



Mapping evidence on parents' experiences of cross-racial adoption in South Africa: A Scoping Review

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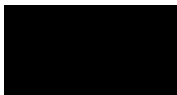
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Declaration

I, Alicia Coertze (223051124), declare that this work, **Mapping evidence on parents' experiences of cross-racial adoption in South Africa: A Scoping Review** is my work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. All materials used have been properly cited and referenced.



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I would like to thank God for the incredible opportunity to pursue my dream of becoming a psychologist. Completing this degree was possible because he gave me the strength and resilience to complete this thesis and pursue my dream.

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Abstract

Introduction: Due to South Africa's Apartheid history, cross-racial adoption only became legal in 1991 (Schröder, 2015). Research in South Africa has explored the reasons behind cross-racial adoption, the identity formation of adoptees, and the challenges faced by adoptive parents (Hall, 2010; Schröder, 2015; Finlay, 2006; Jackson, 2018). International studies have also examined the experiences of black children raised by white families (Caballero et al., 2008; Samuels, 2009). However, research gaps still exist, necessitating further exploration of this emerging phenomenon in South Africa. The current study examined cross-racial adoption within the South African context. The study mapped and synthesised evidence on parents' experiences of cross-racial adoption in South Africa.

Methods and Analysis: An overview of the current literature in this research area was compiled through a scoping review. The PRISMA-ScR flow diagram was utilised to meticulously screen the data, following specified inclusion and exclusion criteria. A search across relevant databases yielded ten studies that were ultimately included in the final analysis.

Results and Discussion: The data were charted in table form and summarised by: (1) Author(s) and date, (2) study title, (3) aims of the study, (4) study design, (6) population, (7) most relevant findings and (8) study limitations. A thematic analysis was used to analyse the gaps and trends in the literature to create a narrative interpretation of what was already written. Six themes emerged from the ten studies included in the review: (1) Parents' motivations and reasons to adopt cross-racially, (2) parental experiences of the pre-adoption process, (3) parental experiences of specific cross-racial adoption constructs, (4) challenges faced by cross-racial adoption parents, (5) opportunities and positive experiences faced by parents and (6) strategies that can be applied or that should be considered to minimise the adverse effects of cross-racial adoption.

Conclusion and Recommendations: The scoping review highlighted significant gaps in the literature on transracial adoption, particularly the underrepresentation of adoptees' perspectives, especially in South Africa. Future research should focus on the long-term psychosocial impacts on adoptees, the motivations of men and same-sex couples in adoption, and the experiences of families who did not proceed with adoption due to obstacles.

Keywords: Cross-racial adoption, Transracial adoption, Interracial adoption, Adoptee, Adoption, Parental experiences, South Africa

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List of Abbreviations

Population, Content and Context

PCC

Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool

MMAT

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the background information of the scoping review. This chapter defines relevant keywords as they affect the research topic. This chapter also includes the problem statement and rationale, showing the relevance of mapping evidence to cross-racial adoption in South Africa.

1.1 Background Information

As a result of South Africa's history of Apartheid, cross-racial adoption is a relatively recent practice that was only legalised when the law was amended in 1991 so that prospective parents were allowed to adopt a child from a different race (Schröder, 2015). As the consequences of the past linger, the most common form of cross-racial adoption is white parents adopting black children. Kausi (2014:4) asserted that "the practice of cross-racial adoption in South Africa is controversial, yet an increasing phenomenon in which most black children are being adopted by white parents".

To contextualise South Africans' experiences of cross-racial adoption, it is crucial to understand the societal factors that have resulted in children being adopted by parents of a different race. In South Africa, these conditions cannot be understood independently of universal 'racial' disparities in economic status, resource availability and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS (Jackson, 2018). For contextualisation purposes, it is necessary to consider the reasons for cross-racial adoption.

A previous study in South Africa has examined the reasons why parents choose to adopt cross-racially and the perceptions of cross-racial adoption (Hall, 2010). Studies have also examined the identity formation of a cross-racial adoptee (Schröder, 2015). Other studies have explored the challenges faced by parents who have adopted cross-racially in South Africa (Finlay, 2006; Jackson, 2018). International studies have been conducted on the experiences of

black children being raised by white families (Caballero et al., 2008; Samuels, 2009). Various researchers have aimed to unpack cross-racial adoption from various angles; however, research gaps are still evident. This phenomenon is reasonably new in South Africa. To truly understand the phenomenon, it is important to identify relevant gaps in the literature to aid the research development of this topic.

1.2 Problem Statement and Rationale for the Current Study

This study explored cross-racial adoption from a South African perspective. In South Africa, many children are in the child protection system and available for adoption (Gerrand & Stevens, 2019). However, limited families are willing to adopt, let alone adopt, a child of a different race based on many determining factors (discussed in the literature review) (Mokomane & Rochat, 2012). This research can enlighten South Africans on the phenomenon of cross-racial adoption.

The findings of this study can also enlighten and educate mental health workers, such as psychologists, counsellors and social workers, regarding this phenomenon. Mental health workers may find the research significant if they seek to understand cross-racial adoption in South Africa. The insight gained in this research can help healthcare workers to assist parents who have adopted or want to adopt cross-racially. Healthcare workers may also gain better insights into cross-racial adoptees by understanding their experience. This study, therefore, contributed to professional competencies in this field.

Families considering cross-racial adoption might find the research findings valuable. It can help them to understand the different experiences, perceptions, and contexts. It may also make it more realistic for these families, prepare them, help them with their decision-making process and might even answer some questions they have.

A variety of research exists on cross-racial adoption. The focus of these studies ranged from:

- challenges faced by families that have cross-racially adopted from an outsider's perspective (Breshears, 2018);
- the experiences of families who have cross-racially adopted (Devon, 2022; Luyt & Swartz, 2023);
- racial socialisation (Breshears, 2022);
- intervention strategies (Mokomane & Rochat, 2012);
- perceptions (Gerrand & Stevens, 2019);
- overcoming challenges and (Breshears 2018; 2022; Luyt & Swarts 2023);
- addressing cultural socialisation (Breshears 2018; 2022; Luyt & Swarts 2023).

