. The private aspect involves the subjective feeling of "being one and the same person through time and space" (p. 49), having a sense of a true self. This experience of personal consistency is subsequently supported by others who recognise the public aspect of the person in the present, as the same person they had known in the past, because they identify persistent patterns of the 'objective' part of the individual's identity: their name, facial and bodily expressions and features and their persistent expression of themselves in certain social roles (Paranjpe, 1975). It is evident that the private and public aspects of the identity are intertwined and interdependently linked.

2.1.2 Identity Formation in the Social Context

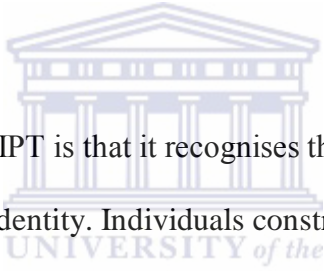
The psychosocial developmental theory of Erikson (1971) discussed social identity in developmental terms but social psychologist Tajfel (1982) focused on social identity which he understood to be part of the individual's self-concept and that in the broader context it is centred on the emotional significance attached to that of belonging to a group and the consequences of identification with their social group in society. Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (SIT) is cited in many articles of identity formation, but, essentially, it is not a theory of identity (Jaspal, 2014). Rather, it is a theory explaining intergroup relations and their conflicts (Tajfel, 1982). The theory also contends that individuals seek self-esteem from their group

membership and this is an important concept to consider when looking at the role the social context plays in the formation of identity.

Breakwell incorporated some of Tajfel's ideas into a far more encompassing theory of identity – Identity Process Theory (IPT). This theory is foremost a dynamic model of identity construction and maintenance, and is concerned with the way the individual defines, constructs and modifies his or her identity (Jaspal, 2014). There is an integration of the various levels of identity formation: the intrapsychic, interpersonal and intergroup aspects. The theory encompasses both social identity, the part of identity that is derived from group membership, and the total constellation of characteristics that make up the whole identity. The latter encompasses psychological attributes of the individual such as personality traits and cognitive capacities; those attributes of the individual that are consistent across time and place, that manifest at times in different ways but are predictable in a systematic manner (Breakwell, 2010). Identity is seen to be comprised of individual traits, experiences and group memberships that combine in a hierarchical structure. There is, therefore, no distinction between personal and social identity in IPT because, when looking at the identity formation process over the life span, social identity is seen to become personal identity (Jaspal, 2014).

Theories that have influenced or have been incorporated in the development of IPT are Bandura's Self-Efficacy Model, Stryker's Identity Theory and Moscovici's Social Representations Theory. Bandura's conceptualisation of self-efficacy which he defined as "the belief in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (1995, p. 2) gives the individual self-agency in constructing and regulating identity, which is a core assumption in IPT. Stryker's Identity Theory introduced the concept of "multiple identities" of an individual. This theory informed IPT about the origins of

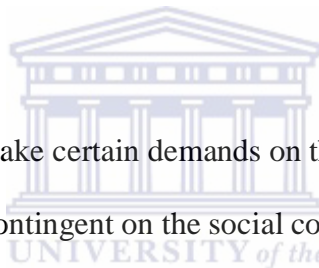
the *content* of identity, the elements identity consists of and the interaction of these elements and their relative salience and centrality to identity as a whole (Jaspal, 2014). The more salient a particular identity is in the life of the individual and the more society confirms that identity, the stronger the individual's commitment to that identity will be. Moscovici's Social Representations Theory (SRT) explained the reciprocal interaction between the social representational processes in shaping identity processes (Breakwell, 2010). These influences led to IPT's deliberate abandonment of the distinction between personal and social identity as postulated by earlier identity theories. Breakwell concluded that when looking across the biography of a person, social identity is seen to become personal identity and that in IPT, identity elements that include traits, experiences and group memberships, all make up a hierarchical structure of identity.



What is also crucial about IPT is that it recognises the individual's agency in the construction and management of identity. Individuals construct systems to make sense of their lives, experiences and identities and to make meaning and they do this by interacting within their social contexts. It is therefore a theory that fits well within the social constructionist paradigm of identity process (Jaspal, 2014).

IPT proposes that the structure of self-identity should be conceptualised in terms of content and value dimensions. The structure is regulated by two processes: that of assimilation-accommodation which is then followed by evaluation, i.e., the individual absorbs new content (characteristics which define identity, both social and personal) into his or her identity structure and makes adjustments to accommodate that information. Then the individual confers meaning and value on the content which is an evaluative process and is constantly subject to revision as a consequence of changes in social value systems (Breakwell, 2010).

Breakwell (2010) identified four principles that guide these two processes: the desire for continuity, distinctiveness, self-efficacy and self-esteem. These four principles vary in importance depending on their relative salience over time and situations and also varies developmentally across the life-span. Other IPT researchers have proposed that more principles are involved, such as the principle of belonging (referring to maintaining feelings of closeness and acceptance by others) and meaning (referring to the need to find significance and purpose) (Vignoles, Chryssochoou, & Breakwell, 2002). In more recent work Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010) proposed another principle, being that of 'psychological coherence'. This principle refers to the need to establish compatibility between the different parts that make up the individual's identity.



Each of these principles make certain demands on the individual and the weight each of them carry varies since they are contingent on the social context and the developmental phase an individual finds himself or herself in. If the demands are compatible with one another, the identity process can proceed unhindered. If however the demands made by the principles are in conflict or contradictory, a disturbance in the identity process will occur (Brygola, 2011). Identity is threatened when the two processes cannot comply with the principles and the individual then engages in coping strategies to deal with the threat. In other words: threats are aversive and therefore coping strategies are employed. In order to understand the processes that drive identity construction, it is necessary to examine how individuals react when identity is threatened (Jaspal, 2014). A coping strategy is “any activity in thought or deed, which has as its goal the removal or modification of a threat to identity” (Breakwell 1986, as cited by Jaspal, 2014, p. 5). Coping strategies can take place at three levels: the intrapsychic, the interpersonal and the intergroup levels. Sometimes coping strategies employ a combination of these three

levels. There is “engagement coping” which is aimed at solving problems and dealing with stressors and related emotions, but there is also “disengagement coping” which is when the individual avoids or withdraws from problems and attempts to escape feelings of distress (Luyckx, Klimstra, Duriez, Schwartz, & Vanhalst, 2012). The choice of coping strategy depends on the interaction between the type of threat involved, the salience of the threat in the social setting and the person’s prior identity structure and ego strength. If coping strategies are effective, the power of the threat itself will lessen (Breakwell, 2010).

For a person who is adopted into a family that is of a different race or ethnicity to themselves there are added layers of complexity to the development identity (McGinnis, Smith, Ryan, & Howard, 2009). Both the separation from the birthparents and subsequent adoption by another set of parents and the visible physical differences between parents and the child create a social context that have a significant impact on identity formation. The impact may vary among cross-racially adopted individuals depending on the pre-adoption circumstances, their temperament, social and environmental context. Because both a person’s adoption status and ethnic identity are aspects that are inundated with stereotypes and preconceived ideas, they need to be highlighted in the following two sections.

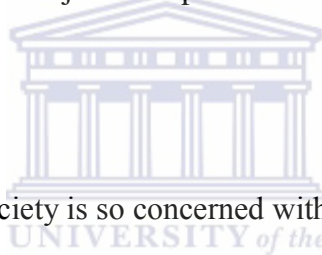
2.2 Adoption and Identity

Adoption is a word that carries increasing meaning to an adopted child as he or she grows up. Initially it may simply be a word that explains to the child why they look different from their parents and that they were not born into their families. In middle childhood (ages 7 – 8), they begin to look at their adoption more critically as slowly it dawns on them that in order for them to have been adopted, there must have been a loss, a loss of a link between their birth parents and themselves and a realisation that they have been relinquished. Considerable

ambivalence about being adopted emerges in many adoptees and with this often comes an increase in anger, oppositional behaviour, depression and self-image problems reflecting a process of adaptive grieving (Brodzinsky, 1990). As their cognitive abilities increase in adolescence, the understanding of themselves and their adoption story becomes more multifaceted and this challenges the adoptee as inevitably ambiguities and contradictions emerge (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004). Their sense of loss may deepen as the loss is no longer only in relation to the loss of birthparents, but also a loss in terms of their emerging identity (Brodzinsky, 1990). Because they did not choose this for themselves and have played no role in their adoption, their perception of themselves as adopted individuals is shaped by societal attitudes and stereotypes (Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, & Lash Esau, 2000). These stereotypes often reveal a stigmatisation of adoption that attribute roles to the different participants in the adoption triad: for example, the deceased, unknown or uncaring birth parents, the wounded and damaged adoptee and the heroic, suffering adoptive parents who want to rescue unwanted children (Javier, Baden, Biafora, Camacho-Gingerich, & Henderson, 2007). There was and sometimes still is secrecy surrounding adoption. In Western society, secrecy about adoption began around the beginning of the last century that attempted to shield adopted children from the presumed stigma of 'illegitimacy' or 'bad blood' associated with being born out of wedlock. It is particularly the stereotype of the wounded, bad or unwanted child that may have an impact on the identity formation of the adoptee. The extent to which these notions are internalised by the adopted child, the stigma they may perceive from outsiders and the negative images they hold of themselves affect their own sense of worth (Grotevant et al., 2000).

Adoptive identity must be understood in the context of societal attitudes toward kinship, which in most societies is based primarily on blood relations (Grotevant et al., 2000). For adopted children it can be difficult to come to terms with the fact that their family ties are

constructed in social relationships rather than biology. Often society's stigmatisation of families that are formed in the absence of blood kinship make the personal lived experience of being an adoptee ambiguous. In a study by March (1995) findings indicated that, while over two-thirds of adult adoptees considered no difference between being raised in an adopted versus a biological family, they perceived that others from the larger community did. Adoptees and adoptive parents alike perceive larger society to hold to stigmatised beliefs which can be summarised into a few themes. These are that biological ties are important for bonding and love and, therefore, bonding and love in adoption is second-best and that adoptive parents are not "real parents" (Lifton, 1994). Furthermore, because of the adoptee's unknown genetic heritage, adopted children are second rate and there is the belief that adopted children are far more likely to have behavioural and adjustment problems and even deviances than non-adopted children (Miall, 1996).



When the narrative in a society is so concerned with the metaphor of "common blood", it draws attention to that which the adoptee 'lacks' and can have an impact on aspects of identity that, according to Grotevant (1997), are particularly important: self-definition, coherence of personality and continuity over time. The latter links the past, present and future, connecting multiple contexts and relationships. They have in actual fact experienced a discontinuity between their genealogical heritage and their lived experience, where they don't look like their adoptive families and don't share personal characteristics and traits. They inevitably grapple with questions of "who am I like" and "where do I come from?" and seek ever evolving answers to the question: "Who am I as an adopted person?" (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004). Passmore (2004, p. 166) quoted a female adoptee who said:

It's hard to describe to other people what it's like being adopted. Usually if I say something like "It seems to have taken me longer to know myself," I get

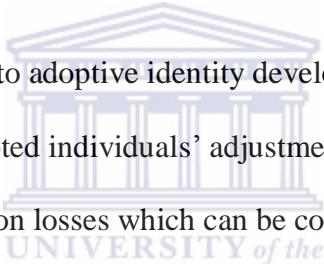
told “Well everybody has to do that,” and somewhere along the line the point I’m trying to make gets lost. Of course I realize that everyone is on a journey of self-discovery in life. Everyone has to struggle to find themselves.” But most people are helped along the way by the fact that they have “Mum’s nose” or Dad’s “sense of humour” or that they have to be careful or they’ll “end up like uncle Fred.” I suppose they have a glimpse of themselves as they might be. I didn’t have that and although my adoptive parents loved me, and I them, I couldn’t see myself in them...It’s like walking down the street, and you’re the only one that looks like you, and then you go home and you’re still the only one who looks like you.

While adoptees may share personality characteristics, interests, values, tastes and preferences with their adoptive families as a result of having been raised in those families and shared environmental factors, most adoptees experience some degree of difference from their adoptive families as many other characteristics, such as physical appearance, personality, ethnicity, talents and medical conditions have no resonance in their nuclear or extended adoptive family and can only be made sense of when they refer to often incomplete genealogical information that they may have of their birth families.

Dunbar and Grotevant (2004) view the search for an adoptive identity as part of a larger process of identity development in adolescence. In their research they studied the narratives of adopted adolescents and identified four patterns of adoptive identity: *An Unexamined Identity* was identified where the adolescent had not actively considered what the meaning of adoption is to them and they perceived it as unimportant to their sense of who they are. They did not consider the issue of adoption as prominent in their lives, affecting their behaviour, thoughts and feelings. *Limited Identity* indicated that the adolescent had explored their adoptive identity

to a modest degree, that they had some questions but had no strong desire to talk or think about it. They also downplayed the differences between them and non-adopted individuals.

Adolescents with an *Unsettled Identity* had thought about their adoption a considerable amount of time and typically harboured feelings of rejection and anger. They were actively working through the meaning of being adopted and had both positive and negative views about adoption. The last pattern identified was of adolescents with an *Integrated Adoptive Identity*. They had typically thought a lot about adoption and what it meant in their lives and had integrated both positive and negative aspects of adoption into a coherent sense of self. They had also “worked through” challenging feelings at an earlier stage of development and had achieved a more positive view of adoption and what it meant in their lives and in their future.



