

Same-Sex Couples and Adoption: A Study of Two Families

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Science (Counselling Psychology) in the Faculty of Humanities, Development & Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

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May 2007

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor, Steven Roche, for all of his help (and for being a shoulder to cry on when necessary). I would also like to thank Kerry Frizelle, as she also contributed invaluable to the initial stages of this dissertation. I am forever in debt to the participants who so willingly laid themselves bare to me – I admire their creativity and strength in doing what so few have yet done. Lastly, to my family and friends (especially my parents): thank you for giving me the opportunity to fulfil my dream, and for supporting me through it all – I love you, and it is FINALLY over!

ABSTRACT

Increasingly, same-sex couples are choosing to become parents. According to Patterson (1992, cited in Mallon, 1997), it is estimated that in the United States of America alone, there are between six and 14 million children being raised by gay and lesbian couples. This study explored the experiences of same-sex parents as they moved through the adoption process, and once they had become parents. Two couples (a gay male couple and a lesbian couple) were interviewed. The study used an ecological theoretical framework in order to understand the myriad influences on the individuals' and couples' experiences. The Voice-Centred Relational Method (Mauthner & Doucet, cited in Ribbens & Edwards, 1998) was used to analyse the data qualitatively. Major themes that emerged from the data include the ways in which parents negotiate roles with partners, the impact of societal reactions (and heteronormativity) on the couples, the quality of relationships between family members and the influence that these had on the couples' experience of parenting.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Parenting manuals for traditional heterosexual couples abound, and they contain much information regarding what the new parents can expect of their impending adventure as parents. However, there is a serious dearth of such information for same-sex couples who have adopted children, especially in South Africa. Considering that the increase in the number of gay and lesbian couples who have adopted children is a relatively recent phenomenon, this lack of information is understandable. However, recent changes to legislation (such as the Civil Unions Act of 2006) translate into gay and lesbian couples being afforded more rights. While we have seen an increase in adoption of children by same-sex couples (some have called it the ‘gayby boom’ – Letellier, 2001), the abovementioned legislative changes could very possibly have the effect of increasing adoption of children by same-sex couples even further. Therefore, the need for information on same-sex parenting is increasingly urgent.

Much of the research on same-sex parenting has focused on the well-being of children raised by gay and lesbian parents. Some individuals state that the children of same-sex parents are prejudiced socially, psychologically and even physically (e.g. the Australian Family Association, cited in Millbank, 2003), and others that the children of same-sex parents either do not differ significantly from children of heterosexual parents (Allen & Burrell, 1996, cited in Millbank, 2003), or that the differences between the two groups of children “are not causal, but are indirect effects of parental gender or selection effects associated with heterosexist conditions under which lesbigay-parent families currently live” (Stacey & Biblarz, 2004: 144). However, there is currently very little research into the ways in which same-sex couples themselves experience parenting in a heteronormative society that largely frowns on the practice, with the exception of this study.

This research focused on the legal, psychological and other processes that same-sex parents themselves experience before they become parents via adoption, and the ways in which they negotiate their roles and relationships once they have become parents. This

study has used an ecological theoretical framework (Bröfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) in order to understand the myriad influences on the individuals' and couples' experiences. The Voice-Centred Relational Method (Mauthner & Doucet, cited in Ribbens & Edwards, 1998) was used to analyse the data qualitatively, as it allows the researcher to unravel the different social and ecological influences on the individual's voice as he/she speaks of his/her same-sex parenting experiences. A further aim of this research is to open up this topic in order to generate more information in the area. In addition, once further research has been conducted, this study will hopefully be useful in developing theories as to how same-sex couples experience parenting, so that future same-sex parents may benefit.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In almost all cultures, individuals are brought up with the (heterosexist) concept that the 'family' consists of a mother, a father and children, all of whom are biologically related. According to Martin (cited in Mallon, 1997), while this conceptualisation of 'family' may still be valid for many people, it is obvious that there are many other family configurations beyond the traditional one. In fact, "the nuclear family is becoming more of a myth as divorce rates and the number of single female-headed households increase" (Neophytou, 1994: 24), especially within the South African context, where the number of single-parent and child-headed households increase daily. Thus, while the nuclear family is no longer the *norm*, it is still widely considered the (heteronormative) *ideal*.

Increasingly, same-sex couples are choosing to become parents through various avenues, including artificial insemination, fostering and adoption. However, because same-sex couples do not conform to the "basic biological mandate" of the heterosexual couple (Neophytou, 1994: 24) – that of being able to create children – they are therefore not only faced with the usual difficulties and adjustment that come with a new child, but they may also have to contend with social perceptions of their sexual orientation, and therefore their abilities as parents.

There are many ways in which same-sex couples become parents or co-parents. Some gay men and lesbians choose to have their own biological children through artificial insemination. Artificial insemination is more commonly utilised by lesbians, as they have the ability to carry a child during pregnancy, while gay men tend to turn to adoption in order to become parents (Letellier, 2001). Other gay or lesbian individuals become parents after becoming involved with a partner who had a child in a previous (heterosexual or homosexual) relationship. Still others turn to surrogacy in order to have children. The focus of this study, however, is on same-sex couples who have chosen to become parents through adoption. 'From a purely logistical point of view, same-sex couples who choose to adopt a child, or children, engage in a number of emotional, psychological, legal and financial processes, quite similar to the processes that any heterosexual couple may endure, should they wish to adopt a child.' However, according to McCann & Delmonte (2005: 335), "because of the ways in which homophobia and heterosexism has (sic) historically shaped the lives of lesbian and gay men, their decision to parent must be seen in the context of the prevailing social, moral, religious and legal mores of the day". Indeed, "[the] mere process of deciding 'if' [they should become parents] could be a harrowing one" (Somerville, 2001: 40). Thereafter, they face the legal process of adoption; and once the child(ren) become part of the family, the life-long experience of parenting begins.

Bröfenbrenner's ecological theory of human development is the theoretical framework on which this study relies to explain the individual's experience of the world. According to Bröfenbrenner & Morris(1998), the individual lives within five environmental systems which influence the individual's sociocultural development, and therefore his/her experience of the world. These systems are known as the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. The microsystem involves the family, peers, school or work environment in which the individual functions; the mesosystem refers to the ways in which different contexts relate to one another, such as the way in which problems within the family system will impact on the individual's functioning at school or at work. The exosystem involves social contexts by which the individual may not necessarily be directly influenced, but which will nevertheless influence the individual's

world – for example, a child's experience of her father's absence from home due to his work demands. The macrosystem includes the general religious and/or moral values and ideologies of a society, the legislation of the country within which the family lives, and so on. The final level is that of the chronosystem, which refers to the level of the sociohistorical context of the society in which the individual lives, as well as the influence of temporal life stage-related changes. Each of these levels is mutually influential, although the proximal processes (those 'close to' the individual) are thought to have the strongest influence on the individual's development (Brönfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

While Brönfenbrenner's model is a comprehensive attempt to explain the various influences on the individual's experience, he neglects the individual him-/herself – the intrapsychic, biological influences on the individual's experience of the world. Thus, in this research Brönfenbrenner's model is augmented by Eksteen's (cited in Mouton, 2001) theory of human development and experience. According to Eksteen (cited in Mouton, 2001), the family ecosystem consists of different levels of interaction. The first level is that of the *individual*, who is a biological and psychological system. The next level is *dyadic*, and involves the interactions between two individuals, be it the two parents, the parent and child, or siblings. The third level is that of the *family system* itself; and the fourth is the way in which the family interacts with the *immediate social environment* (for example, school or work environments). The final level is the way in which the general social milieu of the *society* in which the family exists, impacts on the family's functioning (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 1997). This includes the general religious and/or moral values of a society, the legislation of the country within which the family lives, and so on. These factors and levels of the ecosystem reciprocally influence and/or interact with one another to create unique lived experiences for the family unit, and the individuals within it. The sheer diversity of the social, religious, moral and legislative contexts within which people live (especially in South Africa) means that these lived experiences are inevitably complex.

Much of the literature surrounding the legislation on adoption of children by same-sex couples, as well as the process of becoming parents through adoption and society's perceptions of same-sex parents' abilities to raise, creates a negative (indeed, bleak) view of the entire initiative. Yet many gay and lesbian adoptive parents receive support from various sources and exercise creativity in developing coping strategies for dealing with the pressures and societal perceptions that they and their children may face. Thus, the following literature focuses on the abovementioned factors and their influence on the interactions within families headed by same-sex couples, as they negotiate the decision to adopt a child or children, and then move through the process of adopting and raising their children.

2.1 The Macrosystem – Legalities

As previously stated, McCann & Delmonte (2005) contend that a same-sex couple's decision to adopt a child should be seen within the general social, legal and moral context within which they live. A thorough understanding of such a couple's decision to parent cannot occur without considering the macrosystemic level of legislation, as legislation itself and the individuals within the legal system have a direct impact on the couple's lived experience of the adoptive process.

Patterson (2001, cited in Millbank, 2003) argues that parenthood comprises three general facets: the biological, the social and the legal. Traditionally, these three facets corresponded – “a heterosexual couple fell in love, got married, and had children”, meaning that there was no disconnection between the social, legal and biological aspects of parenthood (Patterson, 2001, cited in Millbank, 2004: 547). However, in today's society, with divorce and remarriage, surrogacy and adoption, these three facets do not correspond as they once did. For example, if a couple discovers that they are infertile, they may decide to find a surrogate mother to have their child. Thus, while the biological link between the parents and the child, and the legal and social link between the child and the biological mother are missing, the social parents have the social and legal responsibility of raising the child. While situations such as those mentioned above are

becoming more and more common, Patterson (2001, cited in Millbank, 2004) argues that gay and lesbian couples who have children are highlighting the difficult legal, social and biological issues – making them more visible, and thus open to social scrutiny and comment. Williams (2002) writes of this scrutiny, of how gay and lesbian parents feel as though they are constantly being watched by society for any sign that they are not fit parents.

The Constitution of South Africa was adopted on 8 May 1996 and amended on 11 October 1996 by the Constitutional Assembly. It includes within it Chapter 2, the Bill of Rights, and these rights apply to all people living as residents of South Africa. The Equality Clause in the Bill of Rights states that the State and each person

may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, *sexual orientation*, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth (Section 9, para. 3 & 4 – emphasis added).

While the Constitution was adopted in 1996, many laws and Acts dating from before this time are still valid. One such Act is the Child Care Act 74 of 1983. This Act states that

A child may be adopted –

- (a) by a husband and his wife jointly;
- (b) by a widower or widow or unmarried or divorced person;
- (c) by a married person whose spouse is the parent of the child;
- (d) by the natural father of a child born out of wedlock (section 17).

As it stands, “[the] Act does not explicitly prohibit gay or lesbian adoptions” (Mosikatsana, 1996: 117), as s17 (b) allows for an ‘unmarried’ person to adopt and does not stipulate the sexual orientation of the individual as a criterion for consideration of their suitability to be a parent. However, the wording of this particular section can be construed as heteronormative, or possibly even discriminatory against lesbigays*. It could thus be used by individuals within the legal system to prevent a same-sex couple

* Lesbigays – a collective noun which encompasses lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals.

from jointly adopting a child. Further, if only one gay or lesbian parent is allowed to adopt the child, only that parent may be conferred the legal *rights* of a parent, despite the fact that both individuals fulfil most of the legal and moral *responsibilities* of parenting, such as feeding, caring for and clothing the child/children. Nevertheless, only the legal parent can fulfil certain legal responsibilities, such as granting permission for medical procedures or sporting events at school. These legal provisions thus place restraints on the fulfilment of parental responsibilities, and may impact on the relationship between the same-sex adoptive parents, which ultimately prejudices the child/children in question. As E. Van Der Merwe (personal communication, 5 May 2005) states, the *Child Care Act* 74 of 1983, as well as the *Guardianship Act* 192 of 1993, “fly in the face of the Constitution”.

On 10 September 2002, it was ruled unconstitutional to prevent same-sex couples to jointly adopt a child or children (*Du Toit v. The Minister of Welfare and Population Development and others*, 2002). This groundbreaking decision in the Constitutional Court acknowledged that it was prejudicial to the child to prevent both same-sex parents from jointly adopting, for the reasons outlined above. In addition, certain provisions of the *Child Care* and *Guardianship* Acts were ruled contradictory to the Constitutional rights of same-sex parents to dignity and equality (*Du Toit v. The Minister of Welfare and Population Development and others*, 2002). While the two Acts in question have been ruled unconstitutional, the changes espoused in the judgement of *Du Toit v. The Minister of Welfare and Population Development and others* (2002) are still being finalised by a task team in Cape Town (E. Van Der Merwe, personal communication, 6 May 2005). Once these changes are complete, the draft will be submitted to Parliament for consideration, and once Parliament is satisfied with the draft, it will be sworn in as legislation. In the mean time, it is possible for same-sex couples to jointly adopt children, although this may be a long-winded and fraught process as procedures for such a request have not yet been finalised.

The *Child Care Act* 74 of 1983 provides that

A children’s court to which application for an order of adoption is made... shall not grant the application unless it is satisfied –

...(b) that the applicant is or that both applicants are *of good repute* and a person or persons *fit and proper* to be entrusted with the custody of the child; and

(c) that the proposed adoption will *serve the interests and conduce to the welfare of the child* (emphasis added)... (Section 18, para. 4)

In order to adopt, prospective adoptive parents are required to consult a social worker who takes them through the entire legal process of adoption, and who evaluates the prospective adoptive parents on their 'repute' and their 'fitness' to be parents. However, according to Ryan (2004: 88), "heterosexism is prevalent amongst social workers", and "[rather] than applying objective decision-making criteria, a social worker's values... and subjective judgement of particular families appear to drive approval and placement decisions". The prospective gay or lesbian parents are subjected to yet another ecological level of scrutiny, that of social and/or psychological surveillance. Thus, if a social worker does not approve of homosexuality, he/she can prevent a same sex couple from adopting by (ab)using the legal provisions outlined above. Further, the tendency towards heterosexism within the social work field seems to be more than simply a matter of individuals who are opposed to homosexuality. The following statement by Marionka Manias, Adoptions Manager of Johannesburg Child Welfare Society in 1992 (cited in Mosikotsana, 1996) seems to indicate a more institutional form of heterosexism:

Placing children with homosexual couples would be very difficult in a very discriminating society like ours. Ideally, we would like a problem-free situation where the child would simply have to cope with the problem of his [sic] adoption and not have a double burden of having to handle the stigma of living with a couple who's different, i.e. homosexuals (p. 128).

This statement reveals a number of assumptions. Firstly, while there is no doubt that many individuals who are adopted struggle when they discover that they are not biologically related to their adoptive parents, this does not necessarily have to be the case

(Humphrey & Humphrey, 1988). If the adoptive family frankly and openly reveals to the child from a young age that he/she is adopted, there is a tendency for those adopted children to be comfortable with their adoptive status (Humphrey & Humphrey, 1988). Secondly, there is an assumption that the children of same-sex couples will be rejected and ostracised by their peers, and that this rejection will cause irreparable damage to their psychological health. Comprehensive overviews of the available studies conducted on gay- and lesbian-led families by Patterson (1992) and Tasker & Golombok (1991 – both cited in Milbank, 2003) indicated that many of the children of same-sex parents showed no differences in psychiatric state, levels of self-esteem, and quality of friendships, popularity, sociability or social acceptance compared to controls from heterosexual-led families. In fact, Chan, Raboy & Patterson (1998, cited in Millbank, 2003) assert that it appears family processes (such as parental stress and conflict) are more detrimental to the emotional and psychological well-being of the child/children than family structure. These studies did not indicate whether these children had or had not been exposed to discrimination because of their parents' sexual orientation. Stacey & Biblarz (2004) argue that, in fact, if the children of same-sex couples had been exposed to prejudice and discrimination based on their parents' sexual orientation, the abovementioned similarities between these children and the children of heterosexual couples suggests that children of same-sex parents have probably developed admirable coping skills.

There have been a number of policy changes within the Johannesburg Child Welfare Society since Manias (cited in Masikotsana, 1996) made her statement in 1992. Nevertheless, the abovementioned statement indicates how pervasive heteronormativity (and heterosexist conceptualisations of homosexuality) can be used as justification to prevent same-sex couples from adopting. An example of the emotional roller-coaster that the welfare system can inflict upon a couple can be seen in Patrick (2006). Patrick's (2006) experiences involved attempting to get his partner and himself approved as foster parents for neglected and abused children who were removed from their biological families, rather than attempting to adopt children. However, the experiences appear similar to those of same-sex couples who wish to adopt. Patrick (2006) shares how he and his partner went through the entire training and administrative process of becoming

foster parents with a religious organisation that friends of theirs had recommended. They found that their experience was pleasant, and they felt in no way discriminated against by any individual within this organisation. At the eleventh hour, however, the agency's director left them a message on their answering machine, apologising and explaining that they were unable to grant the gay couple a license as someone within the church had decided that their "active same-sex lifestyle" violated the beliefs of the religious organisation (Patrick, 2006: 124).

Ultimately, though, an adoption order needs to be approved by the Children's Court; and Mosikatsana (1996: 118) states that "the Courts tend to rely on the prevailing heterosexual social norms of the dominant groups in society in determining if one is 'of good repute' or if he or she is a 'fit and proper' person to adopt". This can be considered yet another form of institutionalised heterosexism and/or homophobia. The 'best interests' standard can also work to prevent same-sex couples from adopting. Mosikatsana (1996: 120 - 121) asserts that the 'best interest' standard has been influenced by familial and Christian ideology, which presumes that "children's needs are best met in a heterosexual, two-parent family...", and that support for this presumption is evident in previous judicial rulings.

Beargie and Dooley (cited in Mosikatsana, 1996) explain that the courts use one of three approaches in determining the fitness of gay or lesbian parents. The *per se* approach presumes that purely because of his/her homosexuality, a gay or lesbian parent is unfit. The *middle ground approach* does not presume that a gay parent is unfit purely because of his/her sexual orientation, but that exposure to a parent's homosexual activity will harm the child, and therefore it is not in the child's best interests to be with that parent. The third approach, the *nexus approach*, takes an ad hoc form and requires that proof of potential harm to the child be produced before a gay parent is prevented from becoming his/her legal guardian. It is thus possible for same-sex couples to adopt children, through the latter legal approach as the law technically allows for it. However, the approach utilised in a court is purely at the discretion of the judge involved, and his/her own

prejudices regarding what the best interests of the child are, may influence the way in which he/she rules (J. De Wet, personal communication, 18 June 2005). There are presumably judges within the courts whose personal beliefs would lead them to use the nexus approach in determining the suitability of a same-sex couple as parents, and some couples may find that their experience of the judicial system is relatively unbiased, possibly even relatively pleasant. Other couples may find that the judge assigned to their case is prejudiced towards same-sex couples, and they may be obstructed in their pursuit of parenthood through adoption, if not completely prevented from adopting a child. However, the sheer unpredictability of whether the couple will appear before a sympathetic judge or not may be stressful in itself.

While the aforementioned changes to the *Child Care Act* 74 of 1983 (those that allow lesbian parents to co-adopt a child) have not been passed into legislation, it is possible for lesbian parents to co-adopt a child (Personal communication with a research subject, 26 July 2005). Before the case of *Du Toit v. The Minister of Welfare and Population Development and others*, 2002, lesbian and gay parents could not jointly adopt a child. This meant that the non-legal parent was at a disadvantage, as he/she has no claim to custody in the event that the relationship between the parents dissolves, and he/she cannot authorise medical treatment for the child in the event of an emergency. In addition, if the non-legal parent dies without writing a formal will, the living legal parent and/or the adopted child have no formal legal access to the estate of the non-legal parent. According to a study into lesbian couples who were raising children together by McNair, Dempsey, Wise & Perlesz (2002, cited in Millbank, 2003: 555),

[lack] of legal recognition as a parent... and a lack of legal recognition as a family, were reported as being the most frequently applicable problems confronting them, and were also perceived as creating the most difficulty in parenting.

However, these difficulties are possibly a thing of the past for lesbian and gay parents in South Africa who wish to co-adopt – and thus a development which may reduce slightly the pressure that some lesbian parents may feel.

It is therefore clear that the legal process of adoption, and the individuals with whom the same-sex couple must interact, may be permeated by heterosexism and even homophobia. This can prevent same-sex couples from becoming parents. That said, it must not be construed that all same-sex couples will be prevented from becoming parents – many will achieve their goal of adopting children, and many will have a positive experience while going through the legal process. However, as Savage (1999: 65) states, “for gays and lesbians, having children... is regarded as a privilege, not a right. And privileges can be taken away”.

2.2 The Decision to Adopt

According to Neophytou (1994: 25), “oppressed people internalise socialised stereotypes and hatred of their particular minority group”. She argues that homosexuality (and specifically lesbianism) is considered a deviation from the heteronormativity of the nuclear family, and homosexuals are “defined in terms of their sexuality” (Neophytou, 1994: 25). The misguided, homophobic perception that ‘gay cannot equal parent’ is eventually internalised by many gay men and women. Many gay men and women thus have to confront and work through their negative internalised views of how their sexuality ‘prevents’ them from being parents. However, this is not always the case. Many gay and lesbian individuals are able to build a self-image that can withstand these social messages, one in which a homosexual orientation and the desire to be a parent are not mutually exclusive.

There is a social discourse on the ‘biological clock’, emanating from the “biological mandate” of producing children (Neophytou, 1994: 24) that surrounds heterosexual relationships. The common perception is that people (more specifically, women) have a ‘biological clock’ which prods them into having children, despite the fact that they may not have planned to have any. Thus, some gay men and lesbians choose to have their own biological children through artificial insemination. Artificial insemination is more commonly utilised by lesbians, as they are able to become pregnant and carry a child,

whereas gay men tend to turn to adoption in order to become parents because of the many legal and personal challenges that may come with surrogacy (Letellier, 2001).

Despite this perception of a 'biological clock', there is another conceptualisation that gay men and lesbians do not wish to have children at all. This may come from the assumption that "[straight, that is heterosexual] sex can be recreational or procreational – or both – but gay sex can only ever be recreational" (Savage, 1999: 25). In other words, because sex between two men or two women does not fulfil the 'biological mandate' of producing children, many people assume that gay men and lesbians must surely not want to be parents – an apparently 'common-sense' assumption arising from a heteronormative view of same-sex relationships. The next (heteronormative) assumption would be that because a homosexual individual's sexual orientation prevents procreation, they would not be subject to the urgings of their 'biological clock' – that it is somehow short-circuited when the individual enters a same-sex relationship. This is not the case, as Letellier (2001) demonstrates in his interviews with two families. One woman explains how her 'biological clock' alerted her to the fact that she was ready to have a child: "My hormones were screaming at me, 'I must have a baby!' It was like my whole body wanted to be pregnant" (cited in Letellier, 2001: 26). Another man talks of the "very strong, primal desire to be a parent" that he experienced (Letellier, 2001: 27). The 'biological clock' may not be the only reason why same-sex couples may wish to become parents. Savage (1999: 34) explained his decision to have children: "Having children is no longer about propagating the species or having someone to leave your lands to, but about self-fulfilment". The reasons for having children, by whichever means, are as varied as the individuals who voluntarily become parents.

Internalised homophobia may take other forms when same-sex couples are deciding whether to become parents or not. Societal reactions to same-sex parents range from unconditional acceptance to tolerance, to outright vitriol, such as the assertion that allowing same-sex couples to adopt children is "a radical social experiment" (LaBarbera, 2002: 14). Gay and lesbian individuals, by virtue of their sexual orientation, grow up with constant messages that they are not worthy, and that they cannot be parents in case

they “expose innocent children to homosexual behaviour” (LaBarbera, 2002: 14). This may lead to “[feelings] of inferiority, lack of self-esteem and fear of rejection” (Neophytou, 1994: 25), which same-sex couples may have to acknowledge when considering the possibility of becoming parents.

The reactions that a same-sex couple may face when they announce their intentions to become parents by adoption can, once again, range from enthusiastic support to disbelief, shock, and perhaps even rejection by their families (Neophytou, 1994). On the whole, negative reactions seem to be more prevalent. A woman spoke of how her relatives “turned their backs on me” (cited in Williams, 2002: 30), suggesting that a lack of support can reinforce the perception of inferiority in the minds of gay men and lesbians, and further undermine their self-confidence as parents. In the case of Savage (1999), his own parents were extremely supportive of the decision to adopt a child, but his partner’s parents were initially quite cold towards the couple when they announced their decision. The literature thus suggests that the dynamics of extended family relationships impact on the same-sex couple’s decision to adopt, whether it be in a positive way (such as supporting the couple through the process of adopting and raising the child), to a more negative pressure (such as withdrawing from the relationship). This is yet another sphere of influence (that of the microsystem) within which the decision to adopt occurs.

- ✦ Further, gay and lesbian individuals may themselves hold negative attitudes towards lesbigay parenting. Savage (1999) talks of how many of his gay and lesbian friends saw having children as a “betrayal of gay and lesbian liberation”; and that adoption by same-sex couples constitutes “selling out” to the pervasive heteronormativity in society (Savage, 1999: 64). Patrick (2006: 123) recalls how a gay friend was “less than supportive upon hearing that Patrick and his partner were hoping to foster children, and commented that “[not having children] is the best part of being gay”. Many gay and lesbian people, due to rejection by family and friends when they come out, turn to other gay and lesbian friends for support – their friends become a surrogate family. This suggests that when a support structure that a gay or lesbian couple has rejects them, it can be devastating to the self-esteem of the couple involved, and may lead to feelings of

isolation. Another factor that may come into play is that of race. Much of the literature around adoption by gay and lesbian couples asserts that most same-sex couples that adopt children belong to the white, middle-class group (Firestone, in Letellier, 2001; Millbank 2003; Patterson, 2007). There is a dearth of information on non-Caucasian gay and lesbian parents. One Chinese lesbian couple spoke of the difficulty that they had in feeling comfortable within a gay and lesbian parenting support group, to the extent that they felt more comfortable within a group of heterosexual and homosexual non-White parents (Letellier, 2001). This suggests that racial and ethnic discourses play a role in individual and family identity, and therefore may play a role in the confidence and support that a same-sex parents feels that they possess.

It is not only relatives who may disapprove of the decision to become parents; Thomson (2003) speaks candidly of her own disapproval when her partner announced that she wanted to become a parent. Thomson (2003: 76) herself had already had children of her own in a heterosexual marriage before entering a same-sex partnership, and “did not need or want any more children” when her partner began to research artificial insemination. After her partner discovered that she would not be able to conceive, she began to talk of adoption; and “[the] months that followed were taxed with undercurrents of tension” (Thomson, 2003: 76). This was due to her struggles with the idea and experience of motherhood, the “wild see-sawing conflict of not wanting to be a mother... [and loving her] two girls so much [she] could sometimes hardly breathe”, and her resulting view that her partner was ‘obsessed’ with the idea of having a child, by whatever means possible (Thomson, 2003: 75). By her own admission, she struggled with the idea of adopting an African baby, descending into a “chaotic spiral of introspection around issues of racism and what it meant to be white and a mother” (Thomson, 2003: 74).

Much of the literature on this topic reflects negativity towards same-sex couples who choose to become parents. However, reactions from others when announcing their decision to become a parent are not always negative. The majority of Savage’s (1999) friends and family were supportive of him and his partner, and this may be the case for many gay and lesbian couples who choose to adopt. And Thomson (2003) writes of how

her 'mixed-race' daughter has brought positive change and growth into her life and her relationship with her partner. It is important to bear in mind that much of the literature on this subject is based on studies in the United States of America; the findings of these studies may not necessarily apply to the South African context.

Most children available for adoption in South Africa are of the African race group (Ledderboge, 1996). Thus, White, Indian or Coloured same-sex couples who wish to adopt are likely to have to adopt cross-racially (Ledderboge, 1996), which adds a complex dimension to interactions within each of the ecosystemic levels. Our prejudices, whether regarding the race, gender or sexual orientation of others, "are formed via a process of inculcation that begins at birth" (Corrington & Luke, 1997, cited in Thomson, 2003: 76). This insidious 'inculcation' creates ways of being in and seeing the world that are often beyond consciousness, and is pertinent within the South African context, where racial prejudice and discrimination have formed an important part of the political heritage. Thomson (2003) honestly revealed how her own vehement reaction to the thought of adopting a child of a different race was even shocking to herself. Many individuals who choose to adopt may not have fully confronted their racial or cultural prejudices until they are faced with the reality of a transracial adoption. For many individuals, the decision to become a parent necessitates the acknowledgement and breaking-down of deeply-ingrained racial and cultural stereotypes, indicating the strong political contribution to the many facets of the ecosystem within which the gay parent exists, especially within the South African context.

Of course, gay and lesbian people are involved with people in other spheres, such as colleagues at work. Although the South African Constitution explicitly states that individuals will not be discriminated against based on sexual orientation, this may not necessarily be practised or enforced in certain instances. For example, in 1998, a lesbian who worked for the police force wanted to add her partner to her medical aid, but her request was refused because the medical aid did not recognise same-sex partnerships (AIDS Law Project, retrieved 18 March 2007). In addition, some forms of discrimination are so subtle as to be impossible to prove if challenged. Thus, many gay or lesbian

individuals “adopt a double life, pretending to be heterosexual in certain instances” (Neophytou, 1994: 26). Somerville (2002: 40) further states that, “[to] be a pair of registered parents, both of whom have the same gender, means that the closet door is forever wide open”. This may present difficulties for dealing with the child’s school and the parents of the child’s friends. The children of same-sex couples may also be ostracised by peers and/or teachers (Neophytou, 1994). This rather daunting situation could be made more difficult as, for same-sex parents in South Africa, there is a “lack of guidelines or role models in the form of interpersonal contact and... serious omissions... in the available literature on parenting” (Neophytou, 1994: 26).

↗ In addition, there is a serious lack of formal support structures for gay and lesbian parents. Neophytou (1994) states that, for example, same-sex organisations do not offer child-care arrangements at meetings or other gatherings. In addition, whilst in 1994 there was only one Gay Parents Support Group in South Africa (Neophytou, 1994), there does not seem to be anything of the sort currently. There is “little or no visible recognition that [same-sex headed families are] a viable family form, either within or outside of the gay/lesbian community” (Pennington, 1987, cited in Neophytou, 1994: 26). This lack of formal support structures can add to the pressure of raising children that same-sex parents face.

The financial ramifications of adoption are also prohibitive. While exact figures for adoption are difficult to obtain, the fees can run into thousands of rands, especially if same-sex parents adopt privately. This can be seen as a form of ‘structural violence’, whereby the social structures of the society within which an individual lives “violates the physical, social and/or psychological integrity of another [marginalised] person or group” (Bulhan, 1985: 135). ‘Pink Rands’ (the colloquial term given to the income that gay men and lesbians earn as a demographic group) reportedly afford gay men and lesbians a higher than average disposable income (Somerville, 2001). Nevertheless, the expense of adoption can unfairly prevent same-sex couples who are desperate to adopt from becoming parents, and can therefore be seen as a form of structural violence.

2.3 Discourses on Parenting

Parenting is a “process composed of tasks, roles, rules, communication, resources and relationships” (Horowitz, Hughes & Perdue, 1982, cited in Mouton, 2001). We can thus see that parenting is complex, and that the various aspects of parenting are interdependent. Louw, Van Ede & Louw (1998) assert that when a new member enters the family, the existing members of the family have to adjust their careers, their lifestyle, their existing relationships, as well as adjust psychologically. Their interactions change. The traditional, heteronormative ideal of the mother taking on child-rearing and home-making roles, and the father being the financial provider for the family is rapidly disappearing as more and more fathers take on child-rearing duties and mothers earn an income outside the home. Within a same-sex couple, however, much of the literature suggests that the divisions of labour and childcare responsibilities that occur are even less likely to be based on traditional gender roles – instead, gay and lesbian couples tend to share these tasks more equally, and are more content with the division of tasks, than heterosexual couples (Milbank, 2003; Dunne, 1998, and McPherson, 1993, cited in McCann & Delmonte, 2005). Same-sex parents are therefore jointly more actively involved in all aspects of parenting than their heterosexual counterparts, and gay fathers are reportedly more concerned about the quality of their emotional relationship with their children than providing financially for them (Milbank, 2003; Scallen, 1981, cited in McCann & Delmonte, 2005). Further, gay fathers are said to put more effort into creating stable environments and positive relationships in the home than heterosexual fathers (Turner, Scadden & Harris, 1990, cited in McCann & Delmonte, 2005).