This study used a scoping review to synthesise research evidence and draw from existing literature within this field. This Study formed a more inclusive and comprehensive picture of cross-racial adoption based on various available studies (Khalil et al., 2016). According to Arksey and O'Malley (2005), a scoping review can describe findings from previous studies in more detail, summarising the essential aspects. This develops topics by identifying the research gaps, similarities, and differences found in previous research (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). This study contributed to developing this area of interest by helping create or integrate intervention strategies that can be implemented.

1.3 Operational Definitions

The following keywords will be defined in this section as they bear meaning to the research topic. The keywords are (1) adoption, (2) cross-racial adoption, (3) parents, (4) race and (5) culture.

1.3.1 Adoption

According to the Children's Act (2005), Finlay (2006), and Jackson (2018), adoption is the legal process of acquiring a non-biological child by taking on the parental duties and rights of the biological parents. By choosing to give their child up for adoption or by abandoning them, the biological parents chose to revoke their parental rights (Finlay, 2006; Jackson, 2018). Therefore, adoption can be defined as bringing people together to create a new family unit (Finlay, 2006).

1.3.2 Cross-racial adoption

According to Hall (2010), cross-racial adoption is when a child from one race group is placed with parents from another, forming a new family unit of members from different races. The term adoption refers to a legal process described in the previous subsection. In various studies, different terms with the same meaning were used, such as interracial adoption or transracial adoption (Finlay, 2006). The term 'cross-racial adoption' was used throughout this study.

3.1.3 Parents

The term 'parents' is defined as a legally recognised union between two individuals, whether through marriage or cohabitation, who have undertaken the formal legal process of adopting a child of a different race than their own. This study's term 'parents' includes parents of various sexual and gender identities.

3.1.4 Race

According to Ferreira (2009), race is defined by a person's skin colour and outward traits that are inherited genetically. According to Schröder (2015), race has shifted from being defined by genetic and biological markers to being understood as a social construct with culturally assigned meaning. Race thus both encompass genetic and biological traits as well as social constructed. Four population groups are recognised by the current official governmental classification of race in South Africa. These groups include blacks (people of African descent), whites (people of European descent), coloureds (defined herein as a non-white group of mixed racial descent; used without the intention of disparagement), and Asians (people of Asian descent). These classifications remain in South African society even after apartheid was dissolved (Bornman, 2010).

1.3.5 Culture

Culture is the set of values, ideals, beliefs, traditions, skills, customs, languages, and institutions into which individuals are born (Javier et al., 2007). According to Ferreira (2009), culture is created by residing in a certain place or sociological environment.

1.4 Chapter Outline

This research consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study by describing its background rationale and providing critical definitions related to the study.

Chapter 2 overviews the literature on adoption and cross-racial adoption locally and internationally. This chapter further includes concepts such as culture and race, perceptions about cross-racial adoption and experiences of parents who have adopted cross-racially.

Chapter 3 describes the study's methodology. The chapter's structure reflects Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) five-step guide for scoping reviews. It includes identifying the research

questions and relevant studies, selecting studies, charting data, and collating, summarising, and reporting the results.

Chapter 4 contains the scoping review findings and a discussion of them in connection with the aims of the scoping review. The data is discussed and interpreted to form links between themes.

Finally, *Chapter 5* analyses the study's conclusions, limitations and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the relevant literature on cross-racial adoption. The literature used in this chapter is necessary to contextualise the scoping review topic.

2.2 Literature Review

This literature review explored relevant literature and research about adoption, cross-racial adoption, and the experiences of parents concerning cross-racial adoption. While the scoping review served to map available studies, highlight key themes, and identify research gaps (Arkey & O'Malley, 2005), this section delves deeper by synthesising relevant findings and engaging critically with the available literature. Throughout the literature review, it became evident that numerous international studies exist. However, there is a gap in the research concerning the South African context.

2.2.1 Adoption History

Adoption has a long and rich history (Brodzinsky et al., 1998). Adoption is an old legal institution that dates back to the 8th century BCE (Javier et al., 2007). References to informal adoption can be found in the Bible and Roman mythology. These ancient sources refer to children placed in the care of someone who was not their biological parents. According to Exodus 2 verse 3, Moses was hidden among the reeds on the Nile's bank until Pharaoh's daughter discovered, saved and raised him (Bible Society of South Africa, 1977).

According to Roman legend, many babies were ordered to be killed as a means of power and control (Morford & Lenardon, 2003). There is a story where servants abandon the babies on the riverbank instead of killing them, and they are often rescued by a she-wolf who saves them from drowning and raises them (Morford & Lenardon, 2003). Almost all the major ancient societies practised adoption (including Chinese, Indian, Greek, Roman and Egyptian)

(Brodzinsky et al., 1998). However, in that period, adoption was for other motives, whether it be a requirement for religious practices, securing labour for the family, or strengthening alliances between rival social groups (Javier et al., 2007).

Adoption was a common practice in ancient Rome, mainly to help families dealing with repeated deaths in the family and to give individuals without biological children a chance to have a child (Van der Walt, 2014). Similarly, fertility was highly valued in Egyptian culture, and offspring was the greatest blessing. Adoption was mainly used to rehome orphan children; usually, women who could not have children took in these orphans (Van der Walt, 2014). Legislation and laws regarding adoption were only passed around the 1800s in the United States (Brodzinsky et al., 1998) and it changed and progressed as different challenges and trends arose. A more significant interest emerged surrounding adoption during World War I and the influenza epidemic of 1918 and the 1920s (Javier et al., 2007; Brodzinsky et al., 1998).

More recent outlooks on adoption have moved towards meeting “the best interest of the child” (Brodzinsky et al., 1998). Every country has its adoption laws, which are amended to fit the country’s legislation and needs (Brodzinsky et al., 1998). Adoption remains a complex social service practice that poses country-specific challenges and hurdles.

2.2.2 The History and Process of Adoption in South Africa

In South Africa, before adoption was regulated by law, informal adoptions generally took place through a private agreement between parties (Van der Walt, 2014). In 1899, the court pointed out that “the law of this Colony does not recognise adoption as a means of creating the legal relationship of parent and child” (Ferreira, 2007). Adoption in South Africa was first subject to legal control in 1923, with the implementation of the Children Act 25 (Van der Walt, 2014).