A life stage model related to adoptive identity developed by Brodzinsky (1990) is based on the assumption that adopted individuals' adjustment is in part related to their awareness and appraisal of adoption losses which can be considered once they are cognitively mature enough to reflect on their unknown genealogy and the circumstances surrounding their relinquishment. Varied emotional and behavioural reactions to the grieving process particular to adoption are to be expected depending on the developmental phase of the child. It been recognised that the stress that results from this and subsequent coping is mediated by the quality of attachment the adopted child has with their adoptive parents and the parent's ability to adjust adaptively to and mirror the developmental shifts in their adopted child. Adopted children's sense of interpersonal trust and commitment to their adoptive families was strongly related to adoption adjustment. Brodzinsky also identified self-esteem and self-efficacy as variables associated with adoption appraisal and ability to cope. Children with low self-esteem and problems in self-efficacy or a diminished sense of control generally exhibited either

internalising or externalising maladaptive behaviour, depending on whom they placed the blame for their relinquishment: themselves, their biological or adoptive parents.

There are many variables that influence the adoptive identity for adoptees and complicates research considerably. These variables include pre-adoption history, the type of adoption (open or closed, private or public child welfare, domestic or international), the age at which the child was adopted, the family composition of the adoptive family (racial and cultural similarities or differences, the presence of adopted or biological siblings) and the characteristics of adoptive parents (McGinnis, Smith, Ryan, & Howard, 2009). Nevertheless, there is emerging empirical evidence that supports theories describing and predicting the impact adoption has on adoptees. The overall findings suggest that adoptees experience psychological stress related to being adopted, have greater challenges in establishing an identity which impacts on overall adjustment and sense of well-being. However, the impact of adoption is significantly moderated or exacerbated by a range of personal, social and environmental factors (Brodzinsky, 1990).

2.3 Identity and Ethnicity

Adoptees also have to come to terms with themselves in relation to the family and culture within which they were adopted (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004). Therefore identity formation for cross-racial adoptees involves developing a racial or ethnic identity without having a lived experience within the adoptive family of what it means to be part of their birth culture or ethnicity. They have to incorporate racial or ethnic differences between themselves and their family in the identity formation process.

Phinney and Ong (2007) describe the construction of an ethnic identity forming over time, beginning in a rudimentary form in childhood, then undergoing major developmental changes in adolescence through exploration and commitment, and by adulthood reaching a relatively stable and secure sense of themselves as a member of their particular ethnic group.

Ethnicity is not something that can be chosen by the individual, but it is determined at birth or assigned by others, as the child is born with certain phenotypic features into a particular language group and social context. However, the individual has choices in the way they deal with their assigned ethnic group, the meaning they attribute to belonging to that group and how important belonging to that group is to them (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Phinney & Ong, 2007). As the individual matures, belonging to a particular ethnic group becomes a reciprocal interaction between the individual and the group. An individual at the most basic level needs to identify themselves as a member of a particular group. Individuals may even use several different self-labels or categories, depending on the situation and these are used different times. The label used is also influenced by the context and view the other group members take of the individual and therefore the individual cannot easily apply labels to themselves that are at odds with their physical appearance (Phinney & Ong, 2007).

What is perhaps the most important when considering ethnic identity is the sense of belonging, or the strength of the attachment and personal investment an individual has in a group. In order for the ethnic identity to become part of a mature and stable sense of self the person would need to have spent time exploring their ethnicity. This would include gaining information and having experiences relevant to their ethnicity and engaging in behaviours that are part of that ethnic group's practices and social interactions, such as speaking the language

and eating certain foods (Phinney & Ong, 2007). When an individual has a strong sense of belonging to a group one would assume that it would include feeling comfortable and having positive attitudes about one's group membership. However, a person could have a personal positive or negative regard (referred to as private regard) towards their group which is affected by how other people perceive that group (referred to as public regard) and the extent to which this is internalised by the individual (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). Therefore if an individual belongs to an ethnic group that is highly valued in society, they can more easily commit to their group identity but when faced with a social context where the group an individual belongs to is devalued, much more time is spent by the individual engaging in a process of negotiating the meaning of their identity (French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2006).

This is of particular relevance to the South African context where all racial, ethnic and cultural groups have been subject to significant social and political change since the advent of a new political dispensation in 1994. In a study by Bornman (2010) who looked at three surveys conducted over a period from 1994 to 2001 examining the group identifications of the various ethnic group in South Africa, showed that there have been shifts and changes in the identity structures of South Africans. Groups that were once highly valued due to their political dominance are no longer viewed as such and previously devalued groups have become more valued, not only because of a change of political power and new opportunities for previously disenfranchised South Africans, but also due to a shift away from nation-building discourse that was present during the nineties to a discourse, steered by the leading political powers embracing Africanism with the use of terms such as “the African Renaissance” or “an African century” (Bornman, 2010). As previously discussed, these changes in group evaluation also alter the overall identity formation processes of individuals.

Another factor affecting ethnic identity that was highlighted in the paper by Bornman (2010) was the importance of language. While group categorisations related to kinship, common cultural focus and historical heritage are distinguishing elements of ethnic identity, language appeared to be regarded as the most important dimension of ethnic identity in South Africa. This is significant when considering the dilemma of the cross-racial adoptee in South Africa as it presents an added challenge to the development of an ethnic identity, which stands in contrast to the USA where most cross-racial adoption research has been conducted and the language is mostly the same.

Much has been written about identity formation of cross-racially adopted individuals but these are usually from minority ethnic groups in the USA or Australia, while in South Africa, the race and ethnicities of most domestic cross-racial adoptees are well represented and are in the majority of the overall population. Therefore, there is more opportunity for South African cross-racial adoptees to interact with others from their own racial groups and explore their birth cultures. However, because the family is the first social context in which young children learn about themselves and their environment, cross-racial adoptees are faced with differences at a later age and aspects that non-adopted children take for granted, become areas of confusion for the adopted individual.

There are many overlaps of identifications in the South African context as well, since identifications are not only related to one's ethnicity or race; individuals can identify with multiple social groups. With globalisation, all South Africans have to negotiate identities that go beyond their own ethnicity and to a greater or lesser degree identify with supranational identifications such as Africanism, Western culture and other global societies (Bornman, 2010). It could be argued, however, that Western culture is the dominant force in South Africa

that is perpetuated by globalisation, particularly in South African urban areas. With the added changes in the political realm, modernisation, education to name but a few change-forces, the various South African ethnic and language groups face challenges in defining and continually updating their group identity (Bornman, 2010). Therefore, many of the challenges of identity formation in cross-racial adoptees and the development of an ethnic identity in general highlighted in overseas studies may also be relevant to South African cross-racial adoptees.

2.4 Identity Formation in a Cross-Racial Adoptee

Much empirical literature indicates that racial or ethnic identity in cross-racial adoptees and their overall psychological adjustment and self-esteem have similar outcomes when compared to same-race adoptions. However the research needs to be carefully analysed as to what is meant by being well-adjusted and what constructs are compared with each other when looking at the adjustment of the cross-racial adoptee in relation to same-race adoptees or non-adopted individuals. In their report, "Beyond culture camp: Promoting healthy identity in adoption," McGinnis, Smith, Ryan and Howard (2009) found that the research has focussed more on ethnic awareness and less on ethnic self-identification. They stated that ethnic awareness is accomplished through the cultural competency of the adoptive parents and exposure to cultural activities, but ethnic self-identification is an intra-psychic process and the research on this can only be understood when examining the perspective of cross-racial adoptees. It appears though that the two concepts are interrelated and that ethnic awareness is one of the ways that can promote ethnic self-identification. In a study by Mohanty, Keokse and Sales (2006) who conducted a survey among international Asian-born adult adoptees, it was found that when adoptive families provided a multicultural environment and gave them opportunities to get involved with their birth culture, that adoptees developed a more positive self-esteem as well as believing that they are not marginal within the culture in which they

were adopted. At the same time they felt that their identification with birth cultures was valued. Furthermore, it enhanced their sense of belonging within the adopted family and the adoptees perceived their adoptive parents as more warm and affectionate. The study also showed the converse: i.e., where there was a lack of social culturalisation, adoptees felt less attached to their adoptive families, were more confused about who they are and where they belong. They felt different and marginalised and this led to them having low self-esteem, making them more psychologically vulnerable. It is thus evident that their identity formation and group affiliation are affected by the extent to which families incorporate social culturalisation.

In a longitudinal study of African-American cross-racial adoptees by DeBerry, Scarr and Weinberg (1996), findings indicated that family cultural socialisation did not directly affect psychological adjustment. It affected the adoptees' orientation for their reference group to be more 'Africentric' as opposed to 'Eurocentric' as it was referred to in the study. At times, during their development, adoptees experiences what was perhaps transient maladjustment within the family because the adoptee experienced a pull between family belongingness and autonomy. Personal identity formation requires autonomy and if families were not able to be flexible and incorporate an Africentric orientation but rather viewed it as a threat to family cohesion, the adoptee was likely to experience more intrapsychic conflict. However their findings showed that where adoptees were Eurocentric orientated and not exposed to much social culturalisation, self –esteem needs were met through other avenues such as intellectual and academic competence and feeling a sense of belonging to their adoptive families and being part of main-stream culture and therefore this would show up in many research studies as an indicator of psychological adjustment. Yet other needs involving belongingness remained unfulfilled and as adoptees would contemplate their losses, their grieving process would not only concern the loss of connection with biological parents but also a loss of culture and

heritage. Therefore unresolved racial identity issues could exacerbate their difficulties as they would not be able to operate well within their family context, they were not adequately prepared to face the wider community and were limited in their ability to successfully orientate themselves to their birth culture (DeBerry et al., 1996).

While children are young, most cross-racial adoptees identify quickly with their adoptive parent's White culture, but even in the absence of culturalisation practices within the family, many eventually seek to reclaim their birth culture (Baden, Treweeke, & Ahluwalia, 2012). Cross-racially adopted children typically become aware of racial differences between themselves and their adoptive parents between the ages of 4 and 5 (Lee, Grotevant, Hellerstedt, & Gunnar, 2006). Baden et al. (2012) found that by middle childhood the majority of cross-racial adoptees (in the White parent Black child context) associate with being White and do not identify with their own racial group. This may continue during adolescence and even into early adulthood. Yet, early adulthood comes at a time when they move into wider society and they develop an increasing awareness of race and a shift occurs where a desire surfaces to identify more with their birth heritage (Samuels, 2010). Because they experience ambiguity or dissonance in their physical appearance and their White cultural affiliation, it often compels them to find resolution which may involve a need to reclaim their birth culture (Baden et al., 2012). Even in adoptive families where parents seek out to give their children experiences in cultural socialisation, these are typically not consistent and substantive enough to provide their adopted child with a lived experience of their birth culture and therefore some adoptees have the need to establish or rekindle their cultural ties. Baden et al. (2012) came up with the term 'reculturation' which can be "viewed as reclaiming of one's birth culture" and "is a process of identity development and navigation through which adoptees develop their relationship to their

birth and adoptive cultures via reculturative activities and experiences leading to one of five possible reculturation outcomes” (p. 390).

In their article, Baden et al. first describe the process of “reculturation” which begins at birth, where the child begins to enculturate their birth culture up until they are adopted. Once the child is placed enculturation ends and assimilation of the adoptive parents’ culture begins. If the child was exposed to their native language, regardless of their language development at the time of adoption, cross-racial adoptees quickly shift to the language of their adoptive parents. Assimilation of the adoptive culture includes an acceptance and absorption of the culture and cultural practices of their adoptive parents so that they can communicate with, attach to and survive within their adoptive families and adoptees use the White race and culture as their reference group (Eurocentric reference group) against which they evaluate and compare themselves and others. While they assimilate their adoptive culture, they may also have an interest in and be exposed to their birth culture and reculturation begins, if not within their adoptive families, then often once they become adults and are no longer sheltered in their adopted culture the process begins or continues. Reculturation occurs through education, experience and/or immersion and leads to several possible outcomes. Sometimes adoptees after exposure and exploration to both birth and adoptive cultures feel they do not fit in either and prefer to associate primarily with other adoptees.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

In cross-racial adoption, race is a central concept and can be understood in a Social Constructionist theoretical framework. Duster (as cited in Lee, 2003, p.1) explains: “our social and economic lives are integrally organized around race as a social construct.”

Constructionism assumes a relativistic ontology in that reality can be understood in the form of multiple intangible mental ideas that are based on the individual's experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and through the interaction with others (hence social constructionism) (Creswell, 2007). In other words, social constructionist paradigms claim that all knowledge is the product of contextual factors (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A subjective epistemology is assumed where the researcher and the responder co-create understanding to reach consensual truth (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The concept of race is then not considered from a biological point of view, but considered from the subjective meaning and content that is attached to race which is negotiated socially and historically (Morning, 2007). Identity formation can also be viewed as a social construction because as individuals interact within their social context they construct systems of meaning in order to make sense of their lives and their experiences and form an identity out of that. The social context within which an individual constructs an identity allows them to utilise social resources such as language, images, and notions in order to set their novel experiences within a social frame and make them seem familiar (Breakwell, 1993). Identity Process Theory (IPT) has contributed substantially to the understanding of identity formation as it incorporates both psychological and social processes in forming an identity. With the recognition that individuals have agency in the construction and management of identity, it distinguishes IPT as utilising a social constructionist model of identity process (Jaspal, 2014). It is within the Social Constructionist theoretical framework and incorporating Identity Process Theory that the findings of this research were evaluated.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study sought to explore the formation of an identity of a cross-racial adoptee in the South African context. Within a social constructionist framework a qualitative methodology was assumed. According to Yin (2009), the use of a case study is indicated when conducting an in-depth investigation of a contemporary phenomenon, where the contextual conditions are pertinent to the study and where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly distinguishable. Cross-racial adoption is a contemporary phenomenon and the South African context is of particular interest given its racialised history and recent change to democratic governance. Yin (2009) argues for the use of a single case study when the case has been previously inaccessible to social science enquiry. He refers to this as a *revelatory* case. A case study of this kind has been previously inaccessible to research because cross-racial adoption is such a recent practice in South Africa and infants from 1991 onwards that were adopted are only now coming of age. Furthermore, due to the sensitive nature of the study it was expected to be challenging to find a cross-racial adoptee, at the age of consent, that was willing to participate.