Same-sex parents are also less likely to be constrained by stereotypic gender roles when socialising their children (Milbank, 2003). Stacey & Biblarz (2004) report on a study by Kweskin & Cook (1982), in which lesbian mothers are less concerned about gender-typed behaviours and play than heterosexual mothers. Perhaps it is this lack of concern for stereotypical gender roles that plays a role in the more equal division of household labour and childcare in gay- and lesbian-headed families, as mentioned above. However, the legal constraints discussed earlier may prevent a truly egalitarian division of tasks and

roles within a family headed by a same-sex couple. For example, only the legal guardian is permitted to sign the contracts that come with admitting the child to school. While the non-legal guardian may wish to fulfil these duties, he/she cannot, and thus many of the legal childcare tasks that heterosexual couples would be able to divide equally fall to the legal parent in a same-sex partnership.

Parents not only have to adjust to their roles as parents, but they also have to develop relationships with their adoptive children. According to Eksteen (cited in Mouton, 2001), gay and lesbian parents have an advantage over heterosexual couples who have biological children, as they are able to 'choose' their children. It is not necessarily as simple as Eksteen would have it, illustrated by a story in Letellier (2001). Wallace, a gay man, decided to adopt two young brothers as he had always wanted to have children. He recounts a visit to a McDonald's close to his home, on his second visit with the boys before adopting them. The boys climbed to the highest point of the play equipment at the restaurant and, screaming and crying, refused to come down when their prospective father called them. He says, "It's hard, because you're committing to kids you've never met..." (Letellier, 2001: 27). It is therefore more a matter of opinion as to whether same-sex couples have a 'choice' when adopting a child, especially in the South African context, for a number of reasons. Firstly, the vast majority of children available for adoption in South Africa are abused or neglected and subsequently removed from the custody of their biological families; or they are abandoned or orphaned due to being affected or infected by HIV/AIDS (Ledderboge, 1996). Successful adoptions tend to rely on placing the child as early in his/her life as possible, preferably within the first two years (Ledderboge, 1996). Many of the children placed for adoption may have spent time in the care of abusive or neglectful biological relatives or group homes, and this could impact on their adjustment within their adoptive families. In addition, their physical health may have suffered due to malnutrition or HIV/AIDS. Thus, a gay couple's chances of adopting a psychologically and physically healthy child appear to be relatively limited. Coping with a child who suffers from a psychological or physical illness places strain on family relations, and could impact on parent-child relationships, or even the parental relationship itself.

Further, Ledderboge (1996) asserts that transracial adoptions can result in unforeseen stress for the families involved. This is because transracial adoptions require a “paradigm shift for the families as their overarching values, beliefs, experiences and practices [need to change]” (Ledderboge, 1996: 56). Another major problem that adoptive parents of ‘other race’ children face is that of forming the child’s ethnic identity (Ledderboge, 1996). Many parents have to decide whether they will bring the child up within their own cultural and ethnic beliefs, or whether they will foster the child’s indigenous ethnic identity. According to Sorosky, Baran & Pannor (1978, cited in Ledderboge, 1996), successful transracial adoption outcomes were reported where the child’s parents appreciated and fostered the child’s identification with their ethnic and cultural origins.

Most of the respondents to Ledderboge’s (1996) study cited public attitudes, including overt racism, as the most stressful aspect of bringing up a transracially-adopted child. Some respondents even stated that they “had been accused by unknown passers-by of bringing up their future gardener or future maid” (Ledderboge, 1996: 126). This resulted in many of the transracially-adopted children in question becoming upset about the fact that they had different hair texture and skin colour to their parents (Ledderboge, 1996). When extended family members expressed their disapproval of transracial adoption, many of the families felt that the friction created by their decision forced them to cut ties with these family members, even if only for a short while (Ledderboge, 1996).

However, the experiences arising from transracial adoption were not all negative. Many of the respondents stated that they felt that they were culturally and personally enriched as a result of adopting a child from another race, as a result of “first-hand insight into South African racial dynamics” (Ledderboge, 1996: 134). Many had made new friends of other racial and cultural groups, and some saw themselves as “catalysts in the process of nation-building” (Ledderboge, 1996: 134).

Williams (2002: 30) speaks of the 'watch-and-wait' phenomenon that many same-sex couples experience when they become parents. Because of the prejudicial perceptions that gay or lesbian parents will sexually abuse their children (Neophytou, 1994; Kennedy, 2002), that their children will themselves become gay, or that they will be more likely to experiment sexually (LaBarbera, 2002), "many lesbian and gay parents feel as if they are parenting on some strange sort of stage – that the world is watching and waiting to see how their kids turn out" (Williams, 2002: 30). The feeling that the world is waiting for them to make a mistake (a pressure to be perfect, if you will), may compound the already existing pressures of having to learn how to look after a child for the first time. Thus, many gay and lesbian parents become hyper-aware of their parenting decisions and interactions (Gelnaw, cited in Williams, 2002). The constant "critical eye" (Williams, 2002: 30), together with possible internalised homophobia, can cause parents to overcompensate in their interactions with their children (Pennington, 1987, cited in Neophytou, 1994). However, other parents feel that being evaluated constantly by family and community has aided them in raising their children: "it makes us even better parents because our parenting is so intentional, so carefully thought out" (Gelnaw, cited in Williams, 2002: 30). Like many marginalised groups, it would appear that same-sex parents have to work twice as hard to receive half the acknowledgement of non-marginalised groups.

As stated previously, there are even fewer role models or resources which same-sex parents can consult for guidance in raising their children, than that which is available for heterosexual parents. However, this may create positive outcomes. Neophytou (1994: 26) asserts that because there are no ordained or preconceived ways of functioning for same-sex parents, it allows them to "[generate] creative parenting skills and coping mechanisms". Also, their children "have greater freedom to negotiate roles and to have more flexible relationships with their [parents]" (Neophytou, 1994: 26). In addition, some gay and lesbian parents feel that their sexual orientation does not necessarily make them any different from heterosexual parents. Wallace (cited in Letellier, 2001: 27) captures the "theme of shared humanity" quite well: "Parenting... in some ways is nothing special. I'm sure three quarters of the world has a four year old". Beach (cited in

Letellier, 2001) echoes this idea, and also indicates that being a parent has helped her to feel less alienated from other people:

Having children brings you a little closer to the world because it's an experience that is kind of universal. I used to feel... I had nothing in common with a person I crossed paths with. But now this person probably has a kid, and we have some kind of commonality (p 27).

2.4 Conclusion

There are many different stages that same-sex couples experience on the path to becoming parents via adoption. Along the way, these couples experience pressure and support from a number of systems, including their families, friends and colleagues, those involved in the legal process of adoption (including social workers and the courts), as well as South African legislation itself. These systems range from the microsystem and mesosystem, through the exosystem and macrosystem, to the chronosystem (Brönfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Unfortunately, most of the influence experienced by same-sex parents is negative, which may compromise them in raising their child or children to the best of their abilities. However, many same-sex parents use those resources to which they do have access, and they utilise creativity in order to give the best that they can to their children. The aim of this study is to explore the influences of the different ecological systems that impact on the families, through tracking their voices and the 'voices' of the social discourses that influence their experience of same-sex parenting.

3. METHODOLOGY

According to Frith (2000: 277), quantitative research, such as survey research, is dependent on "detailed knowledge of the area [to be studied] and a clear understanding of the information required". Therefore, quantitative research requires detailed background

information and theories that can be tested. When one considers the serious dearth of information on adoption by gay couples, and their subjective experiences of such a situation, it becomes clear that qualitative research is more appropriate for this study.

As a qualitative researcher, I am concerned with the “quality and texture” of the experience of being a gay or lesbian adoptive parent in this particular time and place (Willig, 2001: 9), for two reasons. Firstly, quantitative research is traditionally based on positivism, which posits that research can produce an objective and impartial conceptualisation of what is, without any involvement by the researcher (Willig, 2001). This type of ‘male stream’ research, according to Jackson & Van Vlaenderen (1994), is a result of a (largely male) scientific view that a psychological researcher can remain completely objective when interacting with research participants. In addition, Jackson & Van Vlaenderen (1994) believe that it has given the type of unequivocal power to the researcher that allows him/her to “suppress the views of the ‘researched’”. Qualitative methodologies, on the other hand, are based largely on feminist theories, and the major standpoint of feminist research is how power relations within a society work to continue the oppression of women, and minority racial and sexual groups (Parker, 2005). Qualitative methodologies strive to challenge these power relationships. It is my opinion that any research into the experiences of gay and lesbian individuals must allow their voices to be heard, as they have been ‘suppressed’ for many years due to a relatively intolerant view of homosexuality in South Africa.

According to Willig (2001), qualitative researchers do not work with variables defined by the researcher before the research process begins, as this would “lead to the imposition of the researcher’s meanings and it would *preclude the identification of respondents’ own ways of making sense of the phenomenon under investigation*” (emphasis added). This is particularly convenient within the context of this research, as there is very little information on the topic of adoption by same-sex couples, and thus one cannot develop many hypotheses before the research process begins. Therefore, this research will allow emergent themes to develop, while also exploring certain preconceived hypotheses.

3.1 Sample

Initially, I was hoping to be able to conduct a study of five same-sex couples who had adopted children. I therefore placed advertisements in two of the South African publications aimed specifically at the homosexual population. However, Millbank (2003: 564) points out that “random sampling is not a viable research method on [the issue of research into gay and lesbian parenting]”. This is because there are few gay and lesbian couples who have adopted (especially in the greater Durban area), and they may be reluctant to disclose their positions as same-sex parents for fear of censure (Millbank, 2003). It was therefore decided that this research would involve a descriptive case study of two particular families headed by a same-sex couple – one headed by a lesbian couple, and one headed by a gay male couple. These couples were accessed through purposive sampling, as a very specific population was required. This type of sampling is used when a population is relatively distinctive, such as lesbian or gay parents who have adopted children (Northern Arizona University, 1997). The gay male couple was known to the researcher’s supervisor, and the female couple was contacted through a colleague of the researcher. Peter and Terence have been involved in a relationship for more than 11 years. Peter, in his 40s, is involved in acting and teaching, while Terence, in his late 30s, is a manager in the food and beverage industry. Both men are of the white racial group, and while Terence is South African, Peter was born in the United Kingdom and came to South Africa as a child with his parents.

Susan and Alex (their names have been changed in order to protect their identities) are both white South African women. Susan is 54 years old, and Alex is 40, and they both work in the education field. Susan was previously married to a man, and has two biological children from this marriage. After her divorce, she met Alex and they began their relationship approximately 9 years ago.

According to Huysamen (2001), a case study is limited in that it is not generalisable to the general population, and is not comparable to other cases. Indeed, much of the criticism of research into same-sex parenting centres on the fact that the samples are

small, narrowly-defined (that is, much of the research focuses on white, middle class same-sex couples) and therefore not particularly representative of the larger same-sex parent population (Patterson, 2007; Stacey & Biblarz, 2004; Millbank, 2003). However, the area of adoption by same-sex couples, especially within the limited South African context, needs to be opened up to further research, and this descriptive study will hopefully accomplish that.

South Africa is a country blessed with immense cultural, racial, and social diversity. For this reason, “the holist ideal of studying all the important aspects of a particular human whole is unattainable” (Diesing, 1972: 279). This research takes cognisance of the limitations of social science research, and thus aims to simply understand “the uniqueness and the idiosyncrasy of a particular case in all its complexity” (Huysamen, 2001).

It is interesting to note that although no potential participants responded to my advertisements, I was contacted by a couple who is wishing to adopt. Their reason for contacting me was that they had not been able to access any information regarding the matter, and they were not sure how to go about the process of adopting. This, I believe, is an indication of how necessary this type of research is.

3.2 Data Collection

The data collection took the form of one initial semi-structured interview, with one follow-up interview per couple, in order to gather further information. A semi-structured interview approach was chosen as it allows the participants to express their own experiences, in their own words, but also allows for the researcher to obtain the type of information that will answer the research question (Willig, 2001). With both couples, both partners were interviewed together.

Follow-up interviews allowed for salient themes that emerged within the first interview to be addressed and further explored. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed to facilitate analysis of the data.

The participants were asked to sign an informed consent, which stated that their identities will be protected in any written or oral presentation that may be written or given on the findings of this research. This consent form also informed the participants that no person other than the researcher would have access to the tape recordings of their interviews. A copy of this consent form, as well as the transcripts of the interviews, can be viewed in Appendix 1.

3.3 Method of Analysis

This research was analysed using the Voice-Centred Relational Method (VCRM), developed by Lynn Brown, Carol Gilligan and colleagues at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (Ribbens & Edwards, 1998). This is a qualitative form of data analysis, and is based largely on ‘relational’ ontology (Mauthner & Doucet, cited in Ribbens & Edwards, 1998). Relational ontology views human beings not as independent from others, but rather as “embedded in a complex web of intimate and larger social relations” (Gilligan, 1982, cited in Ribbens & Edwards, 1998: 125). The VCRM is also based on hermeneutics, and therefore has a strong interpretive focus in which the data is analysed not only for the meaning that participants ascribe to their experiences, but also for the “further reality ... which can challenge the surface account” (Ashworth, 2003: 19). There are a variety of qualitative methodologies that could have been used to analyse the data of this research. For example, phenomenological analysis or discourse analysis could have been used. These approaches would have allowed the context of the individual’s experience to be explicated, or an exploration of how the individual constructs his/her reality through the use of language; however, neither would allow the researcher to adequately delve into the relational aspects of an individual’s experience – a key focus of this research. The VCRM fits the theoretical perspective chosen for this research project, namely the ecosystemic approach, as it views each individual’s interaction with other individuals, the family, and the social and cultural contexts. While this approach has been used for the analysis of individual narratives, in 2004, a group of four students (Rosalind Lee, Pippa Styles, Robin-Leigh Smith and myself) successfully adapted this method for analysing transcripts of focus groups, for our Honours Research

Dissertations. This research uses the VCRM in order to analyse the couples' stories as individuals, as well as a couple in relation to each other.

The VCRM aims to translate the relational view of human existence into a specific methodology (Mauthner & Doucet, cited in Ribbens & Edwards, 1998). Therefore, this method of data analysis involves four separate readings of the data (in this case, the interview transcripts). According to Lawthom (cited in Goodley, Lawthom, Clough & Moore, 2004: 117), this approach offers "multiple readings of an account, potentially offering richness and complexity while retaining a self/person/individual within the story".

Reading 1: reading for the plot, and for one's own responses to the narrative. The first part of this reading entails reading for the "overall plot and story that is being told by the respondent", including "the main events... subplots... recurrent images, words metaphors and contradictions in the narrative" (Mauthner & Doucet, cited in Ribbens & Edwards, 1998: 126). The second part of this reading is vital for reflexivity. As a qualitative researcher, I am fully aware that my own agendas, perceptions and interpretations will influence the course and results of my research, and self-reflection is essential in research. This reading is designed to make the researcher more aware of personal perceptions (Mauthner & Doucet, cited in Ribbens & Edwards, 1998). In addition, this reading is aimed at allowing the experiences of the participants to be heard, "rather than simply and quickly slotting their words into... our own ways of understanding the world..." (Mauthner & Doucet, cited in Ribbens & Edwards, 1998: 130). Stacey & Biblarz (2004: 139) comment on the fact that heterosexism is a subtle, insidious factor that quietly impacts on much of the research into same-sex parenting; and "[with] rare exceptions, even the most sympathetic proceed from a highly defensive posture that accepts heterosexual parenting as the gold standard...". As a researcher, it is therefore vital that I maintain a level of reflexivity in order to prevent myself from slipping into a heterosexist view of same-sex parenting. I do not wish to 'drown out' the voices of my participants if at all possible.

Reading 2: reading for the voice of 'I'. This reading looks at how the participant talks and feels about him-/herself. The data is explored for the instances in which the participant uses personal pronouns such as 'I', 'we', or 'you'. It is also explored for instances in which the individual moves from such personal pronouns to more 'distanced' words, such as 'one', 'they', and so on. This can indicate areas that cause the individual discomfort, or where the individual can intellectually comprehend an event, but is battling to deal with it emotionally (Mauthner & Doucet, cited in Ribbens & Edwards, 1998).

Reading 3: reading for relationships. This reading allows an analysis of the ways in which participants speak about their interpersonal relationships with those with whom they live, work and socialise. In light of my research, I believe that this reading will be particularly important, as I will be focusing on the negotiation of roles and relationships within the families headed by same-sex couples.

Reading 4: placing people within cultural contexts and social structures. This reading is relatively self-explanatory. Considering that same-sex parents will very likely be influenced by the dominant views of homosexuality that prevail in the societies or cultures in which they live, this reading will allow for an exploration of their experiences as influenced by such contexts.

4 ANALYSIS

4.1 Reading for my own response, and for plots

Two couples were interviewed for this study – Susan and Alex (whose names have been changed in order to protect their identities), and Peter and Terence.

Susan and Alex have been involved in a relationship for approximately 9 years. Susan entered into this same-sex relationship after being in a heterosexual marriage and having two of her own children. Alex has always been involved in same-sex relationships.

When they met through their work in the education field and became intimate partners, Alex informed Susan that she wanted to have a child of her own, and had already begun researching her options. Parenting had been a challenging and, at times, “agonising” process for Susan, and so she was not pleased about raising another child. She felt that she would be able to convince Alex not to pursue the issue of being a parent. However, Alex was determined to have a child. When fertility treatment was unsuccessful, Alex turned her mind to the issue of adoption. Susan found Alex’s “fixation on needing to become a mother” (transcript 1, p 10) extremely difficult to understand, and the ensuing tension created problems in their relationship. However, they were able to agree to adopt a “child of colour” (transcript 1, p 10).

Alex had waited a long time for the opportunity to be a parent. She and Susan were told that there was a child available for them, but they were then told that they had to wait a month as Baby J had a medical problem that had to be investigated before she could be officially handed over for adoption. That month was incredibly trying for Alex, but the following excerpt from the data illustrates the yearning and anticipation that she felt during that month.

Alex: I mean, that was very, very difficult ‘cause then we lived for a month... But, I suspect, and it’s interesting, I... I don’t say this to many people, but it was like that month was like a nine-month pregnancy for me. Where you sort of think Baby J was developing in us, there was a, there was a Baby J soul out there somewhere, she had a name, she had a soul. [...] And I think by the end of that month, we had, we’d become committed to her, and um... I think regardless of her health, we’d have probably [taken her]... (transcript 1, p 8).

Their story is one of struggle – within themselves, sometimes with the people around them, and particularly with “the system” against which they felt they were fighting in order to adopt their child. Another major theme which arose from their interviews was that of difference, how they saw themselves as “living on the edge of difference” (transcript 2, p 10), and their daughter as having to deal with that difference as she grew up and forged her own identity in the world. I found myself admiring the depth of

thought and reflexivity in which Susan and Alex had engaged in order to give their daughter the best that they can. While their reflexivity allowed them to determine their attitudes towards raising their daughter, I felt that it seemed, at times, to lend itself to the “struggle” in which they felt compelled to engage with “the system”. It was also obvious to me at certain points in the interview that Susan and Alex still disagreed on certain issues around raising their daughter, and that there were many tensions between their ideologies and the day-to-day, lived experiences of raising a child as a same-sex couple.

Peter and Terence were the second couple interviewed, and they became parents in an altogether different way. Terence had been engaged to be married, but he had come to accept that he was gay. He ended his relationship with his fiancée, and subsequently met Peter. The two of them had not planned on having children at all within their relationship, although Terence had wanted to have children with his fiancée – it was something that he struggled with when he was trying to decide whether to end the relationship or not. When their domestic worker, Siza*, came to work for them, she already had a three-year-old daughter, T. After some time, Siza became ill, and went home to her family farm in order to get traditional healing. She asked that Peter and Terence look after T while she was away for the weekend. However, she did not return and, for the next 8 months, Peter and Terence tried desperately to find her. Once they had tracked her down, she was well again and still living on the farm with her husband. Shortly after that, Siza had another daughter, U. When U was almost three, Siza fell pregnant with twins and, due to a difficult pregnancy, was confined to permanent bed-rest. As she could not look after U during this difficult pregnancy, she sent her to live with her older sister at Peter and Terence’s home. Both girls have been living with Peter and Terence for the past nine years.

What is most evident from the interviews with Peter and Terence is the suddenness with which they became parents. The transcripts of our interviews revealed a strong sense of bewilderment around the fact that they suddenly had a young child to care for, and yet they approached the task of raising T in an utterly practical and relaxed way. While

* Not her real name.

interviewing them, it was obvious that they had had very little experience in dealing with a three-year-old child, but they managed to find ways of adapting their lives in order to accommodate her. By their own admission, their adjustment to their second daughter was much easier – “with T, there wasn’t a choice and with U, there was...” (transcript 1, p 3). The other major plot within this story is one of strong heteronormativity – Peter and Terence approached the raising of their daughters from a “normal” perspective, simply as *parents*, and without problematising their position as *same-sex* parents. I found myself unconsciously colluding with this heteronormative discourse during the interviews – a danger of a heterosexual individual researching homosexualities, which Stacey & Biblarz (2004) warn against. While I do not want to detract from the ways in which Peter and Terence have decided to raise their daughters, the heteronormativity of their experiences is something that will be further explored.

The themes that arose from the data were incredibly nuanced and complex and, very often, it was difficult to separate the themes neatly to determine under which reading they should fall. This, I feel, reflects the sheer intricacy of the reciprocally influential factors in a person’s experience of his/her life. For this reason, some extracts may be repeated under different readings of the analysis, as they will demonstrate more than one theme. At other times, extracts will be found under one reading when they could very well be said to fit under others as well – this has to be done, as the scope of a short dissertation simply does not allow for an exhaustive analysis of the information that arises from the data.

4.1.1 “Families of Difference”

Both couples spoke of an awareness of their difference from other, heteronormative families. For both couples, this awareness was not only of the fact that they were parenting as same-sex couples, but they were also aware of the fact that they were white couples who had adopted African children. For example, Terence spoke of how this difference could possibly cause his daughters some difficulty as they got older:

Terence: 'Cause, you know, most people already have issues with their parents, so for them it's going to be even harder, you've got the white parents and they're gay... (Transcript 1, p 5).

Susan and Alex have considered carefully how they would prepare their daughter, Baby J, for any difficulties her difference may cause her. They spoke of how they try to read to Baby J about difference, and to encourage her to talk about different families.

Susan: We always tell her she's really lucky to have two moms, but what we, the way in which we're doing it is to talk about different family constellations... And so, to try not to establish heterosexuality as the norm, but simply one variation on a theme. I'm determined to stick to that because I think the power of heterosexuality in society is just staggering and it's that which makes it difficult, not the reality of living differently (transcript 1, p 20).

It is interesting to note the difference in the view of the future that each couple has – while Terence and Peter are aware of the difficulties that their daughters may face, they take a philosophical, relaxed approach to how their girls will cope.

Terence: I think they're pretty well balanced, that they're going to be alright as they get older (transcript 1, p 5).

Terence: ... I like to think that we've brought them up well, and we'll live through it.

Peter: We've weathered everything else, we'll weather this (transcript 1, p 9).

Susan and Alex, on the other hand, appear to be more anxious than Peter and Terence about their daughter's ability to deal with the difficulties that may come their way.

Alex: ... hopefully she'll be secure in herself sufficiently to deal, she'll have the skills and whatever, to deal with whatever she faces, so... (transcript 1, p 18).

Susan: Ja, no, I think she will face some very complex issues. I think they'll begin quite soon, but you just hope that you've done enough that will actually help her ride through them and she won't spin out entirely (transcript 1, p 18).

Alex: At this stage, at three, she doesn't realise that she is different and, and that's going to hit her really hard someday, and in her adolescence it's going to cause chaos, or it could (transcript 1, p 17).

The words "hopefully", "chaos", "spin out entirely" seem to reveal a subtle assumption that Baby J will struggle to deal with her difference as she gets older and becomes more aware of it.

4.1.2 Parental Role Negotiations

Much of the literature on same-sex parenting suggests that same-sex parents are less likely to divide child-care tasks along gender role lines – according to Millbank (2003), Dunne, (1998), and McPherson (1993, cited in McCann & Delmonte, 2005), same-sex parents are more likely to share their child-care tasks in a more egalitarian fashion than heterosexual parents. This is evident in the words of the two couples interviewed for this research.

Terence: In the beginning, I was very much doing the home part, do you agree, Pete?

Peter: Yes.

Terence: Of cooking the dinner and doing the shopping and, um, that sort of part of it... And then my job changed and I got a little notch up the corporate ladder and then another little notch or two, and then it changed.... And Pete now is, is very much the cooking, shopping stuff 'cause his life is more flexible... (Transcript 1, p 16).

Other tasks, such as discipline, are taken care of by either Terence or Peter, depending on the situation and also according to their individual personalities.

Terence: I think I, Pete's a very good disciplinarian... I also get really cross over silly things... I, um, he doesn't worry about messy bedrooms or clothes on the floor, where it's a big issue for me... So I do that bit of it.

Peter: I think we share that quite evenly, in that, you know, it's sort of equal quantities of love and discipline from both, um...

Interviewer: But it's according to personality, then.

Terence: Ja, ja it is.

Peter: Ja (transcript 1, p 16 – 17).

Susan and Alex, due to Susan's initial reluctance to adopt a child, "entered into a contract" (transcript 1, p 13) regarding who would be responsible for what child-care tasks. Alex goes on to explain how the two of them have negotiated their work day in order to accommodate Baby J.

Alex: Essentially, we agreed that it was my need to have a child, and Susan having parented initially, her career was put on hold, and so... Generally, I'd say I do two thirds of the schleppy work... That's in terms of, um, actual, practical, day-to-day chores that need to be done (transcript 1, p 13 – 14).

Alex:... we've sort of shifted our work times so that I start at half past seven in the morning, work through lunch and then end at 3[p.m.], and fetch Baby J at day-care, and then I have the afternoon with her. Because Susan generally starts at half past eight, and... drops Baby J off at her school, so she has a bit of the morning, then works until later, 5[p.m.]. (transcript 1, p 14).

Susan also considers the division of childcare and household tasks to be

differentiated... along a range of lines, um... So there's certain things that are, that Alex does mostly because that was kind of contractually... what we agreed on. But that's not fixed, um... And then around the house... I love gardening, so I do the garden. Alex loves being organised and she loves playing with figures, so she does the money...

Alex: Ja, I generally do the bathing and all the housework stuff, and the day-to-day caring of Baby J... it's also depending on the day of the week and the stresses we have around our work schedules, so duties will swap depending on the pressures at work" (transcript 2, p 7 – 8).

Thus, it can be seen from the data that childcare tasks are divided according to personality type, preferences, and work schedules, rather than according to gender roles. However, it is interesting to note that both couples refer to traditional gender roles when talking of the ways in which they have divided their childcare tasks.

Terence: I almost had the traditional mom role for the early days... the mom role of the person who, stereotyped person who would get dinner together and that sort of side of it (transcript 1, p 16).

Susan, while talking of the fact that she is allowed to focus on her career within her relationship, is aware of the tension between her wish to be more egalitarian within her relationship with Alex compared to her previous relationship with her husband.

Susan: The only role I know, really, is being a mother. And often that, that makes it very difficult to be anything other than that... Alex is very, very generous about it, I now do go away, um, to conferences... which she is hardly doing. And it feels, it feels very odd for me to, because it smacks of the male role. The husband allowed to go off and do these things and not the wife. But I think, in a sense, I, I almost have to keep suppressing those insecurities and just say, 'okay, this is a different space, this is, this is a career space of my life which I would have had had I not met Alex probably anyway'. So I think those have been more difficult for me to negotiate peaceably with myself than Alex has... Ja, I think

that is the very difficult one, I think that's exactly it with, with two women.
'Cause they both come with those roles imprinted on them... (transcript 2, p 8).

Thus, it can be seen that both couples are attempting to make sense of "living on the edge of difference" (Susan, transcript 2, p 10), although this is done by making reference to socialised gender roles. It seems that Susan finds this tension more uncomfortable than Terence does, as it represents a slightly unsuccessful attempt to free herself from the dichotomous discourses of same-sex relationship egalitarianism versus traditional gender roles within her family, regardless of its constitution.

Nevertheless, while the reflexive consideration of gender roles and their (unwanted) impact on Susan and Alex's relationship may cause some anxiety for them, they feel that the effect of socialisation on their conceptualisations of traditional gender roles is not as negative as it could be.

Susan: ... it's complex because we're now changing some of those roles, the only reason why it's difficult is because we still have those imprints... But we carry them out in very uncomplex ways...

Alex: Ja, it doesn't feel complex...

Susan: It doesn't feel weighty [...]. I mean, we're choosing to be particularly introspective here... (transcript 2, p 10).

4.1.3 Internalised Homophobia

Neophytou (1994) talks of internalised homophobia, where the gay or lesbian individual eventually internalises the prejudices and stereotypes that society has towards homosexuals. There is a social perception that lesbians should not (want to) have children, and if this becomes internalised by the gay or lesbian individual, it may create a tension for that person if he/she wishes to have children.

Terence and Peter both spoke of how they had not expected to have children, and so it had made the arrival of T in their lives, particularly Terence's life, something difficult to adapt to.

Peter: ... I had done some nannying, so I had done some work with some very young children... But no, I wasn't expecting to have one of my own (transcript 1, p 8).

Terence: It was very hard for me, very hard, because I had accepted that whole thing [the idea of not having children]. And remember, when I was having children with my... fiancée... it was a different set-up then, somehow (transcript 2, p 4).

Thus, while Terence and Peter are comfortable with their sexuality, they had internalised the homophobic idea that they would probably not have children.

4.2 Reading for the voice of 'I'

This is a particularly interesting reading, as it allows the researcher to start to unravel where the individual's voice ends, and where those of social discourses begin. It also allows the researcher to look for stories underlying the "surface account" (Ashworth, 2003: 19), which may be likened to unconscious communications in psychodynamic theories of psychology. These underlying communications may thus contradict or elaborate on the individual's comments on their lived experiences.

Susan struggled with Alex's need to have a child – she considered Alex's focus on falling pregnant, and then when that was not a possibility, adopting a child, as a "fixation on needing to become a mother" (transcript 1, p 10). She could not understand the desperation that Alex felt. I thus found it interesting to note how Susan spoke of the months leading up to the day that they adopted their daughter.

Susan: Ja, if *I* think about it now, *I* don't think *we* ever attached any sentimentality to what *we* were doing, *it* was a... *there* was an absence of sentimentality. *We* did not for one moment kid ourselves about what it was doing

to *us*... *It's* not wise to gush, and project [oneself into the situation of finally having adopted a child]... (transcript 1, p 7 – emphasis added).

I found Susan's use of 'we' slightly confusing, as it attributed a 'lack of sentimentality' to both of them – directly contradicting Alex's self-confessed desperation to have a child. I then realised that Susan's use of 'we' rather than 'I' was possibly an unconscious reflection of an attempt to emotionally distance herself during the adoption process, as a way of protecting herself from any anguish.

Alex also speaks of the fact that she is an introverted person, and how being noticed by people in public initially made her very uncomfortable.

Alex: And the other interesting thing, you know, that *you're* just noticed all the time. *I'm* quite a reserved person, *I* like to just get on with *my* life and not be seen... There's no chance, *you* just are seen all the time, the minute *you're* in public, people notice *you*, they look and they come up close, they enter *your* space... *That* was initially quite difficult to get used to. Now, *I'm* oblivious to it. (transcript 1, p 22 – emphasis added).

Alex: ... when we've been on holiday in, um, Hermanus, and we've visited places like George, *you* can feel people looking at *you*... And *you* realise *you're* being watched far more (transcript 2, p 4 – emphasis added).

Alex is able to own her introversion, as seen in the use of 'I' when talking of this personality trait. However, her use of 'you' when talking of being noticed (which is contra to her personality) seems to reflect her discomfort, and could be seen as an attempt to distance herself from the memories. She then talks of how she has become "oblivious" to other people noticing her, and she recovers her voice through the use of 'I'. However, she reverts to 'you' again, suggesting some residual tension between her natural discomfort at being noticed, and gradually becoming accustomed to it.

Susan also talks of how 'the system' is closed-minded about same-sex couples adopting, particularly male couples.

Susan: ... if *we* had trouble here... with conservative responses, the chances of *people* being open-minded to male couples adopting, which, for obvious reasons, seems to jar more with *people* than even women adopting... (transcript 2, p 5 – emphasis added).