This law was introduced to protect children's rights and to bind the contract between the birth parent and adoptee (Ferreira, 2007). The procedure of fostering children and legal adoption could then proceed. When a child is given the permanent custody of someone who is not their biological parent, the Children Act (2005) in South Africa specifies that adoption is the appropriate procedure to follow. Adoption aims to connect children to families who will be their permanent family, protecting them and giving them a supportive and safe atmosphere (Ferreira, 2007).

The growing number of vulnerable children in South Africa who require care and placement has always been one of South Africa's growing needs (Van der Walt, 2014). The current state of affairs in South Africa is influenced by several factors, including HIV/AIDS, poverty, illegal immigration, and child abandonment (Roby & Shaw, 2006). The fundamental tenet of the Constitution is that each child has the right to a family or appropriate alternative care; therefore, adoption is undoubtedly a viable option for those children (Van der Walt, 2014).

Adoption is carried out in the child's best interest, as stated by the Children's Act of 2005. The "best interests" of a child take precedence over everything else. According to Van der Walt (2014:449), "Best interests include the child's right to security, need for affection and continuing and long-term stability". Any adoption plan should be built on these considerations. According to the Children Act of 2005, a child must be an orphan to be adopted; in other words, they cannot have a guardian who is already planning to adopt them. An individual who wants to adopt must be older than eighteen, married, in a committed relationship, or living with a partner (Children's Act, 2005).

According to section 29 of the Children's Act (Act 28 of 2005), the purposes of adoption are to (1) protect and nurture children by providing a safe, healthy environment with positive support and (2) promote the goals of permanency planning by connecting children to other safe

and nurturing family relationships intended to last a lifetime. When a child is removed from the family context, he or she has the right to family care, parental care, or suitable alternative care, according to Section 28(1)(b) of the Constitution (South African Law Commission, 2002).

Before the Children's Act, the law mandated that a prospective adoptive parent must be a citizen or have a permanent residence to be registered. After opposition to this restriction, adopting a South African child no longer required South African citizenship (Children's Act, 2005). The Children's Act introduced new developments and methods to alter adoption procedures and increase adoption opportunities in South Africa (Van der Walt, 2014).

2.2.2 Adoption and Child Well-Being

Adoption is a growing phenomenon worldwide, sparking various researchers to expand the literature on adoption. The most common question asked by early research was centred around the effect adoption has on the child's well-being in the long run (Brodzinsky et al., 1998). Adopting as an intervention significantly improves vulnerable children's developmental outcomes (Brodzinsky et al., 2022). However, various elements play a role in developmental outcomes, such as biological factors, genetics and adverse prenatal experiences such as maternal stress, poor maternal nutrition, foetal exposure to drugs or alcohol, and inadequate prenatal medical care.

Adopted children, however, are more likely than their nonadopted peers to develop psychopathology and adjustment issues due to heritable traits, prenatal factors, and early negative experiences within the birth family (Blake et al., 2022; Brodzinsky et al., 1998; Hornfeck et al., 2019). This is further compounded by the problems and difficulties that arise when the child is taken away. These factors include placement instability, dealing with the loss of their birth family, friends, and belongings, and being removed from the physical home (Blake et al., 2022; Hornfeck et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, the adoptive family's level of parenting and the quality of their home environment may have a significant impact on how adopted children develop emotionally, behaviourally, and socially (Paine et al., 2020). According to Brodzinsky et al. (1998), there is much to discover surrounding the contributions of genetics and adverse prenatal experiences compared with environmental factors in the development and adjustment of adopted children.

Blake et al. (2022) conducted a study on the long-term effects of pre-adoptive risk on emotional and behavioural functioning in children who were adopted from foster care. The findings showed that higher prenatal risk may shield this population from postnatal risk exposure and more potent long-term effects (Blake et al., 2022). Findings indicated that prenatal risk increases the chance of unfavourable developmental outcomes, notably challenges with learning and attention (Blake et al., 2022; Hornfeck et al., 2019).

However, the current study (Blake et al., 2022) and others' findings (Hornfeck et al., 2019) suggest that (1) prenatal risk does not independently predict the same degree and scope of problems as postnatal risk, (2) long-term effects of prenatal risk may be better explained by exposure to postnatal risk, and (3) early adoption or entry into foster care may promote resilience to prenatal risk by reducing exposure to postnatal trauma .

Drawing from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model of development, Palacios et al. (2024) underscored the significance of considering the ecology or setting in which individuals develop to gain a deeper understanding of the effects of adoption (Blake et al., 2022). The model proposes that the possibility of adoption being incorporated as a positive personal and family experience or as an unstable and potentially traumatic one depends on the interaction of various contextual factors. In the context of adoption, several key factors interact within these systems to influence whether adoption is experienced as a stable, positive transition or a challenging and potentially disruptive one (Blake et al., 2022; Bronfenbrenner,1979):

- **Macrosystem:** Cultural attitudes, legal policies, and societal perceptions of adoption can shape the level of support available to adoptive families.
- **Exosystem:** Professional interventions, such as mental health support and educational policies, indirectly impact adopted children by shaping their caregivers' resources and parenting strategies.
- **Microsystem:** The child's immediate relationships, including interactions with adoptive parents, peers, and teachers, play a direct role in their emotional and psychological development.
- **Mesosystem:** The quality of interactions between these environments (e.g., how well schools support adoptive families or how mental health professionals engage with caregivers) can either reinforce stability or contribute to additional stress.
- **Chronosystem:** The timing of adoption, transitions between care placements, and changes in the child's environment over time can influence long-term adjustment and well-being.

By applying this model, Palacios et al. (2024) argue that adoption outcomes are not determined by a single risk or protective factor but rather by the dynamic interaction of these environmental influences across time.

One significant factor that has been widely discussed in adoption literature is the influence of attachment to caregivers. Attachment theory, developed by Bowlby (1969), explains how early attachment with caregivers forms physical and psychological security, impacting various relationships throughout one's lifespan. Attachment theorists argue that attachment starts in the mother's womb as the baby develops and that the first two years of a child's life are the most critical in forming attachments (Carter et al., 2005; Javier et al., 2007). During this formative period, the child shapes their 'internal working model', a framework for how they view and start to form relationships.