The enquiry was a collaborative effort between the researcher and the participant as recommended in Creswell (2007). The researcher wanted to capture the participant's experience and meaning in the context of the participant's family dynamics within the South African society as accurately as possible and then respond reflexively to the information gained. According to Stake (2005), it is important that the researcher becomes experientially acquainted with the case, and able to personally embrace it so that through the process of research "the researcher can come to understand the case in the most expected and respected ways" (p. 455). The research was therefore shaped and new themes, ideas and questions

developed during the study as the researcher experienced the research process (Creswell, 2007).

3.2 Participant

The selection of a participant involved finding a cross-racial adoptee that seemed to offer the most opportunity to learn from, which implied taking someone who was most accessible and one with whom the researcher could spend the most amount of time (Stake, 2005). The case study was based on the experience of a Black person who was adopted shortly after birth into a White family in South Africa. Since the change in adoption laws 23 years ago, it would now be possible to identify a cross racially adopted participant who would be developmentally at the age where the researcher could realistically assume that the participant would be able to think abstractly, be reflective and also have negotiated most of the adolescent developmental phase that is generally marked by an intense search for identity. Locating a participant through adoption support groups was attempted and through word of mouth referral an appropriate candidate who was willing to participate in the research study was identified. The researcher needed to have access to the participant that included face to face or video-conferencing interviews, and a considerable amount of time was to be spent with the participant. The participant was a 21 year old male university student, born in KwaZulu Natal (KZN) and relinquished at birth in hospital after which he was transferred to a children's home. He was adopted and taken into the care of his adoptive parents when he was one month old. He grew up with an older brother and sister who were both biological children of his adoptive parents. He attended a multiracial public primary school and private high school for boys in KZN.

3.3 Data Collection

For this case study, three in-depth interviews were conducted until saturation was reached. Open-ended questions were posed during the interviews. Smith and Osborn (2008) recommend the use of open-ended questions as it allows the participant to answer in detail and qualify and clarify responses. Interviews were conducted with the participant via online video-conferencing, using 'Skype' and e-mail communication was used. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. According to Arksey and Knight (1999), qualitative interviews allow for understanding and exploration of in-depth meaning, particularly when the participant is interviewed on several occasions over a period of time. It is also a powerful way to help the participant express his previously unspoken feelings, perceptions and understanding. The objectives for the three interviews were as follows: In the first interview the objective was to ascertain how the participant sees himself in the present and how he would describe himself to others. How the participant believes others see him, was also explored. The second interview focused on the adoption itself and whether the participant believed that this has had an impact on his identity formation and if so, how. An exploration of what experiences affected his identity formation in his development was another focus area during the second interview. In the third interview the objective was to explore how South African culture has informed his identity formation. Included in this was seeking to understand which cultures had been dominant at various stages of the participant's development and what concerns were currently most prominent in his identity formation.

3.4 Data Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to analyse the data. A distinctive feature of IPA is its commitment to a detailed interpretive account of a case and is therefore a very suitable tool for data analysis in this research. IPA explores in detail the

personal lived experience of a participant, the meaning of that experience to the participant and how they make sense of it (Smith, 2011). Although the theoretical approach of IPA is phenomenological (Smith & Osborn, 2008), it also focuses on understanding how people construct their experiences and make meaning and it can therefore be argued that IPA is also suitable to use in a Social Constructionist framework.

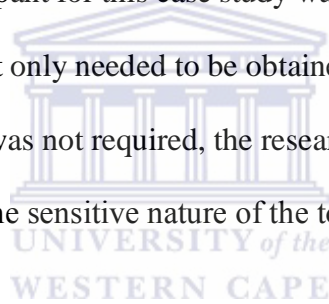
Qualitative research is a dynamic process where the researcher is active in the research, attempting to get an inside perspective of the participant's personal world which can only be done indirectly, by the researcher interpreting the account from the participant through the researcher's own conceptions (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The interpretation is informed by hermeneutics, which in IPA takes on two forms: the first is empathic hermeneutics where the researcher tries to understand the participant's point of view and in a way take their side. The second form hermeneutics takes, involves asking critical questions when examining the text provided by the participant. The researcher may sense something else is going on underneath the participant's surface account. This allows for a much deeper interpretation to be made (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Smith and Osborn (2008) describe the analytic process as follows: Interviews are transcribed verbatim and then analysed beginning with the annotation of interesting or significant things that were said by the participant. Preliminary interpretations include summarising, paraphrasing and noting associations and connections that come to mind. The researcher might comment on the participant's use of language, and the way they come across and also the differences and similarities, exaggerations and contradictions in what they say. These comments are transformed into emergent themes which are concise phrases capturing the essential quality of what was said. Emergent themes that can cluster together are ordered

and grouped. Some theme clusters share commonality whereas others might contradict each other. These are then put together into superordinate and subordinate concepts and are ordered coherently to form a table of master themes. All along the researcher needs to ensure that the themes are connected to the primary source material, the transcript. The final step is where the master themes are written up into a narrative account where themes are explained and supported by verbatim extracts from the transcripts to which the researcher may add an analytic commentary.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical Clearance was obtained from the Higher Degrees Committee at the University of the Western Cape. The participant for this case study was purposively selected to be older than 18 years. Therefore, consent only needed to be obtained from the participant. Even though permission from parents was not required, the researcher sought agreement from the participant's parents because of the sensitive nature of the topic.



Case study research portrays personal views and circumstances and this can put the participant at risk to exposure and embarrassment and loss of standing (Stake, 2005). Therefore confidentiality and safekeeping of all interview material is an obligation. Confidentiality of the participant was ensured by keeping his name anonymous and demographic data vague. Data were stored electronically and password protected. Once the researcher has completed her qualification, all data will be deleted or destroyed. Issues of how the data was to be reported was discussed in advance to minimise risk for the participant. The participant was informed that involvement in the study is voluntary and that he could withdraw from the research process at any time, should he wished to have done so. Because the topic for

research is an ongoing issue of concern for the participant, professional counselling would have been made available if required.

3.6 Reflexivity

Stake (2005) maintains that although a lot of intellectual energy goes into observation, what is more critical in case work is being reflective, digging into meanings and working to relate them to context and experience. As the researcher, I needed to remain aware of my own biases during the interviewing and analysis of the data.

Simons (2009) states that because qualitative research is inherently subjective, the researcher will need to demonstrate how their own values, predispositions and feelings impact on the research. I am a White adoptive parent who has adopted a child from another race and have biological children as well. These factors are important when considering the impact this may have had on the study. I was aware of some of my own predispositions towards conducting a study about cross-racial adoption. These included firstly an awareness of the desire to portray a positive development and outcome for all participants in the adoption process. Initial reading about the topic of adoption, the criticism against it and the conflicted reports the adoptees gave of their experience was very painful at times and I could in some way identify with their pain of loss, rejection and abandonment. At other times there was a sense of irritation at the depth of critical or lamenting voices of researchers and adoptees and felt the need for a more utilitarian approach to the matter of adoption. These moments of irritation or disconnection from the pain posed some reprieve from intense affect that was evoked while researching such an emotive topic. The affect experienced increased my empathy towards stakeholders of the adoptive process, especially the adoptee, and I desired to report as realistically as possible on the experience of the participant. Furthermore, being a parent of

biological children reduced personal defensiveness and anxiety about being an adoptive parent, as I felt that my identity as a parent was to a great extent already established by the time I became an adoptive parent. This I believe lead to an ability to tolerate the personal emotional investment and to an extent an ability to distance myself more effectively from the adoption process and be able to report on the various views.

The research topic also required enquiring into the experience of people from different racial and ethnic groups. In the South African context this is a particularly emotion-laden topic, a mere 20 years after the abolishment of apartheid. Huge changes, opposing voices, pain, anger, guilt, hatred and division are the loudest voices heard daily in the media and they often overrule the softer, gentler voices of reconciliation, of understanding and reaching out to “the other”. There is no denial that the magnitude of the socio-political changes in South Africa affects each citizen of this country, including myself. Coming from a White ethnic background I was aware of some of the values and biases I hold as a result of my own experience and meaning-making. However, it cannot be denied that I may be blindsided in a number of ways which only in part will have been remedied by extensive reading about racial identity and experiences of people from various racial and ethnic groups. There were moments during the interviews when the participant echoed stereotypical White middle-class discourse which caused some emotional discomfort in me and therefore hesitancy in reporting. These issues were discussed with my research supervisor and resolved.

3.7 Trustworthiness of the study

The trustworthiness of a qualitative study depends firstly on rigorous design and that enough detail is provided so that credibility can be assessed (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Yin (2009) refers to trustworthiness as the *validity* of a study which can be tested in several ways. In this

study the researcher made use of key informants: the participant and the research supervisor, to review the draft case study report to address construct validity. The use of inferences during data analysis needed to be continuously examined and rival explanations had to be considered and finally the results needed to be generalised to a broader theory (Yin, 2009), which in this case study occurred by viewing the results through a Social Constructionist lens regarding race, family and adoption and Identity Process Theory (Breakwell, 2010; Jaspal, 2014; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010). Lastly, reliability was ensured by the careful documentation of all the procedures as suggested by Yin (2009).



Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

When considering the development of the participant's identity two overarching themes emerged: The first theme pertained to his struggle to feel a sense of belonging. The other theme related to his evaluation of the influences that shaped him and his effort to make meaning of his experience as a cross-racial adoptee. The sub-themes that emerged were arranged under these two overarching themes, as presented in the following table:

Superordinate Theme 1: A struggle to fit in
Theme 1.1: The nuclear adoptive family
Theme 1.2: The young boy in society
Theme 1.3: The adolescent at school
Theme 1.4: Young adulthood
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Theme 1.1: The nuclear adoptive family

The participant was adopted as an infant and early attachments were established. When his parents heard that he was at the children's home but couldn't take him home yet, they visited him daily, bathing him, spending time with him.

The social worker ...actually asked you know, would you prefer a boy or a girl? ...and my parents said “anything”, they just wanted a new-born baby...and about a week later my parents got a call saying there was a baby, do you want to meet him? ...it was my mom and then my parents came to meet me and I think both my grandmothers came while I was still in the children’s home and eh ja, she came to bathe me every day...(Int. 1, p1)

The narrative of these early moments communicates that he was wanted, that there was a mother yearning for him. It is noticeable that throughout the interviews he refers to them as his parents, *his* mom and *his* dad, not *adoptive* parents. It appears that strong attachment bonds were made early on, in particularly with his mother. A study by Feeney, Passmore and Peterson (2007) showed that similar to non-adopted individuals, perceptions of care and affection from parents during childhood was predictive of the development of secure attachment and that it facilitated future adjustment of the adoptee. They also found that parental bonding was a more powerful predictor of adjustment and self-esteem than an individual’s adoption status.

Ja eh, so when I was little, people always thought I sounded exactly like my mom and the expressions I used and the way I spoke because I spent so much time with her ... doing all those things...and I think even implement wise, attitude-wise, our likes and dislikes of things just little things. I’m almost like, I’m such a mommy’s boy in a sense, but also not, because ja my mom always pushed us towards independence. (Int 1, p9)

The participant’s description of his relationship with his adoptive mother reveals a deep attachment, an intuitive connection between mother and son, demonstrated through similarities in speech, use of language, habits and values. He became accustomed to her movements, her bearings and it appears they formed a healthy mother-infant system which developed into a securely attached child. She seemed to have been able to balance maternal protection with an encouraging stance allowing him to explore the world and start learning to function independently. The participant’s perceptions stand in contrast what was found in some of the

biographical and autobiographical renditions of the adoptive experience in relation to the adoptive mother. Lifton (1994) wrote of her difficulty as an adoptee – and included the narratives of many other adoptees in her writings - to develop a true sense of self and an appreciation of who the ‘real’ parent is. It appears a childhood where there was much denial of the reality of adoption leading pretence, repression and secrecy hampered trust and attachment to the parent. If adoption losses are often unacknowledged or downplayed, which could be associated with little provision of emotional support, a sense of abandonment and rejection is experienced in the adoptee (Feeney et al., 2007). A study by Kohler et al. (2002) indicated that high levels of alienation and low levels of trust between the adopted adolescent and their adoptive parent were related to an extreme preoccupation with being adopted. Therefore a secure attachment forged in the early years, openness and acknowledgement of the added challenges an adopted child faces in their development and sufficient support help the adoptee to adjust. When attachments are secure, the narratives of the adoption experience is constructed more positively and the importance of the role of the adoptee’s losses and grief appear diminished, not because they are denied, but because they are processed within a healthy parent-child relationship and the adoptee is supported while making sense of his adoption status.