Susan seems to be making a valid comment on the prejudices of society in general towards same-sex couples, and particularly gay men, adopting children. Her use of the word 'people' can be attributed to this. However, a further extract could point to another possible interpretation of Susan's words. Alex and Susan discuss the concept of 'mothering', in the context of another gay male couple they know who have adopted children:

Alex: *It comes back to a young baby needing a mother. There's a social construct around that...*

Susan: *And a social construct that only women are capable of mothering...*

Alex: Whereas, certainly one of the men in this couple is such a nurturing person, he's absolutely... *I don't want to say like a woman, but...*

Susan: He's every bit a mother, really, and he knows it himself, he just has these huge mothering instincts... But *I* think unless one of them has that, that's [i.e. gay men adopting children] unlikely to even happen... *It's* got to be a man that's got such a tremendous desire to nurture and, and mother.

Alex: So *I* think a lot of gay men wouldn't... wouldn't probably want to [parent]... But then again, *I* might well be stereotyping (transcript 2, p 6).

The above discussion contains strong references to the concept (or even an unconscious personal belief) that two men are incapable of raising, or unfit to raise, children because

of their inability to 'mother'. In light of the previous extract, one can interpret the discourse that 'children need mothers' as being another manifestation of "the dominant construction of gay men [as] presenting a risk to children" (Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan, 2001: 163). This belief appears to be contra to Susan and Alex's more liberal beliefs, probably causing them some discomfort, and they would therefore attempt to distance themselves from such a sentiment by avoiding personal pronouns. On balance, however, it is more likely that this extract is simply an example of the way in which Alex and Susan are able to reflect on social constructs that may have an impact on lesbian parents.

Overall, it struck me that both Terence and Peter were quite comfortable with their experiences – they 'owned' their experiences by frequently using the words 'I', 'we' and 'us'. However, Terence spoke of how he initially struggled with the idea of having to look after a child:

Terence: And I mean, when *I* think that beginning seemed so hard, *I* knew nothing about looking after a baby, 'cause like you said earlier, *most people* would have gone into this process planning it, or at least deciding what to do. *It* happened in a weekend, from [...] very much *a maid's child* in *your* home, which is *at a distance*, um, to, to being left, and... Suddenly *I* was left with this hectic baby that didn't speak... Oh God! (transcript 1, p 6 – emphasis added).

Terence uses the term "most people" to differentiate his own experience, an experience of suddenly having to care for a young child, from that of other same-sex couples who choose to adopt a child. He then goes on to speak of "a maid's child in your home". The use of these particular words nicely illustrates the "distance" that Terence felt between himself and T when they looked after her that first weekend.

Terence later spoke of how he has adjusted to the girls' presence in his life.

Terence: *It* was a big thing... I found *it* a huge, um, issue. And now, *I've* had a whole about-turn... (transcript 1, p 8 – emphasis added).

His shift from 'it' to 'I' demonstrates how his initial struggle has given way to wholehearted acceptance and love for the girls. Peter, in general, showed a strong connection with his experiences raising his daughters, through the use of 'I', 'me', or 'us'. However, he also may have struggled with the first few months of looking after T, and suddenly having to adjust to a child in his life.

Peter: I mean, any going out anywhere suddenly was not something that *you* could just do at the drop of a hat. *You* couldn't just say, 'Jump in the car' because suddenly *there were* bags... And nappies and bottles – well, it wasn't quite that bad for *us*, but I mean it was... (transcript 1, p 15 – emphasis added).

He moves back to the use of 'us' towards the end, but he does not finish his thought and actually name the experience of adjusting to looking after T. One gets a sense that it was probably a complex experience for him.

Interestingly, Peter speaks of how he feels his daughters should cope with their position as the daughters of a same-sex couple and points to societal trends, foregoing the use of personal pronouns as he accesses a social discourse.

Peter: *We've* become the most consistent family [...] in that particular class. [...] *I* suppose also, *it's* not unusual to have two dads [...] *Several kids* now have several dads [...] Because *there are* step-dads, or the second relationship then breaks down, and then *there's* an uncle or whatever, you know [...] *It* doesn't seem to be that unusual anymore (transcript 1, p 7 – 8 – emphasis added).

It seems that Peter and Terence have completely normalised their family for themselves and their girls, by viewing themselves as *parents*, rather than *same-sex parents*.

Susan talks of how her relationship with Alex is different from a heterosexual relationship, particularly in relation to childcare. She accesses a social discourse around traditional gender roles in the process.

Susan: *I* think what happens very often in heterosexual relationships is that *the woman* just takes care of all this stuff, and a lot of *her* own stuff, who *she* might

be... is simply sidelined and suppressed and begun to be shaped by *her* role as understood by society as *being the mother*... And *the father* can, can do what *he* needs to do and, and even when *they're* home, *I* think that, that retains its, the nature of *it* so that *father* will sit and do whatever. And *I* think with *two women*, *I* think *that's* very different, because in a sense *we* both know what it means to be *the woman*, so... *I* think that's both a huge plus, *I* think *it* brings a depth of insight and maturity and compassion and care which *I* think is quite unique to *two women* parenting together (transcript 1, p 15).

This extract shows that Susan views being in a same-sex relationship as being more positive and affirming than a heterosexual relationship, especially in relation to roles and responsibilities and childcare. She generally talks in the abstract, especially when speaking of societal expectations of what a woman and mother are supposed to be. She begins to refer to 'we' when she talks of how both she and Alex know "what it means to be the woman", pointing to the fact that they have a common understanding of society's expectations of them. However, she still focuses on the discourse around "*two women* parenting together" rather than purely her experiences of parenting with Alex.

4.3 Reading for relationships

If one considers Brönfenbrenner's (Brönfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) and Eksteen's (cited in Baron & Byrne, 2000) ecological theories of development, it is apparent that human beings are relational and that interaction with family, peers, and organisations such as schools, work environments, and so on, help to mould the individual's experience of the world. This reading of the Voice-Centred Relational Method allows us to trace how each person sees their relationship with their partner, their child(ren), their families of origin, work colleagues, and the school environment.

4.3.1 Changes in the Primary Relationship

Louw, Van Ede, & Louw (1998: 565) assert that when a child is introduced into a family, there are "rapid changes and adjustments that require numerous demands and sacrifices from the parents". This means that the dynamics of the primary relationship (i.e. the

relationship between the parents) change dramatically; and while some changes are positive, others are negative and place stress on the primary relationship.

Susan, having already had two children of her own in her previous marriage, was initially reluctant to raise another child. Her feelings about raising Baby J are therefore complex and nuanced.

Susan: Um, I think it is a challenge, it has changed our relationship, it must do... I think what happens very often in heterosexual relationships is that the woman just takes care of all this stuff, and a lot of her own stuff, who she might be... is simply sidelined and suppressed and begun to be shaped by her role as understood by society [...] I think with two women, I think that's very different, because in a sense we both know what it means to be the woman, so... I think that's a huge plus, I think it brings a depth of insight and maturity and compassion and care which I think is quite unique to two women parenting together. But [...] I really miss not just us two, I, I really do [miss] that. And especially now as my girls are not here a lot, I, I feel liberated from some of that stuff [the responsibilities of parenting], but Baby J's going to be with us in this context probably for the next 18 years, so... It puts me in a very old age stage to enjoy any kind of liberation, so... Don't see very many wildly liberated 70-year-olds around [laughter]. So I think that has put a strain... (transcript 1, p 15).

There is a slight tone of regret in Susan's words, and it seems that she felt that she was past the time in her life when she was raising children. She also seems to miss the time that she had with Alex before Baby J was adopted. On the other hand, it seems that Susan's view of her and Alex's ability to negotiate parenting of Baby J is quite positive, in the sense that there is a harmony between them that comes from being in a relationship with another woman.

Alex also appears to miss the one-on-one time that she and Susan used to have.

Alex: ... I've always been such an energetic person [...] and for me, suddenly, in the two years we've had Baby J, I feel like I've got old. You know, suddenly I'm

hitting 40, and I'm, I'm tired at the end of the day. So we, before, you know, we might, um, have our own quality time then... We're just too tired to do that (transcript 1, p 15).

Susan also felt that, because she had already raised two children before, she was in a position where she was giving Alex advice on how to raise Baby J.

Susan: I think [...] there has been inevitably me taking a kind of, I don't know what, nurturing, wise old crone, in a sense... And I felt, right, showing Alex certain things that her mother [...] never modelled as a parent [...] So in some respects, that also shifts, because it ends up [with] me taking a role that is not necessarily that of a partner, it's um... Well, it is a partner, in terms of caring, but [...] it's not an even knowing. So I mean, you asked if anything had changed, that obviously wasn't happening before (transcript 1, p 16).

Alex did not agree with Susan's perception that she possessed a knowledge that Alex herself did not have:

Alex: I think, um, I think that is true but I think in some situations Susan believes that there's only one way to parent in a particular situation because she's done it before... And I, I would do it differently, and I can see no reason why my way's not as good... (transcript 1, p 16).

Susan defends her position as having experience as a mother that Alex does not, although she does acknowledge the negotiation in which she and Alex have had to engage.

Susan: Well, I'm defensive, but I also tried a lot of things that worked. [...] So yes, I've had to learn some humility in this thing and shut up and allow Alex to do it differently, even if she bumbles along (transcript 1, p 16).

Peter and Terence spoke of some of the ways in which their lives changed after their girls came to live with them.

Terence: The other thing that I've noticed about how our life changed is from being a couple, going out jolling and to clubs and all that, which I happen to miss

a bit but Pete doesn't [...] Um, our life changed drastically, and [...] for me, it was a hard transition, because suddenly I became a stay-at-home-in-the-evening person, um, needing to organise a babysitter, but that was never an issue for Peter...

Peter: Because ninety percent of my work was happening at night [...] Kind of taken him for granted almost, which is unfair.

Terence: It's true, it was, it was... Ja, it was a big transition [...] Resentful is the wrong word, but ja, slightly annoyed... (transcript 1, p 14).

Terence: [...] Obviously, Peter sits in that pile of the most important sort of things... It dilutes it, 'cause the kids – it's so hard to explain, or verbalise that love for the kids... (transcript 1, p 15).

Peter felt that the spontaneity in his relationship with Terence had been compromised, with regard to intimacy between them as well as simply going out.

Peter: And the good, old-fashioned basics, like you can't suddenly have sex at any time [laughs]. You have to plan and lock doors, I mean... [laughter] You can't just do it in the middle of the dining room anymore... Not that we ever did, but the option was there! [Laughter] [...] I mean, any, any going out anywhere suddenly was not something that you could just do at the drop of a hat... (transcript 1, p 15).

Despite the fact that their relationship had changed in many ways, Terence never felt overwhelmed by their decision to look after T and U:

Terence: Um, like I said before, the logistics were difficult [...] just getting used to [looking after a child], fitting it into our life. Maybe we didn't compromise enough, we just still carried on going out to restaurants and doing things and just took her with, but it never really became a problem (transcript 2, p 5).

It is apparent from the data above that parenting involves a negotiation of techniques, activities and values, a negotiation of the relationship itself – something that seems to occur regardless of whether the parents are of the same or opposite sex.

4.3.2 Relationships Between Family Members

Extended family members may also be affected by the same-sex couple's decision to adopt a child or children, and their reactions can vary from unconditional acceptance of this decision, to outright rejection of the couple. These reactions will then have an impact on the ways in which the couple's extended families demonstrate support towards the couple in their efforts to raise their children.

Susan's family initially struggled to comprehend her relationship with Alex, as she had been married to a man previously and, by her own admission, had grown up in a "very [...] mainstream" family (transcript 1, p 12).

Susan: I think what I presented my family with has been extremely difficult. Firstly, in living with a woman... [...] And the only person who actively, and through his actions, made it extremely difficult [...] is my brother (transcript 1, p 12).

That said, however, Susan believes that her family's reaction to her and Alex's decision to adopt Baby J has been very positive.

Susan: Um, we [she and her brother] appear to be through it, we don't talk about it anymore, and he carries Baby J, talks to her, things like that. [...] So ja, I think family have been absolutely amazing, they really have, all of them, on both sides... (transcript 1, p 12).

Alex's family were supportive of her decision to adopt a child.

Alex: Ja, my family have always been supportive of my being in gay relationships. [...] And my parents and my brother and sister, they've always known I've wanted a child, so... Essentially, they've just embraced [Baby J] [...] Ja, I think it, it was fairly easy. [...] And Susan's girls [daughters from her

previous marriage] have been amazing, they've just embraced her as a sister, so... (transcript 1, p 12).

Susan also spoke of the relationships between Baby J and her older daughters. Susan's daughters show their support for their mother and Alex by helping out with Baby J where they can.

Susan: Ja, [Baby J] just adores them, she adores them (transcript 1, p 19).

Susan: My girls do, if they come 'round, they'll, they'll very often take over the bathing or... We do use them from time to time to fetch her from school, if there are meetings and we can't get there. Um, that's really the only immediate family involved with care. But if the girls are here, they'll do anything, so... (transcript 1, p 15).

In Peter and Terence's case, they had made no formal decision to take on T and they had simply continued looking after her after they could not find Siza. However, when they found Siza and she asked them to continue looking after T, Peter and Terence's families reacted in slightly different ways.

Terence: Well, 'cause there was no build-up for it, it just evolved, most of our friends already knew T, as did my parents and Pete's parents, so it wasn't a child they didn't know, and the same as when we decided to take U... You know, Pete's mom was stressed, um... I must say, mine are... odd, in that sense, they didn't stress at all, I don't know why they didn't...

Peter: No. Well, if they did, they never sort of vocalised it in any way, shape or form. [...] Ja, my mum was sort of, 'Are you sure you know what you're doing? And why are you doing this? Who are you actually doing this for?' Um, you know, sort of check all the priorities are in the right place (transcript 1, p 10 – 11).

So, while Terence's (very close-knit) family seemed to have been supportive of the decision to take on the girls, Peter's mother seemed to be more concerned about their

motivations for taking on the girls rather than their suitability to parent. Since then, the relationships between themselves and the extended family members have been good.

Peter: I mean, they've just spent the weekend with my mum, cause we were [away], and um, they had a great time [...] But you know, I mean, my mom and dad are always delighted to take them... Well, they take them every holiday, don't they? Um, Terry's mom and dad would, would do the same thing, but they just live too far away (transcript 1, p 10).

In Terence and Peter's case, their daughters also have relationships with their biological parents and sisters. Keeping these relationships open was something that Peter and Terence consciously strived to do, for the girls' sake and for their parents' sake.

Terence: They're also quite lucky, they do have a relationship with their other sisters and obviously with their mom and dad. Their mom comes and spends sort of one weekend a month and stays here, and we, we tend to go out and...

Peter: Ja, we try to make ourselves a bit scarce, give them some time (transcript 1, p 3).

Terence: And I think adopted kids probably have a hard time because you're wondering about these parents. At least they know their parents and have a relationship with them, I mean, 'cause I think it take the mystery away, um, of hoping to find them or whatever (transcript 1, p 20).

It therefore seems that both couples, despite any initial tension or disagreement that may have occurred between themselves and their extended families, receive substantial support from family members.

Susan describes the differences between her relationship with Baby J, and Alex's relationship with their daughter:

Susan: ... I think she, she gets something different from me and me from her that is different from what she gets from Alex in certain circumstances. [...] My,

when I think about it, [my way of relating with Baby J is] probably rather more, um, robust, volatile... Alex, I think, works very hard to be always calm and gentle and so on...

Alex: And yet, um... Not 'and yet', just also in terms of the upbringing I had with my mother, is to continually just make her feel special and to say I love her and that, 'cause I think that did a huge amount of damage in our family growing up (transcript 1, p 1 – 17).

Alex alludes to the ways in which her upbringing and her relationship with her own mother has influenced the ways in which she relates to Baby J. This is an illustration of the ways in which the microsystem impacts on the individual and his/her experience of the world and other relationships, according to Brönfénbrenner's (Brönfénbrenner & Morris, 1998) theory.

Terence and Peter's difficulty in becoming accustomed to a child in their lives also included issues as simple as language differences, but essentially related to them getting to know their eldest daughter and her personality, and vice versa, as she was already three years old by the time she began living with them.

Peter: And we were also dealing with, we were dealing with a three-year-old who was... I don't mean to sound weird, but she was personality-less. [...] To a certain extent, right at the very beginning. Wasn't she, right at the very beginning, do you...?

Terence: She was very shy, very nervous...

Peter: Very...

Terence: And remember, she was getting used to strangers...

Peter: She had no idea what was going on. Obviously, she could, she was following bits of conversation from other members of staff who were speaking in Zulu, I have no idea what was going on or what was being said, you know [...]

Interviewer: So there was the whole language issue as well.

Peter: Yes ja, she spoke no English, none. [...] The first day that she came with me to rehearsals, thank God I had two black cast members because this child was desperate to go to the toilet and I had no idea. [...] You know, it was literally, it was that basic (transcript 2, p 5).

Their difficulty in getting to know T, and she them, echoes the experience of Wallace, whose story was told by Letellier (2001) – he adopted two brothers who, when they were first getting to know each other, climbed into the highest point of the play equipment at a McDonald's restaurant and refused to come down to him.

With U, their youngest daughter, Peter and Terence were involved in her life from the time Siza was pregnant with her.

Terence: But with U, we went to the hospital when she was born...

Peter: Yes [laughs].

Terence: And then they wouldn't let us in, and Pete started, as he always does, he says, "But I'm the dad!" [Laughter] And I saw them look at each other with a look that said, "Oh my God, what is going on here?" [Laughter] And they went in, came back [...] then they let us in... (transcript 2, p 8).

Thus, while they only took U into their home when she was three years old, they already knew her from the time she had been born and they did not struggle with adjusting to her presence in their lives.

4.3.3 *Work and Other Relationships*

Both couples also spoke of the support that they had received from those around them, whether from work colleagues or the school that their child or children attends/attend.

Susan and Alex praised their work colleagues for the unconditional support that they were given when they adopted Baby J.

Susan: We're very, very fortunate, we really are.

Alex: [...] And every single one of them has embraced Baby J. They all got to know her, they all ask after her. I had four months maternity leave once we got her [...] We just had gifts from everybody, from people who were the lowest paid admin staff [...] (transcript 1, p 11).

As previously stated, Susan and Alex had adapted their schedules to be able to look after Baby J. Susan feels that this would not have been possible without the accommodation of their superiors.

Susan: But that's also thanks to a very, um, a really nice [manager], who was willing to make those accommodations for us (transcript 1, p 14).

Alex also feels that Baby J's school was very "progressive" (transcript 1, p 15), and that this had translated into the school accepting and supporting their family constellation much more readily than if the school had been more conservative.

Peter and Terence also felt that their work colleagues had been supportive, especially Peter, who works at the same school that his daughters attend.

Peter: It's actually quite interesting, it's never been an issue in school. [...]

Terence: You know, something that's quite interesting is, is we were told last year that we were one of the most stable families in T's class, that most of the parents were divorced... And through the school time, or that they've been at [this particular school] [...]

Peter: We've become the most continuous family [...] in that particular class, consistent in that class [...] (transcript 1, p 5 – 6).

Peter also recounted an incident where female colleagues of his were very helpful in guiding him through the issues surrounding his girls' impending puberty.

Peter: I went to friends at school, actually two other teachers and said, 'I have no idea, what do I need to buy?' [...] A basic outline of, of what we're going to need when, when puberty starts and periods and that sort of thing, but... What physical equipment do I need to go and get? You know, do I get pads or shields or tampons or what? And they went, 'No, no, no, no, hang on! Don't worry, we'll go shopping with you' [laughs]. And I said, 'You don't have to, I'm not embarrassed about having to go and do it, I just need to know what to get'. And then they start talking you through the whole process, 'We don't think that's a good idea at that sort of age', that sort of thing (transcript 1, p 11).

They went on to talk of their friends, and how supportive they are.

Interviewer: So you find your friends and colleagues at work are quite helpful?

Peter: They are.

Terence: We have a nice circle of friends.

Peter: Ja, and, and it's a very open-minded bunch, basically. Well, I suppose they'd have to be, but I mean they, they, it's a very supportive environment [...] Um, if Terry can't fetch the girls from school, I can't fetch the girls from school, there are half a dozen people that I could ring at the drop of a hat, who will gladly go off and fetch them from school [...] Um, but it is a very supportive group (transcript 1, p 11 – 12).

Thus, it seems that they have not experienced any difficulties with their friends disapproving of their decision to adopt children.

4.4 Reading for social structures and cultural contexts

This reading of the data is vital, as it elucidates the interactions between the macrosystem, the chronosystem and the individuals and/or dyads within the families (Bröfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Eksteen, cited in Mouton, 2001).

4.4.1 The “System”

Susan and Alex made repeated references to the “system”, which seems to refer to the heteronormative, and often homophobic, attitudes held by society in general, and specifically the legal system. They felt that they “had to keep questioning” (transcript 1, p 3) the heteronormative assumptions that they encountered during the process of adopting Baby J. In addition, they also felt that this “system” was attempting to discourage them from adopting Baby J as she was not of the same racial/cultural background as them.

Alex: I did a lot of phoning around, across the country really, to speak to the different clinics... Private and public... And ja, I mean that was quite a disillusioning process [...] Mm, and even through religious institutions [...] as soon as they heard we were gay, same-sex, they just... No, sorry. No-one said anything, but you just, you got told there were no children. We waited another 6 months, till we realised they were blocking us [...] They said that there were no babies available, which was absolute rubbish [...] Subsequently, every family in the transracial adoption group [...] has had similar things, so I think they block transracial adoption (transcript 1, p 2 – 3).

Alex: Ja, and then _____ (the organisation that did their relationship and personality testing), which was great fun, because we had to keep questioning their tests about ‘he’ and ‘she’ and roles that were stereotypical [...] (transcript 1, p 3).

They then decided that they would find a private social worker who would help them to adopt a child. They found a local private social worker, who liaised with another social worker who had helped friends of theirs, another same-sex couple, to adopt a child.

Susan: She [local social worker] was working on our behalf here, and she was really good because she agreed... She kind of stood in for the official capacity of sending reports to Jo'burg on our behalf, which was very useful because normally they would have delayed it even further while somebody came and did house visits and so on. [...] So she got to know us quite well. [...] We would have struggled without her (transcript 1, p 5).

Susan: But the woman who did do it, as Alex said, was really, you know, an outstanding person. I think if it had been anyone other than herself, we might have aborted the process (transcript 1, p 4).

I thought that Susan's use of the words "aborted the process" were very interesting in light of the fact that they were trying to become parents – almost a Freudian slip. They then went on to talk of the other aspects of the legal process of adoption.

Susan: We also had to go before the magistrate here, and the real irony was that the magistrate who was in place when we began was actually quite, looked quite favourably on gay couples. [He left the bar], so he got taken off the case. And we had to go through someone else [...] who clearly didn't find us that easy to, um, embrace, but could find no fault with our circumstances [laughs], so he was morally obliged to, to give us the nod, so it was a very bizarre process (transcript 1, p 6).

The above extract shows that, while Susan and Alex felt that the "system" itself was possibly homophobic (definitely heteronormative), there were individuals within the "system" who were not homophobic at all, and were supportive of them. In addition, while they found the process of relationship and personality testing very difficult, in fact, "very, very intrusive" (Susan, transcript 1, p 4), they also acknowledged that the process of screening adoptive parents needed to be rigorous.

Susan: I mean, as Alex said, although I balked against some of that intensive individual grilling and having to go through psychological testing, [...] I think you've got to separate the bureaucracy, which is tedious and cumbersome, from

what is necessarily rigorous in terms of screening a suitable parent (transcript 1, p 6).

It was apparent during the interviews that both Alex and Susan are very aware of the political and gender issues around their sexuality, and their decision to adopt. They made repeated references to having to be aware of any heterosexist (and even homophobic) conceptualisations of their relationship, and others' perceptions of their fitness to parent, while going through the adoption process.

Alex: I think, um, the system usually sees things in stereotypes, it's um... Transracial adoption is an issue, and two women in a partnership is an issue. [...]

Susan: I think they do think in stereotypes [...] Ja, you do need to be alert to where you're being led and I guess some people may not be as alert as we were, um... (transcript 2, p 13)

Their political awareness extended beyond "the system's" perceptions of their relationship, and to broader sociohistorical factors at play in South Africa.

Susan: So I was very, very sceptical and cynical about the assessment thing we had to fill in. And I did say as much, because I... It wasn't... I mean, we happen to be English-speaking, white, and that's actually who it was written for and anybody else who was, a black couple... You know, if there was a black couple trying to, or African, South African black couple trying to adopt and had to go through that, that would just be so to their disadvantage, and that's shocking, I mean that really is (transcript 2, p 15).

Terence and Peter, although they have not officially adopted their daughters, did have an experience with welfare when Siza first left T with them and they couldn't find Siza at her home.

Terence: At, at six months, funny enough, we went to, um, Child Welfare, who I had contacted, who said um, well if we'd bring the kid in, they'll happily look

after the kid. And then we were too far down the life, we weren't even thinking of giving up... (transcript 1, p 3)

Terence: Well, you see, the problem was, there became this whole issue of where, we were not sure of where the mom was, so they said they would just put her into foster care [...] And that became quite a nightmare for us, because you know, we didn't know how we were going to manage this and the whole idea of a baby being stuck in an orphanage was hideous. Um...

Interviewer: Mm. And they were quite insistent that they wanted to take her.

Terence: I didn't find them, Pete never went with me, and I didn't find them very helpful [...] We just chose not to follow it up, not to leave any information [...] I just left it, but the attitude was quite terrible (transcript 2, p 7).

The logistics of looking after a child, as a same-sex couple, were slightly difficult for them in the first few years of looking after T.

Terence: You know, the funniest thing is the early days, in the shopping centres, now I see there's these nice baby-changing places, but it used to be an absolute pain with U. 'Cause U was in a nappy for a little bit after she came to us, um, and I used to get shushed out of ladies' loos [laughter]. You know, now I see they're decent, the shopping centres make a separate family loo, which is just so sensible.[...] It's obviously, the world has changed, there's more men helping look after kids, I mean... (transcript 1, p 5)

Terence also spoke of how, when they first realised that they would have to look after T, he couldn't find any literature to guide him.

Terence: Um... So no, it wasn't easy. I felt that adjustment very, very hard. And there was no literature, you know, bar – there was the sort of Dr Spock-type books, but there wasn't anything... *T was three, so it's not a baby, you know, it's*

a different sort of category or age group that, the books didn't seem to cater for that (transcript 2, p 4 – emphasis added).

Terence initially seemed to be commenting on the difficulty of finding literature to help lesbian parents to look after their children, but it becomes apparent towards the end of this excerpt that he was simply looking for (heteronormative) guidance on raising a child.

4.4.2 Societal Reactions

Williams (2002) speaks of how many lesbian parents feel that they are being watched and judged by society, and the tension that this can cause them. This feeling of 'waiting with bated breath' for negative societal reactions was something of which Susan and Alex were very aware.

Alex: And the other interesting thing, you know, that you're just noticed all the time [...] you just are seen all the time, the minute you're in public, people notice you, they look and they come up close, they enter your space... (Transcript 1, p 22).

Interestingly, Alex feels that geographical location has an impact on the reactions that others have to them.

Alex: I suspect in different parts of the province, and perhaps in other provinces, it might be more difficult (transcript 1, p 12).

Alex: I mean [...] certainly in KZN, there's been no problem from many people, but when we've been on holiday in, um, Hermanus, and we've visited places like George, you can feel people looking at you [...] And I think there's certain conservative white Afrikaans communities that...

Susan: They do have a problem.

Alex: And you realise you're being watched far more (transcript 2, p 4).

Bröfenbrenner's (Bröfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) theory explains how the macrosystem (that is, the ideological and moral systems within which the individual lives) influences the individual(s) and the interaction between partners in a same-sex relationship to create particular paradigms and behaviours. Alex and Susan relate how their feelings regarding how others would react to them as same-sex parents raising a child of a different ethnic group eventually affected their behaviour in public.

Susan: But the other thing we have not mentioned about the change in our relationship is that we've had to realise what that's done to us [...] we tend to publicly put that relationship, um, set it back for Baby J and don't talk about it. And I think that's, that's uh, that's not good for us because...

Alex: It's a loss of identity.

Susan: It's a loss of identity for ourselves and we, it came upon us subtly, where we suddenly realised that that's what we were doing, that publicly we were almost self-effacing, subconsciously... Being mothers [...] makes it very easy for everybody, everybody knows a mother, they don't know how lesbian couples operate (transcript 1, p 20).

Susan and Alex seemed to unconsciously feel that their relationship would prejudice Baby J in some way, and they thus "set [their relationship] back" when in public. In one way, just 'being mothers' allows others to interact with them as 'known entities' – they seem to have been pre-empting any negative reactions that society may have to same-sex parents raising a child. They did, however, realise that they were possibly creating a situation of "shame" for Baby J.

Susan: And we've kind of resolved to be much more careful about that, to say... otherwise that... Because if for one minute we show shame, that will never help Baby J. She, there's no way in the whole world that she must ever think that we're ashamed of our relationship. [...]

Alex: And yet ours wasn't out of shame, it was just a subconscious thing where [...] the mothering was the focus...

Susan: Ja, but she might have read it like that, she might say, 'Well, you never tell your friends who you are,' or whatever. And, 'Are you ashamed?' The answer's no. [...] I think those are things, I think, you have to think quite carefully... and sensitively, 'cause you don't want Baby J to be embarrassed so it's a fine line (transcript 1, p 20 – 21).

Susan: But of course, most of who we relate to now are people who know us anyway, so it's not an issue there.

Alex: Oh ja, most... All our friends, you know, all the family knows, it was more just those few parents [of the children Baby J is at school with] [...] But I guess everything we do, I think that's what we've said we've done, subconsciously everything's about protecting Baby J. 'Cause, you know, we've been very aware of her difference and therefore trying to protect her from being hurt by the world (transcript 1, p 22).

It would seem that, while Susan and Alex state that they are not ashamed of their relationship, there is an element of fear that, if others knew of their same-sex relationship, it could be difficult for Baby J – that she could be embarrassed by her mothers' relationship with one another. This could be interpreted as a form of internalised homophobia (Neophytou, 1994), where they feel, at some level, that their homosexuality could become something negative for their daughter – there is an implicit assumption that she will struggle with her family's constellation, and that she must be protected from this pain.

However, the negotiation between being a same-sex couple raising a child, and taking societal reactions into consideration, is a complex one. Susan feels that by being mothers to Baby J, she and Alex are accepted much more readily by others.

Susan: And we've found it quite interesting that – in fact we talked about it, hey? – that having Baby J makes it easier for a lot of people who would not normally embrace lesbian couples to embrace us, because it kind of defects the lesbian issue to the child, and everyone must embrace a child (transcript 1, p 20).

Another factor which Alex feels allows society to accept their decision to raise a child is Baby J's background.

Alex: But I think for a lot of people, when they hear Baby J's story and that she was abandoned, then for me, most of the people, especially black people, say, 'God will bless you,' and um, 'You've done a marvellous thing, she's lucky'. [...] But the fact that she had nothing, was abandoned, makes it acceptable that some family took her in, and I think regardless of colour (transcript 2, p 11).

It was obvious from the interviews with them that Peter and Terence were completely comfortable with their position as same-sex parents of girls that come from a different ethnic background, and they had not problematised it. It would seem that this allows them to remain unaware of negative reactions.

Peter: We've had no negative response, no kind of prejudice in any way, shape or form. [...]

Terence: No, nothing (transcript 1, p 5).

It may also allow them, and their girls, to cope with any negative reactions that they may experience.

Peter: We had a, a situation a while ago, where somebody said to U, 'Why have you got two dads?' She said, 'I don't, I have three'. End of conversation, dumbstruck, didn't know what else to do. [Laughter] And also, again, we had a couple of days, all the little Grade 1s [...] standing downstairs and I was standing at the top of the steps and, 'Mr _____, is your girlfriend black?' So I said, 'No'. They said, 'Cause U is'. And I said, 'No she's not, she's brown'. [Laughs] And they were, 'Oh. So your girlfriend's not black?' So I said, 'No'. And then one

little bright spark went, 'Is your boyfriend black?' So I said, 'No, he's not!' [Laughter] (transcript 1, p 20).

For Susan and Alex, becoming more comfortable with their position as same-sex parents, and less concerned with others' reactions, resulted in a decreasing awareness of others' reactions to them – and possibly even a decrease in any reactions from those around them.