Researchers have pondered what effect this has on children who have been adopted, as some of them might not be adopted before the age of two (Brodzinsky et al., 1998; Raby & Dozier, 2019). Research has shown that when previous relationships are disrupted, young children's attachment systems can adjust and realign themselves to accommodate new caregivers (Carter et al., 2005; Raby & Dozier, 2019). Differential plasticity is seen in attachment, where children appear capable of building secure attachment bonds even when adopted later when behavioural indicators are utilised; however, attachment representations evolve more slowly (Brodzinsky et al., 2022). This means that while a child may form new, secure attachments with their adoptive caregivers, the process of internalising and restructuring their mental framework about relationships (shaped by past disruptions) takes longer (Raby & Dozier, 2019). These internalised representations influence how they view themselves and others in relationships and may not align with their behavioral attachment indicators immediately (Brodzinsky et al., 2022). There is growing evidence that the attachment status of the adoptive parent influences the child's ability to form a secure attachment with them. This is particularly evident in cases when the child is adopted later in life and is more likely to have a disordered attachment (Raby & Dozier, 2019). Children of more secure-minded adoptive moms displayed more secure attachment by adolescence (Brodzinsky et al., 2022). The process of recovery depends significantly on the post-adoption context. Favourable aspects of the family environment predict better developmental outcomes across domains. These aspects included the following: stability, a parenting style that supports age-appropriate behaviours, parental confidence regarding attachment, and warm empathy for parent-child relationships (Duncan et al., 2021; Helder et al., 2016; Paine et al., 2020; Raby & Dozier, 2019).

A systematic review conducted by Duncan et al. (2021) concluded that the reviewed evidence is consistent in showing that parenting style, depending on its nature, is both a protective and risk factor for adopted children's mental health and behavioural problems. It is

also a significant protective factor when the parenting style reduces the impact of unfavourable pre-adoptive experiences. It appears that adoptees' mental health and behaviour are adversely affected by negative parenting styles, while positive parenting styles have a positive buffering effect (Duncan et al., 2021). Supporting this evidence, a study by Paine et al. (2020) revealed that adoptive parents who are incredibly loving and warm consistently improve and enhance the outcomes of their adopted children. This suggests that the advantages of a positive family environment extend beyond the formative years.

There is often a strong need to "make meaning" from the adoption experience as adopted people grow from infancy to maturity and become more conscious of their adoption's social and personal ramifications (Brodzinsky et al., 2022). Adoption's impact on children's well-being is complex and intricate. Different factors can impact the child and their attachment depending on the circumstances (e.g. pre-natal or post-natal experiences and ecological systems).

2.2.5 Cross-Racial Adoption Internationally

During World War II, various Chinese and Japanese children became orphans; they were adopted by white families, mainly in the United States, during the 1940s (Brodzinsky et al., 1998). Therefore, cross-racial adoption became more prevalent in the United States in the late 1940s and the United Kingdom in the 1960s (Mosikatsana, 1995). Cross-racial adoption was historically a controversial practice in the United States (Simon & Altstein, 1977). However, it has since been promoted as a means to address the high number of children of colour awaiting adoption (Marr, 2017). Concerns arose in the early 1990s that a lack of adoptive parents of colour was preventing children from finding homes, particularly within white families. In response, the 1993 Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) was enacted to remove racial barriers in adoption and reduce delays in placing children of color (Patton, 2000). Cross-racial adoption was emphasised in media in the early 2000s when families from

the United States of America started to adopt children from African countries (Gerrand & Stevens, 2019).

This was due to the ‘orphan crises’ at the time when 12,3 million children lost one or both parents due to HIV/AIDS in Africa (Roby & Shaw, 2006). Various attempts have been made at national, organisational and community levels to address the orphan issue. For this to be effectively accomplished, a significant amount of money, materials, and continual dedication was required, which was not always available (Roby & Shaw, 2006). At the time, many African countries refused other racial families to adopt black children due to cultural and racial identity considerations (Gerrand & Stevens, 2019; Roby & Shaw, 2006). However, there was no funding or resources to make alternative plans (Gerrand & Stevens, 2019; Roby & Shaw, 2006).

American celebrities such as Madonna, Sandra Bullock, Charlize Theron and Angelina Jolie also adopted children from African countries, making many headlines (Devon, 2022; Roby & Shaw, 2006). The international approach is a ‘colour-blind’ or charitable approach; therefore, many critiques oppose the idea of cross-racial adoption (Devon, 2022; Dos Santos & Wagner, 2018). The international approach and perspective are a negative representation of cross-racial adoption, as not all of these adoptions were successful (Luyt & Swartz, 2023). The challenges were highlighted and formed many misconceptions concerning cross-racial adoption, which caused many to avoid adopting cross-racially (Dos Santos & Wagner, 2018). Consequently, there was an overall decline of transracial adoption numbers falling from around 18150 in 2000 to just 6600 in 2012 (Marr, 2017). The National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) in the U.S. has consistently opposed transracial adoption, arguing that historical racial dynamics in the U.S. may prevent white parents from fully understanding the societal challenges their Black children face. As a result, they may struggle to equip their children with the tools needed to navigate these experiences (University of Nevada, 2024).

Similarly, the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) in the U.S. emphasises the importance of keeping Native American children within their families and communities. NICWA focuses on preventing child abuse and neglect within tribal communities and promoting kinship care, a traditional practice that helps maintain a child's cultural and familial connections, including language and heritage (Simon & Altstein, 2000; University of Nevada, 2024).

Recent statistics recorded by 'Administration for Children and Families' (2024), noted that 28% of all adoptions in the U.S. were transracial between 2017 and 2019. From that statistic 90% of these cases were white parents adopting children of different races. In a recent study done by Marr (2017), regarding international trends and issues in transracial adoption noted that transracial adoption trends reflect broader racial dynamics in the United States, with girls adopted from China having the most notable impact on trends related to the sex of adoptees. International adoption has experienced significant changes over time, shaped by evolving policies, shifting global dynamics, and the unique challenges of cross-cultural placements, ultimately impacting the demographics and experiences of both adoptees and adoptive families (Marr, 2017).

2.2.6 Cross-Racial Adoption in South Africa

South Africa's history of Apartheid, which caused the segregation of races, is the main reason why cross-racial adoption is a relatively new phenomenon within the South African context (Hall, 2010). Cross-racial adoption was only legalised in 1991 thereafter the Child Care Act of 2005 was implemented (Breshears, 2018, 2022).