The participant’s close relationship with his adoptive mother enabled him to also develop a close relationship with his adoptive father and the quality of this relationship became more apparent later in his development. His father travelled a lot but the participant experienced him as an involved parent.

When my dad was here he would be at every sports game...and leave from his work early, he really did, he really went kind of above and beyond what most other fathers did. (Int. 1, p10)

It appears that the father influenced him subtly rather than pushing an agenda on him,

He has uhm, probably made me sure of myself, in me being the person I am...I think he influenced my identity in a sense that he kind of let me in a way find out who I am. I think there was no pressure from my parents to kind of go either way. (Int. 3, p2)

There appeared to be honesty and openness to discuss issues of race, but the strength of the attachment overarched issues of difference or, as will be seen in other quotes, home was a haven away from having to face issues of race and difference.

I think we've always been able to talk about things and to be completely honest, not that in terms of race and, and race themes a lot of the time, not that I forget that I'm Black but growing up I forget that I'm different to them, so in terms of the whole race thing, it's never in our family been a big issue. (Int. 1, p10)

At the same time, however, he didn't always feel a part of them and as a younger child he wished he was one of them.

... when I was around 11 it was something I was insecure about I think, because I was different and I think I only really had White friends and, you know, just because, you know, most of my parents' peers are White and I definitely kind of didn't understand why I couldn't be White or I couldn't look like my dad or look like my brother or you know. (Int. 1, p13)

His older siblings were supportive of him, sometimes protecting him from negative comments from others and sometimes providing a listening ear to him, yet their presence in his family context was also a tremendous source of feeling inferior. As the youngest child he struggled to keep up with them and because his siblings were two very high achievers it may have been impossible to avoid feelings of inferiority. In part he made sense of his inferiority through the lens of being different: being biologically unrelated to them. He yearned to belong

and he adjusted his behaviour in order to feel a greater sense of belonging. He also felt that he needed to *earn* his place in the family.

I think a lot of my issues weren't race based but I can say kind of it went that way; it kind of felt that I was a let-down for my family in a sense because I wasn't as good as my brother and I didn't have trophies and medals and stuff. I think I felt, not ashamed, but I was just sad because I felt that I wasn't good enough for them, sometimes. (Int 1, p14)

Probably ja...I started realising then, that I really wasn't their child biologically. That was probably the first time I noticed it, like... because I wasn't as good as them so probably I wasn't their child. (Int. 1, p15)

At 5 and 10 I was like absolute, absolute, absolute perfect child, perfect marks, perfect behaviour, perfect, perfect, perfect. And people always told my parents [he] is so well behaved, [he] is so polite, [he] is so smart, [he's] such a good boy, such a nice boy, and I think that to me was justification that, oh my word, "I actually fit in here!" because I told you before that I wasn't sporty and stuff but I was academic. So everything I could do well I wanted to do really, really well. And uhm, I think that almost like justified my place in this family...(Int. 2, p5)

As he became older he struggled with the idea of earning his place in the family, perhaps when he saw that his peers and siblings took such a notion for granted. He never alluded to his parents verbalising these expectations of him but these pressures were perhaps communicated on an unconscious level. In his adoptive family culture where competency and achievement was amply modelled and highly valued, it would have been intolerable for him to be merely average. His powerlessness to compete successfully with his older siblings, a belief that he wasn't good enough and that he was somehow defective, could have gradually hindered a healthy developing sense of self. This belief of a 'defective self' may also have developed through his interactions with the public which will expanded upon under the next theme.

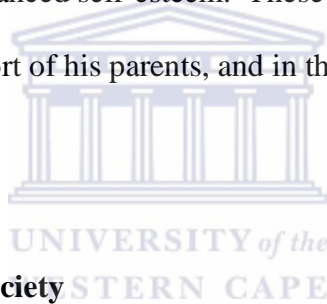
However, a swimming coach recognised that he had potential to become a good swimmer, so at last he had found something in which he could excel and experience mastery. He emerged through this developmental stage having overcome his sense of inferiority with competency or what IPT refers to as self-efficacy. His increased competency shows how action is linked with identity (Jaspal, 2014) as it provided him with feelings of control and competence.

...I couldn't do as well as my siblings did, and I think my saving grace, just generally in life has been the fact that I mean, I started swimming at about 9 or 10. There was a swimming coach that had noticed that I had some natural talent and I went to a club and just for my identity I think, you know, I mean, I made the team and Province about six or seven times and I think that if I hadn't found something that I was passionate about - and to be completely honest: good at - I don't think I would be where I am now. (Int. 1, p14)

His parents appear to have been sensitive to this dire need and within a supportive environment provided him with opportunities to find an area of mastery that was unique to him.

In this section the beginnings of identity construction can be observed in the participant. There is the reciprocal interaction between the social and the individual. As a young boy who was becoming gradually self-aware, he assimilated and accommodated messages from his environment that achievement is important and to be valued you must excel at something. He absorbed these messages uncritically which would be in line with the cognitive capacities of a child of that age. However these messages threatened the three of the four identity principles of Breakwell's Identity Process theory (In Jaspal, 2014): distinctiveness – he wants to be “as good as them”, self-efficacy – there was no way he could compete with his older siblings and self-

esteem – he felt inferior because he was not able to achieve in the same way as his siblings. His identity as an adoptee adhered to the principle of distinctiveness, but it resulted in feelings of alienation which conflicted with an identity motive of belonging, the need to maintain closeness and acceptance by others (Vignoles, , 2002). This need is particularly salient in childhood when attachment to caregivers, adaption to family values and needing to belong is a matter of survival. It has also been hypothesised that adoptees may be sensitised to the possibility of rejection within their families because of adoption losses and feeling ‘different’ from their family members (Feeney et al., 2007). Because the assimilation-accommodation processes did not comply with the identity principles of continuity and self-esteem, the participant employed adaptive coping strategies: he discovered areas of mastery, which engaged his self-efficacy and enhanced self-esteem. These were existing traits that he was able to put into practise with the support of his parents, and in this way was able to modify and lessen a threat to his identity.



Theme 1.2: The young boy in society

People had mixed reactions towards the participant as an adoptee: some were interested and responded positively, others showed bewilderment at the idea that a Black woman would relinquish her child to grow up in a White family.

...you'd also get people, kind of who didn't understand it whatsoever: Why's a Zulu boy living with a White family? Almost that, you know because I think that there's this notion with, with Black culture like kind of "my child is your child is our child" so also I think that people didn't understand that a Black lady has given me up to live with White people in a sense, so ja in a sense there has been mixed reaction. (Int. 1, p3)

In the above quote it is evident that as he interacted with people in the wider social context, he assimilated values from his birth culture. His evaluation (as understood by IPT) of

the value “my child is your child is our child” led to feelings of rejection as the statement appeared to reject the notion of adoption and therefore him as an adoptee. However, in a subsequent interview he used the quote again (Int. 3, p15), but this time in a positive sense when describing a sense of community he believes to inherent in his birth culture and because by then he had achieved some level of identification with his birth culture the value enhanced potential acceptance and gave him some distinctiveness possibly from his adoptive culture. The distinctiveness principle does not push to total distinctiveness; people like to be unique and be different from other people, but not completely (Breakwell, 1993). The shift also shows how the same value can contribute either positively or negatively to self-esteem, one of the identity principles, which further demonstrates that identity is not a stable construction but continually undergoes changes (Brygola, 2011). The saying “your child is my child is our child” is a social representation that may have been constructed over a long period of time in small African rural communities. Engagement with this value affects membership to a group. As a young Black child with a White family, the value was seen not to be in keeping with the participant’s ethnic in-group and he was therefore perceived as a non-member. Duveen (2001) stated that representations precede identities, because an individual’s identity takes shape through engaging with a large host of representations. Those representations that the participant encountered and was able to use to make sense of the material and social world, became part of his identity. It stands then to reason that social representations from his adoptive group were instrumental in the formation of his personal identity. However, social representations are created through social negotiation as they interact with the inherent traits of the individual, some of which only develop as the child matures and are therefore not fixed.

He often had to face people that made certain assumptions about his group membership based on his appearance and when those assumptions were not confirmed it put him in difficult

situations. There was an inability to engage with people from his birth-culture because he was not able to share the same social representations.

So I speak of myself as [Zulu name] and people wouldn't understand why I couldn't speak Zulu obviously and a lot of them would think that I had Black parents and that I was just "too good" to speak Zulu and they kind of gave me, ja, really bad attitude and just didn't treat me like the way they treated my peers...Uhm, often I would speak to people in English at a shop or at a restaurant and they would kind of give me a look and speak to me back in Zulu, meanwhile I had no, no idea what they were talking about. (Int. 1, p4 – emphasis in dialogue)

So I'll often speak in English and I often get a "oh but why don't you speak Zulu?" and when I was younger I was like into "well because I'm adopted" and as I've gotten older I just don't feel the need to explain anymore; it's just like it's not anybody's business.(Int. 1, p5 – emphasis in dialogue)

The people in his social environment regularly questioned him, enquiring about the dissonance they perceived between his appearance and behaviour, particularly his inability to use the language of his birth culture. His identity as an adopted person could never just remain private, forcing that part of his identity continually in the forefront. Language had become a big stumbling block for the participant and he spoke at length and impassioned about the difficulty it caused.

It's just weird how we live in a country where there are 11 or 12 languages and people tell from the colour of your skin kind of assume that you speak a certain language. (Int. 1, p5)

From the Black public he got negative responses because they assumed he had a haughty attitude, speaking only English. Those from the older generation thought of him as a rude child and in defence he would have to explain himself and reveal that he was adopted. Linking negative responses of adults to his adoption must have added to the complexity of dynamics that already existed around being adopted. He became fearful which led to

withdrawal from strangers in order to cope. The coping style he employed withheld him from participating with people from his birth culture and, therefore, only the assimilation and accommodation of the adoptive culture continued unhindered. At school he was also confronted with the uncomfortable language issue as he was the only Black child in the Second language Zulu class.

And when we'd go to Zulu in grade 2 and grade 3, I'd be the only Black kid in my class because all the first language speakers went to one class and I was often teased that I couldn't speak Zulu. I was the only one who couldn't speak Zulu and so, put it this way, there has been more challenges just because as a 6, 7, 8, 9 year old you battle with so much I mean as a person just regardless of being adopted or not, we just go through so much, so many changes as well (Int. 1, p4).

It is interesting that he experienced this time of his life as the most difficult in his development, when it is usually around the time of puberty that many children are at their most insecure (Erikson, 1971). It is evident that he was faced with many contradictory messages from his environment and he had not yet attained the mental capacity to make sense of these messages and neither did he have the power to change his circumstances. Like all young children he was a recipient of what his caregivers could provide for him.

He stressed that it would have been better for him, especially in these earlier years if he had learnt the language of his birth culture. In this way he could have avoided uncomfortable interactions with Black adults and his Black peers. It would have given him confidence which eroded as a consequence of the hostility and intrusion he experienced from not being able to speak the language and it would have helped him develop an identity at a younger age that was more closely aligned with his birth culture.

[speaking Zulu]would have eliminated a lot of questions that I was asked. I think it would have, especially when growing up, a comforting... in dealing with Black people because there were a lot of times when I would avoid at all cost dealing with older Black people in the service industry because I didn't want to deal with any of that animosity or questions or personal issues that come along with it. So, I think it would definitely have helped my self-confidence. I think it would have been very African, and it would have been growing up again been all the issues now that I see as irrelevant just because of the person I've grown into. (Int. 1, p6).

I think it is just important for your identity growing up that you can speak the language because put it this way: If I at 8 years old walked into a classroom and people, you know maybe Black kids maybe address me in Zulu and I responded, right then and there that stopped 10 questions from being asked, ... If I could have answered all of those questions like my peers did I would never have to explain why I don't speak Zulu, why my hair was like this, why, why, why and why, why, why and why my surname is [English surname]. (Int. 2, p10)

There were times he wished he had a Black family just like the other Zulu children at his school. In the following excerpt he also expresses a longing to have experienced and know his birth culture.

...there was definitely a time when I was about 5, 6, 7 where I just wished that you know, I could have a Black mom and dad and Black siblings and uhm, uhm be able to speak to my friends in Zulu and uhm just enjoy some of the more like traditional African things...(Int. 1, p14)

Apart from the language barrier there were many other ways which set him apart from his Black peers and therefore found his niche among his White peers.

It was confusing because my Black peers would dress in different ways and shop at different stores and wear different styles and watch different shows on TV like they'd talk about it at school and ... so eh, so it was tough because, at that stage I didn't speak Zulu or understand it

like I did so I really wanted to kind of befriend them but we ate different things for lunch, we were completely, completely different but we looked the same. So it was just kind of, it really was a stage of, yes I fit in with my White friends and I, I am happy there but I always knew that (pause) I wasn't White. But I wasn't fitting in with my Black peers so where did that leave me? That is why it was quite hard because it was- well I'm never gonna jell anywhere basically.
(Int. 2, p13)

He cannot label himself as White because it is at odds with his physical appearance resulting in an incompatibility between the different parts that make up his personality. This is a significant point where there is a discontinuation between his social identity and his personal identity which will hinder attainment of what Jaspal and Cinnerella (2010) refer to as the principle of “psychological coherence” in IPT.

His White peers had no difficulty accepting him into their circle, he was after all much like them except in his appearance. It seemed to the participant that they didn't even think of him as 'really Black' and were quite insensitive to his racial heritage.