Interviewer: So you don't think that your perceptions of your family being different, um, as those are changing, people's reactions to you are changing? [...]

Alex: I think I'm not noticing as much...

Susan: It doesn't matter.

Alex: I just, it doesn't matter anymore and I'm far more grounded...

Susan: Look, which, by its own workings might mean that they [others] don't really notice...

Interviewer: That's the thing, ja, that's what I was trying to get at, is that if you're comfortable, then other people...

Susan: Ja, they don't risk it, or think to challenge it (transcript 1, p 23).

One can thus see that the families headed by same-sex parents learn to adapt to, and cope with, the influences exerted on them by the macrosystem.

4.4.3 *Ethnic and Cultural Considerations*

Ethnicity comprises part of what Bröfenbrenner (Bröfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) calls the macrosystem, and has an influence on the ways in which the families interviewed construct and understand their experiences. In addition, South Africa has a very rich

socio-political history (part of the chronosystem), which further adds to the ways in which these families understand their situations. This adds another layer to the experiences of both couples interviewed for this research, as they are Caucasian, and had adopted African children.

Because of the historical socio-political conflict between African and White people in South Africa, Susan was concerned that by adopting a child from an African ethnicity, she and Alex would offend some African people.

Susan: ... long before we even got Baby J, while I was thrashing through all those other issues, I spoke to a black colleague of mine. And I suddenly decided I needed to actually speak to a black person, to say, 'What do you think about what we're thinking about doing?' And um, she was absolutely marvellous, in terms of just saying a child needs to be loved [...] But she said, 'You should expect that there will be many black people who don't like what you've done' (transcript 2, p 4).

As a result, Susan feels conscious of negative reactions from African people.

Susan: I do always feel, um... I'm always very conscious when we go into contexts where, where we relate or just, through shopping or wherever, with other black people, how they might be feeling, I have a kind of... I've, I've made a space in myself to accept any reactions. [...] I think since then, I always hold my breath a little bit because I don't think we can expect everybody will like what we're doing (transcript 2, p 4).

It is interesting to note that, despite Susan's concerns about how African individuals may react to her and Alex's decision to raise Baby J, she comments that:

Susan: ... I've never yet experienced any black person do a double take or be hostile a) at being white and having adopted her, or b) to say she's got two moms (transcript 1, p 20).

Thus, while she fears that their family would draw negative reactions from African people, by her own admission this has never been the case.

Susan and Alex are very aware of their daughter's need for a sense of ethnic belonging, a sense that she is not disconnected from her ethnic identity. As a result, they have tried to encourage her to speak Zulu, the predominant African language in Kwa-Zulu-Natal.

Alex: And one of the things we're very aware of is her need to learn to speak Zulu, which we can't teach her. I really wish we could, but none of us can speak Zulu. So it's about us asking _____, the maid, when she comes, to speak Zulu [...]

Susan: But even that's entrenched as the old social pattern, so it's the maids who speak Zulu. I think the language thing is a huge, is of great concern for us.

Alex: Cause if she can speak Zulu, she can, then she can look and feel like she's a part of the...

Susan: She can make choices about that.

Alex: Another thing we did consciously was to give her a Zulu name... She came to us as Baby J, um, and we kept that because, as I say, she was a little soul and we kept that name, but we gave her a Zulu middle name [...]. But we also thought that would give her a choice as she chooses to rebel and, you know, be called by her Zulu name. [...] I think that, the language thing, could be a huge issue in terms of fitting in... (transcript 1, p 21).

Peter and Terence seemed less concerned with encouraging their daughters' ethnic identification than Susan and Alex, although this could be because they still have a relationship with their biological family. They are, however, encouraging their daughters to learn to speak Zulu, which they are doing at school.

4.4.4 *'Universalities' of Parenting*

Letellier's (2001) article explores the idea that certain experiences of same-sex parents are the same as those of heterosexual parents – he surveys the “theme of shared humanity” that some same-sex couples experience when they become parents, the idea that they now have something in common with (heteronormative) society, whereas before they were ‘different’ (Letellier, 2001: 27). These ‘universalities’ come, in part, from the experiences of the chronosystem, which include experiences that result from life transitions and periods of development common to most people. For example, Susan and Alex spoke of how they have been able to interact with those around them simply as parents, rather than same-sex parents.

Alex: Ja, in the, in the first two years, we've hardly had to buy anything, we've been lent cots and car seats and clothes and whatever, so... I mean, it's incredible, 'cause we've now passed on to other people who have had babies [...]
It's been very, very inclusive (transcript 1, p 11 – 12).

Terence and Peter, as stated previously, seem not to have problematised their position as same-sex parents and simply consider themselves parents. This seems to lend itself to the kind of ‘universal’ concerns that any parent may have, relating to their child(ren) growing up, rather than concerns that may be unique to same-sex parents. These range from money and education, to puberty, adolescence, moving out of home and boyfriends.

Terence: [...] Because, the thing is, our story adds to it with time, because there's all sorts of dynamics to come. Boyfriends...

Peter: Oh, God! (transcript 2, p 13).

Peter: [...] I still think of them as little, but I don't know if I'd cope with boyfriends staying over and [...]

Terence: You won't deal with that very well!

Peter: I won't, I think I'd be horrible! (transcript 2, p 13)

Terence: And now, I've had a whole about-turn, 'cause now I'm working on bigger, longer-term, working out now how will we get them a flat when they're finished varsity and all these sort of silly things [laughs] [...]

Peter: It's all financial. I'm trying to work out how we're going to get through puberty [laughter] [...] Ja, that type of thing. Slightly more immediate (transcript 1, p 8 – 9).

It seems that Peter and Terence's concerns are similar to the concerns that any parent may have, particularly the seemingly universal anxiety that any father may have regarding his daughter. This raises an interesting question as to whether Peter and Terence's concerns would be different if they had adopted male children rather than girls.

5. DISCUSSION

While the data analysed above definitely does not cover the entirety of what emerged from the analysis (the scope of this dissertation precludes a full analysis of all of the data), what was analysed was incredibly rich and layered. The Voice-Centred Relational Method is a useful tool for exploring the different layers of 'voices' that can be heard in a participants words; that said, it is still difficult to adequately investigate all of the ways in which our relationships with individuals, community, society, legislation, and other social networks impact on the ways in which we view ourselves and the world.

There were four main plots or themes that arose from the data: the couples' views of their position in society as same-sex parents; their child(ren)'s ability to cope with this difference; their own feelings about same-sex parenting, even if these feelings were largely unconscious; and the ways in which they negotiate childcare responsibilities. Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan (2001: 46 – 47), from their research into same-sex relationships, suggest that there are two discourses surrounding a non-heterosexual relationship: the first is an "affirmation of difference" and the choice that a non-

heterosexual relationship offers the individuals involved; and the second is an “assertion of equality”, particularly in relation to rights afforded to both heterosexual and same-sex partnerships. It is posited that these discourses can be extended to same-sex parenting, where the parents either reject outright the heteronormativity of society, or where they embrace the discourse of equality and expand this to cover all aspects of their parenting.

It is interesting to note that, purely by chance, each of the two couples interviewed for this research identified largely with one of these two discourses. Susan and Alex seemed to problematise the heteronormativity of the society in which they live, and they appear to have actively strived to move beyond the roles and expectations that their gender would have (traditionally) prompted in them. They have carefully reflected on the ways in which they wish to raise their daughter and what they wish to encourage, and avoid, as parents. On the other hand, Terence and Peter seem to have identified strongly with a discourse of equality, where they see themselves as being very similar to any other couple raising children, regardless of gender or sexuality. They have focused on developing qualities of kindness, manners and confidence in their daughters, and have encouraged their daughters to value who they are and have minimised the ‘differentness’ of their family constellation.

By their very nature, however, discourses have a very strong influence on one’s understanding of one’s position in society. Thus, while each couple lives the tenets of a particular discourse, there is still tension between the lived discourse and the tenets of the other. A good example would be when both Susan and Alex, and Terence and Peter, refer to ‘traditional’ gender roles when identifying what roles they have played in their relationships with their partners, and in caring for their child(ren). As Terence and Peter have normalised their position in society, a reference to a heteronormative concept such as gender roles may not be viewed as entirely unusual – although they are aware of their ‘difference’. For Susan and Alex, it would seem that, despite a conscious rejection of heteronormativity, the discourse of heteronormativity is so pervasive (something of which Susan is very aware – see p 39 in Analysis) that it makes traditional gender roles very difficult to escape entirely when thinking of themselves as parents – a tension that

causes Susan slight anxiety. However, as Weeks et al. (2001: 114) state, while choosing one's relationship values is relatively straightforward, "[the] actual living of the values is, of course, another matter".

Another difference between the two couples is the way in which they view their children's ability to cope with their difference. Weeks et al. (2001: 168) state that same-sex parents are "parenting 'on the hoof', without obvious guidelines", which "can be experienced as liberatory [or] it can also be experienced as a daunting task that requires careful and constant thought". Susan and Alex appear to be quite anxious about preparing their daughter, as well as themselves, for what they see as a difficult time in the future. They made repeated references to how they are 'hopefully' able to prepare Baby J regarding her 'difference', so that she 'doesn't spin out entirely' at a later stage. On the other hand, Terence and Peter, while acknowledging their anxieties and that they will have to deal with the various changes that their daughters go through as they traverse adolescence (and that this may very well be difficult), do not seem to be overly concerned about their daughters struggling with being the African daughters of a Caucasian, same-sex male couple. They are quite positive in their predictions of their daughters' ability to cope. While it is not in the scope of this dissertation to establish whether there is a causal link between the two factors, it is possible that these two views are related to the differing views that each couple has regarding their position in society, as discussed above. It is possible that by problematising one's position as a same-sex couple, one is also assuming that one's child will struggle with his/her family constellation. However, it is also entirely possible that the personalities (and possibly even gender) of the two sets of parents would predispose them to their particular way of raising and thinking about their children.

While many of the studies reviewed for this dissertation (e.g. Millbank, 2003; Dunne, 1998, and McPherson, 1993, cited in McCann & Delmonte, 2005) have stated that household labour and childcare tasks are more equally divided between same-sex partners than between heterosexual partners, any relationship is subject to the impact of differential power between the two partners. As Weeks et al (2001) state, a truly equal

relationship is not necessarily the lived experience of the couple, despite being held up as the principle for which they strive. Nevertheless, a relationship that is not entirely equal in terms of labour division and childcare tasks may not necessarily be seen as unfair by the couple. For example, Peter and Terence spoke of how their work commitments had a large impact on which of them had a greater 'load' in terms of looking after their girls. Terence initially spent more time looking after them, especially at night or for periods of time when Peter was working away from home. However, when Terence's work responsibilities became greater, Peter took over as a more principal caregiver as he is working at the school which the girls attend. In Susan and Alex's case, they entered into a verbal contract which spelt out exactly what each of their responsibilities were. This contract, however, can change. It would seem that the role that each partner takes is subject to negotiation – and this negotiation, while influenced by power dynamics between the individuals involved, is not constrained by traditional gender roles. Their negotiations of each parent's responsibility seem to fall along the lines of work responsibilities, personality type and preferences, rather than traditional gender expectations.

Neophytou (1994) introduces the concept of internalised homophobia, where the lesbian/gay individual may struggle against internalised conceptualisations of homosexuality that directly clash with his/her identification as homosexual. While Susan and Alex did not struggle with the heterosexist assumption that lesbians would not want to be (or do not deserve to be) mothers, Terence and Peter had resigned themselves to the fact that they would probably not have children as gay men. This was a particularly difficult concept for Terence to deal with, as he had always intended to have children within his heterosexual relationship. It is possible that this lent itself to the anxiety and bewilderment that they felt when they first had to look after T. While Susan and Alex did not struggle with the idea of being same-sex parents per se, Susan did have reservations about the idea of adopting a child of a different ethnic group, especially as she had already raised two biological daughters from a heterosexual marriage and felt that she was finished with parenting, which she found anguishing in some respects. Thus, her preparation for becoming a same-sex parent involved less a working-through of her

sexual identity, and more a consideration of what it would mean to embark on the process all over again, at a stage of her life where she was focusing on her career and her relationship with Alex.

Reading for the voice of 'I' is interesting, as it uncovers unconscious difficulties that the individual may have, and it allows the researcher to delineate where the individual stops talking and 'society' starts. For example, there were individual concerns that each of the four participants had, and when speaking of them, their use of 'I', 'me', or 'my' disappeared. For Peter and Terence, these incidents of distancing involved some of the difficulties that they had when they first began caring for T. Williams (2002) speaks of how many same-sex parents feel that they are 'parenting in a fishbowl', with others watching them. For Alex, while she was able to acknowledge that she is an introverted, private person who does not like attention from strangers, she distanced herself slightly from the uncomfortable memories of being watched by others in certain instances and places. This was evidenced by the way in which she moved from the use of 'I' and 'my', to 'you'. Susan spoke of the time when she and Alex were waiting to be told that there was a child for them. She switched from using 'I' to 'we', then to the more impersonal 'it's' or 'there's' and, in particular, attributed "an absence of sentimentality" to the way in which both she and Alex viewed the process of adoption. This was confusing in light of Alex's desperation for a child – at one point, she spoke of how she began to "think completely deviously" about paying someone to give her a baby or even stealing a baby. While she would not have done something as drastic as that, it points to her very real distress and angst regarding her wish for a child. Thus, Susan's use of 'we' rather than 'I' was possibly an unconscious reflection of the protective emotional distancing that she may have engaged in at the time that they were going through the adoption process. In another extract, Susan talks of how she views two women parenting together, as opposed to a heterosexual couple parenting together. She accesses a social discourse around societal expectations of gender roles, and contrasts the ways in which this can create a situation of unequal power in a heterosexual relationship (Weeks et al, 2001), where the woman is "simply sidelined and suppressed", and a same-sex relationship, where there is a common understanding of what it is to be suppressed, so that it becomes more

“compassionate and [caring]”. Thus, she uses a social discourse to illustrate how she experiences her own relationship with Alex, although she very rarely uses personal pronouns.

Further, this reading allowed the participants’ voices to be distinguished from the dominant social discourses that are intricately embedded within their words. For example, Peter speaks of how T’s teacher informed him and Terence that their family was the most stable family of all the children in T’s class. He moves from talking of their personal situation, where his girls have two fathers, to an increasingly common social discourse around changing family constellations, where “it’s not unusual to have two dads [...] there are step-dads [...] and then there’s an uncle or whatever...” It seems that Peter and Terence have completely normalised their family for themselves and their girls, by viewing themselves as *parents*, rather than *same-sex parents*, and there is an implicit assumption that their family is simply one variation on a theme. This social discourse allows Peter and Terence to place their daughters’ situation in a ‘normal’ context (relating to Weeks et al’s, 2001, concept of equality, mentioned above), thereby helping their daughters to cope with any negative societal reactions they may experience. Some may consider this to be buying into the heteronormative view of parenting and a rejection of the political aspects of being a same-sex couple choosing to be parents. On the other hand, it is simply the way in which Peter and Terence have chosen to understand their position as same-sex parents. It is difficult to problematise such an understanding, because while it is a function of the pervasive heteronormativity in society, it works for them and their daughters and thus helps them to cope with societal reactions to their situation.

In the next reading, the participants’ experiences of their relationships are traced so that one can begin to see how different relationships have impacted on the parenting experience. For example, Susan talks of how her relationship with Alex has changed since Baby J has come along, and her experience of their interactions with one another is obviously contrasted with her previous experiences of being married and having her own children – these experiences were, at times, difficult for her as she had “[found] parenting

very scary”. In addition, she acknowledged that she had been looking forward to having time with Alex, and to “[enjoying] ... liberation”. Thus, there is a sense of regret in Susan’s words; however, her experience of parenting with Alex seems to be a positive one, as she talks of the “depth of insight and maturity and compassion and care” that arises from parenting with another woman. On the other hand, there is a struggle between Alex and Susan as to what is the correct way to raise their daughter – at times, Susan feels that she has to advise Alex as to what is right, although she does acknowledge that she has had to learn to negotiate with Alex exactly how they will go about certain things. She does this by allowing Alex to do what she feels is right in certain circumstances, despite the fact that she feels it could be done differently.

Terence and Peter spoke of how their lives were somewhat constrained in many ways when T came to live with them, and how they were not able to move about as easily as before. Terence, in particular, felt that his social life changed dramatically as, in the beginning, he was required to stay at home with the girls as frequently Peter worked at night. Peter also felt that the intimacy between him and Terence had been constrained as well, and the spontaneity had disappeared. However, in some respects, they had continued with their lives as before, going out to dinner and so on. Thus, it is apparent that, like any other parenting couple, parenting techniques, childcare responsibilities and activities have to be negotiated – and, as with many compromises, the resulting decisions are not always necessarily satisfactory for all parties involved.

Relationships with extended family members can also have an impact on the experiences of same-sex parenting. For Terence and Alex, their families of origin were supportive of their respective decisions to take on a child. Susan’s family had originally struggled with her decision to become involved with Alex, and so initially her brother in particular was not encouraging of her decision to adopt a child with Alex. Peter’s mother was concerned about his and Terence’s decision to take on a child, although her focus was more to do with whether they had thought their decision through and were aware of the difficulties they may face. Nevertheless, both couples’ extended families had grown to support the couples, and love the children, and they help to look after the children where

possible. This positive reaction from their families contradicts the largely negative experiences related in much of the literature reviewed (Savage, 1999; Neophytou, 1994; Williams, 2002). The children had grown to love their extended families as well – Baby J “adores” Susan’s biological daughters in particular, and T and U both love spending time with their grandparents. T and U have contact with their biological family, something which Peter and Terence encourage for the sake of their girls, although Terence was initially very angry with Siza for what he saw as abandoning her child. According to Peter and Terence, T and U love spending time with their parents and sisters, whether at their biological parents’ home, or Terence and Peter’s home. Each of the couples felt that their individual relationships with their daughters were different, and special. This was related to how each parent’s personality interacted with each daughter’s personality – a situation that one could reasonably expect to be similar to the interactions between heterosexual parents and their children. In addition, Alex alluded to the ways in which she was raised, and how this impacted on how she consciously tries to raise Baby J. This is a good example of the ways in which the microsystem’s (i.e. Alex’s own experiences of being parented) influence on Alex impacts on her understanding of what her role as a mother should involve (Brönfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Letellier (2001) relates an incident where a gay man struggled to get to know his two foster boys, and they him. Patrick (2006) also refers to how frustrating it can be to care for foster children, as it involves them getting to know each other, and particularly because many of his foster children have been hurt or abused. While T was not abused, she did not speak English, and Terence and Peter did not speak Zulu, so they initially struggled to get to know her. This probably would have compounded the bewilderment that Terence and Peter felt about suddenly having to care for T. With U, they had been involved in her life from the time she was born, despite the fact that she also only came to stay with them permanently when she was three years old. Thus, they did not struggle to get to know her as they did with T.

Both couples had had very positive experiences with work colleagues, and the schools that their daughters attended. Susan and Alex referred to the gifts they received when

Baby J was due to come home with them, and the accommodation that their manager had shown to them; Alex was even given four months' maternity leave to look after Baby J. Terence did not specifically mention work colleagues, although Peter said that the school that his girls attend, and where he works, was like a "family" that had accepted their situation without concern. He said that the other children at the school did not react negatively to his daughters, which he attributes to the fact that they have grown up with U and T, and so have become accustomed to their family configuration. This is contra to the negative reactions and rejection that many children of lesbian parents allegedly suffer (Neophytou, 1994; Patterson, 1992, and Tasker & Golombok, 1991 – both cited in Milbank, 2003). In addition, he recounted how female colleagues had offered to help him address the issue of his daughters' impending puberty. Alex felt that the politically "progressive" nature of the school Baby J attends was directly responsible for the way in which they had "embraced" the child. In addition, both couples mentioned that their friends had been very helpful and supportive of their decision to parent. Thus, while the literature reviewed shows that many lesbian couples are greeted with negative reactions when they announce their intention to parent (e.g. Patrick, 2001; Savage, 1999), neither couple seems to have had negative experiences with friends.

The final reading involved placing the couples' experiences "within broader social, political, cultural and structural contexts" (Mauthner & Doucet, cited in Ribbens & Edwards, 1998: 132). A large focus of Susan and Alex's story was the 'system', that is, the heteronormative and often homophobic attitudes held by society and specifically the legal and welfare system. Their experience of the adoption process was largely negative, and they described it as "disillusioning", "intrusive", "onerous" and "tiresome". Their experiences with private religious adoption agencies were particularly negative, as they were told that there were absolutely no children available for adoption – they felt that this was a direct "blocking" of their attempts to adopt. This is similar to Patrick's (2006) experience of a religious organisation preventing his attempts to foster children. Their other attempts to adopt through government organisations also left them feeling discriminated against – as Alex said, "no-one said anything, but you just, you got told there were no children". It appears that, if they were in fact discriminated against, this is

in direct contradiction of the Constitution of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996, which expressly prevents discrimination on the grounds of sexuality. Susan and Alex then decided to adopt through a private social worker, who, in their words, “was really good” and “an outstanding person”. Their experiences with the courts were mixed; their initial magistrate was sympathetic to their situation, and looked set to grant them an adoption. However, he left the bar and the next magistrate, although he did not seem to agree with same-sex adoption, granted their adoption order. This is encouraging, considering that it is possible for a magistrate to prevent a same-sex couple from adopting if he/she is prejudiced against same-sex parenting, simply by using the ‘best interests’ standard, which has been influenced strongly by fundamentalist Christian and nuclear family ideology (Mosikatsana, 1996) – the approach used to determine whether an adoption order is granted is at the discretion of the magistrate involved (de Wet, J., personal communication, 18 June 2005). Susan and Alex’s political awareness also extended to the ways in which some of the organisations’ policies may impact on non-Caucasian, second-language English speakers. They felt that the wording of some documentation would prejudice such individuals as they were written specifically for Caucasian, English-speaking individuals, particularly heterosexual individuals. They felt they had to “[keep] questioning” the wording of documents they were required to fill in.

Terence and Peter, despite not being legal parents of their daughters, had an experience with a welfare organisation. They contacted this organisation for help in finding Siza, but the organisation said that they could not do that but would take T as a foster child. Terence and Peter thought this insensitive and “the whole idea of a baby being stuck in an orphanage was hideous”, and they felt that “the attitude was quite terrible”.

Terence felt that there was very little structural support for him and Peter in their attempts to care for T. For example, there was no place for them to change T’s nappy when they were in a shopping centre – baby changing stations were found only in women’s toilets, and this created some difficulty for Peter and Terence. Today, there are family toilets that allow mothers or fathers to change their children’s nappies. This is probably due to changing social expectations of the roles mothers and fathers may take in caring for their

children. Terence also spoke of how there was no literature to guide him in caring for T – a fact that Neophytou (1994) also pointed out. Thus, from the experiences related above, it becomes evident that the macrosystem (Brönfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), which comprises the dominant ideologies of the society in which the individual lives – in the case of South Africa, a strong heteronormative ideology – can create negative experiences for same-sex parents. Franz Fanon (cited in Bulhan, 1985) talks of how a dominant belief system of prejudice can create a situation of structural violence for an oppressed group – although his theory applied to racial prejudice, one can apply it to heteronormativity and homophobia. However, there are individuals within the macrosystem that can mitigate the same-sex parents' negative experiences, creating nuanced understandings of their world.

Another manifestation of the dominant heteronormative and/or homophobic and/or racially prejudiced ideologies that comprise the macrosystem is the way in which individuals in society have reacted to the couples interviewed. As previously stated, Williams (2002: 30) wrote of a 'watch-&-wait' phenomenon, where same-sex parents feel as though society is watching them for any sign that they are not parenting well. This feeling of being watched, and even judged, was evident in Susan and Alex's story. They spoke of how, when they first adopted Baby J, it was difficult to become accustomed to the stares from others. Interestingly, Alex and Susan felt that geographical location within South Africa had an impact on how 'watched' they felt. For example, they were definitely more aware of others' stares when in George and Hermanus (both in the Western Cape), than when in their home city, which is more cosmopolitan than either of these towns. Because Alex and Susan are a Caucasian couple and their daughter is African, it is difficult to determine whether people in these two towns were unaccustomed to the racial dynamic in their family, or whether they were reacting to Susan and Alex's known, or perceived, sexual orientation. Nevertheless, it points to either differing macrosystems across South Africa, or differing influences across geographical location from one dominant macrosystem, or even differing interpretations & influences of the sociohistorical context of South Africa (the chronosystem – Brönfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The macrosystem (and the other environmental

systems) can influence the individual and thus the interactions between partners, helping to shape the interactions between the partners. Susan and Alex found that their awareness of possible negative reactions from others eventually impacted on their interactions with one another while in public. They realised that they had begun to “set [their relationship] back” while in public, ostensibly to protect their daughter from prejudice. They found themselves compromising their identities as same-sex parents, and focused purely on projecting themselves as mothers while in public. They felt that others would know how to interact with mothers better than how to interact with same-sex parents, and so unconsciously pre-empted any negative reactions that might have arisen. This relates to Williams’ (2002) ‘watch-&-wait’ phenomenon, as it could also be viewed as a pre-empting of any negative societal views of their ability to parent, simply because they are lesbian. However, they realised that by trying to prevent prejudice or embarrassment for Baby J, they could, in fact, actually be creating a situation where they seem to be ashamed of their relationship. This is evidence of the difficult negotiation that a same-sex couple engages in when trying to parent – balancing their identity as a loving same-sex couple against any prejudice that they and their children may face. However, there also seems to be an implicit assumption that Baby J will most likely find their relationship to be something that causes her shame, embarrassment, and discrimination from others. This could be seen as another form of internalised homophobia on Susan and Alex’s part (Neophytou, 1994). On the other hand, Susan feels that by presenting as mothers to Baby J, it helps others to accept their lesbianism more readily, as others can identify with something that they know and, presumably, get to know Susan and Alex for who they are as people rather than simply judging them for being lesbian. Similarly, Alex feels that Baby J’s story, which involves her being abandoned shortly after birth, creates pity in others and helps them to see Susan and Alex as rescuing her from a certainly doomed fate – thus making them more readily-acceptable.

Peter and Terence, in contrast, seemed to be completely comfortable with their position as same-sex parents, and reported that they had had no negative reactions from others. It would seem that by not problematising their family configuration, they are able to ignore any negative reactions from others. They also seem to use humour to deflect any queries

or negative reactions from others, as evidenced by Peter's story of the Grade 1 boy. Susan and Alex also acknowledged that as they have become more accustomed to their family, their awareness of negative societal reactions had decreased. Susan and Alex seemed to attribute this change to the fact that they are so comfortable with their family that others do not "think to challenge it". Thus, it is unclear whether a decreased awareness of negative reactions from others could be due to a) simply not noticing negative reactions, or maybe interpreting others' reactions as being more positive than they are, or b) others not noticing them as much as before because they are less self-conscious. Regardless of the origins of the change, it would appear that same-sex parents develop ways of coping admirably with negative societal reactions.

Susan and Alex were very concerned about possible negative reactions from others due to the fact that they had adopted cross-racially. Susan, in particular, spoke to African friends to determine whether their decision would offend African people. She also stated that she had "made a space within herself" for any negative responses – she had prepared herself for this eventuality. Her consciousness of the racial tension and segregation that characterises South Africa's history (the influence of the chronosystem, once again) makes her very aware of any negative reactions from African people. Despite her anxieties, she reports that she has "never yet experienced any black person do a double-take or be hostile..." This seems to suggest that Susan's concerns are largely unfounded – and is possibly an echo of their assumption that Baby J will struggle to deal with being raised by Caucasian lesbians as she grows older. For, although much of the literature on same-sex parenting suggests that the experiences of the parents and the children are negative, Millbank (2003) cites Patterson (1992) and Tasker & Golombok (1991), who report in their studies that children of same-sex parents do not seem to differ significantly from children in heterosexual-headed families in terms of psychiatric state, levels of self-esteem, and quality of friendships, popularity, sociability or social acceptance.

Another major concern regarding Baby J's ethnic identity is her ability to speak an African language. Susan and Alex were encouraging Baby J to speak Zulu, as they felt it would help her to feel less alienated from her ethnic background, and therefore help her

with “fitting in” with other African groups. Further to this, they have given her a Zulu name. Terence and Peter did not seem as concerned about their daughters’ ethnic identity. However, the girls do have contact with their biological family, and so are exposed to their cultural heritage in that way. Further, Peter and Terence are encouraging their daughters to speak Zulu.

The final theme to emerge from the data was that of universal concerns of parenting. Wallace (cited in Letellier, 2001:27) speaks of how “[parenting...] in some ways is nothing special”, and Beach (also cited in Letellier, 2001: 27) also comments on how parenting is an experience that is “kind of universal”, so that same-sex parents come to feel that they share something with heterosexual parents. Alex reported how having Baby J had been an “inclusive” experience, as she and Susan had shared baby car seats and other equipment with other parents. Peter and Terence also spoke of how worrying about how they would deal with paying for their daughters’ education, their daughters becoming independent, puberty and boyfriends. These concerns seem to be part of any parent’s lot in life, regardless of sexuality or family constellation.

6. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to qualitatively explore the experiences of same-sex parents, and the ways in which they deal with raising their children in a heteronormative, and often homophobic, society. Bröfenbrenner’s (Bröfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) ecological theory of human development, supplemented by Eksteen’s (cited in Mouton, 2001) ecological theory was used as the theoretical framework for understanding the multiple influences on same-sex parents and their families. The Voice-Centred Relational Method, developed by Brown & Gilligan (cited in Ribbens & Edwards, 1998), was used to analyse the data as it allowed an exploration of the many levels of social influence explicated in the ecological theoretical framework. Mauthner & Doucet (cited in Ribbens & Edwards, 1998: 135) admit that using the VCRM results in “overlapping themes and sub-themes”. This is an artifact of this particular method as it is not simply a thematic analysis of the data, but an exploration of the complex ways in which individuals create

their realities by weaving their own experiences with the discourses of the societies in which they live. A benefit of the VCRM in the context of exploring same-sex parenting, especially as it is a relatively uncharted research topic in South Africa, is that it considers the contexts within which the individual lives, unlike many other methods. It also allows the voices of the participants to be heard through the social discourses that inform their experiences, as the researcher is encouraged to use reflexivity.

This study is, admittedly, broad in scope as it was an attempt to obtain an overview of the issues that same-sex parents face and, thus, open up a variety of topics for further study. Thus, it was not possible to thoroughly explore all issues that arose from the data. The themes that arose from the data included the couples' perceptions of their societal position as same-sex couples who are parenting; their child(ren)'s ability to cope with the 'difference' that their parents may feel that they embody; the parents' feelings regarding same-sex parenting, even if these feelings were largely unconscious; and the ways in which same-sex parents negotiate childcare responsibilities. Other themes that were explored included the particular issues that each couple (and each parent within the couples) struggled with, and how they were able to voice these struggles, and where they placed themselves in relation to the social discourses to which they were exposed. Such difficulties included the impact of the socio-political history of South Africa and the ways in which this could impact on the reactions from others, as both couples are Caucasian and have adopted African children. The influence of relationships with extended families, work colleagues, school acquaintances and other individuals and organisations was also examined, and it emerged that, while some negative reactions had been experienced by the couples, they had largely been supported by those with whom they came into contact. This is a matter that requires further study, as well as the fact that the couples interviewed for this study seem to have developed creativity and improved coping skills in order to raise their children in a way that is healthy for all involved. Interestingly, Susan and Alex felt that geographical location may have an effect on the ways in which others react to same-sex parenting – it is proposed that this is an artifact of differing religious and moral perceptions within different parts of South Africa. The heteronormativity of society, and the ways in which this can hinder same-sex parents in

the raising of their children, was discussed, as was the relative importance of maintaining the ethnic identity of an adopted child who is ethnically different from his/her parents. Further issues that were explored included the concept of internalised homophobia and legal processes (among other macrosystemic influences).

Other topics that could be studied further include possible homophobia in the social work field, and possibly the impact that this could have on the outcome of attempted adoptions by same-sex couples; the intricacies of parental role negotiations between same-sex parents; and the relationship between geographical location and attitudes to same-sex parenting. A topic that, I believe, particularly warrants further study within the South African arena regards the extent of discrimination (towards the family and/or children) based on the sexual orientation of parents; and the ways in which same-sex parents cope with any negative reactions, and how they teach their children to cope.