According to Zaal (1994), transracial adoption is considered both acceptable and necessary within the context of South Africa. Cross-racial adoption is one of the fundamental tenets that the South African government has embraced for the care and protection of children. According to Tanga and Nyasha (2017), this idea has made it possible for many kids to grow

up in secure family settings. In South Africa, many children are in the child protection system and available for adoption (Gerrand & Stevens, 2019). South African adoption is relatively low compared to the majority of children currently within the child protection system (Mokomane & Rochat, 2012).

According to Joubert (1993), the adoption process is regulated by supply and demand, which might indicate that more black and coloured babies are readily available for adoption in contrast to white babies. Notably, most children available for adoption are black or coloured (Breshears, 2022; Gerrand & Stevens, 2019). On the contrary, few white newborns are available for adoption, and the waiting list for white parents to adopt white babies is lengthy (Szabo & Ritchken, 2002). According to Mabry (1997), the waiting period could extend over five years.

It has been reported that the majority of adoptive families are white families (Luyt & Swartz, 2023). There are far more black infants available for adoption in South Africa than there are white infants (Hall, 2010). Black families are reluctant to adopt, and there is no theory as to why they decide against formal adoption (Gerrand & Stevens, 2019). Although under-researched, there may be a connection between the disparity in adoption applications from black and white populations and the historical disadvantage experienced by black people (Hall, 2010; Schröder, 2015; Shozi, 2018).

Another assumption is that many black cultures in South Africa do not consider going through the formal adoption processes due to cultural aspects and financial costs (Freeman & Nkomo, 2006; Gerrand & Stevens, 2019). The reasons for adoption are also different, as most white families tend to adopt due to social responsibility (Mokomane & Rochat, 2012) or out of humanitarian values (Devon, 2022). Due to this aspect, the majority of adoptions are cross-racial, notably white families adopting black or coloured children (Breshears, 2018; Dos Santos & Wagner, 2018; Gerrand & Stevens, 2019; Mokomane & Rochat, 2012; Szabo & Ritchken,

2002).

2.2.7 Factors of Race and Culture Concerning Cross-Racial Adoption

Cross-racial adoption has spread beyond its original purpose of finding loving parents for orphans during the war. It has become a sensitive topic, especially regarding race and culture (Brodzinsky et al., 1998). Race and culture, despite being two completely distinct factors, are interrelated (Ferreira, 2009). A family is typically interracial if they are intercultural, and vice versa (Ferreira, 2009). According to Ferreira (2009), culture is created by residing in a certain place or environment, whereas race is the similarity of outward traits that a person inherits at birth through genetics.

According to Kausi (2014) and Schröder (2015), people from majority-black racial groups worry that when members of other racial groups adopt black children, they may lose their cultural links to their racial group. According to Tanga and Nyasha (2017), children who are adopted across racial divides are thought to struggle with the decision of whether to adhere to their own culture or to absorb the new cultural values of their adoptive family. When a child is born, they become part of a specific culture because this is the culture of which the biological parents are part (Ferreira, 2009).

According to Schröder (2015), the child could find it challenging to identify with the racial or ethnic group of their biological parents or adoptive parents. Steinberg and Hall (2013) stated that children who are cross-racially adopted may struggle to acquire a strong racial identity as their self-image is heavily influenced by their perception of their racial or ethnic heritage and society's attitudes towards it. White families are more focused on raising children in a loving and pleasant family atmosphere rather than on preserving the child's culture (Breshears, 2022; Kausi, 2014). According to Breshears (2022), South African parents place more emphasis on family culture and typically reject the idea of exposing their children to their birth culture.

Similarly, Kausi (2014) concluded that white people are more receptive to the adoption of children from a different race. This may be because white families are less concerned with maintaining cultural links and more concerned with raising children in a happy home. Due to their positive acceptance, they cannot recognise the difficulties that could develop when a child grows up in a family of a different race (Finlay, 2006), mainly if there are apparent discrepancies between the adoptive parents and the children (Kausi, 2014).

Breshears (2022) explored the cultural problems that are noted in South Africa with the high rates of child abandonment. This may hamper attempts to establish a sense of the adoptee's birth culture because parents are frequently unaware of the child's cultural background (Breshears 2022). This should, however, not be an excuse, as transracial adoptees have criticised their parents' colourblind behaviour as an obstacle since they were unprepared to deal with racism. Furthermore, when parents do not address topics such as racism, they might leave their adopted child to face those issues in society on their own (Breshears, 2022; Samuels, 2009).

According to Melina (2002), some cross-racial adoptive parents believe race does not matter. While the purpose may be honourable, it ignores the experiences of people of colour, as the world is not colourblind. Steinberg and Hall (2013) argued that honouring a birth culture does not exclude the adoptive parents' history, which should be shared and lived as if it were a birth child. However, if parents encourage their children's interest in and connection to their birth culture, they will have exposure to all aspects of themselves throughout their lives.

The child may begin to wonder about topics like their whereabouts and what happened to their biological parents (Finlay, 2006). Finlay (2006) asserted that apartheid may also be a subject that the children may contemplate in a South African context. The questioning of the child's past is called racial- and cultural awareness, as stated by Kausi (2014). Breshears (2022) noted that more racial and cultural awareness education may be required for families who have

adopted cross-racially in South Africa, given parents' ignorance of (or denial of) the significance of race in their children's lives. It is evident that parents, in particular, need to learn about the significance of race at every stage of their children's lives and how racial issues affect the family as a whole (Breshears, 2022; Samuels, 2009).

In contrast to having no family at all, those in favour of cross-racial adoption argue that a child should have a family, even if that means being raised by parents of another race (Fletcher, 2016; Moos & Mwaba, 2007; Tanga & Nyasha, 2017). Although vital, culture should not precede other elements that could affect a child's best interests (Ferreira, 2009). This may be the reason why Kausi (2014) thought that white people are more accepting of a child who was adopted from a different race. They are so accepting that they fail to recognise the potential difficulties that could occur when a child grows up in a household where the parents are of a different race (Finlay, 2006).