...in terms of White people I think, none of my peers have been negative about it but people definitely - I think that because I'm adopted they think that it is ok to say certain things like things that are concerning Black people and I think that they think that I won't take offence because in their eyes I'm not really Black, but it is something that I just can't understand because to every man on the street I'm a 20-year old Black man. (Int. 1, p8)

While his White peers were unconcerned about the differences, he was aware and constantly reminded of the differences between him and them, including his family.

...for example when I was small uhm, if I stayed at my White friend's house for example their clothes don't fit me the same way that it fits them. Their clothes don't look the same on me as it does on them, our - we use different things to comb our hair, we have different grooming

habits. We you know kind of, even though me, ~ has grown up in a White household there's still such - there are so many different things I do, for example to my brother, based on the fact I have different hair, I have different skin, I have you know a lot of different, you know like needs, just based on the fact that I am of a different race. So I think it's more the fact that every day, you know when I go brush my hair I use something different to my brother or my sister, that it kind of it's like all the small things you do, subconsciously remind you, oh, I'm different, I'm not using this, or oh, I'm different because you know, they are doing this but I'm doing this. (Int. 3, p19)

He also got irritated with comments and assumptions White people made (and still often make) concerning his language and the way he speaks English. They showed surprise that he spoke like a White English South African and it seemed that they immediately then would attribute qualities of superior education or intelligence to him, which he actually found quite insulting.

[White] people would say "Oh you speak so well" and like ... "Oh but you speak so well what school did you go to?" (Int. 1, p8)

It's often White older women, middle aged White women, even White girls, White, anybody White and Indian also um, when I say something, "oh but you speak so well" and uhm it's ugh! (irritation) I just want to say ok, so because I am Black does it mean that I can't speak like White people? ... it means they assumed that I didn't speak so well or that I wasn't so smart or educated. (Int. 1 p9)

A summary of the participant's early and middle childhood showed that while he developed strong attachment bonds with his adoptive parents in infancy and early childhood, middle childhood appeared to have been a very difficult period for him: he struggled with feelings of inferiority stemming from comparing himself to very talented older siblings, trying

to earn his position in the family; to be one of them. Once out in public he faced, in spite of his parents trying to shelter him, many situations that he was too young and vulnerable to handle on his own. He was also constantly aware how little he had in common with his peers that looked like him and that his White peers denied his racial identity, something he rejected on every level because Black is what every man in the street would see him as; and that is what he is. While he knew he was Black and, therefore, saw himself as being a member of his birth culture, the birth culture group could not accept him as their own because he couldn't speak their language, nor could he behave in a way consistent with his Zulu peers.

Theme 1.3: The adolescent and his peers

A new phase started in adolescence when he entered High School. He gained a swimming scholarship and attended a prestigious boys' school where both his father and elder brother were alumni. While the school was still predominately White, it had opened its doors to pupils from different races for a number of years already, but most of these were children from affluent Indian and Black families.

...race wasn't an issue and we literally all...we all did sport together and stuff, so when we got to high school, for the first time it actually didn't matter. It really was the first time where I felt like I could be friends whom I wanted to be friends with, it didn't matter that I couldn't speak Zulu, people didn't really ask why, and, funnily enough, those quote unquote those hard years 13,15,16, when things should have been really tough, was probably the easiest I had, because I also went to a school that ... to me I really felt like for the first time I didn't stand out and I was just another boy who went to the school. So my teenage years are probably, ironically, my easiest in terms of my self-identity and me being Black (Int. 1, p16).

The Black boys came from families where their parents were business people or in professional jobs. These boys had been in private schools and were quite Westernised and he

felt that apart from speaking Zulu they had everything else in common. For him it seemed to be not so much an issue of race as it was of socio-economics. They seemed at ease with the idea that his family was White, something he had not experienced from his Black peers before. His experience was analogous to what Butler-Sweet (Butler, 2007-08-11; Butler-Sweet, 2011b) found in her research: that socioeconomic class played a critical role in racial identity formation in middle-class African-American young adults (cross-racially adopted or not adopted). She explored the identity formation of Black youths who were either cross-racially adopted or from biracial or mono-racial biological parents, all from the middle to upper-middle socio-economic class. Most of them had been through private schooling, and her findings were that that non-adoptees experienced a similar processes attaining a racial identity and faced similar struggles with the meaning of racial identity. They de-emphasised race in their personal self-descriptions and ascribed to more to middle-class values, including individualism.

The participant reflected back that during middle adolescence period where everyone was still questioning who they were and trying to establish an identity, the focus was less on him because his peers were more focussed on themselves, trying to manage this period of transition from child- to adulthood.

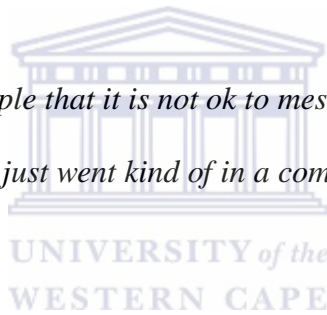
I think naturally as I got older uhm, I just kind of blended in because at that stage we were all just trying to find an identity and we were all a little unsure. I think at 14, 15 you are, you are experimenting with everything, the way you dress, the way, way you talk, you know... you're experimenting with alcohol, all those things for the first time. (Int. 2, p14)

His experimentation with different ways of living life, rebelling against certain norms and challenging his parents resulted in a felt sense of rejection from his adoptive culture. He rebelled against his earlier motivation to justify his place in his family. He described it as a 'switch' where he did 'an about' turn and purposefully misbehaved in some extreme ways. He

started sensing a negative reaction towards him from extended family members and friends who were at times dismayed at his behaviour. He admitted that he may have been oversensitive but, nevertheless, felt that they were extra critical of him because he was adopted and they felt that he owed his parents gratitude by behaving well.

Maybe when I misbehave or, there's just certain things that I feel like being an adopted child you aren't always given the same kind of leeway as your siblings are. It's like you're not allowed to mess up as much because you owe it to your family to always be perfect ... it's almost as if, when you're adopted to everybody but my family's house, which is - because my family I mean, I'm treated exactly as my siblings are and I've always been from day one - but in other people's eyes it's almost as if I owe my family something if they have adopted me. (Int. 2, p5; emphasis in dialogue).

I kind of got that feeling from people that it is not ok to mess up if you are adopted, so I think in some self-destructive teen mess, I just went kind of in a complete flip, a complete 180 and went a little bit crazy...(Int. 2, p6)



He suspected they were critical of him by their distancing themselves from him. This perception drove him to behave more defensively by acting out resulting in further rejection of him. In the interaction with his adoptive culture he was faced with stereotypical judgements which threatened his identity. He started suspecting that he was only accepted as long as he 'did well' and suppressed his 'bad' side. When he tested the waters, his suspicions were confirmed: the original abandonment of having been given up for adoption was re-enacted by the extended adoptive family and friends.

That's why I think the biggest challenges I face as a human being and then as a human being in my situation, living with who I am, being Black, is that when I do well and everything is good, everything is perfect, people want to be around you, people want to be friends and I'm talking about people like my White friends, my peers and even adults and other people. It's

like when I'm doing well its good, it's perfect, but as soon as like I step out of line or I do what people don't want me or I'm not meant to do, like it's all fall down, like people have nothing to me (Int. 2, p6)

The coping mechanisms he employed, alienated him further on an intrapsychic interpersonal and intergroup level within his adoptive environment. His coping on an intrapsychic level was less adaptive because his self-protection strategies increased the conflict between his personal needs and social expectations. This increase in conflict could intensify negative affect and lead to a serious crisis in identity. The early experiences that led to his feelings of inferiority and lack of belonging were likely internalised into his belief schema and he also developed traits that would protect him from experiencing the full force of these feelings. There was evidence of anger and depression in his narrative, which could lead to decreased ability to function when under stress. However, levels of self-efficacy and self-esteem had increased during early to mid-adolescence due to an increase in competence and mastery and various areas of his life and these were protective factors.

He was now also at an age where he had more agency and he could interact in various social contexts, absorbing new information and evaluating it, for example he began to experience his membership to his birth culture positively as he interacted with upper-middle class Black families whom he met through social contacts he had made at school. He made closer friends with Black peers and Black family friends who understood the situation regarding his adoption. He spoke of two families in particular who invited him in, tolerated his cultural mistakes and patiently guided him, showing him how a Zulu young man ought to behave in Zulu culture.

They [the mothers of his friends] encourage me to speak Zulu without threatening to only speak Zulu in the house, and they, they... it's just been like a slow process and I can see that

literally, all they're trying to do is showing what they feel I've missed out on growing up in a White household, being a Zulu man. So just certain things I mean, like wearing a cap. Put it this way: like I mean in my house I can wear a cap inside but obviously when you sit down to have dinner you take your cap off. Uhm, I went to my friend's house the other day and I was wearing a hat and even inside they obviously don't do that. And just small things like how uhm, how a Black man is to greet women and how to speak to elders and even in greetings they've got idiosyncrasies that you would not see vividly any other way than in a Zulu house - and it's all important in business. (Int. 1, p21)

...because they know I was raised by an all-White family, they're just trying to show me what it means to - or what it would have meant to grow up in a Black household and just kind of fill in the gaps. (Int. 1, p22)

He recognised that this would help him adapt better to his situation, and although it hasn't acculturated him sufficiently to be recognised as unambiguously Zulu, he is willing to gain as much from these experiences as he can.

Everybody's family is unique and these are mine. So they are, I feel like, to the best of their ability trying to help me with some of the problems that I face. So obviously people can help you and it will never be enough but, like as opposed to what? Like this is my life that all [I] can do is try make the absolute best of all I got...(Int. 1, p22)

Theme 1.4: Young adulthood

A sense of abandonment followed him through late adolescence to the time of the interviewing and his challenges continued when he started university studies and was far away from home. He realised even amongst Black university students from various ethnic groups, he was perceived as different, not fully Black but neither was he actually White. He came to the conclusion that he would never be fully able to integrate in either culture. He wasn't able to

complete his degree because of adjustment difficulties and was encouraged by his parents to return home for respite. It was also in this time he started for the first time contemplating what it would mean for him to make contact with his biological mother.

And I was talking to my friend and we've become closer probably this year as well because we've both been adopted, and the challenges you have with being adopted change as you get older. (Int. 2, p5)

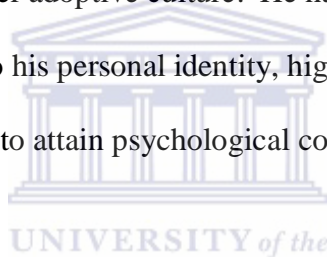
He spoke of struggling with a lot of contradictions, but the most difficult part was feeling that he was is not fully part of one cultural group.

I...will never...100% be embraced by either culture, I think I could be 90 or even 95% in some people's eyes, but I'm never going to be a 100% Black to my Black friends and also I'm not White - but in every way with my White friends I'm White with a Black skin. So it's like you're really caught between a rock and a hard place. It's like I'm Black by my skin and I'm White by everything else, so where does that leave me?(Int. 2, p17)

I feel as I get older it's getting more difficult for me to, to kind of blend in with being White, uhm and also I sometimes on some levels can't relate with my Black peers so ja, it's just I'm caught between a rock and a hard place at times because I kind of feel like although I'm very clearly Black uhm I've got, a very White, you know, part to me so it's, you know. Where does that leave me? Because I'm not coloured, I'm not Indian, I'm not Chinese uhm. So I'm Black on paper but that's it, so that almost is not enough for me to fit in there. But because of, you know, the fact that I am different looking, I'm also not White, so ja I, I just meant that it, it's becoming more kind of, more apparent now that I am different from my peers in both groups. (Int. 3, p10)

He stated several times that he is seen by his White friends as White with a Black skin. Yet that notion has not resonated with him because he has attached more meaning to having a Black skin than his White peers do; it is linked to other parts of his identity which he cannot

disavow. It is the principle of continuity that is at work here. Continuity refers to what Erikson refers to as a “persistent sameness with oneself” (Erikson, as cited by Breakwell, 2011) or a subjective sense of consistency so that growth or change feels congruent to the present conceptions of the self, continuity also refers to the link a person has with the past, the present and the future. With adoptees the link with the past is often unknown (Grotevant et al., 2000). He often stated that “every man in the street” (referring to people that don’t know him or his background) sees him as Black Zulu or South African man and that is what he is. His social identity is ambiguous, different people would give him contradictory messages about himself and where they believed he fitted in. To some he is Black, to others he is White with a Black skin. Members from his birth culture treat him with ambivalence and he feels he is only conditionally accepted by his wider adoptive culture. He has, therefore, found it difficult to incorporate his social identity into his personal identity, highlighting the struggles he has had all along since middle childhood, to attain psychological coherence (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010).