During the initial stages of this research, the legal factors surrounding adoption were assumed to have an effect on the couples' experiences of adoption and parenting. While there was evidence of such effect, it was not as significant as initially thought. Another considerable limitation of this study is that it involved only two families, thus it cannot be considered to be representative in any way of a homogenous experience of same-sex parents. For this reason, as well as the fact that there is an increase world-wide in the number of same-sex couples who adopt, it is vital that more research is conducted into the experiences of same-sex parents.

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8. APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. The decision to parent:
 - a. How did you decide to become parents?
 - b. Why did you decide on adoption
2. The adoption process:
 - a. How long did this process take?
 - b. What difficulties were encountered?
 - c. Was there anybody or anything that was particularly helpful or positive?
3. Legalities:
 - a. Who is the legal parent?
 - b. How did you decide who would be the legal parent?
 - c. Have you encountered any difficulties related to legal guardianship?
4. Childcare responsibilities:
 - a. How is childcare divided?
 - b. How have you negotiated this division?
 - c. If one of you has more responsibility for the child, who is it? (Is this influenced by legal guardianship?)
 - d. Are there any other family members or friends who help with childcare?
5. Family relationships:
 - a. How did your family members react when you told them of your decision to adopt?
 - b. How has the relationship between you, as a couple, changed (if at all)?
 - c. What are the relationships like between each parent and the child/children?
 - d. If you have more than one child, how do you view the relationship between them?
6. Societal Reactions:
 - a. What sort of reactions have you had from people in general regarding your position as same-sex parents?
 - b. How did you feel about these reactions?
 - c. How did you deal with any negative reactions?
 - d. Have your children told you of any reactions that they have had to deal with?
 - e. How have you dealt with these situations?

9. APPENDIX 2 – TRANSCRIPTS

Susan and Alex: Interview 1

Leigh: Before we start, if you don't mind me asking, how old are the two of you?

Susan: 53

Alex: I'm 39.

L: Alright, um, [...] I'd like to know, for you, because it was your yearning for a child, what brought that up? What do you think...

Alex: The yearning?

L: Ja, the decision to be a parent.

Alex: Well, I've always wanted to be a parent...

L: Mm

Alex: You know...Um, I had quite an abusive home background, so... I knew I had to put myself together before I could parent...

L: Ja.

Alex: So I sort of did the career thing first. And I knew I'd want to parent as an older, you know... When I did, at 30, start trying to fall pregnant, obviously being in a gay relationship doesn't help with falling pregnant, so I had to go the infertility route. And, um, ja... At that time in my life, biologically, the need to have a child was very high [inaudible]...

L: Mm

Alex: I just knew that I had to do it. I tried on and off, um, with the fertility treatment for about six years to no avail. Then the specialist said I had gone into peri-menopausal state, so that's when we started looking to adopt.

L: Ok.

Alex: And that's it. [Inaudible] straddled another rela... Well, when I was on my own, and then when I came together with Susan...

L: Ok.

Alex: [...inaudible] trying to negotiate...

L: Mm

Alex: ...between the two of us...

L: Ok, so it's quite a long [inaudible] for her?

Alex: It was very long. And um, a lot of people would have kept on trying, after that, but it was essentially 2 years of difficult trying in our relationship, and... I think it, financially, it was an issue, but it was more an emotional, just day-to-day thing, the thing of counting the hours to the next period, or whatever... So it was [inaudible] actually, we decided we couldn't continue like that, not with the chances of falling pregnant being so low.

L: Mm. So, the costs outweighed the benefits, at that stage...

Alex: Mm.

L: Ok. Ok. And obviously, you battled with this...

Susan: Mm

L: ...this whole thing?

Susan: Mm. Ja, I did. [...] No, when I met Alex, one of the first things she said was 'I do want to have a child', and I was distant really, although I can still picture when she said it... Um, I didn't, I thought 'Oh well, I'm sure I can handle that, dissuade her... I certainly didn't allow it to impinge on conscience or intellect to the degree I should've, probably... Um, had I properly anticipated what we would go through, but um... No, again, just because I had done it before, and I find parenting very scary, and it's been a huge... I always say the girls are the greatest gift I've been given, but they've also... it's just made life so indescribably hard, the anguish and the problems, you know. I thought, you know, having finally got two to, into their 20s, unscathed, on track, fulfilled, self-actualised, I just thought I cannot face the responsibility of doing it again, what it takes out of me. So no, it wasn't easy.

L: Ok. Um, so you came to adoption obviously because other methods didn't work... Ok. Moving onto the actual adoption process, how did you start with that, you started researching it?

Alex: Ja, we went... I did a lot of phoning around, across the country really, to speak to the different clinics and... Private and public... And ja, I mean that was quite a disillusioning process... You know, at that stage, you know, the issue of race was an issue for Susan, so it was about looking for a White child, and just knowing that there were no White children to be, um, that were available...

Susan: Not through the State system.

Alex: No.

Susan: You could pay.

Alex: Mm, and even through religious institutions, like there was a Catholic adoption kind of agency, and as soon as they heard we were gay, same-sex, they just... no, sorry. No-one said anything, but you just, you got told, there were no children. Then you sort of think completely deviously about, well, don't I know someone who's just fallen pregnant, can't I pay someone... Can't I steal a baby [laughs].

Susan: I have to say those were Alex's ideas...

Laughter.

Alex: No, I was pretty desperate by then. Um, if I can't express myself [inaudible]. So it was through the Internet, through phoning around. And then we went to _____ Child Welfare, and... But I mean, obviously, a whole lot happened in between, obviously by the time we were there, we knew we would get a child of colour. So, ja. [inaudible].

L: Ja, I just want to know, how long did it take, from the time you started researching until you actually got to _____ Welfare?

Alex: About 6 months. 6 months till _____. We waited another 6 months, till we realised they were blocking us. Hugely... I think... They said that there weren't any babies available, which was absolute rubbish.

Susan: Ja, that simply wasn't true.

Alex: Ja, and... There's no ways. And then they'd... Subsequently, every family in the transracial adoption group in _____ has had similar things, so I think they block transracial adoption.

L: Mm.

Alex: And I think the fact that we were same-sex couples didn't help either. So the entrance... We got accepted on paper very easily, but the process wasn't rigorous at all. It, there was just delays, delays, and they kept saying, 'there are no babies'. And that's when, after 6 months, I said to Susan, this is ridiculous. And we knew of a same-sex couple in Jo'burg that just got a baby.

Susan: Mm, they were guys, so...

Alex: Ja, which is... much more difficult.

L: Ja.

Alex: And so we went through their social worker that they had used. She was absolutely fantastic, embraced us completely. But we went through a four-month, very, very rigorous process of testing, psychologically, financial statements, then medicals.

Susan: Relationship [testing]...

Alex: Ja. And then FAMSA – was it FAMSA? Tests and that for relationships, which was great fun, because we had to keep questioning their tests about 'he' and 'she', and roles that were stereotypical... But over those four months, and those were very taxing, travelling back in the car from Jo'burg after each one, inevitably we'd end up in tears because it was very... And I think, especially for you, Susan, 'cause you, you knew you were a damn good mother, and now you were being...

Susan: Tested.

Alex:... tested to the nth degree.

Susan: Ja, it was quite... But before I say that, I mean, I realise we could be had up for liability for what we said about the _____ Child Welfare. Please –

L: No, I won't say anything.

Susan: Please.

L: No, No I won't.

Susan: They certainly would take a case against us. We're basically accusing them of racism.

L: Mm.

Susan: Um, I found that process, a lot of it very, very intrusive. Um, but only because I had already grown two children to their twenties without them going off the rails or me going off the rails. So, I mean, I had to... Ja, I had to swallow hard on a lot of those, especially when... There were often moments when basically the, my fitness to parent an adopted child was questioned.

L: Mm.

Susan: A lot because of my age, um, but also being told, 'do you realise you have to be patient, do you realise...?'. And I thought, yes, I do realise this. I do know all about this. I also know myself, that I can lose my, I can get impatient very quickly, but it's over. So to even, there were a lot of things I wouldn't even acknowledge because I knew exactly how they would be construed. But without knowing how I lived with them. So, yes, I

get mad at Baby J quite quickly, but it's over in seconds, and it doesn't result in hitting or weeks of silence, anything like that. So I knew that would be the case, and I, what I was terribly conscious of all the time was whether anything would jeopardise Alex's chances of getting a child, I mean... Cause I knew there was no reason for them not to give us a child. We were, we were probably one of the... sounds arrogant to say so, but we were probably one of the best-constituted scenarios one could possibly hand a child over to, in terms of experience, maturity, educational background, financial security... Proven records of a domestic stability... So I did find some of the process... But the woman who did do it, as Alex said, was really, you know, an outstanding person. I think if it had been anyone other than herself, we might have aborted the process.

L: Mm.

Susan: Ja.

Alex: But at the same time, the fact that the, that that process is in place is really a good thing, in terms, of course, of protecting the child, because I felt that even the _____ scenario... Ja, wasn't fair at all.

L: Mm.

Alex: It was all very superficial.

Susan: But what we didn't say was that we actually had a private adoption agent.

Alex: She used to... Social work...

Susan: Social worker.

Alex: The Child Welfare thing.

Susan: She was working on our behalf here, and she was really good because she agreed... She kind of stood in for the official capacity of sending reports to Jo'burg on our behalf, which was very useful because normally they would have delayed it even further while somebody came and did house visits and so on. Whereas this woman, who was from Cape Town, just came and did them for us and we were really happy about that. So she got to know us quite well.

L: So, there were two women then?

Susan: Mm.

L: One here and one in Jo-burg.

Alex: And the one we paid privately...

L: Mm.

Alex: ...she was a retired social worker from _____, so she knew, ja, the system that she was able to use...

Susan: Cause you had to go through the magistrate here, and she knew them personally, and it was... I... We would have struggled without her.

L: Mm.

Alex: And just to give clarity on a bureaucratic process, cause you want to bash your head against the wall when the magistrate doesn't think this, and... It's very disempowering.

L: Mm.

Alex: I guess, as academics, when you sort of, ja... I don't know... So often you're in control of the bureaucracy – not anymore, I suppose [laughs], but... You know, you just want to understand, you want to... be given rational answers and just be told that it's nothing. Closes down...

Susan: We also had to go before the magistrate here, and the real irony was that the magistrate who was in place when we began was actually quite, looked quite favourably on gay couples. Ended up stealing two CDs from a shop in town, so he got taken off the case [Laughter]. And we had to go through someone else...

L: Ok.

Susan: ...who clearly didn't find us that easy to, um, embrace, but could find no fault with our circumstances [laughs], so, he was morally obliged to, to give us the nod, so it was a very bizarre process.

L: Mm. It sounds like it was a very... What's the word? It mu... it must have been a process that made you feel very insecure. Not, like you say, not knowing what's going on, or paperwork shuffling backwards and forwards, or the interminable waiting.

Alex: Mm, delays. 'Sorry, this person's not available...

L: Ja.

Alex: ...she's not in her office'.

L: Ja, it must have been horrible, horrible. So you say the process itself is not very... What's the word, user-friendly? That there were some people who were really wonderful, specifically the two social...

Susan: The bureaucratic process is, but, but not... I mean, as Alex said, although I balked against some of that intensive individual grilling and having to go through psychological testing, and relationship aptitudes and things, I think you've got to separate the bureaucracy, which is tedious and cumbersome, from what is necessarily rigorous in terms of screening a suitable parent. I think those two are... And they're both onerous...

L: Ja.

Susan: ... and they both take it out of you...

L: Mm, mm.

Susan: ...but the one is more tiresome than the other.

Alex: Ja. The interesting part about the process was the four months that we were, we went up once a months for four months to Jo'burg. And during that time we were able to look around the home and all the interviews took place there, so it was just being immersed, you know, amongst the children, seeing what they were like, and seeing the babies. And Baby M must have been there the whole time we were there, but um, at no stage was it ever pointed out that she was going to be ours, so um... At the end of that fourth interview, I think we got a... We got a phone call at the end of the third month to say that we could have Baby J if we wanted her. And then they found a lump as they were... In her neck, hey?

Susan: Mm.

Alex: And we had to wait another month. But essentially, that whole period, as we were being interviewed, they were already thinking in terms of our needs...

L: Mm.

Alex: And that was really useful for us, that we didn't have a long wait after the screening process ended, cause I might well have [laughs] completely lost it by then [laughs].

L: Ja.

Alex: I would definitely have stolen another child [laughs].

Susan: And lived the rest of your life alone [laughs].

L: But it must have been, in a way, quite exciting going to visit the home and knowing that one of these children will be ours, and which one will it be?

Alex: Mm. I don't even think that, probably consciously, that I allowed myself to go there, to project to... I had waited, and I was desperate for so long that I, I think I probably... Don't even look at projecting...

Susan: Ja, if I think about it now, I don't think we ever attached any sentimentality to what we were doing, it was a... I mean, we do know each other rather well, but uh, it was also – there was an absence of sentimentality. We didn't for one minute kid ourselves about what it was doing to us. And also the, the... It's not wise to gush, and project and...

L: Get your hopes up.

Susan: Live in that kind of ideal space, romanticised space, because um... You have no idea whether this is still... You're up against a system.

L: Mm.

Susan: So, I would simply advise anyone to just try and put some distance between hopes and expectations and so on because it... takes too much out of you.

L: Ja, I think you're right about that. So...

Alex: I think the only time I did get my hopes up, um, was when we got the call at three months...

L: Ok.

Alex: ... when Baby J was three months old to say... Susan phoned me, I'll never forget the moment when I was about to go into a meeting. Well, I don't think I ever followed through [laughs]. And then two hours later, she said, 'Don't go and tell everyone', which we had already done, hey? Because, um, they retracted it. And then, ja... I mean, that was very, very difficult cause then we lived for a month... But I suspect, and it's interesting, I... I don't say this to too many people, but it was like that month was like a nine-month pregnancy for me. Where you sort of think Baby J was developing in us, there was a, there was a Baby J soul out there somewhere, she had a name, she had a soul. And I think all our will was just going into, 'Well, can we help with the medical things, can we help see what's wrong with her?' And I think by the end of that month, we had, we'd become committed to her, and um... I think regardless of her health, we'd have probably... We had a choice at the end, hey, we...?

Susan: We had always asked for a bab – a non-AIDS baby.

L: Mm.

Susan: We had always asked. We felt we could not take on an AIDS baby.

Alex: We said a healthy girl child...

Susan: A girl.

Alex:... between four and six months [old].

L: Why specifically a girl? If you don't mind me asking.

Susan: Well, for obvious reasons, I should imagine.

Alex: I've only ever wanted a girl child. Um, as I said, I grew up in a, in an abusive home, my father's into little children and so it's been really difficult for me, um... And that was part of the risk I took, having to expose that in the whole testing thing in Jo'burg, and risking that and knowing, wondering if they'd say I couldn't have a child because of my father's involvement.

L: Mm.

Alex: So that was really difficult for me. So I've... I was really scared.

Susan: We did divulge it, by the way. We didn't hide it.

Alex: Ja, we did, ja.

L: Mm.

Alex: Ja, I, I just know I can do a lot better by a girl than a boy. I'm sure if I mothered a boy child, I'd do a fine job, but I'm... Ja, I think there's less risk for a girl child [laughs].

Susan: The way we felt, and I still, and I think we were right, I've given... Alex's never had any doubts she was, she's only ever been in lesbian relationships. I obviously haven't. This is the only relationship I've ever had, so... And I've got nephews and a brother and so on. So I, I don't actually have anything like the entrenched, often anti-male attitudes that Alex inevitably has, given her background...

L: Mm, mm.

Susan: ... and I just, I really knew we could not do right by a little boy, in terms of according him his full maleness, or seeing it well, or... Too much would have to be overcome, and I think that would just only be at the child's expense. And I, I'm, well, I'm delighted with the choice we've made. I think, I think it is very difficult for two women to give a young growing boy, I imagine, everything that is best for him to grow completely whole, and then make his own sexual choices later, but... And who's to know what's happens to Baby J? I have no idea. There, I mean, as I understand it, the research shows that there's no more chance of a child being homosexually orientated from a heterosexual [inaudible], homosexually...

L: Mm.

Susan: And I find that fascinating because that really does throw a spanner in the works for people who say, 'well, she's inevitably going to be gay'.

L: Mm mm [No].

Susan: It doesn't happen like that.

L: No.

Susan: So I think we, we knew we could do best by a girl child, and I think we [inaudible].

L: Mm. Ok.

Alex: And we've got, ja, it's an all-girl family. I mean Susan's girls have also got very strong personalities. One little boy... [laughs] in a female-dominated family [laughs].

L: Shame, ja.

Alex: So, ja, it was the right decision.

L: Well, it's good that you know your limitations [laughs].

Susan: Definitely.

Alex: And I've been very honest and reflective about the way we feel. I think that in the really hard times.

L: I like that imagery about that last month being like a pregnancy, I think it's... It just captures all the, all the... thinking and the agonising tat goes into it, hey?

Alex: Cause the previous however many years, it was agony, but it was agony as an individual or as a couple. But those, that last month was embracing having a child. Because I hadn't let myself, as I said, go there at all.

L: Mm, mm.

Alex: In terms of even looking at other children and saying, 'Could this one...?'

Inaudible.

Susan: We tried to prevent people buying us stuff or setting up a room. We couldn't think...

Alex: So the day we, the day before we got a phone call, 28 November 2002, at 3 o'clock, to say, 'you can fetch your daughter tomorrow morning in Jo'burg at 11' [laughs].

L: Oh, my word.

Alex: I mean, that was when we quickly went to Baby & Company and bought everything... And people just, our colleagues at work were amazing, we just had second-hand stuff invade our house, and ja... it... That's when it all happened! In 24 hours [laughs].

L: Big shock...

Alex: Ja [laughs].

L: So, from the beginning of, going to... well, starting your research, till, right to the end, how long was that? It was six months and six months... Six months and four months?

Susan: Jo'burg was very quick, it was um, what? About six months from start to finish. No, no, a year.

Alex: I... decided I would stop the treatment and go the adoption route probably in about August of 2001. By December 2001 we had said we can adopt a child of colour. So it was probably December 2001 to about November...

Susan: Till we actually got her...

Alex: End of November...

L: Ok. Right, almost a year...

Alex: A year.

Susan: Which is not – which is actually very quick, by some standards.

Alex: Ja.

Susan: But Jo'burg worked quickly, I mean Jo'burg was like six months from start to...

Alex: But I think, also, it, it felt long and hard... But I think also in terms of our personalities, we fought the whole way. We just didn't let up. We phoned, we questioned... you know... So, I suspect the process could've been delayed much longer than... And we just kept questioning them, making the decision, hey, this isn't going anywhere, let's [inaudible]. But ja... Looking back now, a year is not long at all.

Susan: But I think anyone who really wants to do it, then there are costs involved. I mean, we made the decision to go to Jo'burg, we were on the road every three or four weeks. Cause everything was done there. You know, they'd say, "Look, if you wait, we can organise for someone to..." And I mean, we had to make a choice about that...

L: Mm, mm.

Susan: I, to be absolutely honest, I thought I could no more drag out this business than fly. But it... Because I didn't really ever identify with Alex's fixation on needing to become a mother. So I found that very difficult to deal with [...]. Um, so I really couldn't face this going on any longer, it was becoming too big a thing. So ja, I think it was worth the trips up there, I think it made us behave in a very real way. Got caught up in the whole thing.

Inaudible.

L: So you say your colleagues were quite supportive...

Alex: They still are.

Susan: We're very, very fortunate, we really are.

Alex: The whole, we've got a facul- well, school, I would say, school on campus, it probably has 40 academic staff and perhaps 20 admin staff, if not more. And every single one of them has embraced Baby J. They all know her, they all ask after her. I had four months maternity leave once we got her, and they set up a tea which... You know, normally when a staff member has a child, they get one present from...

L: Mm.

Alex: You know, combined kitty sort of thing.

L: Mm.

Alex: We just had gifts from everybody, from people who were the lowest paid admin staff [inaudible], little gifts. So somehow she Baby J had... Ja, somehow the whole thing had touched them in a way... And I suspect it's the transla- transracial nature of it, she was a Black child and... Her story, too, is, the fact that she was abandoned in a shoe box two hours after she was born...

L: Shoo.

Alex: You know, it's that sort of... It's very touching.

Susan: She has no parents, to all intents and purposes.

L: Ok.

Alex: Legally.

L: Ja.

Susan: Ja. They could not find them, so... That sort of... Obviously she [inaudible] and Baby J's own identity later. Or maybe quite soon [inaudible].

L: Ja.

Alex: Ja, in the, in the first two years, we've hardly had to buy anything, we've been lent the cots and the car seats and clothes and whatever, so... I mean, it's, it is incredible, cause we've now passed on to other people who have had babies.

L: Ja, ja.

Alex: It's been very, very inclusive. I suspect in different parts of the province, and perhaps in other provinces, it might be more difficult. For us, it's been extremely easy.

L: And family also? Have they been supportive as well?

Susan: Um, everybody is, now. Um, the only person who really... I think what I presented my family with has been extremely difficult. Firstly, in living with a woman, and then adopting... I grew up in a very [...] mainstream... And the only person who actively, and through his actions, made it extremely difficult, although he appears to be through it, is my brother. He was appalled with what I was doing. And- But I think it's infinitely more complex than just his sister doing something he doesn't care for. It is tied to his young son, son's declaring himself gay. I think it was very much more complex than that.

L: Mm.

Susan: Um, we appear to be through it, we don't talk about it anymore, and he carries Baby J, talks to her, things like that. But it's kind of mutually agreed we won't open that can again. But we are through it, and um, so we still have all the family gatherings and things like that. So ja, I think family have been absolutely amazing, they really have, all of them, on both sides, know... just, ja, just who we are.

Alex: Ja, my family have always been supportive of my being in gay relationships. I've been in relationships since I was 22, so it's par for the course. And my parents and my brothers and sisters, they've always known I wanted a child, so... Essentially, they've just embraced her. Um ja, we have pictures of all of three of the nieces together now, because my brother and my sister have had two. Ja, I think it, it was fairly easy.

L: Mm. Ok...

Alex: And Susan's girls have been amazing, they've just embraced her as a sister, so...

L: Mm. Ja, ok. Who, who is the legal parent, of the two of you?

Susan: Both.

L: Are you both...?

Susan: It was all [inaudible] that about a month after we got her.

Alex: Mm.

L: Ok, ok. Because I have been doing a lot of research into the legal stuff, and all the lawyers that I've consulted said to me at this stage, they don't think it's possible, but you guys have actually both been declared legal parents. That's brilliant, that's brilliant.

Susan: No, it was, it had just passed, and –

Alex: Ja, I can't remember the couple...

Susan: It was that Jo'burg, one of them was a judge.

Alex: Judge. De Vos.

L: Oh, De Vos, Ja.

Susan: That was a [inaudible] case.

L: Ja, that was in 2002.

Susan: Ja, and then we applied, and there we are.

L: Ok. So that hasn't affected in any way, you know, signing indemnities or medical care for Baby J.

Alex: She's on my medical aid, just cause we have separate medical aids within the [organisation within which she works]. It was financially beneficial, Baby J's on mine.

Susan: It's also cause you're quite young.

Alex: But Baby J could have been on yours.

Susan: Oh, I see what you mean.

L: I know this is probably quite a naïve question, but how is childcare divided between the two of you? Does one of you take more care of Baby J?

Alex: We entered into a contract...

Susan: I think we're going to have to [inaudible] that, because I'm a linguist.

Alex: Oh [laughs].

Susan: We both take great care of her. Who does more of the schleppy work, that's Alex.

Laughter.

L: Oh, ok.

Alex: Ja. Um, ja, essentially it was agreed between us. It's just very difficult living with a linguist.

L: Don't worry, my father's a linguist, lived with it for years.

Alex: I'll speak and you can correct me.

Laughter.

Alex: Essentially, we agreed that it was my need to have a child, and Susan having parented initially, her career was put on hold and, so. She's presently doing her PhD and stuff. Generally, I say I do two thirds of the schleppy work, um, but it... That's in terms of, um, actual, practical, day-to-day-chores that need to be done. But it doesn't work that way emotionally, I think Susan sort of thought she could remain emotionally slightly safe from it, and I think emotionally we parent her equally, and Baby J sees us both as equal parents. Susan often says that when I go for a run or do something, Baby J cries and says she wants Mommy. She thinks that's cause I'm the primary parent, but I said no. Whenever something goes wrong or she's a bit upset, she wants Mom, so I think it's very equal.

L: Equal, mm.

Susan: She calls Alex Mommy and she calls me Mom. And she doesn't... If she gets them muddled, she self-corrects, so it never confuses her, ever.

L: Ok.

Susan: Um, but my own children call me Mom, so they said it would be really silly for her to call me anything else, cause otherwise how do you sustain a kind of sister relational thing. Um, so it confuses more people out there than it confuses Baby J.

Alex: And we know that if she calls, "Mommy", then I answer. If she calls, "Mom", then I go, "Yay! It's your turn!" [Laughs].

L: Ok. And is she at a daycare at this stage?

Alex: Ja, she's been at the daycare since she was 8 months old, but we sort of share that chore because we've sort of shifted our work times so that I start at half past 7 in the morning, work through lunch then end at 3 [pm]. And fetch Baby J from daycare, and then I have the afternoon off with her. Because Susan generally starts at half past 8, an hour late, and take, drops Baby J off at her school, so she has a bit of the morning, and then works until later, 5 [pm]. I mean, that's, that's an ideal scenario. Obviously there are meetings and stuff that are scheduled...

Susan: But that's also thanks to a very um, a really nice head of school, who was willing to make those accommodations for us, Ja.

L: Ja, that's brilliant.

Alex: The school, the school has been going for 20 years. And H_____, who's the principal of the school, headed up the transracial adoption group. Because way back in the 80's, she adopted, as part of her very big family, M_____, who was an abused child.

Susan: Terrible story [inaudible].

Alex: Ja, but she's now fifteen or something. So the school's very multiracial and integrated, and... Ah, from the time she's been there, Baby J's been just loved by all the teachers there, she's well-known and, ja... We've been very fortunate in terms of the inclusivity of it all. She loves it at school.

L: Ja. Did you specifically look for a school like that, or was it just by coincidence?

Susan: No, I mean, we did know about it, because it's one that lots of academics' children go to cause it's 200m from varsity. But also that they were leading lights, they were progressive and in the ANC [inaudible], so we knew that they, ideologically, it would be... And we'd known about it, but um it's a lovely school... Ja, she's an absolute...

L: Ok. Um, are there any other family members that help with the day-to-day care of Baby J? The schleppy work, as you call it.

Susan: My girls do, if they come round, they'll, they'll very often take over the bathing or... We do use them from time to time to fetch her from school, if there are meetings and can't get there. And my sister babysits, from time to time. Um, that's really the only immediate family involved with care. But if the girls are here, they'll do anything, so... But they are busy themselves, so they're not here every day.

L: Ja, ok. Um...

Lost time on tape.

Susan: Um, I think it is a challenge, it has changed our relationship, it must do. And I think what happens very often in heterosexual relations is that the woman just takes care of all this stuff, and a lot of her own stuff, who she might be and... is simply sidelined and suppressed and begun to be shaped by her role as understood by society as being the mother. And the father can, can do what he needs to do and, and even when they're home, I think that, that retains its, the nature of it so that father will sit and do whatever. And I think with two women, I think that's very different, because in a sense, we both now what it means to be the woman, so... I think that's both a huge plus, I think it brings a depth of insight and maturity and compassion and care which I think is quite unique to two women parenting together. But then both women have women's needs, so they also want to... I really miss not just us two, I, I really do that. And especially as now my girls are not here a lot, I, I feel liberated from some of that stuff, but Baby J going to be with us in this context probably for the next 18 years, so... It puts me in a very old age stage to enjoy any kind of liberation, so... Don't see very many wildly liberated 70 year olds around. [Laughter]. So I think that has put strain, and it's... I don't know what you'd say, Alex?

Alex: I think, for me, it's um... I've always been such an energetic person, we're both very involved in sport and running and gymming and tennis and whatever, and for me suddenly, in the two years we've had Baby J, I feel like I've got old. You know, suddenly I'm hitting 40, and I'm, I'm tired at the end of the day. So we, before you know, we might, um, have our own quality time then... We're just too tired to do that. And I, I don't think that's a bad thing, in that we've still got, I think, higher energy levels than most forty or fifty year olds do have, so... But ja, it's just displaced, because you're spending the energy with Baby J and doing all the chores and having fun, teaching her and um... Ja, just suddenly we've run out, you can't do it anymore, then it's just easy to be quiet and sit and read.

L: Mm.

Susan: I think, well I think maybe it's just, obviously, each case is unique. The fact that Alex's own way in which she was mothered really was, could have been a whole lot better. So I think, there have been inevitably, there has been inevitably me taking a kind of, I don't know what, nurturing, wise old crone, in a sense. And I felt, right, showing Alex certain things that her mother just simply either never did for her, never modelled as a parent, still doesn't model as a grandparent... So, so in some respects, that also shifts, because it ends up, me taking a role that is not essentially that of partner, it's um... Well, it is partner, in terms of caring, but it, it's not an uneven knowing, at least it's, it's not an even knowing, to both have reached the same point. So, I mean, if you asked whether anything had changed, that obviously wasn't happening before...

L: Ja.

Susan: I mean, so...

Alex: I could counter that [laughs].

Susan: Well, counter it. You must, you must counter it. What would you like to say?

Alex: I think um, I think that is true, but I think in some situations Susan believes that there's only one way to parent in a particular situation because she's done it before...

Susan: Of course! [Laughter]

Alex: And I, I would do it differently, and I can see no reason why my way's not as good, but um...

L: But isn't that part of negotiating as parents?

Susan: Well, I, I quite understand that, um... I've been, I single parented on my own for 10 years, so I reared these children on my own. I...

Alex: You're defensive about it.

Susan: Well, I'm defensive, but I also tried a lot of things that worked. So, ja, I can be overbearing, so I won't... But you know it's a hell of a lot easier if people do what you tell them to do! [Laughter] To do it your way then you don't have to worry about all the alternatives, but um... So, yes, I've also had to learn some humility in this thing and to shut up and allow Alex to do it differently, even if she bumbles along. [Laughter]

Alex: You might want to end this question.

L: Excuse me, I was hoping I wouldn't cough.

Alex: Would you like some water?

L: No, I've got my water here, sorry. Um, so you say, you know, Baby J views each of you equally as her parent, um, and obviously there is certain, there's a certain specialness about her relationship with each of you.

Susan: Ja. Um, I try to put that into words, but I, I know... No, I think you're right, I think she, she gets something from me and me from her that is different from what she gets from Alex in certain instances. I think that's exactly why sometimes she will want to be with you rather than me, so whatever it is. I mean it's hard to say what it is, but you can see that. We can have a different way of relating. My, when I think about it, mine's probably rather more um, robust, volatile... Alex, I think, works very hard to be always calm and gentle and so on...

Alex: And yet, um... Not 'and yet', just also in terms of the upbringing I had with my mother, is to continually just make her feel special and to say I love her and that, cause I think that did a huge amount of damage in our family growing up.

Susan: But I do that.

Alex: Ok. Ja.

Susan: I would say that, cause I definitely do do that...

Alex: I'm not saying you don't...

Susan: ...cause that's the only reason my girls feel like they do, is because I did exactly that, because my mother didn't. She never said anything, she never said, "I love you", she never said, "Well done". I mean, I think we spend a huge amount of time, um, affirming Baby J value and worth and...

Alex: Cause we're also very aware that as soon as she realises... At this stage, at three, she's doesn't realise that she is different, and, and that's going to hit her really hard someday, and in her adolescence it's going to cause chaos, or it could.

L: Mm.

Alex: And so I think the more we make her feel secure and confident in the world and loved in the world...

Tape turned.

Alex: I guess in a way because [inaudible].

L: Mm. So both of you definitely agree on that?

Susan: Oh, ja. It's the only thing that will...

L: Lay the groundwork now before she gets to the stage where there's upheaval.

Susan: Oh, absolutely.

L: Are you particularly worried about that? Because in, in two respects she's different, you know, she's a transracial adoption, and she's got two moms instead of a mom and a dad. Are you worried about that?

Alex: Um...

Susan: We'd be stupid not to be.