2.2.8 Perceptions of Cross-Racial Adoption

Many South Africans shy away from adopting cross-racially, perhaps based on their perceptions about cross-racial adoption. It is unavoidable that South Africa has a history of racial segregation and racism, which causes various complex perceptions and concerns from various races (Breshears, 2018). Despite the various concerns, the adoption rate in South Africa remains relatively low, which is problematic (Mokomane & Rochat, 2012). If South Africa wants to begin to address this issue, it would be beneficial to increase the number of families eligible for adoption based on the criteria of the Children's Act of 2005 (Gerrand & Stevens, 2019).

Contextually, people need to be enlightened about cross-racial adoption and be made aware of the real-life experiences (Breshears, 2018; Devon, 2022), challenges (Roby & Shaw, 2006), positives (Breshears, 2018) and tips from other families who have adopted cross-racially (Dos Santos & Wagner, 2018) as well as advice from other professionals (Luyt & Swartz,

2023).

Hall (2010) conducted a study on cross-racial adoption in South Africa. Hall (2010) found that black students were most concerned about the possibility that a black child raised in a white household would lose their sense of being 'black'. In other words, there were concerns of the child becoming de-racialised and de-culturalised. They worry that doing so will diminish their ability to retain their status in society by relying on the social appearance of being black (Hall, 2010). Social constructivism was a significant theme of the study, and the students' perceptions of cross-racial adoption were utilised to guide their responses.

2.2.9 Experiences of Parenting a Cross-Racially Adopted Child

For adoptive parents, parenthood can be a complex and multifaceted experience, as they face distinct challenges at each stage of the family life cycle (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002). Not only do adoptive parents face the adjustment to parenthood but this transition also encompasses unique obstacles they might encounter. Parents who adopt cross-racially face unique challenges that differ from those encountered by parents raising their biological children (Park, 2012). According to Finlay (2006), parents who adopt children of a different race generally experience feelings of insecurity, isolation, and misdirection during the adoption process. Many adoptive parents recognise the importance of helping their children understand and appreciate their cultural heritage for healthy development, encouraging them to cultivate a bicultural identity (Park, 2012).

It is also stated that many parents, even those who have adopted members of their race, occasionally feel misled by the adoption process (Finlay, 2006). This might result from the paucity of studies on adoption, particularly interracial adoption (Finlay, 2006; Kausi, 2014). After waiting for a long time to be given the chance to parent, it is indicated that adoptive parents are typically not psychologically prepared for the child. According to the study, unlike

parents who have naturally conceived and undergone physical changes, parents who have waited a long time have nothing to actively serve as a reminder that they should be preparing (Finlay, 2006). This is another stressor that has been discovered.

Unlike residential or foster care, cross-racial adoption ensures that a child has all the benefits of growing up in a loving household. Long waiting times for black children up for adoption are reduced (Schröder, 2015). The longer it takes for children to be adopted, the more probable it is that they may experience sociological problems and become more challenging to place. Since infants and young children are generally seen to have been less exposed to and impacted by adversity and bonding between the child and parents is easier to build, prospective adoptive parents typically prefer to adopt newborns or young children (Schröder, 2015).

Parent's experiences of parenting their cross-racially adopted child differ from parent to parent. Apart from the initial adjustment, many parents face the visible difference between them and their adopted child. These visual differences often lead to anxiety within adoptive families, as they are frequently confronted with questions, stares, or comments in public (Morrison, 2004). Some parents note that the questions, stares and comments are not always negative but more out of curiosity. This does however not lessen the anxiety parents face regarding the visual differences (Romanini, 2017). Adopting cross-racially encompasses different obstacles like race, culture, language and visual differences. Parent's experiences and opinions differ where some parents are open to teaching their adopted child about their culture and language (Attwell, 2004), where other parents feel that their adopted child is now part of their family and should adopt their culture and language (Camara, 2014). Many parents generally experience mixed emotions regarding these unique challenges, however for many it does add some pressure in terms of decision making (Morrison, 2004).

The differing experiences surrounding parents who adopted cross-racially are fully explored in this scoping review clearly outlining the various contrasting and similar

experiences.

2.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, with cross-racial adoption only legalised in 1991, there is a paucity of research on cross-racial adoption in South Africa (Mokomane & Rochat, 2012). Most of the research on cross-racial adoption is conducted internationally in countries such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand (Breshears, 2018; Luyt & Swartz, 2023). With the legalization of cross-racial adoption only occurring in 1991, South Africa remains underrepresented in research literature on this topic (Mokomane & Rochat, 2012). Majority of existing studies largely focus on the challenges faced by adoptive families in international contexts, with limited attention to the South African experience, particularly concerning the historical, cultural, and racial complexities that shape adoption processes and outcomes in this context (Breshears, 2018; Luyt & Swartz, 2023).

With the increase in cross-racial adoption in South Africa over the past few years, this has become a topic of interest that was and is being explored by various South African researchers (Breshears, 2018; Luyt & Swartz, 2023). To better understand the experiences of parents who have adopted cross-racially in South Africa, this emphasises the need for increased critical engagement with the significant and prevalent topic. With numerous research developments, the future of adoption, according to Javier et al. (2007), is positive as it implements change and adjustment for parents and organisations. Furthermore, significant gaps remain regarding the intersection of race, culture, and identity in South African cross-racial adoptions, as well as the long-term impact on child well-being (Jackson, 2018; Romanini, 2017). Research conducted by local scholars has begun to address these issues, yet there remains a lack of comprehensive studies that provide critical insights into the motivations, challenges, and coping mechanisms of adoptive families within the South African context (Breshears, 2018; Luyt & Swartz, 2023).

Thus, this literature review highlights the critical need for a more focused exploration of cross-racial adoption in South Africa, specifically regarding how race and cultural dynamics influence adoption experiences and outcomes. This scoping review aims to map gap by systematically examining the South African literature on parental experiences of cross-racial adoption. Through this approach, the review seeks to contribute valuable insights to the field, facilitating informed discussions and future research directions that address the unique challenges and opportunities within the South African context.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology of this study. This chapter highlights the research aims, questions, and design. After that, the chapter consists of an in-depth scoping review of research design steps and how data was collected, analysed and interpreted. The chapter also describes the ethical considerations of this study.

3.1 Aim

The study aimed to map and synthesise evidence on parents' experiences of cross-racial adoption in South Africa.