I think a lot of my friends and people very close to me seem to forget that at the end of the day, you know, to the person in the street I am Black and I’m, I’m not White like my family. (Int. 3, p6)

I have harped on being Zulu but you now that’s, that’s kind of like a subsection of who I am. I think you know to anybody in the street I am you know a young, Black South African man so just ja, I’m, I’m, I’m Black (laughs). That is how I see myself. (Int. 3, p5)

... to every man on the street I’m a 20-year old Black man. I’m not White uhm my family is White and they are my family, but I’m not White, I’m Black and the rest of my family is White and people think that I have identity issues but I really don’t. I understand completely that I’m Black. (Int. 1, p8)

He may deny that he does not have ‘identity issues’ but by constructing his identity based assumptions strangers make because of his physical appearance, rather than a sense of a coherent self, brings along many contradictions, leaving him confused. The salience of his ethnic identity is evident but it is not consistently confirmed by society and this, according to Stryker’s Identity theory, will make it difficult for the participant to fully commit to the parts of his identity pertaining to his ethnicity. He experienced this acutely at university:

... the Black kids that don’t know that I don’t speak Zulu, don’t treat me the same and that’s more because I gravitate towards White people. Uhm I don’t use the same kind of slang they use for example, I don’t dress the same way, so even aside from the fact you that know I kind of, can’t speak the language, they can pick up just, just purely based on the way I dress and, and who I sit with in like class for example, that I am not the same as them. (Int. 3, p19)

Peers picked up from his non-verbal cues, his attitudes and the way he speaks that he is different from them. His words are not consistent with his behaviour, because if he saw himself as Black, he would seek out Black peers and actively engage with them and make adjustments in order to be accepted as one of them. He intuitively behaves more like a White person because of enculturation into his adoptive culture since infancy, but he cannot apply the White label to himself, because it is too much of a contradiction: he is Black, his inner experience is one who lives daily with what it means to have Black physical characteristics and he has come to accept and deeply value his physical appearance which forms part of the ‘distinctiveness’ principle of IPT.

He also reported on receiving contradictory messages from the older Black generation. Some consider him “not really Black” by virtue of his upbringing.

Because to them my skin is Black but in their eyes my family is White so two oranges for example can't make an apple, two oranges make an orange. So the virtue that my parents are White, I am White in every sense but my skin - in their eyes (Int. 2, p21).

Others, knowing he has been raised in a White family affirm him as a Black person and remind him of his birth heritage.

...it's like every kind of older Black person that I kind of come across uhm, who has an understanding of me being adopted always says to me "You're a Zulu man. You're a Zulu man" almost to kind of in a way reassure me, but also make me realise that that's who I am and they say that - not from a point to like disregard my parents or their culture - but they say ok, basically, "you, you in a way have been raised by White people but that's not what everybody else sees, so you can't see yourself as White if I, if everybody else sees you as a Black man because that's a major contradiction." (Int. 3, p12)

Some Black people have communicated with him the view that he cannot label himself as White. This is very affirming to him because 'whiteness' does not resonate with his inner experience. These are reinforcements aiding him to better incorporate his social identity into his personal identity leading to an increase in psychological coherence. He strongly believes that he is *more* than a person with a Black skin, he also believes he was born from a particular culture which he refers to as his 'real' culture and that it is not the one that he was raised in. Here he is incorporating his biological genealogy into his identity, indicating that he places great value on the principle of continuity. Continuity is one principle that keeps on disturbing his identity formation. While many may consider culture as something that is acquired, the participant believes it to be more of a birth right, a heritage that is passed on to the child by his biological parents. This belief helps him to strengthen the continuity principle and enables him cope with what still appears to be an insufficient internal or personal continuity. He, therefore,

seeks continuity from the social context. He has not been able to find it consistently amongst his ethnic group in the present and he, hence, raises the importance of his birth heritage.

My culture is Zulu ... whereas I know what it is like to be White, but how can I say that that I have a White culture if that's not what people see when they see me? So I'd say being Zulu is my culture but it's not that I'm able to practice ... I would have been raised very differently had I been raised in a Black household, so I'm saying, purely based on the fact that my family, biologically aren't mine. My culture, you know at the end of the day, when I was born, my culture I was born to a, I was born to a Zulu father and Zulu mother in KZN so that's kind of above all is, is in a large sense who I am. (Int. 3, p11)

It is in this context that he started contemplating for the first time to try and make contact with his biological mother. In his continual struggle to make sense of the social and personal parts of his identity that cannot easily be integrated, making identity formation a slow and arduous, and seemingly unending circular process, he hopes that meeting his biological mother may increase his acceptance into his birth culture. Before he had turned twenty years old he claimed that he had never given it much thought, but the challenges he had in terms of adjustment and his present confusion have highlighted to him that meeting his mother may answer some of the questions he has and he hopes a better understanding of who he is:

And I haven't wanted too, but literally since 20, you know and for no other reason because I mean, I'm obviously more than happy and comfortable in my family situation but just some kind of knowledge as to where I come from you know, ja just basically ja, whose blood runs through my veins I think, it's just more you know if I have siblings or I don't know. It's just something that's a missing 5 or 6 % that is missing that...if I don't look. (Int. 2, p1)

It is indeed interesting that he suppressed his curiosity or longing for his biological mother. He stated many times that his adoptive family was “more than” fulfilling his needs. Seeking out his biological ties may have been too threatening to contemplate in the past.

However the conflicts he has experienced in the past two years have brought him to a point that appears to have led to an identity crisis. This, in turn, can be a stimulus to search for more answers to presently unanswered questions pertaining to his identity development (Brygola, 2011).

To be completely honest this could be a subconscious thing that we do as humans, but I literally haven't thought about my mom per se a day until I turned 20 and I thought about being adopted and a family but I think actually, ja I hadn't thought about her physically or her as a person probably until the beginning of this year funnily enough. And since then I've really started to think: I wonder what she looks like, I wonder if she's still alive? (Int 2, p3)

It may also be that he already had enough challenges or threats to his identity to face during adolescence and that suppressing thoughts about his biological mother was an adaptive coping mechanism at the time. It appeared that he used self-protection on the intrapsychic level by splitting off that part of himself allowing him to remain in what Marcia (1966) refers to as an identity moratorium and in the context of his identity as an adoptee he may have settled for a so-called "limited identity" (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004) for a period of time. With the aforementioned identity crisis compelling him and an increased ego strength, he has more recently become ready to face the challenge to find an important aspect of his identity. He alludes to this in the following excerpt:

So I'm almost glad that I got through that horrible teenage phase with not wanting to know and now that I'm at a stage where emotionally I can handle any news that they can give me... I just think as I was saying to you it's kind of great that everything is happening now because I am actually ready to talk about and ready to dealwith all the emotions I think. (Int. 2, p4)

Superordinate Theme 2: Making meaning– a growing integration of the self

Theme 2.1: Considering the losses

A strong theme of pain and loss emerged as he entered young adulthood. It was noticeable that he always talked about cross-cultural adoption and not cross-racial adoption. Upon enquiry he responded that it was not his race but his connection to his *culture* that was lost when he was relinquished and adopted by a White family.

I: So then when you speak about cross-cultural adoption would you think that that is what has happened to you? Or cross-racial adoption?

R: Both, I think, but more importantly cross-cultural because at the end of the day race is what race is; it literally is our skin but I say cross cultural just because, not in a negative or positive way, I would have had a very different cultural experience growing up in my biological family's home had they kept me just based on the fact that they, they are Zulu. So I'd say cross cultural because I, I've been raised differently than my peers who are Black and who are Zulu, so it is a cross cultural thing because ... it is...it, it is just different. So I'd say cross cultural above, well not above, but kind of you know, that is the ... kind of, the most important thing rather than, than me being a different race to my family. (Int. 3, p9)

One notices the differences in the meanings he holds towards race and culture. Race to him is merely an aspect of biology and this is a common view of the public and the scientific majority, especially to those disciplines outside the social sciences (Morning, 2007). It may be for this reason that he does not focus much on race when he contemplates his adoption. On the other hand, culture is more clearly understood as being socially constructed as these are ideas, thoughts and feelings held by a group of people that are encoded into language and reified by experiences, creating an intersubjective consciousness amongst the people who share the same culture (St. Clair, 2009). Because it is obvious that he lacks the linguistic skills and lived experience of his birth culture and therefore has difficulty sharing in their collective

consciousness, he feels like an outsider, an observer and because he wants to be part of it, the loss of culture is acutely experienced.

As was highlighted in the previous section, he learnt about his birth culture from some of the parents of his Black friends. Even though he had many opportunities to experience his birth culture it has not sufficiently made him culturally adept and able to reculturate into the Zulu community as he himself recognised the existence of various subtleties the he would not immediately perceive and act upon. For cross-racial adoptees to fully reclaim their birth culture, they would have to immerse themselves into that culture (Baden et al., 2012).

Although the participant didn't state it directly, he spoke with passion about his birth culture. A part of him wishes that he had grown up in the Zulu culture when he was a child. It may be really difficult for him to state it openly as it could feel like he would then be rejecting the culture of his adoptive family. But when he says "I was born to a Zulu father and Zulu mother in KZN so that's kind of above all is, is in a large sense who I am." (Int. 3, p11) when he refers to the Zulu culture being his culture, he is looking for continuity between his genealogical heritage and his social identity which would then culminate into an integrated personal identity.

So ja just, I feel that I'm never really going to be at home in terms of my people and my culture. I'm at home with my family and with my friends and with people you know but I'm never going to be a 100% Black and I'm not White, so I'm never going to be a 100% White. (Int. 2, p20)

He has in a sense lost a part of who he is and without that part he will never be completely at ease in his birth culture. He believes that the implications of this is that he will probably not be able to marry someone who is from his birth culture because as stated earlier

he is not fully accepted by his birth culture because he is perceived more White than Black and neither is he able to make sense of cultural practices in which he wasn't raised.

Disadvantages are (pause) probably that (pause) you know I probably won't get married to somebody of my culture. Uhm I (pause) will never (pause) really a 110% be embraced by either culture, I think I could be 90 or even 95 in some people's eyes, but I'm never going to be a 100% Black to my Black friends (Int. 2, p20)

The participant highlights his plight, which is reflective of the concept developed by Stonequist in 1935 in sociology and anthropology of the “marginal man” (Mio, Trimble, Arredondo, Cheatham, & Sue, 1999) and some clinicians call it “double consciousness.” It is the stressful experience of simultaneously identifying with two cultures but he is not fully accepted by either culture and therefore is detached from both (McGinnis et al., 2009). The participant spoke very slowly in the above excerpt, and it sounded very emotionally laden, indicating how deeply painful this must be to him. After a significant pause he then was able to better regulate himself and explained further:

It's just something that by virtue of the way we were raised, will probably more than likely never happen because we have different kind of perceptions as to what role males and females play for example or, what foods a girl would like to prepare or - and all these things I know I say to people that I would be around would be more Westernised and more. But all of my Black girl friends and boy friends who are - and have grown up in Westernised Black homes, still date Black kids who come from a similar background because in as much as they've grown up Westernised, their parents are still very traditional and uhm you know their dads are in their fifties. They are men who've grown up, a lot of them were part of the struggle, so they really want their kids to be Westernised. When I say they want to keep it as Zulu and as Westernised: they still want their Zulu daughters to marry Zulu boys, to have, have Zulu children, to pay Labola, to go through that whole process – yes, the private school, the good universities, the -

all of that stuff, like the English names but, it would be like a lot of them, it would be their children marrying a White boy: And that is still, that is still quite an issue. (Int. 2, p21)

The idea of a family that he may start in the future has taken on no particular shape as yet as he cannot pattern it on anything he knows. Therefore the next developmental phase may be challenging and perhaps be delayed or it may precipitate another identity crisis as he alluded to having had while at university.

He was more able to access and articulate his pain in the last interview as he had become more at ease with the interview process and was able to reflect on the previous interviews. During his reflections he was able to give himself permission to access deeper feelings which resulted in richer communication during the interview. He spoke of feeling completely at home with his family, however, there were occasional moments that reminded him that even there, he didn't fit in completely, which would then fill him with utter loneliness, loss and sadness:

...sometimes you want the like the ground to swallow you because ... you know... you are different. You, you, for example I, you know, at Christmas people would bring out old photos, like my gran brought out photos ... of when she was 18 and everyone was commenting on how my cousin ... looks just like my gran and they've all got long legs ... and you know it's like you know, I don't fit in there, I don't look like anybody, I don't sound like anybody, I don't have your nose or your eyes or your lips or you know, I just don't have that. So that's when it can be really hard. And the funny things is that the ones who are inflicting the pain - because they aren't doing it on purpose, but you know, the people that make me feel this way are my family.

I: Hmm ...well, that does sound sad

R: It is sad

I: It's a loss

R: It is a loss and that is purely why I'm looking for, you know, my like my biological mother because there's just some things I want to ask, you know, and I want to know how my dad looked or how tall he was for example or you know, if he was like a good sportsman or if she was a good sportsman or where I get my genes from or, you know, what their strengths are, what they like and just kind of more kind of reasons as to why I am the way I am.

I: You find something that you look like, there's some people that you look like.

R: Ja, you know, just it's - I just want you know some kind of a point of reference.

(Int. 3, p20)

The lack of genealogical ties is particularly difficult on an emotional level and his experience mirrors the experience of an adoptee quoted earlier: "I suppose they [non adopted individuals] have a glimpse of themselves as they might be. I didn't have that and although my adoptive parents loved me, and I them, I couldn't see myself in them...It's like walking down the street, and you're the only one that looks like you, and then you go home and you're still the only one who looks like you" (Passmore, 2004). Physical resemblance forms part of establishing a stable sense of personhood. For example, in a quest of self-discovery, seeing a resemblance of oneself in one's family may be highly significant to one's sense of connection and relatedness to others. While it can be argued that the importance of genetic kinship is socially constructed (Leon, 2002; Miall, 1996; Wegar, 2000), it nevertheless is imperative for a significant proportion of adoptees world-wide (Lifton, 1994; Rushbrooke, 2001) as it creates a sense of 'fluent narrative', continuity and belonging (Breakwell, 2010; Diver, 2014; Vignoles et al., 2002).

The other loss he speaks of is that he didn't learn to speak Zulu from a young age.