Alex: Ja. I don't think, ja... Um, we're very aware of the possibility, um... We know, well I know, growing up being different, um, you just don't fit and you have to make plans about what choices you make, where you do feel that you do fit, and valued so... I think it's really about just being aware of it and hopefully she'll be secure in herself

sufficiently to deal, she'll have the skills and whatever, to deal with whatever she faces, so... I'm not worried as much about the two moms as I am about the transracial. And one of the things we're very aware of is her need to learn to speak Zulu, which we can't teach her. I really wish we could, but none of us can speak Zulu. So it's about us asking _____, the maid, when she comes, to speak Zulu and [inaudible].

Susan: But even that's entrenched as the old social pattern, so it's the maids who speak Zulu. I think the language thing is a huge, is of great concern for us.

Alex: Cause if she can speak Zulu, she can, then she can look and feel like she's a part of the...

Susan: She can make choices about that.

Alex: Another thing we did consciously was to give her a Zulu... She came to us as Baby J, um, and we kept that because, as I say, she was a little souls and we kept that name, but we gave her a Zulu middle name, which I love, it's _____, which means "she brings the light". But we also thought that would give her a choice as she chooses to rebel and, you know, be called by her Zulu name. And some of our colleagues at work call her by her Zulu name. Um, I don't think she realises it's her Zulu name at this point, but um... [inaudible]. I think that, the language thing, could be a huge issue in terms of fitting in...

L: Mm, ja.

Susan: My daughter's research Masters thesis is on transracial adoption with adolescents, and that's one of the single biggest things, is those who can speak Zulu have a much stronger sense of 'okayness', despite having White parents, and those who can't, you know... I don't really know how, how we're going to overcome it, except do everything in our power to do it and in later years just say to her, we did everything we could.

L: Mm.

Susan: Ja, no, I think she will face some very complex issues. I think they'll begin quite soon, but you just hope that you've done enough that will actually help her ride through them and she won't spin out entirely.

Alex: It's been very, um, actually... Her room's full of books, she, we love reading to her, she loves reading too, now. But um, I've found a lot of, sort of, human rights books, that are illustrated, about the rights of the child and we talk to her about that, and then a lot of books on adoption...

Susan: And difference.

Alex: ...and difference, and being Black in a White family, um, and just reading those to her so she can start... Already you can see she's making links, like she came the other

day with a picture of a mixed family, and said, "That child belongs to that family and that child belongs to that", by colour. So...

Susan: It doesn't apply to herself, she doesn't see it at all.

Alex: It will come soon, cause she's a very bright girl, so she'll be asking very soon. But then it's about just being completely open, upfront, honest...

Susan: Absolutely.

L: So, have you informed her from, from the time that she could understand that she is adopted, or you haven't...

Susan: Well, we use the word all the time.

L: Oh.

Susan: She doesn't really know what...

L: What it means.

Susan: ... she'll say, but...

Alex: She'll say, we say, "Who are you", and she'll say, "I'm your adopted daughter".

L: Oh, ok.

Alex: She's started...

L: And so as she grows up, her understanding can change, ok. And um, so you say, between Baby J and her sisters, the relationships are good.

Susan: Ja, just adores them, she adores them.

Alex: She can recognise their cars when they come up the road.

L: Oh, by the sound? Oh, is it?

Alex: And will stop. She actually loses it, she goes completely nuts, gets so excited.

L: Well, we can tell that she likes them! [Laughs] Ok, now obviously because Baby J is so young at this stage and unaware, she obviously hasn't had reactions from her peers about being a transracial child...

Susan: Or having two moms.

L: ... or having two moms, but have you experienced anything like that in public?

Alex: I've overheard, I don't know how much of it Baby J overheard, some of the older children at school, White boys in aftercare, saying to me, saying to her, they say something like, "But is Baby J your child?" And um, when I said, "Yes, I'm her mother", "But how come you're White and she's Black?". So it's happening, I think she's alert enough to pick up on it, but um...

Susan: We always tell her she's really lucky to have two moms, but what we, the way in which we're doing it is to, is to talk about families having different constellations. So that you get some families where there's just a gogo, and sometimes you get a mom and a dad, and sometimes you get just a mom, and sometimes you get two moms, sometimes you get two dads. And to, so to try not to establish heterosexuality as the norm, but simply one variation on a theme. I'm determined to stick to that because I think the power of heterosexuality in society is just staggering and it's that which makes it difficult, not the reality of living differently.

Alex: She is aware of the dad concept...

Susan: Ja, she knows dads, ja, some people have dads...

Alex: She asks about her dad, and his dad.

L: Mm.

Alex: That's been in the last six months or so, she's... And she'll often play with her dolls and talk about the dad, and so she's creating...

Time lost on tape.

Susan: ...when they hear the story, and I've never yet experienced any Black person do a double take or be hostile a) at being White and having adopted her, or b) to say she's got two moms. That's the only way I put it, I mean, again it's about language, um, you don't have to throw 'lesbian' in front of people's faces, you can just actually say... And we've found it quite interesting that - in fact we talked about it, hey? - that having Baby J makes it easier for a lot of people who would not normally embrace lesbian couples to embrace us, because it kind of defects the lesbian issue to the child, and everybody must embrace a child. And so we find ourselves, in a sense, being easily accepted, thanks to Baby J. But the other thing we have not mentioned about the changes in our relationship, is that we've had to realise what that's done to us, is that we, the relationship, we tend to publicly put that relationship um, set it back for Baby J and don't talk about it. And I think that's, that's uh, that's not good for us because...

Alex: It's a loss of identity.

Susan: It's a loss of identity for ourselves and we, it came upon us subtly, where we suddenly realised that that's what we were doing, that publicly we were almost self-effacing, subconsciously...

L: You were being mothers.

Susan: Being mothers, so that makes it very easy for everybody, everybody knows a mother, they don't know how lesbian couples operate. And we've kind of resolved to be much more careful about that, to say... otherwise that... Because if for one minute we show shame, that will never help Baby J. She's, there's no way in the whole world she must ever think that we are ashamed of our relationship. Cause then there's no recourse, there's no recourse to any strong, you know, back-up or anything, so that was a subtle, we didn't realise it was happening...

Alex: And yet ours wasn't out of shame, it was just a subconscious thing where...

Susan: Ja.

Alex: ... the mothering was the focus...

Susan: Ja, but she might read it like that, she might say, "Well, you never tell your friends who you are", or whatever. And "Are you ashamed?" The answer's no.

Alex: It was very apparent reflecting on the birthday party because we shared it with another transracially adopted little girl in her class at school. And it was in a big home, and we invited all the school children, and the group of parents... You pass each other as you're dropping off and fetching, and you know it's Luke's daddy, or Abongile's mommy, but you don't know names and that. So we got to know these people, but I actually thought, how many of them actually know number 1, that we're gay, and number 2, that we actually co-adopted Baby J. One of us drops and one of us fetches... A lot of people might well think it's the mother and the granny...

Susan: Oh, I'm sure they do, a lot of people have done that, thought that Alex was my daughter. I now say, "No, she's not, she's my partner". [Pulls face] It's a real conversation-stopper. [Laughter]

L: I would have said Mom and friend, but you know... [Laughter]

Alex: Ja, so...

Susan: I think those are things, I think, you have to think quite carefully... and sensitively, cause you also don't want Baby J to be embarrassed, so it's a fine line.

Alex: But just the assumption, if it's a man and a woman, then they're married, then if there's two women...

Susan: And to be demonstrative in public, um, we don't, we really, that's the other thing, we just don't do that, we just... Whereas, if Luke's dad and mom arrive holding hands, no-one gives it a second thought. In fact, they think it's wonderful. If we were to do that, um, they would be horrified.

Alex: Or that... Well, we're assuming...

Susan: Well, we're probably quite right [laughs].

L: So essentially, I mean, the way I understand it, it's essentially a protection of Baby J until she's old enough to understand?

Susan: I think... Well...

L: Or is that too blunt a way to put it?

Susan: No, probably, no, I think that's probably what we would do. I mean, she sees us loving here, um that's not the issue. It's really about us presenting as a genuine family, publicly, you know, in all contexts. But of course, most of who we relate to now are people who know us anyway, so it's not an issue there.

Alex: Oh ja, most... All our friends, you know, all the family knows, it was more just those few parents...

L: Mm.

Alex: But until they become sort of proper friends, I think then we'll, you know, have to deal with it. But I guess everything we do, I think that's what we've said we've done, subconsciously everything's about protecting Baby J. Cause, you know, we've been very aware of her difference and therefore trying to protect her from being hurt by the world. I think in 99 percent of the situations they've just embraced her. You can see... Black people, from cleaners at Pick 'n Pay to judges and magistrates and managers in shops... The amount of gifts she gets given wherever she goes and stuff, just because of who she is in the world is incredible, it's so interesting. And the other interesting thing, you know, that you're just noticed all the time. I'm quite a reserved person, I like to just get on with my life and not be seen... There's no chance, you just are seen all the time, the minute you're in public, people notice you, they look and they come up close, they enter your space...

L: Ja.

Alex: That was initially quite difficult to get used to. Now, I'm oblivious to it.

Susan: But what we said over the weekend is that we're realising that we, we're moving into a place where we forget that we present as different. It doesn't even... Like the birthday party, you said, "I wonder what they thought", and I thought, and she was right,

that we, in planning the whole party, it never occurred, it never ever set up against who we are, um, in terms of, well I wonder how this looks. It was just simply to put a birthday party together. And I think...

Alex: And also just seeing, you know, everybody, the whole group of friends she's in, I kept thinking, "Gee, it's a whole White group of friends". That's when you think, hang on, Baby J not White, you know, it's not an homogenous group really, but you forget... In the psychomotor group, when there was a slight problem, we were working through it, and then someone says, "But is she the only child of colour in the group?" And I'd never even thought about her being different, for me we were all the same. So we forget often that it's two women parenting and... She's just so a part of us...

L: So you don't think your perceptions of your family being different, um, as those are changing, people's reactions to you are changing? You don't think that's the case?

Alex: Say that again?

L: In the sense that um, possibly when you first adopted Baby J, you were very aware of the fact that you were different, but as you become more used to it, do you think other people's reactions to you are not as, um... strong as they were before, or is it just that you're not noticing the reactions anymore?

Susan: That's impossible to answer.

Alex: I think I'm not noticing as much...

Susan: It doesn't matter.

Alex: I just, it doesn't matter anymore and I'm far more grounded and...

Susan: Look, which, by its own workings might mean they don't really notice...

L: That's the thing, ja, that's what I was trying to get at, is that if you're comfortable, then other people...

Susan: Ja, they don't risk, or think to challenge it.

Alex: Mm.

L: Mm.

Susan: [inaudible]

L: Um...

Susan: I'm just worried about the time.

L: Ja, are you...

Susan: What is the time?

L: It's five past two.

Susan: Ok.

L: Just in terms of um... Ok, ja, no you said that if any of these situations had come up for Baby J, then you'd deal with them as honestly and openly as possible.

Susan: Absolutely.

L: Ok, well I think that's pretty much it. Is there anything else that you'd like to add, that I haven't covered?

Alex: I just, just to pick up on that last point, I think um... Certainly, we've talked about the difficulty in trying to create a... a picture for Baby J of her parents that is positive, that can be a positive force in her life. Um, this little friend, _____, that she shared her birthday with, the mother got ill and died of AIDS, and the father tried to care for her but couldn't manage [inaudible], so there's some caring for her. They wanted her to be taken in by a White family, that was his request, there's some sort of picture... You know, just the meagre facts we have, she was abandoned in a park, naked, in a box, in the middle of winter... It's quite a sad story really. And you know obviously you can look at the mother, desperate, absolutely desperate, probably young, didn't know what else to do, but the challenge for us will be to, to somehow make that something that she can take with her. Cause, ja, cause...

Susan: I think, um... in relation to that, what I think, though, might also help as the years go on is that there are more and more children like Baby J, and I think there will be a whole generation of these little ones emerging now, and who are fostered cross-culturally or adopted cross-culturally, and... And I really do hope that she will find children similar to herself, and in the end they will draw on different resources to, to construct identity and stability and so on. Because it must be the case, they are this generation, of this generation, they've been abandoned or... Or parents have died, or whatever, who have not had the original biological parents rear them, and it's a vast number, you know, not just the odd child, it's bound to be a vast number...

L: There are about 600 000 of them so far.

Susan: And not all of those find their way into, into stable domestic circumstances [inaudible].

L: Mm, mm.

Alex: But that whole coconut issue, of these kids...

Susan: Ja.

Alex: That's the minority and they're ridiculed now, but I think it's... it'll start self-normalising, sadly...

Susan: It's a huge sector of society.

Alex: Just another thing I was thinking about in terms of support for us, I mean obviously, there's a whole transracial adoptions, none of them were lesbian parents. But um, we've got the gay couple, the men couple who've adopted transracially in Johannesburg that we are in contact with... I mean, _____ & _____, they had their own, _____ had her own children in the relationship, so it's not transracial, but it's still a gay couple...

Susan: They've got two boys, the older boy's now twenty, they've been together 24 years or something. But that boy's just declared himself gay, but not the younger one.

Alex: The younger one. So there, in terms of, I mean, we oft- well, whenever we go up to Jo'burg, we see them and that's quite useful just to... Cause they also talk about parenting as older women, I think we're far more energetic than they are, but um... But, ja, it's just really useful to... two other families of difference that we can talk to and keep in contact with.

L: Do you think it would be worthwhile to have a support group for gay parents? You know...

Susan: Ja, I mean we've always been interested in these support groups, I mean, I think so much would depend on whether you, you're even able to have the same kinds of conversations, it's, it's not enough just to say you've got a child of colour in common, um, and that you're two women together. So it would be hard to say that, I would have to be invited to one and then get a sense of, oh maybe those two are people that we could...

Alex: Perhaps an email communication, you know, cause I would imagine it would be in a province or a country, cause I don't think there are too many in _____ at the moment...

Susan: Ja, but...

Alex: Loose communication would be...

L: Ja, just to bounce ideas off each other.

Alex: Ja.

L: Because that has been one thing that's come up with this research is, a lot of people have contacted me to say that, you know, they may not have adopted children, but they have had children by artificial insemination or whatever, and they're just finding it really

difficult to find people to talk to about it. And I, I have definitely considered, as part of my internship, doing that as my community project. So I would like to get a sense, I mean, if you think some sort of communication would be worthwhile...

Susan: Cause you never know...

Alex: And then if um...

Cat enters.

Alex: Ja, like a loose communication, where you get a list of addresses and then you can meet, and then you might have some little community within that big group... That speak the same language and deal with the same issues.

L: Ok. Alright, well [...] Thank you very much.

End of interview.

Susan and Alex: Interview 2

L: I just want to turn this on while we're chatting, 'cause like I said to, um, to Susan, if there is at any point something that you spot that doesn't sound like you, then let me know. Um, I have no problem changing the transcript because I mean, this can lead to mistakes.

Susan: It can be very difficult.

Alex: There was one point where the word, it... Did you transcribe?

L: Yes.

Alex: Where it also didn't make sense, and I'm sure I didn't say it, but I, I need to just think about what I would have said.

L: Ja, no, that's exactly it, that's exactly it. Um, but having... You say you haven't really read through it so you haven't really had an opportunity to discuss it with each other?

Susan: No, but I, I mean, we did talk about it afterwards.

L: Ok.

Susan: Ja.

Alex: Um, I certainly read it through, and it was, essentially it represents much of what we said...

L: Ja.

L: And it was amazing, just reading through it again after I had transcribed it, um, you know, 'cause at the time of transcribing it's just, get it on the paper, you know. And you read through again, and all the, you know, the layers start coming up and the richness and... But I still really love the, the image of the pregnancy, the one-month pregnancy, I think it's absolutely fantastic. [...] Ok, I don't really think today's going to be [...]

Alex: I'd go as far as saying, um, that I wouldn't worry if you said education...

L: Ok.

Susan: Ja, I think, ja...

Alex: Teacher education [...].

Susan: Ja, no, teacher education's fine, it, it's certainly a huge part of our identity anyway, so...

Alex: And perhaps, in the transcript, it said Baby J, you could maybe change that...

L: Yes, no, I'm going to change the initials, don't worry.

Alex laughs.

L: And even for your names, I'm not going to use anything that sounds similar to your names. Ok, um, ja, as I was going to say...

Alex: I want to be Alex.

L: You want to be Alex, that's fine.

Susan: Gosh. The next provocative question would be to say why?

Laughter.

L: I think everybody's spent some time in their life thinking, "Why did I get this name? I want this one."

Alex: I wanted that one for Baby J, so I might as well use it.

Susan: I don't mind what you use for me.

Laughter.

Susan: I'll probably do when I see it, but at this point I don't have a choice.

L: I'll find something with a nice meaning behind it.

Susan: Ja.

Laughter.

Alex: 'Difficult one'!

Laughter.

Susan: If I object, I'll tell you.

L: Ja, no problem, no problem. Ok, ja, today's going to be lot shorter, I think, than last time was, just filling in the gaps I found. Um, I don't know if you saw, in the transcript, that I actually lost time on the tape. I think I explained that in the email when I sent you the transcript. There must have been a flaw in the actual tape, because it was both sides of the tape. So it wouldn't have been a malfunction in the tape recorder. So, ja, the one, the one point that I wanted to just clarify, um... The last time I spoke to you, you said...

You were talking about, um, "I've never yet experienced any Black person do a double take or be hostile", um, at the fact that you've adopted transracially or anything like that. I just wanted to clarify, have you had any reactions from White strangers, or strangers from any other group?

Alex: I mean, it might be repeating what's on the tape, but certainly in KZN there's been no problem from any people, but when we've been on holiday in, um, Hermanus, and we've visited places like George, you can feel people looking at you...

L: Mm.

Alex: ...and I think there's certain conservative White Afrikaans communities that...

Susan: They do have a problem.

L: Mm. Sort of balk at the idea.

Alex: And you realise you're being watched far more. I mean, here you don't, I'm, I'm very at ease, being out with Baby J.

Susan: I do always feel, um... I'm always very conscious when we go into contexts where, where we relate or just, through shopping or wherever, with other Black people, how they might be feeling, I have a kind of... I've, I've made a space in myself to accept any reactions...

L: Mm.

Susan: And I say it like that because, long before we even got Baby J, while I was thrashing through all those other issues, I spoke to a Black colleague of mine. And I suddenly decided I needed to actually speak to a Black person, to say, "What do you think about what we're thinking about doing?" And um, she was absolutely marvellous, in terms of just saying a child needs to be loved, her view is that a child needs to be loved. If you can love her, that's all that matters. But she said, "You should expect that there will be many Black people who don't like what you've done." Because it's not something that is... Adoption is foreign in, generally speaking, in African communities. And so, I think since then, I always hold my breath a little bit because I don't think we can expect that everybody will like what we're doing. And I noticed, what does often happen is that... Well, maybe because they have a difficulty with the Whiteness in that constellation, they often address themselves directly to Baby J. And I've found that quite interesting, that that's... Like that young man in the fish shop last night, he did, he bare, he glanced at, at us, but then directed his gaze and said hello to Baby J, and I wouldn't want to even presume to analyse the, what's happening there, but... In a, in a sense, I guess that's one way people can cope with it, is to, again, see only the child, and um... So I'm, I'm always a little alert to possible negative, hostile reactions, and so far we've not had any overt ones, but I don't think they're not there. I think there might be many

people who are just really, really nice to us because they like us, but still have a problem with what we've done.

Alex: But I think for a lot of people, when they hear Baby J's story and that she was abandoned, then for me, most of the people, especially Black people, say, "God will bless you", and, um, "You've done a marvellous thing, she's lucky".

L: So it's a paradigm shift for them.

Susan: Ja, no it is. That's absolutely true.

Alex: Ja. Whether um, you know, her context had been different, you know... But the fact that she had nothing, was abandoned, makes it acceptable that some family took her in, and I think regardless of colour.

L: Ja. Ok.

Alex: I've never been blessed so much in my whole life as I have in the last two years!

Laughter.

Alex: By other people.

L: Well, I suppose that's a good thing. Ok, um... You also said on, somewhere here that um, you have friends, male friends – where was it – male friends who have adopted children, and you think that it would be a little bit more difficult for a male couple to adopt a child. Why do you think that it could be so?

Susan: I think we're talking systemically here, that [one of the government organisations], I mean talking literally, that that woman who... We only went through her because we had such good recommendations and we thought that was a very open-minded, um, attitude to take. So I don't think, if we had trouble here in _____ with conservative responses, the chances of people being open-minded to male couples adopting, which, for all the obvious reasons, seems to jar more with people than even women adopting. Um, that's the only reason...

Alex: I think it's more about the term 'mothering'.

L: Mm.

Alex: It comes back to a young baby needing a mother. There's a social construct around that...

L: Mm.

Susan: And a social construct that only women are capable of mothering.

L: Mm.

Alex: Mm.

L: And that nurturing, the term sort of, ja...

Alex: Whereas, um, certainly one of the men in this couple is such a nurturing person, he's absolutely... I don't want to say like a woman, but...

Susan: He's every bit a mother, really, and he knows it himself, he just has these huge mothering instincts.

Alex: They've just adopted their second or third...

Susan: Second.

L: Oh wow, ja.

Susan: Ja, so I think... But I think unless one of them has that, that's unlikely to even happen.

L: Mm.

Susan: It's got to be a man that's got such a tremendous desire to nurture and, and mother.

Alex: So I think a lot of gay men wouldn't, or gay couple, gay men couple, wouldn't probably want to, but he had the need because of his...

L: Ja.

Alex: But again, I might well be stereotyping.

Susan: In fact, subsequently, I met another couple, though they're an American couple, two men who are now in their fifties, and they adopted a child 15 years ago, and um... And again, it's an interesting thing, because although I didn't meet the other partner, it – and they're a mixed race couple, who've adopted a Black American boy. But only when...

Alex: I didn't know his partner was Black?

Susan: Mm. Only when this boy was nine did they only... He'd been hugely troubled, he was severely abused before they got him. But clearly again, the one that I met, is the, is the mother in that, with the whole softer... And the other one was the disciplinarian, I associate that with being the disciplinarian. So I think it's just on, on a kind of personal role...

Phone rings.

Susan: Do you just want to stop that?

L: Ja.

Tape off.

Tape begins again.

L: Start again. Um... Where were we?

Susan: You were asking about male couples...

L: Mm. Yes, so in terms of um... You know, uh, if you look at the traditional heterosexual family constellation, um, you know, duties and things like that are sort of made out with your gender, um... But what would you say in your situation influences the way in which you've, you've managed to make your caring of Baby J more equal?

Susan: It is an interesting thing, because we don't...

Alex : We swap gender roles, we don't... One of us isn't male and one female...

L: Mm.

Susan: There's certain things... I mean it's differentiated along different, along a range of lines, um... So there's certain things that are, that Alex does mostly, because that was kind of contractually...

L: You agreed on that.

Susan: ...what we agreed on. But that's not fixed, um... And then around the house, somehow around meals, neither of us particularly enjoys cooking, so I think it's always a sense of "Ok, I'll take a turn 'cause you've done it for two nights". We don't set anything out, it's never been an issue. I love gardening, so I do the garden. Alex loves being organised and she loves playing with figures, so she does the money. I'm not terribly interested in it, I'd like to know that we've got enough, occasionally, but... I don't know, what would you say?

Alex: Ja, I generally do the bathing and all the housework stuff, and the day-to-day caring of Baby J... As you say, we share the food...

L: Mm.

Alex: And it, it's also depending on the day of the week and the stresses we have around our work schedules, so duties will swap depending on...

L: Mm.

Alex: ...the pressures at work.

Susan: I think what I feel freer to do now, which I didn't 'cause it was not so easy... It's not easy being... The only role I know, really, is being a mother. And often that, that makes it very difficult to be anything other than that, but... So in terms of how this relationship is different from how it might have been when I was married, in that, in that time, my husband got all the opportunities, 'cause it seemed that that was the [inaudible]. So I mean, in effect, slowly, and particularly because of the PhD, I think, um... and Alex is very, very generous about it is that I now do go away, um, to conferences or going away next week and so on, which, which she is hardly doing. And it feels, it still feels very odd for me to, because it smacks of the male role. The husband allowed to go off and do these things and not the wife. But I think, in a sense, I, I almost keep having to suppress those insecurities and just say, 'okay, this is a different space, this is, this is a career space of my life which I would have had had I not met Alex probably anyway'. So I think those have been more difficult to negotiate peaceably with myself than Alex has.

Alex: And I think underlying that is, is that, just the way you said it, seems to me that you don't, that if you're having those doubts you should be valuing yourself more.

L: Mm.

Susan: It's a funny place...

Alex: You're not really allowed to have that space.

Susan: Ja, I think that is the very difficult one, I think that's exactly it with, with two women. 'Cause they both come with those roles imprinted on them...

L: Spending so many years saying...

Susan: Not me...

L: Not me, someone else...

Susan: Serve, serve, serve!

Laughter.

Susan: Ja. In terms of Baby J, at least I just pick up when either when I get a conscience about being, about not doing enough, or sometimes the moments are just that... Every so often she makes her own choices about who she needs and who she wants and... And she will say, 'no, I want Mom', whatever.

Alex: Like this morning, she wasn't feeling very well, so Susan went off early and I stayed a bit and we went in later. She said, 'I want Mom, I want Mom', and that's typical because the minute one of us goes away, she wants that person.

L: Mm.

Susan: And if the one gets cross, then she definitely... Then she says, 'I am not your friend, I want the other one'.

Bell rings.

Susan: That's strange.

L: Well, it seems like it's a complex negotiation, it's not so simple as well, this is what women are brought up to do and this is what men are brought up to, to do. It's like personality, your own likes and dislikes... I can identify with the not liking the cooking thing, you know...

Alex: Ja.

L: And, and that type of thing, and then just contextual factors...

Susan: Well, I think it's complex because it's, it is actually set against what we were brought up to believe, so although it's... It's complex because we're now changing some of those roles, the only reason it's difficult is because we still have those imprints, I mean... So I think they're very, very powerful and I think they continue, will continue to remain powerful so long as it's a male-dominated society, and I can't ever see it, in anybody's lifetime that I know, of making any profound shift.

L: Mm.

Susan: But we carry them out in very uncomplex ways...

Alex: Ja, it doesn't feel complex...

Susan: It doesn't feel weighty...

Alex: Ja, we don't spend two hours every morning deciding who's going to do what...

Susan: Who's going to do what...

Alex: It does flow.

Susan: I mean, we're choosing to be particularly introspective here, so...

L: Mm. Ja, interesting. And then in terms of Baby J's sort of general socialisation, it seems to me you've thought quite a lot about that for her, um... You know, where do you stand on the whole issue for her?

Susan: She can become whoever she needs to be, as far as I'm concerned.

Alex: I mean, I just look at her, I'm sure every mother says this, but I just see such potential in so many areas, and I think it's our job really to expose her to a range of stuff, a range of emotions and feelings and opportunities for her to decide.

Susan: I think, and it's just as this occurs to me, I think perhaps what the strength of, perhaps, having a, um, a situation like our own, where we, where we're all living on the edge of difference, is that it's so much easier to just let her be who she needs to be. And even with my own daughters, I realise I have no, none of those things that I hear so many women fantasise about, weddings and babies and grandchildren. I don't hold any of those, I just simply... It sounds terribly sanctimonious, but I literally don't. These girls know they can do, they can do anything, they won't disappoint me if they don't have children, they won't disappoint me if they don't have a white wedding... They might disappoint me if they do have a white wedding, I don't know [Laughter]. And I think it makes it easier.

Alex: And I think even with what they want for their careers and, and...

L: Mm.

Susan: Mm. I think it's taken, I think both of us have really had to deal with a huge amount of issues around identity...

L: Mm.

Susan: And one of the, and the single biggest thing was that people weren't able to see us for who we were.

L: Mm.

Susan: And I think that's our, our sort of mission.

L: And expectations about what you were supposed to be.

Susan: Mm, mm. And it's not difficult to know when you're having an, your own expectation of someone.

L: Mm, mm.

Susan: So I hope we can do that for her.

Alex: And I think that comes back to the point I made at the last interview about saying that... Just all I try and do is tell her as often as I can, and we both do, about just saying we love her and how special she is, and when she does something that really amazes us to tell her that. Because I think that links to just giving her the, the freedom to explore further and to be creative, to take risks. Sometimes you don't want her to take risks, you want to... But it, it, ja... It'll just give her the strength to, to cope in the world in terms of who she is, which seems... [inaudible].

Susan: I think it also teaches them to take greater responsibility for their actions, because if you say, 'You do what you would like to do', then they have to take responsibility for their actions, whereas it's so easy to turn around and blame people, saying, 'well, you made me do this, or you made me do that'. And um, I guess I gave her quite a hard lesson the other day [laughs]. I do chuckle about it, and one day she will laugh too. But she's quite, um... At the moment, she needs to know whether you mean what you say, about almost everything. And it's quite tiring.

L: Mm.

Susan: And I was watering the garden the other day and she was on her bicycle and she was about to destroy the tulips across the way. And we said to her, 'please move your bicycle'. And she sat and she waited. And I said, 'please move your bicycle', and I said, 'If you don't move your bicycle, I'm...

Alex: And each time the hand gets closer and closer to ____'s tulips...

Susan: And I said, 'I'm going to count to three, and when I get to three, if you're still, if your bicycle's still there, I'm going to wet you with the hosepipe'. And she sat and she waited.

Laughter.

Susan: And when I wet her, oooh, the whole world ended...

L: It's the ultimate betrayal [laughs].

Alex: Terrible, ja.

Susan: So I mean, I think that, that was part of saying ok, well now that's fine, you can choose not to move your bicycle, but suffer the consequences. [Laughter] And I thought they were quite mild, she just got wet.

L: Shame.

Alex: Interestingly, because I thought that she would enjoy being wet, but it was devastating 'cause it wasn't in the right context.

L: Ja.

Susan: Ja, 'cause it was different.

L: What sort of qualities would you like her to have in terms of her personality? If, if all goes perfectly according to plan, what sort of identifiable qualities do you think you'd like in her?

Alex: You mean values like courage and honesty and ja, integrity...

Susan: I'd like to see her with such a strong sense of her own worth, that, that's about the single biggest thing, it really is. And then a com...

Alex: Compassion.

Susan:... A compassion for other people.

Alex: And then to listen well, hear... To speak up when, in whatever situation she's finds herself, to always have a voice...

Susan: Ja, that's it.

Alex: To have a voice.

Susan: I was reading, I'm reading a book at the moment, which is a novel, but it turns... I chose it because the, the child in it has a similar of background to Baby J although it's an American novel. Basically she had no parents, she was abandoned. And they make a very, she makes a very valid point there, she's... She eventually had her own children, and for her that was the most, such a critical moment because the first time she shared blood with someone... And it occurred to me that that's going to, that must be a very painful thing. Maybe we, we never think into that biological level, where it's like literally sharing blood, and I just thought that, that will be something, I imagine, that would, we would have to think about, about how that might make her feel and to be able to talk about it. And it also made me think that she might want her own child, um, more urgently than maybe some, some youngsters and maybe at a younger age. I suppose we'll have to be very nurturing and cautious, so...

L: Interesting, ja, the fact that they have to... Not have to, but there is an urge to connect with someone in the world.

Susan: Come from somewhere, belong.

L: Mm, go to somewhere, ja. Um, the other thing that I've picked up is that, you know, you said that you had a lot of very helpful people during the process of adopting, um, but that you were still up against a system and that there was a bit of caution about, 'what do I reveal about myself?' Um, why, why do you think that could be?

Susan: Which part, that we should be cautious or why were we cautious? Why did you feel that you were up against a system?

Alex: I think, um, the system usually sees things in stereotypes, it's um... Transracial adoption is an issue, and two women in a partnership is an issue. Then if you're looking at it, is our home okay enough for a child, to adopt a child? The fact that my father's history, um, was so bad, could also count against us. I certainly wasn't sure how much of that I wanted to share. And any really good social worker would not, um, skewer the two. Ja, some people are more considerate and able to separate out the two.

Susan: I think they do think in stereotypes, I think our age difference was [inaudible], and, and I think it was certainly raised, ja.

L: So that was, that was one of the biggest issues that they came out with, was the age difference.

Susan: Well, they certainly, I was certainly grilled on it, um... They asked me if I knew that I would have to be patient, and I found that quite objectionable...

L: Mm.