3.2 Objectives

The main research objective of the study was:

- To explore the evidence on the experiences of parents who have adopted cross-racially in South Africa.

The sub-research objectives were:

- To explore the existing literature on challenges and opportunities faced by parents who adopt cross-racially in South Africa.
- To explore the key strategies that can be applied or that should be considered to minimise the adverse effects of cross-racial adoption in South Africa.

3.3 Research Design and Phases

This study utilised the guidelines of a scoping review to synthesise evidence of the relevant findings on cross-racial adoption in South Africa. Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) guidelines showcased how a scoping review can map existing literature on a particular topic or research question. This method allows for a comprehensive overview of the information within the specific subject area. Scoping reviews are a valuable tool for synthesising research evidence and have commonly been used to map the nature, features, and volume of existing literature on a specific topic (Buus et al., 2022; Daudt et al., 2013; Levac et al., 2010; Peters et al., 2015; Westphaln et al., 2021). In addition, scoping reviews have previously been used to identify research gaps, provide recommendations for future studies, and summarise and distribute study findings (Peters et al., 2015).

Another review type is a systematic review. The purpose of a systematic review is to combine the evidence from various study designs. Frequently, the richness and understanding derived from the qualitative evidence are applied to improve the understanding derived from the quantitative evidence (Peters et al., 2015). In contrast, a scoping review aims to ascertain the range of available evidence (qualitative and/or quantitative) on a subject and to graphically depict this evidence using a mapping or charting of the data that has been identified (Peters et al., 2015). Scoping reviews differ from systematic reviews in presenting an overview of the available evidence, regardless of its quality (Peters et al., 2015).

According to Levac et al. (2010), scoping reviews might be particularly relevant to disciplines with emerging data. Scoping reviews are the best option in these circumstances because they allow researchers to address topics other than those on the effectiveness of interventions and combine various study designs from published and unpublished literature (Levac et al., 2010). With cross-racial adoption being a relatively recent phenomenon, there is

a paucity of research, and it is still an emerging study topic. A scoping review helps determine the literature gaps to gain insight into the research topics. The following proposed framework by Arkey and O'Malley (2005) was utilised in this study:

- Stage 1: Identifying the research questions
- Stage 2: Identifying relevant studies
- Stage 3: Study selection
- Stage 4: Charting the data
- Stage 5: Collating, summarising and reporting the results

Recommendations from Levac et al. (2010) were utilised in terms of quality appraisal guidelines to ensure the study is of high quality.

3.3.1 Stage 1: Identifying the Research Question

Developing a strong research question is the backbone of one's research as it will continuously guide the study (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The main research question of the study was:

- What is the evidence on the experiences of parents who have adopted cross-racially in South Africa?

The following two sub-research questions supported the research question:

- What is the existing literature on parents' challenges and opportunities when adopting cross-racially?
- What are the key strategies that can be applied or that should be considered to minimise the adverse effects of cross-racial adoption in South Africa?

This study used the Population, Content and Context (PCC) Framework in line with the methodology of a scoping review recommended by Arksey and O'Malley (2005). The PCC

framework allows for the structure of the research question to be defined, allowing for more clarity and precision (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005).

Table 1: PCC Framework

Population	Concept	Context
Parents OR Families	Cross-racial adoption OR Transracial adoption OR interracial adoption	South Africa, Between the period 1991 - 2023

3.3.2 Stage 2: Identifying Relevant Studies

The identification of relevant studies was mapped using a comprehensive search on the following electronic databases: EBSCOhost, SABINET, Google Scholar, and Open Access: Thesis and Dissertations. A variety of terms were used to describe the notion of parents of one race adopting a child of a different race. Articles were searched on the databases using the following search terms ('Cross-racial' OR 'transracial' OR 'interracial' OR 'cross-cultural' OR 'transracially' OR 'Multiracial' OR 'Racially mixed') AND ('Parents' OR 'Mother' OR 'Father') AND ('adoption' OR 'adoptee' OR 'adopted' OR 'adoptive') AND 'South Africa'.

3.3.3 Stage 3: Study Selection

Data was collected systematically using the exclusion and inclusion criteria to filter through the various findings (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were outlined to make the search comprehensive and topic focused. The following table (Table 2) illustrates this study's inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Table 2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Study Design	All research study designs were included.	No exclusion was made based on the study design.
Population	Studies were included if they were based on the experiences of parents who adopted a child or children of a different race.	Studies that focused on the adoption of children of the same race or fostering were excluded.
	Experiences from parents were not limited to any particular experience. Therefore, all experiences were included.	Experiences from other people (e.g. teachers, grandparents, social workers, adoption agencies) were excluded.
	The experiences of the adoptees were included if they aided the main focus of this study. The main focus of the study was on the parental experiences.	The experiences of the adoptees were excluded when the views did not contribute to the study's primary focus.
Concept	All terms to describe this phenomenon were included, for example, cross-racial, transracial, multi-racial, and interracial.	Studies unrelated to cross-racial adoption or alternative forms of care, such as fostering, in the process of adoption or same-race adoption, were excluded.
Context	South African-based studies were included for contextual relevance.	Studies not based in the South African context were excluded.
Language	Articles written in English were included	Articles in languages other than English were excluded.
Period	Research published between 1991 and the present were included.	Studies published before 1991 were excluded.

The researcher used the relevant keywords in the search; all identified citations were noted by title and collated. Once title screening was completed, abstract screening commenced. All abstracts were reviewed alongside the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Once abstract screening was completed, selected articles were downloaded and saved for full-article screening. Two independent reviewers co-screened articles (AC) and (SR) for assessment against the inclusion criteria to ensure the full article screening was accurate and relevant. In the matter of a dispute between the two reviewers, a third reviewer (CZML) was involved in making the final decision. All studies that met the inclusion criteria were included in the studies' qualitative synthesis. All records of the included and excluded studies have been compiled. Final screening outcomes were presented in a PRISMA-SCR diagram, as illustrated in figure 1.

3.3.4 Stage 4: Charting Data

A descriptive summary of the results was included to ensure that the extracted data agreed with the aims and research question of the scoping review. A draft charting table was developed to facilitate the summary of the results. This charting table highlights the important aspects of the study. The following table was used to extract the necessary titles and variables (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4).