I mean, just based on the fact that I am a Zulu in KZN adopted by a White family: not to speak Zulu was only to my detriment. There was no positives; yes I speak English beautifully now, but there's been absolutely no positives to me not understanding Zulu (Int. 2, p10)

He mostly refers to the detrimental effect of not learning Zulu in terms expediency: of avoiding invasive questioning and that it would have allowed him to keep his adoptive status private, to avoid harsh responses from the Zulu public and not to have to explain himself to people continually. However he also felt that it would have allowed him to cross the dividing bridges more easily between himself and his Black peers when he was in primary school.

...it was tough because, at that stage I didn't speak Zulu or understand it, like I did, so I really wanted to kind of befriend them (Int 1, p13).

But for all its expedience, it would also have aided him in developing the African side of himself, his identity as an African. Because culture or ethnicity and language are so closely linked, his ethnic identity would have been better developed had he learnt to speak the language.

I think knowing Zulu ... would make me an African. Knowing Zulu would just... seal the deal almost, it would just ... just complete me being ~, because then again people hear that my name is ~ which is a traditional, traditional Zulu name, but now I can't necessarily hold a conversation in Zulu, it's just a big contradiction, because then they like: your name is ~ but you can't speak Zulu, it can be quite baffling. Uhm and that's something myself I've always been like shoh you know: I'm telling them I'm Zulu on one hand by introducing myself as ~ but on the other hand, I can't do the basic thing, which is communicate in quote, unquote, in my mother-tongue. (Int. 3, p14)

Theme 2.2: Considering the gains

In this section the participant's ambivalence was heightened as he compared what he had gained having been raised in a White family as opposed to having been institutionalised or having grown up in his birth culture. While he understood some of the nuances and the delicate nature of some of the controversies in this country, from his perspective he felt less obliged to sound politically correct.

Throughout the interviews he asserted that the positives of having been adopted outweighed the negatives, even though he has had many challenges.

...it's definitely been more positive than negative I think if I had to weigh it up I would say that 80 - 85% of my experience has been positive and - maybe I think a lot of times you seem to forget the negative, there definitely have been challenges and times where I have been in tears or have to have had to reflect because I really have to kind of in a sense find who I am but it's, it's ja been an enriching experience (Int. 1, p5).

He has experienced his adoptive family in the true sense of family and he regards them as his only family. The level of adjustment he has achieved is related to the quality of attachment that was fostered in his adoptive family. As these attachments appear to be secure it is likely that he would feel protected and supported by his parents and feel loved and worthwhile. Secure attachment also is positively correlated to higher self-esteem which is a measure of healthy psychological adjustment of adoptees (Feeney, Passmore, & Peterson, 2007; Miall, 1996).

My family are ~~, my mother, my father, my brother and my sister – that is my family. Ja that's my family. (Int 3, p12)

When asked about his 'biological family' he quickly corrected that perception, highlighting his own perspective:

No, because they are not my biological family. It will be my biological mother and my biological brother and sister but you know I don't think they will, they'll ever be family, because they – family is a word associated with people who have raised you, and have been in your life and you know, and influenced you positively in some way. I mean, you know, family, like, doesn't always have to be blood (Int 3, p12).

He spoke of his relationship with his parents and how they had made a great positive impact on his life: his mother in terms of his intellectual development and the opportunities for a good education he has been receiving from them.

I also uhm in terms of academically as a child I was very bright and very smart ... and having spent so much time growing up with my mom I think I was a lot sharper than most of my peers at my age. (Int 1, p14)

... I spent every day with her, you know, I learnt vocab, I learnt to read and write before most kids my age will. I learnt to read and write definitely before I would have had I grown up... (Int. 3, p22)

I'm studying a university degree which shoh, I'm not sure I would even finished matric had I grown up anywhere, you know, had I grown up in the environment that probably I was going to. Uhm so just to sum that up: education, ja, education, travels, just general knowledge hey, uhm, there's, there's ja there's just been so many more positive things with being adopted than there have been negatives (Int. 3, p23).

He had an awareness of a disadvantaged trajectory his life could have taken on had he been raised by his biological family. This was a theme that also emerged in a study done by Butler-Sweet (2011a) and a sense of gratitude Black adoptees had towards their White parents that does not appear in the general discussions of adoption. The participant in this study appeared deeply grateful of the way his adoptive parents had invested in his life. This gratitude

seemed unforced compared to what he felt as a child that he had to 'be good' to earn his place in the family. The difference is likely to have been a function of maturation but may also be an indication that his self-esteem and self-efficacy have increased as he mastered new abilities and attained significant academic achievements and not least of all, the relationship he continues to have with his adoptive parents. His father has impacted his life positively as a great example and a mentor, but also as someone with whom he has a very close relationship, which when he compared that to the quality of relationships most of his peers have, he feels very grateful.

I think I am close to my father which, let's say out of the children's home context or a second, had I grown up in a Zulu household, I don't think I would have been as close to my father. (Int. 3, p23)

He's you know, uhm, really strong and kind he's like the man of the house but at the same time he's really approachable, really friendly, and just really personable and also really loving and caring so it's, it's in a way I think ja kind of given me something to work toward in terms of being a man. You know just he's there with support financially as a breadwinner, kind of emotionally for all of us and I think he understood what it meant to be a husband and a father and just... (pause) a good man... (Int. 3, p3)

He also spoke of being able to take advantage of the best of both worlds, that being African in South Africa has many benefits, but having grown up in a White family and having had a lived experience of that culture he believes had made him more prepared to face the modern world.

The advantages are that I've, I've in a way have the best of both worlds. I've had the benefits of being Black and I say benefits but uhm (pause) I (pause) ja I think, in (pause) let's be honest: in South Africa today, it doesn't hurt your case having Black skin, uhm, so I kind of enjoyed (pause) not enjoyed, but I've been Black with none of the cultural baggage and none of the issues that go along with it. Where I've grown up in a family where for example I don't

have two Black parents who hate White people. I have had experiences that just growing up in a Black family I never would have had (pause) uhm (pause) so (pause) I (pause) I'm just lucky, because again, when you meet me in the street you see a Black man but I've had the most westernised and prepared just, shoh, I don't know how to say this, because it is not better growing up in a White family or better growing up in a Black family. It's just, I feel like I'm so prepared for the outside world having had the experiences I have had, because I don't think I would have been as ready to take on the world, to go to varsity or at work and to do all these things had me personally growing up in a Black household. (Int. 2, p18)

What emerged here is that having been raised in one culture and also having actively emerged himself to learn about another culture, has given him an ability to perceive things without the negative connotations that different cultures hold against 'the other.' He is 'the other' and does not fully belong to either of them which perhaps allows him to make comments that are somewhat removed from the lived experience of those who are fully associated with one culture.

Another advantage he mentioned is that the milieu in which he was raised has given him a strong drive to succeed. There are strong messages communicated from parents who have high expectations of children who enter university: that it is unacceptable to bring home a poor school results when you can do better and this has pushed him to avoid failure and press on with his studies. He experiences this ambition as an advantage and because he has always been academically successful, it is an area that has enhanced his self-esteem.

...what I've realised, one of the biggest benefits and this I can honestly now, I'm going to make a generalisation here ... 90 % of the Black friends that I know and I only say this, I've got, shoh, I could, I've seen it over and over and over and over and over as Black kids we aren't pushed anywhere like I say we aren't pushed, I've never been pushed by a teacher as a Black kid at school, ever. Uhm Black parents don't push Black kids. ... If you study that is more than

enough ...where if I brought home a report card where I failed one or two modules, that would be, it's a big issue, because why are you failing? Why are you not, why are you not doing what you can do? ...there's a drive and a push and a want to succeed and a want to, want your children to be better to achieve more that I think that White families instil in their kids, that maybe Black families don't. Because the Black families, 20 years ago, there wasn't an option or 30 years ago, when their parents were kids there wasn't an option to study at UCT. ... So I just think when I say I have had the best of both worlds I've had only, (pause) ok there have been negatives but I think the negatives come down to obviously what I've spoken of but I have the benefits of being Black with all the benefits of a White upbringing.

While the participant perceived this as a difference between White and Black families, it may be a result of differences in family socialisation practices between middle-class and working-class families as described by Lareau (2003) where American middle-class parents typically focus on exposing their children to many opportunities and structured activities to develop their talents and skills and encourage them to express their opinions and enhance their sense of personal efficacy. It is not clear whether middle-class family socialisation practices in South-Africa are similar across all racial groups as Lareau (2003) puts forward in her writings. This is however beyond the scope of this study. That the participant benefited from the opportunities he was afforded is quite evident. Because the participant attributed his accomplishments to his 'White' upbringing, his perceptions may lead to devaluation of his birth culture which in turn could negatively impact his acceptance by people from his birth or his ethnic identity.

Theme 2.3: The result: An ambiguous self

It appears that the participant has been struggling to form a fully integrated sense of self and for the greater part is to be related to not being able to sufficiently fit into and be accepted

by his birth culture. Neither does he feel fully at home in his adoptive culture. On a personal level he appears to have accepted himself as he is and can convey who he is and what he stands for.

He firstly sees himself as a Black person:

I'm Black and the rest of my family is White and people think that I have identity issues but I really don't. I understand completely that I'm Black. I'm also not going to change the way I speak and act because of the colour of my skin and because of other people. I am out there.

(Int. 1, p8)

... to me it's never been something to be ashamed of I think I've enjoyed being Black, uhm and I think, ja ,it's something I'm quite proud of... It's something as I have gotten older, just as most people do, I come to terms with my skin and my body, everything that goes along with that. I've accepted myself over and above me having been adopted into a White family. (Int. 1, p13)

Additionally, being Zulu he sees as a part of who is and being Zulu defines his inherent cultural identity. And this is where the ambiguity becomes evident: he stated himself that he is not able to fully partake of his culture.

So I'd say being Zulu is my culture but it's not that I'm able to practice. (Int. 3, p11)

Furthermore, because he was raised by White parents, he has taken on their way of speaking and for a big part their worldview, values and attitudes. A number of cultural practices will remain foreign to him and as he highlights in his narrative particularly related to gender roles.

He feels more naturally drawn to his White peers and his Black peers sense something about him that does not quite fit. He is a young man who on the face of it is Black, yet the way he dresses, walks and expresses himself does not fit with being Black and this makes him

ambiguous to people that meet him for the first time. He admits that over the years he has become more defensive and it would appear that he would rather be misunderstood than divulge his background to strangers. Here the principle of distinctiveness takes precedence over the need for belonging. This may be a stance he has taken on as a coping strategy.

... they always want to want to ask questions that are kind of inappropriate for people that I meet for the first time ... so I've always just felt like that people want to ask too many questions, so I'm not going to let them ask any questions. So absolutely on the one hand you can say that is just my demeanour, but it is the way I have chosen to treat everybody because, if I'm not that defensive all the time ... let me actually re-answer that, I would say, because I was adopted that in certain situations I don't even give people a chance to get in. (Int. 2, p8)

Frequent enquiry about the ambiguities other people notice in him remind him on an intrapsychic level of internalised objects and cognitive schemas from early childhood and exposes the vulnerabilities he experienced during that time. The negative affect he experiences in the present is likely to be linked to the estrangement he felt toward the children from his birth-culture and the bewilderment at the reactions of adults towards him. He copes with this on an interpersonal an intergroup level by protecting himself through avoidance. This further distances him from others, particularly to those from his birth culture and his sense of alienation persists and may even increase. He has developed many competencies and has confidence to face the world, but yet he does not feel that he completely fits in anywhere once he moves out of his family circle.

He is continually in the process of making meaning of his situation and one of the ways he does this is by speaking up in order to help people around the issues of cross-racial adoption.

...in a positive sense that I feel like I've been able to talk about adoption and people around me have become more aware of it ... it's ja been an enriching experience for all those people's whose lives have been a part of it. (Int. 1, p5)

You know (inaudible) schools of thought that need to be opened up with someone in my position. I think uhm, I'm on a position where I can help people and kind of advise them and it's - I mean ja to be honest there aren't many cases as you know of cross-racial adoption of people my age uhm who have been adopted into White families. So you know any kind of advice I can give that would stop children from going through some of the hard, hard things that I have had to go through, I'd absolutely, you know, be happy to talk to people. (Int. 2, p5)

He believes few people really understand what he is going through apart from others who have also been adopted.

I've just had a friend leave right now, when we were on the phone funnily enough, who's also adopted and we were just talking because I'm seeing a new psychologist. And simply sometimes when we talk about challenges that I face with adoption and even to this day still face with being adopted, he gives me advice but it is so difficult because, yes he's very learned, he, he's you know, he's a psychologist, but he doesn't have any, not understanding, but I don't think he has any first-hand experience with cross-cultural adoptions. So he can give me advice but he actually, he has no idea. So it's kind of hard talking to somebody and getting and all that kind of (pause) advice but they actually have no idea where you're coming from.

And so for him it has become important that people, including professionals, get to understand what it feels like, perhaps not only so that other adoptees after him might not struggle as much, but also for himself – that he is better understood.

As a summary of the findings then, what became apparent was that as a child in his latency developmental phase, he struggled to fit into his adoptive family, to fit in with peers at primary school and to fit into the mould society has for a Black South African young boy.

In adolescence his school environment allowed him to ignore the issues somewhat as he was schooled in a more homogenous environment. There were however undercurrents of expectations that he perceived his wider adoptive environment had of him and he rebelled against those expectations. He also seemed to take enjoyment out of people's surprise which in turn enhanced his self-esteem when he was able to rise above people's expectations.