Susan: ... a, because it's so easy to paint things in black and white and [inaudible], and I know that I get irritable quite quickly, but I also know that I'll never damage anyone, so it's, it's... Ja, you do need to be alert to where you're being led and I guess some people may not be as on the alert as we were, um... But once, I think a huge relief was knowing that they, that the, the person we worked with could separate Alex's father's deeds from her. I mean, that was our most critical moment, and very, very gruelling for Alex because nothing could be more punitive than to have his actions continue to bear... It's a...

L: It's such a, such a simple concept to, once you've grasped it, is that someone else's actions...

Susan: Separate things out...

L: But it's so difficult for so many people to do.

Susan: But you see, they also always have the best interests of the child at heart...

Alex: Yes.

Susan: ... and they might have said, 'well sorry...

Alex: Child can't have a grandfather like that.

Susan: Ja.

L: Well, it's like you said, it's necessarily rigorous.

Susan: And uh, so that was a huge moment...

L: Um...

Alex: Just also, the, the testing that we went through was often so superficial. I think, you know the point that we made earlier about being in teacher education and having that um... being open about that... I think in teacher education, you are reflecting all the time about your own practice, and you, basically you got those skills, you transfer them to your life and I think, I think we, both, are very reflective. We question what we do all the time, and so to go in and be exposed to these superficial sort of things, where you know that they want you to trot out certain things, it's just... Oh come on, let's just...

L: Be real.

Phone rings.

Susan: I would suggest that we answer, 'cause those people who...

Alex: No, it's the woman from UIF.

Susan: Oh, ok.

L: Um, ja, it sounds to me that you guys were then kind of at an advantage, um, compared to other couples. I mean, you've got the background, critical thinking, and you were aware of the, some of the flaws, possibly, in the system.

Alex: And the issues adopting transracially...

L: Yes.

Alex: We were not being naïve about how easy it's going to be adopting a child of colour, given our age and...

L: So you think that, that has, um, stood you in good stead, the fact that you were aware of these things, you went into it with open eyes?

Susan: I think we have a, um, apart from having... Yoo, that is incredible [referring to phone ringing]... Um, apart from having a professional background of intellectualising and reflecting and so on, I mean we've both been through therapy so that's an indicator of disposition, and as teacher educators we've come across aptitude testing and all this kind of stuff that's used, and the, the kind of naiveness of just sticking dangerous generalisations that are drawn from those kinds of broad assessment tools. So I was very, very sceptical and cynical about the assessment thing we had to fill in. And I did say as much, because I... It wasn't... I mean, we happen to be English speaking, White, and that's actually who it was written for and anybody else who was, a Black couple... You

know if there was a Black couple trying to, or African, South African Black couple trying to adopt and had to go through that, that would just be so to their disadvantage, and that's shocking, I mean that really is.

L: Mm.

Susan: So I guess we were quite, we were alert to all sorts of things. But uh, saying that, that sounds like it might have been gamey, I don't think we were at all gamey, um... We just know the system better.

L: Gamey?

Susan: Well, people say well then you withheld this and that...

L: Oh.

Susan: It wasn't that at all. I think _____, we got to be very close to _____ [private adoption agent], I think she was very... Ja, we really [inaudible]. And I was able to say to her, 'we doubt this', and she would say, 'Don't worry'. But she [inaudible].

L: Ja. Well, like I say, I mean there's not really much else that I wanted to, to ask you, like I say, it's just filling in the gaps, um... Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Dog coughs.

L: Ooh, shame.

Laughter.

Alex: Put that on tape!

Susan: Oh, I don't think so. I would be very interested to read your thesis.

L: Mm. And I will, before I actually send out the final, well, submit the final project, the final write-up, I will definitely send the...

Susan: Just that section.

L: ...the analysis to you, so that if there's anything you don't like, you're more than welcome to let me know and suggest changes.

Susan: [...] So before we're ready to tell her certain things, so I think I will look for how you've presented certain things.

L: Mm, definitely.

Susan: It's highly unlikely that she won't be ready for it by the time she reads anything coincidentally.

Alex: Ja, out of a research thesis [laughs]. Bright chick!

Laughter.

Alex: A 10 year old in the university library, poring over these things.

L: That would be very nice.

Susan: We would have done such a good job with her...

L: Ok, well, thank you very much And I will also send you a copy of this transcript, it won't be as big as the first one. And I'll let you know when I...

Susan: And we will read this one closely to look for the...

L: Yes, ja. You've got my numbers, you've got my email address. Ok.

End of interview.

TERENCE AND PETER – TRANSCRIPTS

Terence and Peter: Interview 1

L: Ok, just to get a bit of background, I know you're in the theatre business. What do you do?

T: I'm a, a regional manager for an industrial catering company, that's what I do, so I look after the whole of Kwazulu Natal. I'm a manager...

L: Mm.

P: Mm.

T: ... I suppose that's what I do, I manage people.

L: Ok.

T: People think I do food, I manage people...

P laughs.

L: Ok, ok. And just as a matter of interest, you don't have to tell me, how old are you guys?

T: I'm 36, 37 next month...

P: And I'm 41 next month.

L: Ok.

P: And I also teach, um, I teach three days a week as well.

L: At the University?

P: No, at a girls' school.

L: Oh, ok. Oh. Drama, obviously.

P: No.

L: English?

P: No, Designer Technology and Art.

L: Well, that's very interesting.

P: Subjects that never existed when we were at school. Well, I mean Designer Technology, definitely.

L: Ja. Interesting subject, hey.

P: Professional arts and crafts.

L: Ok, ok. And um, obviously you've had... How old are the girls now?

T: Well, T's 11...

P: 12 this year.

T: She'll be 12 in November, and U is 8.

P: She'll be nine in Feb.

T: Nine in Feb, ja.

L: Ok. And you've had them since they were babies, hey?

T: Ja, T was three...

P: Well, we've had them both since they were three, in fact...

T: Ja, but um... T, we only got to know when she was three. U & T's mom worked for us then, so through her pregnancy and all of that, we were there. And then it's only after T was, sort of, a permanent fixture in our lives that U then...

L: Mm.

P: Became...

T: Ja.

L: Ok. So they're, they're sisters and their mom worked for you.

T: Yes.

P: Ja. They're full biological sisters, same father, same mother.

L: Ok. And their mom's not working for you anymore?

T: No...

P: Not directly!

T: She, she works for the company that I work for as well. Um, after... We used to run a guest house together... Well, I ran it, Pete still had his normal work, and, and Siza worked for me. And then after that, I can't remember how? She gets a job at _____...

P: Ja, ja.

T: And then I end up working there later. It's quite weird, actually, it's funny how life does funny things...

L: Mm, mm.

T: Um, cause we, we had a, odd, um, adoption process, but... Can I go for it?

L: Ja.

T: Ok, well what, what happened was Siza became ill, she ended up with a tumour and all sorts of issues, and... She didn't speak to us, which I was bitter and angry about for a long time, but she'd seen us sort of treating T well and whatever and, and all this sort of thing. And she was quite convinced that she was going to die. And one weekend, she'd never, um, looked after us on a weekend before, you know, we'd never looked after the baby for a weekend before. And she just said, please, she's going home to the farm, would we look after her? Which she did, and never, um, came back.

L: Oh dear.

T: And a week went by, a month went by... It was quite, uh, nerve-wracking because there'd been no sort of anything on our part that we were going to adopt a kid...

L: Take on this child.

T: ...Or take on a kid, so it was quite a hectic process... And in the end, we, we starting getting really worried, and, and... sort of, we... Once we'd got to three months, we started going the official route, we'd gone to the police, and... You know, this mythical 'farm' place, we didn't know how to find it. In the end, I remembered she had a sister at _____, we went there, found her, um... And we finally then found _____. It was eight months later. At, at six months, funny enough, we went to, um, Child Welfare, who I had contacted, who said um, well if we'd bring the kid in, they'll happily look after the kid. And then we were too far down the line, we weren't even thinking of giving up... So anyway, we then found Siza and she'd gone the sort of traditional way of herbal medicines and all this sort of thing, but she was fine, um... And... Um... We, we didn't change anything, hey?

P: No.

T: T just carried on with us, um... And then she had U, and U used to come and visit. Um, and then she fell pregnant with twins, and had a really rough pregnancy...

P: Ja, really bad. She was told she had to go onto permanent bed-rest.

L: Ooh.

T: And U then came to live with us on, on a permanent basis.

P: Ja.

T: Cause we, we made up our minds. It's quite funny now, with T there wasn't a choice, and with U there was, and it was really, it was very hard for me. It was easy for Pete, he knew we were quite happy to have two kids. I was very stressed about it, taking on another child, cost, bills, you know all the things that go with it.

P: You weren't quite as stressed as my mother was. [Laughs]

T: Um, and it was absolutely the right thing, you know, we've never looked back on it, um... And it's lovely for them... They're also quite lucky, they do have a relationship with their other sisters, and obviously with their mom and dad. Their mom comes and spends sort of one weekend a month, and stays here and we, we tend to go out and...

P: Ja, we try to make ourselves a bit scarce, give them some time.

L: Yes, Ja.

T: She's not a mom role, um, like an aunt, perhaps.

L: Mm.

P: Or big sister.

T: Or a big sister, maybe. Cause mom's only 33, so she's young, and they love the twins, who are really cute, but we're not having any more children...

P laughs.

T: Absolutely not!

P: And then there's _____, who is a bruiser of note... [Laughs].

T: Ja, there's a new one, who's about two, or three now, three... Ja, but we're a two-person family...

L: Ok.

P: _____'s probably the most bilingual of the lot.

T: Ja, it's quite odd. _____, the newest baby, is the only one that as a mother, she's bringing up. Cause the other two went to other people, and the twins went to others, so ja... T's the oldest of her family. Been quite a palaver with the, the dad because five girls, it's such a problem in the Zulu thing with no boy.

L: Yes, ja. You need your boys.

T: Um, so that, that's... quite simple really.

P: Mm.

T: Um, what else can you add to that?

P: Only that we have no real legal standing, I mean we could take it further now, um...

L: Ok, so you're not legal parents?

P: We're not legal parents, I suppose we're more legal guardians, in that sense because...

L: Mm.

T: They've lived with us a long time.

P: Ja, and if it's over two years, then it constitutes abandonment and you can go into legal proceedings from there. Um, but it's worked thus far.

L: Mm.

P: I mean the girls created their own surname, T came up with her surname, she chose to call herself _____.

L: Ok.

P: She chose a double-barrelled name for herself.

T: It's quite pretentious.

Laughter.

L: Pretentious and precocious, but very sweet.

Laughter.

L: Ok, so they've chosen their surname, and U's got the same surname.

P: Yes, ja. U just got lumped with it, she didn't have a choice.

Laughter.

P: T, ja, T came to me one day, and she said to me, "you're Peter what?" And I said, "Peter ____". And she said, "Terry's Terry ____", so I must be T ____". So I said to her, "Well, if you want to be", and she said "Yes".

L: I love it. And I saw the sign outside.

T: It's quite interesting, they... Obviously, we have a mixture of a circle of friends, there's gay, straight, there's sort of everything, um... So I, I like to think that they're pretty well balanced, that they're going to be alright as they get older.

L: Mm.

T: Cause you know, most people already have issues with their parents, so for them it's going to be even harder, you've got the White parents and they're gay, um... But that's maybe where the cousins will also help, with the mixture in our family...

L: Ja.

P: It's actually quite interesting that it's never been an issue in school.

L: Ok.

T: No, never. It's quite, we're very lucky, no-one's ever been horrible to us...

L: Oh really?

P: We've had no negative response, no kind of prejudice in any way, shape or form.

L: So not even in a shopping centre?

T: No, nothing. You know, the funniest thing is the early days, in the shopping centres, now I see there's these nice baby-changing places, but it used to be an absolute pain with U. Cause U was in a nappy for a little bit after she came to us, um, and I used to get shushed out of ladies' loos...

Laughter.

T: ...You know, people are so difficult. But now I see they're decent, the shopping centres make a separate family loo, which is just so sensible.

L: Ja.

T: It's obviously, the world has changed, there's more men helping look after kids, I mean...

P: It's weird how in less than five years that's happened.

T: Ja. But it has.

L: Ja, it's true. So you haven't encountered any legal difficulties with the girls at all.

T: No, the school knows the situation. You know, something that's quite interesting is, is we were told last year, that we were one of the most stable families in T's class, that most of the parents were divorced... And through the school time, or that they've been at _____.... The, the, ja... I never think of us as a stable family...

P: We've become the most continuous family...

L: Mm.

P: ... in that particular class, consistent in that class. Which is quite weird [laughs].

L: Ja.

P: I suppose also, it's not unusual to have two dads...

L: Mm.

P: Several kids now have several dads...

L: Step-dads...

P: Because there are step-dads, or the second relationship then breaks down, and then there's an uncle or whatever, you know...

L: Ja.

P: It doesn't seem to be that unusual anymore. It will be quite interesting when she goes to high school, I think that will be maybe a different thing, because obviously all the kids in the school have grown up with us, and therefore grown up with them. So, we were sort of introduced to the school quite early, and therefore...

L: And so the kids from such a young age, it wasn't, it wasn't such a big thing to them...

P: Yes, it wasn't a shock or something different or, ja... I mean, cause I also teach at the school...

L: Mm.

P: ... so, teaching at the same school that, that the girls are at, is quite an issue as well, but I've never had any hassles because of it...

L: No, it is a very unique situation.

T: Ja, it is. And I mean, when I think that beginning seemed so hard, I knew nothing about looking after a baby, cause like you said earlier, most people would have gone into this process planning it, or at least deciding what to do. It happened in a weekend, from...

P: Friday to...

T: ... very much a maid's child in your home, which is at a distance, um, to, to being left, and, and Pete often works at night. Suddenly I was left with this hectic baby that didn't speak... Oh, God!

L: It wasn't a human being yet.

Laughter.

T: No, it was very hectic for me.

Laughter.

T: I, I'm very happy with this age, where they like shopping and nice clothes and things like that, but that pooing and weeing was... Hideous.

Laughter.

P: I mean, literally, I mean, Monday morning arrived and we didn't have a stitch of clothes for her.

L: Ja.

P: Nothing. Hang on Mr Price, here we come! And it was, buy seven outfits and seven sets of knickers and... [laughs].

T: No, Pete, you were very dull. You bought them all the same, even the same colours.

Laughter.

T: Those jump suits lasted forever.

P: Two years, it was, about [laughs].

T: Ja.

L: I'm sure you had plenty of time to get a bit more creative with the clothes.

T: Yes, I was able to get creative, yes.

P: Very quickly.

T: He's supposed to be the creative one, but not very when it came to the clothes.

Laughter.

L: So you'd never had any plans to have kids before?

T: Well, I'd had, in my straight life before I met Pete, um, and it was a deciding factor for me of, 'Do I continue in this relationship to hopefully have kids', da, da, da. And you know, a couple of months away from getting married. Um, and somehow, I saw the light, I don't know how, I mean I'm really glad I did, but it was a, a hectic process for me, um... And an easy process, where it was completely accepted beautifully by my family and, and stuff like that, where my family really was wonderful, um... But I made a conscious thing, although I'll never have kids...

L: Mm.

T: And Pete, cruelly, when he moved in with me, made me give away all my children's book that I had collected from my own childhood, saying, 'Well, it's silly keeping all this, you're never going to need them'. And three months later, we had a child.

P: Bam! [laughs].

L: So you've never wanted...?

P: Um... Not a case of never wanted, I just never expected to, um, I never thought it was going to happen. Um, I'd had a lot of dealings to do with kids, because obviously with, with schools, although in the UK I was teaching senior, secondary, so it was, you know, basically Matrics...

L: Mm, mm.

P: But I had done some nannying, so I had done some work with the pretty young children, I'd done some pre-school work, but uh... But no, I wasn't expecting to have one of my own.

L: Ok.

P: And the seven we're going to have.

Laughter.

L: I was going to say, it sounds like you've found the transition to parenthood a lot easier.

Laughter.

T: There's no way we're having more.

L: Ja, it's an expensive business, isn't it?

T: Hectically. It is. No. We, we... You know, those cousins that have just had their new little baby, they arrived with their new baby and she's just a year old and they got her at three weeks old. Um, so it was our first proper visit with her, and it just reminded me how I do not want a baby.

Laughter.

P: You have to pick everything up!

T: Oh, the ornaments are getting trashed, oh no.

P: The only thing that's any fun is the Tupperware cupboard, cause you can fling it and it's fine.

Laughter.

L: Ja, I remember that.

T: Definitely not happening.

P: We'll see.

L: And now, throughout the process of, I mean, getting used to the idea that you're now going to take on a child, that must have been...

T: It was a big thing, cause I'm very much a controlled, responsible person, so I always look at the long-term things, more than Pete will.

L: Mm.

P: Long-term for me is the next three hours, anything beyond that doesn't count.

T: Ja, so, so I found it a huge, um, issue. And now, I've had a whole about turn, cause now I'm working on bigger, longer-term, working out now how will we get them a flat when they've finished varsity and all these sort of silly things [laughs]. Although I'm planning now before they've got to high school, but anyway, I'm working on long-term projects, um, so it's interesting how your mind shifts and things...

P: It's all financial. I'm trying to work out how we're going to get through puberty.

L: Ja.

Laughter.

P: Ja, that type of thing [laughs]. Slightly more immediate.

L: Ja, it is a bit of a scary thought, that, hey.

U enters.

P: Hello, you. The lady's recording it.

V: Oh, ja.

P: Oh, ja. Shoo.

V: Daddy, but I needed some paper.

P: Oh, ok, in the printer. Bye.

V: Bye.

L: How are you going to handle that, the whole puberty thing?

T: Oh, like we've handled everything else, we'll just deal with it as it happens.

P: As it comes, ja.

T: We've done all the little chats about it and all, and they know far more than one realises, um... And schools are more progressive now, so they really help. And it takes away myth and misinformation that I think used to exist, um, I don't think it's easy for any parent to deal with and, and it's another chapter for us. Um, this chapter that, that we've gone through of, of, has been wonderful because we're the cleverest people in the world, and our time is narrowing now...

Laughter.

T: ...We're not going to be so clever and fabulous anymore, it's going to be a very different chapter. Um, but I like to think we've brought them up well, and we'll live through it.

P: We've weathered everything else, we'll weather this.

L: Mm.

P: I've, um, T and I sat down and found websites and found brilliant sites, Children's Hospital of Cincinnati, um, which – Cincinnati or Chicago, don't know which – and then, you know, bright purple page and enormous daisies and exploding fireworks and things going off and congratulations... It was very interesting the way in which it's all been done, and it's a big celebration and a lot of fun. Um, so um, sat and went through that, in fact I thought it was such a good site I actually downloaded it and took it to school, as a, a disc for it to go onto the school computers, so I think ja, we'll, we'll get through it...

T: Ja. Nothing can be harder than the beginning.

P: No. I went to friends at school, actually two other teachers and said, 'I have no idea, what do I need to buy'.

L: Mm, how to look after a baby.

P: A basic outline of, of what we're going to need when, when puberty starts and periods and that sort of thing, but... What physical equipment do I need to go and get? You know, do I get pads or shields or tampons or what? And they went no, no, no, no, hang on. Don't worry, we'll go shopping with you [laughs]. And I said, 'You don't have to, I'm not embarrassed about having to go and do it, I just need to know what to get'. And then they start talking you through the whole process, 'We don't think that's a good idea at that sort of age', that sort of thing.

L: So you find your friends and colleagues at work are quite helpful?

P: They are.

T: We have a nice circle of friends.

P: Ja, and, and it's a very open-minded bunch, basically. Well, I suppose they'd have to be, but I mean they, they, it's a very supportive environment.

L: Mm, mm.

P: Um, if Terry can't fetch the girls from school, I can't fetch the girls from school, there are half a dozen people that I could ring at the drop of a hat, who will gladly go off and fetch them from school, who the school now know because it's happened on several occasions. You know, we phone in advance and say, so-and-so's going to fetch them. Um, you know, they'll feed them, water them [inaudible], bath them, put them to bed, whatever, and then we come home and take over. Um, but it is a very supportive group.

L: Ok.

T: The nice thing is people do like looking after the kids...

P: Yes.

T: ... we always get nice feedback, that they're well-mannered and behaved, so we've done that part right...

L: Ja, they seem to be, definitely.

T: Ja, we seem to have got that bit right...

P: Ja, I mean they've just spent the weekend with my mum, cause we were up at the festival, and um, they had a great time, it was lovely to be very missed and hugs and kisses when we got back, which was great, it's always nice. But, you know, I mean, my parents are always delighted to take them... Well, they take them every holiday, don't they. Um, Terry's mom and dad would, would do the same thing, but they just live too far away.

L: Ja. What was the original reaction from your friends and family like, when you said, you know...?

T: Well, cause there was no build-up for it, it just evolved, most of our friends already knew T, as did my parents and Pete's parents, so it wasn't a child they didn't know, and the same as when we made the decision to take U... You know, they, it, it... You know, Pete's mom was stressed, um... I must say, mine are... odd in that sense, they didn't stress at all, I don't know why they didn't...

P: No. Well, if they did, they never sort of vocalised it any way, shape or form.

T: No, um... But they didn't.

P: Ja, my mum was sort of, 'Are you sure you know what you're doing? And why are you doing this? Who are you actually doing this for?' Um, you know, sort of check all the priorities are in the right place.

T: It's quite strange, cause currently our kids are the only grandchildren of our parents.

P: Yes.

L: Oh really?

T: Pete's sister doesn't have kids, and my brother doesn't have kids. Him and his wife have only been married a little bit, so they still might.

P: And it's highly unlikely that my sister will ever have children, so...

T: Ja. So it might be the only grandkids, um... Which is quite bizarre...

L: So I bet they're spoilt...

T: They are... Well, they're very...

P: Mmmm...

L: In terms of how grandparents spoil kids...

P: Spoilt in, from um...I think they are spoilt, I really think they're bloody spoilt, but spoilt from an emotional quota, not from a...

L: Mm, lavished, ja...

P: Ja, not necessarily a financial one, but um, you know... Sometimes T decides she's going to sit on your lap, she'll sit on your lap, and she'll sit on whoever's lap happens to be the person she's chosen to sit on, you know, it's that type of thing, it's not, um... And uh, they're loved, they're really, really loved. And that's really nice.

L: I think so, too. How would you describe their personalities?

Peter laughs.

T: Well, they're quite different. The, the... Cause it's quite funny, also, in them, which is something we've, we've discussed before, Pete and I, there's characteristics of us that are coming through, and I find that so bizarre. Cause I never understood before, you'd hear people who'd adopted kids say, you know, that they've got similarities. But it's obviously, what? How do you word it?

P: I don't know, it's nature versus nurture, it's that whole debate, it's very, very strange...

L: Mm.

T: Ja. T's definitely more bossy, and U is – but she's smaller, so she's got a more, um, kinder nature perhaps, um... T's very much on her own mission now and doing her own little things...

P: She's an organiser as well...

T: Yes.

L: She seems very confident...

P: No, they're both very much so. I mean, U, last, two weekends ago, sang solo in front of three and a half thousand people and didn't bat an eyelid, you know...

L: Good grief.

P: ... that type of thing.

T: I was very stressed for her.

Laughter.

T: Just didn't want her to be in a situation where they fail, it's just, one worries...

L: It's part of being a parent, isn't it?

P: Very much, very much. But they, they are confident, U... Also the age gap between the two of them has, has not been evident until now. Now all of the sudden, U's always been the follower, so it's sort of, T says, 'Let's do this', and U goes, 'Ok'. Now T goes, 'Let's do this', and U goes, 'Why?'

Laughter.

P: She says, 'No, I want to do this'.

T: But she's not a baby anymore.

P: Cause this conflict of interest has never happened before, so that's, that's quite interesting to watch, it's quite fun to see that dynamic changing, and to see how they handle it as well.

L: Mm.

P: T's got this wonderful, you get The Look. The only person who gets the Look currently is U [inaudible]. But if you catch her giving U The Look, she goes [pulls a startled face], cause U, she tries to give this teenage look, but doesn't quite make it, can't sustain it at all, she gets the giggles.

Laughter.

P: It's really quite sweet.

T: But I mean, they also love each other, they often will share their, sleep in the same bed, um... It's really good...

P: They miss each other, they miss, if one is away on a sleepover or something, then they miss each other terribly, um... They are very, very, genuinely, fond of each other...

L: Mm.

P: And they look after each other, I think. T's... T's on a mission, um... U just wants to take care of the world, she's the social one...

T: T's very, if she sees an animal being hurt on TV, she will cry...

L: Oh, shame. So she's quite a, an empathetic little child, ja.

P: Yes, ja, she can't cope with anything like that.

T: They both seem to have got that.

P: They can't bear injustice, if anything is unfair, then ooh, it kills them, they can't stand it.

T: And I think their confidence is also... You know, we don't have sort of sexist stereotypes, they're able to do anything, um, and there isn't sort of girls' sports and boys' sports, and we... Like T really wants to go to Northlands Girls', cause they have a girls' rugby team there, and... Neither of us is sporty, how the hell they've become good at sports, I don't know...

P: I think it's from my parents.

Laughter.

P: They learnt to play golf this weekend, and they watched an awful lot of rugby.

Laughter.

L: Golf is an expensive hobby, you'd better watch out.

Laughter.

P: Yes, Terry's just taken it up for business purposes.

T: But I mean, they do very well at school, they're both, like, high up in the top of their classes academically...

P: They're both within the top 10 in their class...

T: [inaudible] made the swimming team and stuff like that...

P: But again, it's sort of all-round [inaudible]...

T: I think it comes with confidence, those things.

L: Ja.

T: Tied in with it. You need some skill, but if you're confident you can pull it off.

L: Or at least give it a try.

T: Ja, maybe it's the giving it a try.

P: Yes, the lack of confidence is the back-down instantly.

L: Ja.

P: Before they've even tried.

L: Ok. So, you've tried to instil that in them?

P: I don't know, maybe we just do it naturally.

T: I think so. I mean, they both read, and love reading, and I, I also love reading and it's so nice that they will read. Obviously, they do watch too much TV, as kids do, um, it's just one of those things.

P: We've just set up two TV-free days a week.

L: Oh, ok.

P: Cause otherwise [laughs].

L: Not weekends, that's a bad idea.

P: No. No, there's no point in trying the weekend.

T: No point in punishing ourselves!

Laughter.

P: Because otherwise, they just watch soaps.

T: The other thing that I've noticed about how our life changed is from being a couple, going out jolling and clubs and all that, which I still happen to miss a bit but Pete doesn't, um, and I will tend to go out and have a little dance every now and again. Um, our life changed drastically, and within very much, for me, it was a hard transition, because I suddenly became a stay-at-home-in-the-evening person, um, needing to organise a babysitter, but that was never an issue for Peter, um...

P: Because ninety percent of my work was happening at night and therefore, I would be on stage, so... Kind of taken him for granted almost, which is unfair.

T: It's true, it was, it was... Ja, it was a big transition.

L: Sort of like a reining in.

T: Ja, it was for m, um... It, it was, I don't know, I felt that a big adjustment... Resentful is the wrong word, but ja, slightly annoyed... 'I want to go out tonight'.

Laughter.

L: That's why I'm not having kids right now.

Laughter.

L: If I get the itch, I need to go!

T: Ja, definitely. You must wait.

L: Alright. Any other ways that your relationship changed, after you...?

T: Well, it does, like, which... A big way for me, were... Obviously, Peter sits in that pile of the most important sort of things... It dilutes it, cause the kids – It's so hard to explain, or verbalise that love for the kids, um... Because for me, I don't even see them as not my own children...

P: Ja.

T:... They truly are my own kids, um, ja, that's very hard.

P: And the good, old-fashioned basics, like you can't suddenly have sex at any time [laughs]. You have to plan and lock doors, I mean...

Laughter.

P: You can't just do it in the middle of the dining room anymore... Not that we ever did, but the option was there...

Laughter.

L: Ja, that spontaneity...

P: That's it, yeah.

T: Definitely changes, ja.

P: I mean, any, any going out anywhere suddenly was not something that you could just do at the drop of a hat. You couldn't just say, 'Jump in the car', because suddenly there were bags...

L: Extra bodies.

P: ... And nappies and bottles – Well, it wasn't quite that bad for us, but I mean it was...
Ja, change of clothes, and all of those types of things.

T: Well, I always packed enough for myself, now I'm having to pack for myself and kids.

Laughter.

T: Pete can go with a gym bag.

P: Terry goes overnight somewhere, we have to have three suitcases.

T: You don't know what the weather might be like.

Laughter.

L: It's so true, you need at least three choices of outfit, depending on what happens.

T: Definitely, rather be sure.

P: Terry has to have three choices per possibility.

L: I do the same, actually.

T: Oh good. And there's nothing worse than not having a choice of something. Oh, I hate that.

L: I agree with you, definitely. Ok, so how do you divide childcare? I mean, it's a bit of a naïve question, but...

T: In the beginning, it, I was very much doing to home part, do you agree, Pete?

P: Yes.

T: Of cooking the dinner and doing the shopping and um, that sort of part of it. And you almost, I almost had the traditional mom role for the early days...

P: Mm.

T: In the mom role, of the person who, stereotyped person who would get dinner together and that sort of side of it. And then my job changed and I got a little notch up the corporate ladder, and then another little notch or two, and then it changed. Cause my hours became longer and...

P: Ja, it suddenly became much more of a regular job.

T: And Pete now is, is very much the cooking, shopping stuff cause his life is more flexible, of fetching kids more than I do and dropping kids more than I do. Um... And at the moment, he's dropping kids in the morning so that I can go to gym, but I'm not getting to gym.

Laughter.

P: And that's got to stop.

T: I'm still trying to get my figure back after the two kids.

Laughter.

P: Hate to tell you... It's not going to happen [laughs].

T: It might, it might.

L: Early morning gym, I can understand.

T: Six o' clock, it's horrific. It is too hideous. But it can't happen in the evening because one has to be home. Um, when the kids are a little older, I think it will be nice, we could probably do the evening because they could go, whereas, whereas now...

P: They're desperate to go...

T: The kid bit at the gym is boring, you know, it's just a TV and not much else. I haven't looked at the La Lucia one, if it's any nicer, but... So, there, the roles are very blurred. I think I, Pete's a good disciplinarian, he speaks twice, third time always comes with a hiding. Um, I also get really cross over silly things...

P: You're a shouter.

T: I, um, he doesn't worry about messy bedrooms or clothes on the floor and things like that, where it makes a big issue for me, um... Pete wouldn't notice mess, would you?

P: Not until I finally tripped over it.

T: No. So I do that bit of it. I then do the awful thing and say, 'I'm fed up now, Pete, deal with it'.

L: And you take over.

P: Well, yes and no, cause he says that but then he doesn't actually stop. Wah, wah, wah, wah, which doesn't help either, because it doesn't help either cause it kind of dilutes what he's said previously. But um, I think we share that quite evenly, in that, you know, it's sort of equal quantities of love and discipline from both, um...

L: But it's according to personality then.

T: Ja, ja, it is.

P: Ja.

T: They've got boundaries, they know the boundaries, they know the rules...

P: Yes, they like pushing them, as all kids do, but they don't...

T: But they're pretty obedient, I think, really, they know if we're serious or if we're playing. And the kids and I have lots of fun playing together...

P: Verbally?

L: Are you the more physical player, or is there not much of that?

T: Oh, please, Pete can just walk to the post box.

Laughter.

P: Ja, I'm not, for somebody who used to dance forever, I'm not physically active, I don't enjoy it anymore, um so...

T: It's quite odd, for me, the fat one, who loves walking, it's very odd the way it's turned out.

P: So no, from a physical, games type of thing, no we don't, we don't sort of play any, um... But I'll be making stuff in the workshop, I'm gluing, I'm painting, whatever, and the girls will gladly come out and say, 'Oh, can we join,' and I'll say, 'Yeah, there'. And they'll sit and they do their own thing. U's always making Christmas cards to send all over the world.

T: My physical stuff with them is more, um, oh, we'll go to the beach and do things like that, but they also love shopping centres at Gateway or La Lucia Mall or whatever, um...

P: If they didn't do so much sport at school, I think I would, it would worry me, but it doesn't because they, I mean they play sport every single day of the week. Um, there's something different going on, whether it tennis or hockey or netball or whatever, I mean, they're always running around like lunatics...

T: And I'm sure you remember from school, if you're good at it then you make the team, then there's the weekend things, and oh God...

L: Tournaments and matches...

P: Uh huh, uh, huh.

L: ... and getting to the school on time to get in the Kombi to go to the other school, ja.

T: Cause they both sing really well, so they often have choir stuff, and then there's tennis and then there's swimming and oh... I, I think they're very busy.

L: And they still manage to come in the top 10? Don't you wish you had the energy?

T: Ja, kids have the energy when they don't need it, you know...

L: Just wish you could swap it around...

T: Definitely, definitely.

P: Siphon a bit off [laughs].

L: And who else helps with childcare and that type of thing? I mean, you said you've got a group of friends, or...

P: Yes, ja, I mean it's a very good support system...

T: But no, no-one as in bringing them up.

P: No.

T: Even their mom doesn't have a role there...

P: No, I suppose Aunty Beauty is with us on a daily basis, but the girls don't see her much...

T: Ja, but Aunty Beauty is like a stereotyped little white South African kid had their nanny, is what she is, it's quite bizarre.

Phone rings, Peter answers.

T: What's he doing?

L: Someone at the gate.

T: Oh, he's got a dress-fitting.

L: Oh, ok. Do you want to...

T: No, what have you got there? Cause I can...

L: Well, just um, I'm just thinking, I mean we've pretty much covered it in a different sort of order to what, um, to what I was looking at... Um... One thing I wanted to ask...

T: He's going to send her... Just stop there.

Tape stops.

Tape begins again.

L: What was I talking about? Oh, I was talking about who, like, helps to look after the kids and that type of thing. But you say it's not, it's not a major childcare, it's more sort of fetching...

P: No, not, sort of, on a daily basis...

T: There's no-one else doing the bringing up...

P: We use the school aftercare system, which makes sure that homework gets done. And also if you try and pick them up before, if I go try and pick them up before half past three, she'll go, 'Shoo, go away, go away, I'm having fun,' you know, they're playing, they're having a great time, so, um... Also, I mean, that's starting to change for T now, she's starting to get older, but again, she has sports in the afternoons, all the different kinds of activities and things...

L: Ok. So, if you need anyone, they just pick up and just babysit for the afternoon...?

P: Yes, very much.

T: Yes.

L: Ok. Is, are you... Do they speak Zulu?

T: They, they, um... U knew hardly any Zulu, T knew a bit but not helluva fluent, she forgot it from not using it. They're both doing Zulu at school now, and both obviously like high marks, obviously it's parked there somewhere in the brain, um... But English is obviously their predominant language.

P: Also found that people don't speak to them in Zulu.

L: Oh, really?

P: Even now, when we're in shops or something, and somebody says hello to them, it tends to be in English.

L: That's very interesting.

T: We, we've got other, a couple of other Black friends who could do, and people like that, also Black who don't speak Zulu...

P: Ja, it's not part of their regular language.

T: Ja.

L: Mm. Now if, um, you say you haven't really had any particular difficulties with negative reactions from people or anything like that. Let's say now, T's going off to high school soon, um, and let's say something happens to her, someone says something to her when they see you two together, or fetching her from school or whatever. How do you think you're going to handle that?

T: I think fine, personally, because...

P: Ja.

T: ... it would be like anything else. Manage it, very calm and collected and not, we can deal with hectic stuff, um... I don't see a problem with it.

P: No...

T: I think it's normal stuff that most parents deal with, be it, 'ooh, you've got fat parents or ugly parents or your mother's car is hideous, or...'

P: How many kids make their parents drop them off around the corner, you know, then they walk to school.

T: Didn't you? Isn't that what one does?

Laughter.

L: I did.

P: I had to cycle to school, so that doesn't count.

Laughter.

T: No, so ja, I think we'll take it in our stride, honestly.

L: And the girls, do you think they'll handle it?

P: I think so, ja. I think they are confident enough in themselves to be able to deal with it, I mean... We had a, a situation a while ago, where somebody said to U, 'Why have you got two dads?' She said, 'I don't, I've got three'. End of the conversation, dumbstruck, didn't know what else to do.

Laughter.

P: And also, again, we had a couple of days ago, all the little grade 1's, reception unit, R class, standing downstairs and I was standing at the top of the steps, and 'Mr Court, Mr Court, is your girlfriend Black?' So I said, 'No'. They said, 'Cause U is', and I said, 'No, she's not, she's brown'. [Laughs] And they were, 'Oh. So your girlfriend's not Black?' So I said, 'No'. And then one little bright spark went, 'Is your boyfriend Black?' So I said, 'No, he's not!'

Laughter.

P: I mean, that's reception unit...

L: Ja, and that's four, five years old, I know. No, they're a lot sharper than we give them credit for.

P: Ooh. So that was quite interesting. So I don't know, I just don't see it as a big issue in our lives.

T: I don't think so.

L: You're comfortable that you've sort of made the foundation for them, hey?

P: It's not kind of what... It's what we are, not who we are, if that makes sense, it doesn't affect every area of our lives because it's a part of it...

T: It's very funny, cause they, they're very aware of how lucky they are. They'll often say, cause you know they, they know their mom's house, they go there, they visit, they see it, and it's just a very normal two-bedroom house. And now and again, it'll come out, 'Oh, if I wasn't adopted I couldn't do this, or couldn't do that, and I'm so lucky'. And I think adopted kids probably have a tough time because you're wondering about these parents. At least they know their parents and have a relationship with them, I mean, cause I think that takes the mystery away, um, of hoping to find them or, or whatever.

L: Or maybe for you guys having to explain to them, you know... The other couple I interviewed said that they had a real problem with the idea, their child's very young, and she was abandoned, a few hours old in a park...

P: Yes.

T: Oh, how do you do that?

L: ...and to try and explain to this little girl...

T: Gosh, that's hard.

L: You know, the instinct is to say, 'Your parents really did love you', but how...

T: I mean, but you're starting a whole lie, I don't know if I'd be happy with that lie.

L: But at least you guys have got that background.

T: Have you, have you met another lady that, that we know? I don't know if, if I have _____'s number since my phone was stolen. But she adopted a little Black girl, a single woman on her own, I mean, that might be interesting for you. And she's an older woman, in her late forties? No, no she must be older than that...

P: Early fifties, I think. Her daughter's just gone into Grade 8.

T: If you want another one, we can give you my cousin's number...

L: Oh, well... it's a bit late now, I'm frantically trying to finish up interviews with you guys, so I can finish for the year.

T: Well, if you need more...

Dog enters.

P: Uh, uh, uh. Smelly.

L: Not a problem. Ok, well that's pretty much it for now. If I'd like to interview you guys again, sometime within the next few weeks...

T: Mm, happily, if there's something you think of.

L: Is that ok?

T: Sure.

L: And what I can do is I can give you, if you want, um, I can give you a copy of the transcript of this interview...

T: Oh, that will be nice.

L: ... and then when I analyse, and do my final write-up, I can... Because the method that I'm using allows you guys a say, so if I analyse something and I come up with something that doesn't fit right with you

P: Mm hm.

T: Oh, that's interesting, ok. Oh, I like that.

L:... then I, you guys can let me know because it's about [...] it allows your voice to come through.

T: Oh, I like that.

P: Right, ja.

L: So, if you have an email address – can I take it? [...] Ok, so this is going to take a while to transcribe, maybe two or three weeks.

T: Mm?

L: It's a painstaking business.

T: Oh, it must be hideous.

L: But I'll get it done as soon as possible, I'll send you guys a transcript. If there's something that doesn't sound right, because it sometimes it doesn't pick up words very correctly, clearly, then just let me know, and let me know of any changes. And then if I need to interview you guys, I can give you a call.

P: Fine, by all means.

T: Lovely.

L: Thank you very much.

P: Not a problem.

End of interview.

Terence and Peter: Interview 2

L: Um, like I said to you in, I don't know if you've even got the email by now, or if I said to you on the phone...

Peter: We got the first one.

L: Ja, but this is not going to be too long, I don't think...

P: Fine, fine.

L: Ja, and the first transcript did come out nicely, because your voices carried a lot better than the first couple's, they were both very soft-spoken women and we were sitting a lot further away from the...

Laughter.

T: So it was training for you, so you knew to get us a lot closer

L: Ja, so it was rewind, play, rewind, play to try and get it, ja. Um, but ja, I thought our first interview was actually lovely, and there was a lot of very useful stuff. Um, I was just saying to Terry that I don't think I'm going to get my research done by this year...

P: Mm.

L: ... so I will try and get it, as much of it done this year, so expect the analysis part of my research sort of toward the end of the year, maybe the beginning of next year.

P: Fine.

T: Great.

L: Ok? So I just wanted to start it, start off, um... Can you just give me brief family background, where did you grow up...?

T: Ok, well mine's quite easy, I grew up in Durban, um, I lived a little bit in Cape Town, Ladysmith, my father was a quarry manager, so we moved around, so we moved around a fair bit, but the biggest chunk of it was in Durban. After that, I go to school at Northlands, for high school, then hotel school, uh, my little two-year stint in the army, in Bloem, and then um, I come back to Durban, get a job running a hotel, and then I leave there and join this industrial catering company, which is the company that I'm with now, and I've sort of worked my way up the ladder.

L: Ok.

T: That's my little... Mine's quite simple, not complicated like Peter's, different countries...

Laughter.

L: Ok, before we get to Peter's then, um...

T: My little thing, which I suppose is interesting, I don't know if it's interesting, was um, obviously before I met Pete, I was engaged to get married, I'd been in a long-term relationship with a woman, um... We'd been together six years, seven years, I can't actually remember anymore, um. And I had broken that relationship off, and then met Peter.

L: Mm, hm. Ok.

P: No, it wasn't my fault.

Laughter.

T: But that's my sort of...

L: Ok. And your parents, what sort of...? Just quickly describe your parents, what were they like?

T: Um... My mother was a, a model and hairdresser and um... She was runner-up in the 1967 Miss South Africa...

Laughter.

T: And that's how she met my father, who was a Duzi canoeist, who won the Duzi a few times, and she was the blonde at the finish line handing out rosettes...

Laughter.

T: Um, and that's how they met. They live on a farm in the Midlands...

L: Ok.

T: Um, what else? Quite an uneventful sort of childhood, I would say, quite a nice little loving home, folks are a lot of fun, um... A normal South African family, I would say, but at the same time, I would also say quite progressive, because they've embraced my relationship with Pete, as they have the kids, so I would say that's quite good.

L: Mm, ok. Now onto you.

P: Mine's a bit more complicated. Um, Swansea, South Wales, is where I was born. My parents worked for the Queen's Trust, which is the British Regime American Peace Corps, so we went off to Nigeria and lived in Nigeria for several years, uh, then various sort of European stops on the way home, Hungary, Budapest, um, back to UK, then my parents emigrated to South Africa when I was 11, to deepest, darkest Sasolburg...

Laughter.

P: In die Vrystaat, and I lived there until I was 16, so I was there for 5 years, um... And because of my dyslexia, I was then, at that point, severely dyslexic, and there was no way I was going to be able to finish Matric, so I elected to go back to the UK. Went back to the UK, did O's and A levels, came back to South Africa when I was 19, started working at a theatre in Jo'burg. I was there for about two years, and then the law changed, you could no longer have dual citizenship...

L: Ok.

T: ... um, which my parents had been told would never happen. Anyway, I had to make a choice, I decided to remain a British subject, um... Went back to the UK, came backwards and forwards for holidays every three or four years or so, um... And then came back ten years ago, for a three week holiday... And stayed.

Laughter.

L: Nice holiday! Ok. And your parents, how would you describe them?

P: Um, very British, isn't it? Upper-middle class. They both come from very working class backgrounds. Um, my mother was involved in the police force, she was a policewoman, uh, my father is an engineer, taught engineering for [inaudible], taught engineering in Nigeria. My mom was involved in tsetse fly and that type of thing, um, research material...

L: Ok.

P: Um, and bilharzia, and then... I don't know, how would you describe them? They're...

T: Religious...

P: Yeah...

T: They're... lovely morals, and very kind...

P: Ja, typical... They're very run of the mill...

T: They've worked very hard for their money and they appreciate the nice things they've got...

P: Yeah...

T: The one big difference between Pete and I is that I have a huge extended family...

L: I know!

P: Yes, yes.

T: ... of aunts and uncles and cousins...

P: Yes, there's millions of them!

Laughter.

T: It's hectic.

L: I know, I know! [Laughter] Kelly always used to say to me, 'my cousin's had a baby', and I would be like, 'Another one?' And she would say, 'No, no, no, this is the other cousin.'

T: Ja, it's a hectic family, but like Pete has absolutely no contact with his family bar his parents and his sister...

P: Ja, ja.

T: Where I have, my level of cousins, is very much, the ones of my age, are like sisters, so it's quite strange, um... And you already know my mixed-up family, other kids, black kids, inseminated kids, it's all there...

Laughter.

T: Even coloured children.

L: Yes, I've met _____, I've met them.

T: Ja, we're covered in every category.

Laughter.

P: Truly South African!

Laughter.

P: Ja, so typical, liberal parents.

L: Ok. Um, I wanted to ask you specifically, because you said, um, you know, after you consciously – obviously, this also applies to you, but after you consciously decided that, right, you're probably not going to have children now, what was it like to get used to the idea that now you were...

T: It was very hard for me, very hard, because I had accepted that whole thing. And remember, when I was having kids with my girlfriend, fiancée, wife, whatever she was to me, it was a different set-up then, somehow. You know, there's sort of different dynamics that you're dealing with, so... I had accepted that a whole chapter wouldn't happen in my life, so that was tough for me. I felt that extremely hard. Um possibly because I so enjoy big families and so on...

Laughter.

T: It was tricky. And I felt the beginning very hard, because I was the principal caregiver in those early days, 'cause Pete worked at night all the time then, I was based at home working. So I was very hands-on, I don't think I was ever expecting to be so hands-on.

L: Mm.

T: Um... So no, it wasn't easy. I felt that adjustment very, very hard. And there was no literature, you know, bar – there was the sort of Dr Spock-type books, but there wasn't anything... T was three, so it's not a baby, you know, it's a different sort of category or age group that, the books didn't seem to cater for that. The books that were around didn't seem to cater for that, um...

L: Mm.

T: Um, like I said before, the logistics were difficult, there weren't family toilets and all those things, I felt that quite hard, just getting used to it, fitting into our life. Maybe we didn't compromise enough, we just still carried on going out to restaurants and doing things and just took her with, but it never really became a problem.

P: I think also because, because it was open-ended, we had no idea how long it was going to go on for, but we didn't think it was going to be permanent.

L: Mm.

P: So...

L: So it was easy, in that sense, to adapt, go with the flow...

P: Yes. And it was a case of, 'alright, we're going out to dinner, come!'

Laughter.

L: 'Can't leave you at home!'

P: And we were also dealing with, we were dealing with a three-year-old who was... I don't mean to sound weird, but she was personality-less.

L: Mm.

P: To a certain extent. Right at the very beginning. Wasn't she, right at the very beginning, do you...?

T: She was very shy, very nervous...

P: Very...

T: And remember, she was getting used to strangers...

P: She had no idea what was going on. Obviously, she could, she was following bits of conversation from other members of staff who were speaking in Zulu, I have no idea what was being said or what wasn't being said, you know, that type of thing. So it was quite tricky dealing with that sort of side of it.

L: So there was the whole language issue as well?

P: Yes. Ja, she spoke no English, none.

L: Wow.

P: And Terry spoke some Zulu, I have nothing, you know, I didn't have a clue. The first day that she came with me to rehearsals, thank God I had two black cast members, because this child was desperate to go to the toilet and I had no idea.

L: Oh, shame, ja.

P: You know, it was literally, it was that basic.

L: Wow, ja.

P: So, it was...

L: So it wasn't just getting your mind around the whole concept, it was also lifestyle and...

T: No, very much so.

P: No, absolute practicalities.

L: Wow, wow. And for you, the whole idea of getting used to...

P: Again, I think because it was a gradual thing, it was, there was no sort of moment when I thought, 'I'm a parent', you know...

L: Ja, ja.

P: Um, there was no light bulbs going off, nothing, it was just, it was just that she had become completely integrated into our lives. I think probably when we thought we were going to lose her, it was a different thing. Um, and then it was no, hang on a minute, that's not happening, you're not doing that, you're not taking my child. By that point it was my child, our child.

L: Mm.

P: Um, I think as we said before, in the last interview, she's as, they both are, they're as much our kids as if we, they were biologically ours. You can hear it in the way they speak, you can see it in their attitudes, you can see it in the way they think. And I don't think that's us putting a blanket, um, thing on top of their personalities, it's just that they've chosen to take on things of our personalities.

T: It's environment [inaudible] other characteristics [inaudible].

L: Mm. Just as a matter of interest, because I put in the transcript that U called you daddy, that's what I'd heard, does she?

P: They both, they both specify. If they shout daddy, it's whoever answers, or perhaps one of them will shout, 'Dad!', and then it's whoever goes, 'Yes'. Um, I think U tends to call me Daddy, but the, more often that not, they specify, Daddy Peter or Daddy Terry, they're quite specific if they're calling one of us.

L: Ok. And then their mom? Biological mom?

P: Mom.

T: Mom.

L: Ok, and biological dad? Not sure?

T: Well...

P: Daddy _____.

T: Ja, Daddy _____.

P: Daddy _____, I would say. They specify.

L: Ok. Which is obviously how they made sense of it.

P: Yes.

L: Ok. And you said that you were possibly going to lose her, was that in terms of Child Welfare?

T: Well, you see, the problem was, there became this whole issue of where, we were not sure of where the mom was, so they said they would just put her into foster care...

L: Mm.

T: ... And that became quite a nightmare for us, because you know, we didn't know how we were going to manage this, and the whole idea of a baby being stuck in an orphanage was hideous. Um...

L: Mm, mm. And were they quite insistent that they wanted to take her...

T: I didn't find them, Pete never went with me, and I didn't find them very helpful...

L: Ok.

P: We just chose not to follow it up, not to leave any information...

L: Mm.

T: I just left it, but the attitude was quite terrible.

L: Mm.

T: But it was fine, we, we did find the mom. (Pause) It's funny how easy it was with U, it wasn't at all complicated...

L: Was that more a case of, 'please can you take her?'

T: Yes, ja. It was just so much easier... Um, it's quite funny, her, their mom came to visit this weekend with their baby sister, oh she's cute as a button...

L: Is that the...?

P: The last one.

L: ... the bruiser?

P: Yes.

T: Yes. But she did go home!

Laughter.

T: I made very sure she went home!

Laughter – inaudible.

T: I wasn't taking any chances!

P: Any time she went anywhere, 'where are you going? Take _____ with you!'

Laughter.

L: That must have been quite difficult, you know, after – well, I suppose, like you said, because the dynamics were different and you were more hands-on, but then, you know, in my mind it's sort of like this whole idealised thing, 'I'm going to have kids one day', and when they actually come along, it's 'oh, crap!'

P: [Laughs] Literally!

T: It was different with U, because Siza was around, pregnant with her. Funny enough, I also worked with Siza when she was pregnant with T, but I never saw T when she was born or anything. But with U, we went to the hospital when she was born...

P: Yes. [Laughs]

T: And then they wouldn't let us in, and Pete started, as he always does, he says, 'But I'm the dad!'

Laughter.

T: And I saw them look at each other with a look that said, 'oh my God! What's going on here?'

Laughter.

T: And they went in, came back, then they spoke to Siza, and came back again, and then they let us in, only one could go in.

P: That's [inaudible]

L: Ok, so you were actually there in the same room while U was being born?

P: No, no this was after...

T: She was all cleaned up and neat!

L: I was going to say, very brave man!

Laughter.

P: No, she was all very nice.

L: Ok.

P: She was cute, God she was cute.

L: But, they always are, though.

T: But I've enjoyed all the different ages we've gone through, you know, I mean, we're in a very different category with T now, she's 11, and she's loving clothes and things, all that stuff, and it's really lovely, um... You know, the teenage time's a little bit hectic...

L: I was going to say, the calm before the storm.

P: Absolutely!

T: It's inevitable, it's part of growing up. So, ja, I'm sure we'll handle it like we've handled everything else.

L: And there always comes a time when they have passed those teenage years, they turn around and they actually think, 'you know what, you're not so bad'...

Laughter.

L: ... they come back and they become your friend.

T: Ja, ja, I think so, I think it's a difficult stage.

L: Um, we've gone through the questions pretty quickly, but um, in terms of, you said that when their mom was sick, she didn't talk to you about it and you were very angry and bitter about it for a long time...

T: Ja, I was because... I cannot understand, when you've given birth to these kids, they are yours, how she let eight months go by. Without even checking if she was alright or if we were looking after her or anything. Um, I just had such an issue with it, I was just so angry and mad and the fact is, we did the looking for her. She never, ever, she knew where we lived, she knew exactly where we lived, but she never, ever came... Or sent someone. You know, no matter how sick you are, you can send a person. I know it was a little bit before cell phones were as common as they are nowadays, but you could make

a plan. Write a number and say, 'please phone this number', it could have been done. So, ja, I was very peeved with that.

L: And did you eventually discuss the whole issue with her when you did find her?

T: I did more shouting on my side, not discussing! Pete was trying to shush me up. But I was very annoyed, for myself *and* for T.

L: Mm.

T: You know, I really thought it was wrong.

P: Ja, we had gone through a lot of angst and a lot of trauma...

T: Ja, we didn't know if she was dead, or lying in a morgue, or lying in some hospital unable to talk. The concept that she just hadn't come back didn't occur to me. I *always* believed something terrible must have happened, um... And, you know, in her defence, it was her conscious decision that she would have a lovely upbringing with us, but it wasn't her call! I mean, you've got to discuss that with somebody, you just don't leave a child, like those old-fashioned movies, you see where they leave them in a basket...

L: Ja.

T: Ja, that's how I felt it was.

P: Ja, it certainly did have that feel about it.

T: Ja.

L: Mm. But obviously, you've managed to put that all aside.

P: Got past it, yes.

Laughter.

L: Shame, how's your blood pressure?

Laughter.

T: Ja, I still battle to deal with that concept that you don't come and find out what's happening or send a message or something...

P: Ja, that would be normal. [inaudible] I don't know whether it's something cultural, because it just seems such a normal thing within, because of the extended family within, um, black families, especially within Zulu families too, to have a child, hand it over to somebody, and go straight back to work, or get back to work as quickly as possible, and

that you, the parenting of that child is dealt with by somebody else, for quite a long time. I mean, up to about two years old, isn't it?

T: Well, _____ is the first baby that their mom is bringing up herself...

P: Yes.

T: ... out of five kids.

P: And so I don't know if that has something to do with it, but I don't know.

L: I think, possibly, it has something to do with the fact that they, there's that whole concept of *ubuntu*, your children are my children because you're my brother, you're my sister...

P: Yes, yes...

L: And so, no matter who's bringing the child up, as long as the child's being brought up by one of us...

P: Yes.

L: So that's maybe, maybe...

T: Ja, but that also surprises me, because then her own extended family should have been questioning and saying, 'where is she, what happened to her?'

L: To look at it in a slightly different way, maybe she saw you like family.

T: Yes, maybe.

L: I mean, it is a possibility.

P: I think she did, I, personally, I think she did, by that point. Um, we, we got on very well, as a trio, I mean, you know, we always have, you know... Running the business, we worked together so well...

T: We've always worked well.

P: It, it always... It feels like a family relationship, you know, it feels like a... not necessarily a sister, more like a cousin, that type of close relationship. Well, your type of cousins, not my type of cousins!

Laughter.

T: [inaudible] He just doesn't deal with people that he doesn't phone or doesn't have anything to do with, it's just so different from how I've grown up, it's just too weird.

L: But I can kind of identify with both of you, because I couldn't believe the vastness of Kelly's family...

Laughter.

T: It just goes on forever!

L: I couldn't, I just couldn't! Because yes, you know, on my mom's side, I come from quite a big family and so I've got a few cousins, about 7 or 8 on that side, but on my dad's side, I've only got one, so I can kind of identify with you!

P: No, I've got several of them, I'm just not in touch with them. I mean Terry's dad had a birthday party [inaudible]...

T: It was his 60th.

P: And, you know, immediate family only, and there was like 60, 70, 120 of them, I mean, that was immediate family only!

Laughter.

P: Ja, it was trial by fire because that was everybody!

[...] Laughter.

L: Anyway, ja. Is there anything that you'd like to add that I haven't covered?

T: I don't think... Because, the thing is, our story adds to it with time, because there's all sorts of dynamics to come. Boyfriends...

P: Oh, God!

T: There's all different cultures, it'll be quite interesting to see what happens there, and...

P: High school...

T: ... we're going to end up with other extended families, ultimately, and that's also going to be a whole interesting dynamic to get used to.

L: Grandparents.

P: Mm.

T: Ja. It's, it's weird. But, ja, I think it's sort of... That's where it is now.

P: Ja, come back in ten years!

Laughter.

P: Ja, I can't think of anything...

T: I don't know what else we can add.

P: But I suppose, if there's a summing up to do, um, I do not regret one, single second of it, I really don't, um... I think we've been bloody lucky, and I think we, the girls that we have are wonderful. I don't know how much of that is nature versus nurture, I'd be fascinated to actually see that...

L: I really can't tell you!

P: That would make me [inaudible] forever. Um, but I wouldn't trade a second of it, I would not. I've loved the good times, the bad times, the crying, the...

L: Pooley nappies!

P: ...Shitty nappies, the whole toot! I wouldn't, I wouldn't miss any of it, because it has been wonderful to do, I really, really... I'm just honoured to have been part of it, really, it's been... And to do it with Terry. Um, yeah, he goes away overnight, and I think, 'my God, I don't know how people can cope as single parents'. I've been away for up to a month and a half, you know, and I think that...

T: Lord have mercy!

Laughter.

P: And I, I don't know how people do it, I really don't, and I take my hat off to them because to juggle job and kids and everything else, oof.

T: That's true, that's true.

P: It's been, it's been... fun!

Laughter.

L: As long as you're looking forward to the rest of it.

T: No, I'm more nervous for the rest, I dread when the kids want, when they're moving out of home and things like that, I hate the idea of all of that.

L: And why is that?

T: No, I like my little life as it is, so...

L: You like the energy and the noise.

T: Ja, it's nice, it's different, I suppose. But, ja, but what I find the scariest, moving onto another thing, I was saying to myself the other day, gosh, T might only have a few more years left at home, you know, she might be moving, you know.

L: But if you look at other people today, they don't move out until they're thirty!

Laughter.

T: Oh, I hope we're in that category!

Laughter.

P: No, I mean, you say that, I mean... I still think of them as little, but I don't know if I'd cope with boyfriends staying over and...

Laughter.

P: You know what I mean? I don't know how I'd deal with that!

T: You won't deal with that well!

P: I won't, I think I'd be horrible!

Laughter.

T: Can I turn the TV on?

L: Ja, my mom always says you, you're a lot more liberal until you actually have children!

P: Ja, I think so, I think, yeah, liberalism is this wonderful bubble concept that is an umbrella that goes over everything, and then suddenly it hits a specific and you go, oh. What do you want, sweetheart?

T: You can tape over it.

P: Yes, I'm sure Uncle _____ didn't catch any of the beginnings and any of the ends, so...

Inaudible

L: Ja, but these are, these are all things that you're going to have to face, hey?

P: It is, and it's going to be... It's going to be like everything else that we've faced, it's going to be, as the issue comes, we'll deal with it. It's usually scary for them.

L: Scary for them, or scary for you?

P: Both, I think.

T: You're top of the tree in your primary school, and then it changes.

P: And also because, at primary school, they've known us all the way through.

L: Yes, and there's going to be...

P: And now they're going to a whole new set-up, with people who don't know them. Well, there will be a handful.

L: Yes, but there's no family feel to it.

T: Yes, that's the change.

P: Ja, that's... And I suppose, it's really no different from what every child goes through, you know, that jump from Grade 7 to Grade 8, it's going to be quite interesting.

T: Ja.

L: And I suppose, you learn about yourself as you go along as well, when the new challenges crop up.

P: Yeah, yeah. Because you sit there and sort of analyse and go, 'well how are we going to deal with this?' But until that happens, you can't...

L: How am I reacting to this?

P: Yes, yes, ja. [Laughs] Not if it's very bad, and you think, 'Am I going to deal with this?' When it happens, you go, oh, well. We'll deal with it as it goes.

T: I think there's so many things... If I look at our parents, they're all getting much older, and that's where I think the kids will be good because ultimately we have to deal with them becoming frail, and it's quite nice to have a child to help you with that, um... And I really like the concept of, you know, I've got some cousins...

Laughter.

T: ... that are old and alone, and I play a, sort of important role within their lives, doing things and stuff like that and, ja, I, I'm very glad that I have a little family unit of my own, um... You know, the kids like teasing me and saying they'll send me to an old-age home and sell all my antiques...

Laughter.

P: That's U's favourite gag. Terry's going on 40, you know...

Laughter.

L: Ja, ja. But like you say, there is a bit of comfort in knowing that there will be people there, blood is thicker than water, kind of thing.

T: Ja, it's nice...

P: And also, that they're involved in that continuity, that they see Terrence looking after them, going out of his way to make sure that Aunt Hazel is fine, Uncle Peter's fine, just a phone call her, or go to fetch somebody to take them somewhere or, you know, checking up on their doctor's appointments and things like that type of thing, and so that, yeah, that blood is thicker than water set-up. But they are involved, they have always been involved in that, but then maybe that becomes part of their tradition, part of their... Actually, it will be, actually, their lives...

L: Mm.

P: It will also be interesting, as their biological parents get older, how that dynamic works.

L: Mm, mm. Very interesting.

T: You know, it's funny, when you think, we used to do so many funny little things, like at Christmas time, I used to get so cross with their mom because she never used to send anything. So I always used to wrap something up and pretend it was from her. I can't remember how it goes wrong, it falls apart somehow...

Laughter.

T: And they said, 'we know it's you'.

Laughter.

T: And now she does do something, be it a shirt or a pair of shoes, or something, she does something. It's never a frivolous gift, it's a useful gift. Like an aunt would give you!

Laughter.

P: It is that type of relationship, that is the relationship, estranged older sister or an aunt, it's that type of set-up. It was lovely, she was here over the weekend, and um, suddenly there was a whole fashion show, you know, sort of, half a dozen items that the girls were wearing and going, 'ok, how does it look, Mum?' And there's a huge excitement about the fact that it had come from her. And that's lovely, I don't, don't begrudge that or get jealous about it in any way, shape or form, it's, it's lovely that there's an added bonus to that particular gift because it's from her, and it's lovely...

L: Mm, and there's that excitement about being with mom.

T: Yes.

P: Yeah. And not that they, in any way, take us for granted or anything that comes from us is diminished because it's from us, you know, it's uh, it's just different, it's got an added something about it, and it's lovely, it's magic.

Pause.

P: They're very grateful for everything that they get, always massive amounts of thanks and hugs and kisses, for everybody...

T: But that's taught.

P: Yes.

T: You don't have that naturally, I don't think.

P: No, it's like the shoes tonight. I said to them, 'Make sure you say thank you', 'oh yes, of course'. She had thought about the fact that she was going to, but um, that extra [inaudible].

'Tell your aunty you like the cardigan!'

Laughter.

L: Even if it's got reindeer on it!

Laughter.

P: Yes, and even though it's three sizes too small!

Laughter.

T: Have you got nothing else?

L: No, that's about it. I know you're frantically busy, so...

End of interview.

10. APPENDIX 3 – Copy of Consent Form

This is a single case study of a same-sex couple who has adopted a child/children, conducted by Leigh de Wet as required for the partial completion of a Masters degree in Psychology (University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus). This study entails an exploration of the ways in which the same-sex couple experienced the process of becoming parents through adoption, and their current experiences as same-sex parents.

Data collection will take the form of one semi-structured interview, with the possibility of a further interview(s). These interviews will be tape-recorded and later transcribed. Participants are assured that these information sources will be kept in a secure, confidential place. The audio recording of the interviews will only be accessed by the researcher, while the transcripts of the interviews will only be accessed by the researcher and possibly her research supervisor (Steven Roche).

Participants should feel no obligation to participate in the abovementioned interview(s), and are fully entitled to withdraw from the research at any time without prejudice. Anonymity of the participants is assured as far as possible, as the researcher will use pseudonyms for all participants in any oral or written report given on this research project. Other identifying information, such as profession, place of residence, and so on, will similarly not be used in any reports if the participants so wish.

Final research results will be available to the participants at their request.

Chosen pseudonym: _____

I have read and fully understood the above consent.

Signature: _____

Date: _____