Entering early adulthood, the struggle to be affiliated to a group remains unresolved. There are people from his birth culture that make an effort to give him a cultural education and in so doing develop his cultural identity but there are others who believe they can never accept him as one of their own. The perception he has of his adoptive culture is that they accept him as long as he fits in with their ideals and as long as he is 'doing well'.

The participant has been able to engage in this struggle with his ego functioning remaining relatively in-tact. This may be attributable to the strong attachment bonds he made in his adoptive nuclear family. As he has overcome his initial sense of inferiority as the youngest child in the family, his family has become a place of respite, where race issues hardly matter and he experiences an openness to engage on every level.

He can therefore reflexively engage in his world, taking advantage of what life has offered him: A stable family, a good education, many opportunities and exposure to two cultures. There is an acknowledgement of the losses he has and still endures as a result of

having been raised in another culture, not his birth culture and therefore having lost the lived experience of being raised among those with whom shares his race and ethnicity.

Throughout his development there is evidence of a slowly emerging identity. A young man with contradictions and ambiguities which are at times confusing for himself and others, but it also allows him to adapt more easily to the various situations with which he is presented in South African public life.



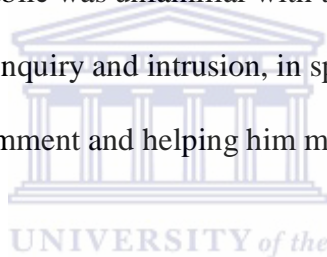
Chapter 5: Conclusion

The question as to whether identity formation is in some way different for individuals who are cross racially adopted when compared to individuals raised in their biological families has been explored in a large number of overseas studies (Butler-Sweet, 2011a; Docan-Morgan, 2010; Howe, 2008; Kohler, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2002; McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale, & Anderson, 1982). This study sought to explore the identity formation and the possible challenges to identity formation of a cross-racial adoptee in South Africa.

Various identity theories (see Breakwell, 1993; Brodzinsky, 1990; Erikson, 1959; 1971;1993; Grotevant et al., 2000) predict added difficulty in identity formation for adopted individuals. Theories of ethnic identity development (Baden et al., 2012; Phinney & Ong, 2007) predict that individuals from ethnic minorities as in the USA or groups that were previously devalued and oppressed as in South Africa, spend more time making meaning of their identities than those individuals from the dominant culture. For the cross-racial adoptee, both adoption and ethnicity are aspects that present added challenges in forming an integrated identity. In the terms of IPT, cross-racial adoptees will most likely experience more serious threats to their identity. Furthermore, adoptive parents can often not adequately guide the child in relation to ethnic identity as they themselves have not experienced it in the same way (Docan-Morgan, 2010; Mohanty, Keokse, & Sales, 2006; Vonk, Lee, & Crolley-Simic, 2010). While parents may not have first-hand experience in development of ethnic identity that matches the ethnicity or race of their adopted child, studies found that awareness of race and racial attitudes in adoptive parents led to a greater likelihood of parents engaging in enculturalisation and racialisation parenting practices. They were also found to hold stronger beliefs about the value and importance of cultural socialisation (Lee et al., 2006). These

practices aided the adoptee in healthier race or ethnic identity development. Therefore ‘colour-blind’ racial attitudes in adoptive parents may not be useful in raising a child from a different ethnic group.

This particular case study was about a cross-racial adoption which took place in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) where the Black population is fairly homogenous. Therefore a prominent assumption that is held by the majority of the population in KZN is that if you are Black, you are Zulu. This assumption made it more difficult for the participant to easily make inroads into connecting with his birth-culture because of the expectation people had of him to be able to communicate in Zulu. He was also one of the first infants that was adopted by a White family and therefore the public was unfamiliar with the practice of cross-racial adoption and, as a result, he faced a lot of enquiry and intrusion, in spite of his parents trying to protect him from inappropriate public comment and helping him make sense of this.



South Africa is a nation that has undergone huge socio-political change: change in government, access to education, new openness to the global community, increase in technology, the rate of global change as well as the youth following a different developmental trajectory from the older generation (Ansell, 2004; Durrheim, Tredoux, Foster, & Dixon, 2011; Jensen, 2003; Thom & Coetzee, 2004). Therefore identity formation for a South African cross racial adoptee is complicated on many different fronts: adoption itself, ethnicity, socio-political change, and globalisation. The interactions of these various factors increase the complexity towards the development of an integrated identity and these challenges have resulted in this participant experiencing a delay in reaching a coherent identity. According to the adoptive identity statuses described by Grotevant et al. (2004), the participant would be regarded as having achieved an ‘unsettled identity’ which means that he is likely to spend a considerable

amount of time and effort thinking about and processing the meaning of being adopted, considering both positive and negative views of adoption. He has not yet fully integrated these views into a current sense of self and future identity and he is still adjusting after having experienced a recent crisis in identity and continues to explore different avenues to make sense of himself in his social context by for example considering searching for his birth mother.

He has constructed his identity based on how other people see him – a Zulu man. He has tried to disregard his intrapsychic experience of himself which for the most part has been informed by his values and attitudes of his adopted parents who are White and upper-middle-class. There is therefore an obstruction of what Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010) in IPT refer to as the principle of psychological coherence – there is low compatibility between how he feels, how he looks and how others perceive him and accept him into or reject him from their ethnic group. The principle of coherence can furthermore not be adequately realised in his lived experience as it is contingent on the social context and his acceptance into his birth culture or of another group. The salience of this particular principle was highlighted as it emerged frequently in the interviews. He repeatedly expressed the contradictions with which he struggles when he described his view of himself as Black in appearance, White in values and attitudes, but wanting to be accepted as a Zulu person.

It is then helpful to look at Baden et al. (2012) and the varying outcomes that can result after a cross-racial adoptee has been exposed to enculturation. At the time when the interviews were conducted, it seemed that the participant was most comfortable with and felt best understood by other adoptees which is something that frequently occurs when an adoptee feels neither fully at home in their birth nor adopted culture. Baden et al. (2012) referred to this as identification with the adoptee culture. This may, however, change if or when he meets his

birth mother and could lead to greater identification with his birth culture. Because he is also very attached to his adoptive family, he may settle for a combination of cultural outcomes (adoptee, bicultural, assimilated and reclaimed).

This study showed that there are complex challenges and struggles in the search for an integrated identity of the cross-racial adoptee who participated in this case study. Critics of cross-racial adoption emphasise the difficulty of achieving a healthy identity, in particular an integrated ethnic identity, and many have voiced concern of challenges the adoptee may face when interacting with persons from their birth culture. These concerns have shown to have substance in this case study.

While the identity of this participant may not yet have been fully integrated at the time of the interviews, studies have suggested that most adoptees are well adjusted and achieve a cohesive sense of self although they often may take more time than their non-adopted peers. Furthermore, although the centrality of certain identity principles such as coherence and belonging have been evident in the experience of the participant, as he makes meaning and applies various coping strategies, other principles such as self-efficacy, distinctiveness and self-esteem may come to the fore and take on greater meaning and importance. Identity formation never remains static as the relative importance of the principles in the assimilation-accommodation and evaluation processes vary over the life span of an individual. They are situation-specific and contingent on the reciprocal interaction between the individual and his or her social context and dependent on the existing identity structure of the individual. The participant's eloquence, his ability to be reflective, his healthy family relationships, high academic and social functioning are all indicators that he has greatly benefitted from the upbringing his adoptive parents were able to provide him. He has internalised many of the

values, beliefs and behaviour from his adoptive context but depending on what social contexts he engages with in the future, he will find different ways in which he can integrate his identity into a compatible meaning system.

However, cross-racial adoption remains controversial because it includes more than only the adoptee's personal identity, it also a concern with regards to the collective identity of communities as a whole (Rushton & Minnis, 1997).

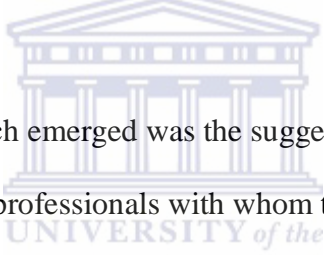
5.1 Limitations of the study

Based on the theories of identity formation by Erikson (1971) and Tajfel (1982), the researcher posed a foreshadowed problem that a cross-racial adoptee is likely to have challenges when forming an identity. This is not the same as having a preconceived idea, being determined to prove a certain point, but rather an approach to the case with an idea of what to look for, to concentrate on issue-related observations (Stake, 2005). The selection of the key issue for this study was around identity formation.

This study investigated one case of a cross-racial adoptee which has its own unique variables and context and therefore generalisation is not recommended in this research. Furthermore, Baden and O'Leary Wiley (2007) noted that adoptees world-wide form part of a heterogeneous population, that the diversity and complexity of each adopted individual's story needs to be acknowledged and therefore overgeneralisation is not useful in research and clinical practice.

5.2 Recommendations

Little research on cross-racial adoption has been conducted in South Africa. More case studies will continue to garner a wealth of information about the experiences and identity formation of cross-racial adoptees from which some general trends may emerge. These trends could then be combined to develop ways to improve the development of cultural competence for adoptive parents. It is clear that parents often enter the journey of raising a cross-racially adopted child without much prior knowledge about how to manage this in the best interest of the child and that of the family. It is also recommended that case studies are conducted with members of the adoption triad that are of a difference race, ethnicity and gender. During this study many other questions emerged, one of which may be how would cross-racial adoption be different for a so-called coloured child where language is less of an issue?



Another minor theme which emerged was the suggestion about the knowledge and competency of the psychological professionals with whom this particular participant had interacted, suggesting that professionals need extra training or at least be knowledgeable about the literature related to adoption and cross-racial adoption when taking on a client who is part of the adoption triad.

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Appendix A

INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: A Case Study: Identity Formation in a Cross-Racial Adoptee in South Africa

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by Marian Schröder (researcher), Charl Davids (supervisor) and Jenny Rose (co-supervisor) at the University of the Western Cape. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a South African person who was cross-racially adopted as an infant. The purpose of this research project is to explore identity formation of an individual who was cross-racially adopted in South Africa.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?

You will be asked to participate in three one-hour interviews with the researcher. These interviews will be conducted at the University of the Western Cape, Psychology Department or, if more convenient, we will use audio and video conferencing over Skype. The objectives for the three interviews will be as follows: In the first interview the objective will be to ascertain how the participant sees themselves in the present and how they would describe themselves to others. There will also be an exploration of how the participant believes others see them. The second interview will focus on the adoption itself and if the participant believes that this has had an impact on their identity formation and if so, how. An exploration of what experiences affected identity formation in their development will be another focus area of the second interview. In the third interview the objective will be to explore how South African culture has informed their identity formation. Including in this will be learning which cultures have been dominant at various stages of the participant's development and what concerns are currently most prominent in his identity formation.

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

This research project involves making audio recording of the interviews with you. Please consider the following:

- I agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.
- I do not agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.

We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, your name will be kept anonymous and demographic data vague. Data and audio

recordings will be stored electronically and password protected. Only the researcher will have access to the password. Once the researcher has completed her qualification, all data will be deleted or destroyed. Issues of how the data is reported will be discussed in advance and caution will be exercised to minimise risk. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible.

What are the risks of this research?

There may be some risks from participating in this research study. These include psychological discomfort as you consider how adoption has affected your life. Psychological counselling and support will be made available to you should you wish to make use of their services

What are the benefits of this research?

This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about identity formation in a cross-racial adoptee. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of cross-racial adoption.

Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.

Is any assistance available if I am negatively affected by participating in this study?

Because the topic for research may be an ongoing issue of concern for you as the participant, professional counselling will be made available if required.

What if I have questions?

This research is being conducted by Marian Schröder, at the Psychology department at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Marian Schröder at: cell: 082-680-3293 or 021 959-3093, e-mail: 3370772@uwc.ac.za.

Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

Head of Department: Mr Charl Davids

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17

Bellville 7535

This research has been approved by the University of the Western Cape's Senate Research Committee and Ethics Committee.



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Appendix B

CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project:

The study has been described to me in language that I understand and I freely and voluntarily agree to participate. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed and that I may withdraw from the study without giving a reason at any time and this will not negatively affect me in any way.

Participant's name.....

Participant's signature.....

Witness.....

Date.....

Should you have any questions regarding this study or wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact the study coordinator:

Study Coordinator's Name: Charl Davids

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17, Belville 7535

Telephone: (021)959-3092

Fax: (021)959-3515

Email: cdavids@uwc.ac.za



Appendix C

Interview Guide

1. Background information:
 - 1.1. What would you like to tell me about your family?
 - 1.2. How did it come to be that you were adopted?
2. When and how did you become aware that
 - 2.1. you were adopted and
 - 2.2. that you were a different colour to your parents, and how did you experience it?
3. Identity
 - 3.1. How do you see yourself? (May need to probe further with this question: You may on occasion have a gut response when you feel “this I the real me!” How would you describe “the real you”?)
 - 3.2. How did you view yourself while growing up? Or: Could you give me a history of how you developed this sense of “the real you”?
 - 3.3. Are there parts of you that you feel are missing or still developing? Would you be able to describe them?
4. How do people from the various communities (Black, White, middle class, working class, peers, and friends) respond to you as a cross-racial adoptee?
 - 4.1. How do you think others see you?
 - 4.2. Which people do you feel most comfortable with?
 - 4.3. To which group(s) do you feel you belong?