Table 3: Charting table template

Author and date	Study title	Aims of study	Study design	Population & Sample size	Most relevant findings	Study limitations	Conclusion
A							
B							
C							

3.3.5 Stage 5: Collating, Summarising and Reporting Results

According to Levac et al. (2010), qualitative data analysis techniques can help facilitate and analyse the data from the various findings. Therefore, a thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), was utilised to analyse the data of this study. A thematic analysis involves the researcher identifying themes within the findings and capturing the meaning of these findings as relevant to the research question (Flick, 2014). With the use of guidelines posed by Braun and Clarke (2006), themes were not pre-determined to remain objective throughout the synthesis of the findings from the data collection (Fick, 2014). The only consideration was ensuring the themes aligned with the research question, aim and objectives.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis follow a structured process with six phases of analysis. The first step involved familiarisation of the data through reading and re-reading it while initial notes were made. Once the data was familiarised, step two focused on coding, where meaningful sections across the data were systematically identified and categorised using the coding system. In step three, these codes were organised into themes, where similar patterns were grouped together. The themes then underwent reviewing as part of step four, ensuring they accurately represent the data and align with the research focus. In step five, each theme was defined and named to capture its essence. Finally, in step six, a final analysis was conducted to ensure that all findings are linked to the research question, providing a cohesive narrative. As Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise, thematic analysis is not a strictly linear process; instead, it is recursive, allowing movement back and forth between phases as needed. This iterative approach was followed throughout the analysis to ensure a thorough and accurate interpretation of the data.

Levac et al. (2010) recommended quality appraisal as an additional step to scoping reviews for article inclusion and exclusion purposes. The researcher utilised the quality appraisal step to assess the quality of the articles. The quality appraisal used for this study was

the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (Hong et al., 2018). Using the appraisal tool, two screening questions were used; if 'no' or 'cannot tell' was selected for a study, it might indicate that the paper was not an empirical study and cannot be appraised using the MMAT. After questions in the appraisal tool were used, a detailed presentation of each criterion's ratings was used to better inform the quality of the included studies (See Appendix B).

3.4. Search Strategy

For this research, studies conducted on cross-racial adoption were required in the South African context. The following databases were used, EBSCOHost, Sabinet, Open Access and Google Scholar, as South African studies can be found in these databases. These platforms were all accessed on the UKZN online library.

The databases selected for this scoping review were chosen based on their relevance to the research topic and their accessibility to South African studies. EBSCOhost and Sabinet were included as they provide access to a wide range of peer-reviewed journals, particularly in the fields of psychology, social sciences, and adoption research. Open Access was utilised to ensure the inclusion of freely available scholarly work, increasing the accessibility of diverse perspectives. Additionally, Google Scholar was used as a supplementary tool to identify relevant studies, especially those that may not be indexed in traditional databases but still contribute valuable insights. Certain databases were not included in this study due to their limited relevance to the research focus. For example, IEEE Xplore and ACM Digital Library primarily cover engineering and technology, making them unsuitable for adoption research. PubMed, while valuable for medical studies, does not extensively cover psychological and social aspects of adoption. The chosen databases were selected to ensure a comprehensive and contextually relevant review, with a particular focus on research applicable to the South African context.

The studies were limited to English, and articles published between 1991-present

were utilised. The database was completed in September 2023. The search strategy results are showcased in the table (Table 4).

Table 4: Results of the search strategy

Database	Search Strategy	Yield	Total relevant to the study
EBSCOHost	(‘Cross-racial’ OR ‘transracial’ OR	42	6
Sabinet	‘interracial’ OR ‘cross-cultural’ OR ‘transracially’ OR ‘Multiracial’ OR	2550	4
Open Access	‘Racially mixed’) AND (‘Parents’ OR ‘Mother’ OR ‘Father’) AND	118	6
Google Scholar	(‘adoption’ OR ‘adoptee’ OR ‘adopted’ OR ‘adoptive’) AND ‘South Africa’	20900	10
Total Yield		23652	26

3.5. Selection of Studies

The titles and abstracts of each study retrieved through the search strategy were read and compared to the inclusion and exclusion criteria to determine if they met the inclusion criteria for this study. The included research articles were then reviewed in full, and the studies included in the final review were all determined to be eligible for inclusion based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The PRISMA-ScR flow diagram (Figure 1) showcases the progression of inclusion and exclusion of articles. It ensures that the reporting and results are transparent and standardised, improving the reporting quality (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005).

The following table (Table 5) shows the results before and after title screening, showing the number of publications retrieved after applying search strategy keywords. The table illustrates the number of eligible studies after title screening. During title screening, all articles were reviewed by their titles, and irrelevant titles that did not meet inclusion criteria were removed, as proposed by Arskey and O’Malley (2005).

Table 5: Title Screening Results

Date of Search	Keywords search	No. of publications retrieved	Search engine utilised	Number of eligible studies
2 September 2023	Cross-racial OR transracial OR interracial OR cross-cultural OR transracially OR Multiracial OR Racially mixed	42	EBSCOhost	12

	AND Parents OR			
	Mother OR			
	Father AND			
	adoption OR			
	adoptee OR			
	adopted OR			
	adoptive AND			
	South Africa			

3 September	Cross-racial OR	2550	Sabinet	18
2023	transracial OR			
	interracial OR			
	cross-cultural OR			
	transracially OR			
	Multiracial OR			
	Racially mixed			
	AND Parents OR			
	Mother OR			
	Father AND			
	adoption OR			
	adoptee OR			
	adopted OR			
	adoptive AND			
	South Africa			

9 September	Cross-racial OR	118	Open Access	9
2023	transracial OR			

interracial OR
cross-cultural OR
transracially OR
Multiracial OR
Racially mixed
AND Parents OR
Mother OR
Father AND
adoption OR
adoptee OR
adopted OR
adoptive AND
South Africa

10 September	Cross-racial OR	20900	Google Scholar	43
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2023

transracial OR
interracial OR
cross-cultural OR
transracially OR
Multiracial OR
Racially mixed
AND Parents OR
Mother OR
Father AND
adoption OR
adoptee OR

adopted OR	
adoptive AND	
South Africa	
TOTAL	82

After the title screening process, the eligible articles were screened by abstract. All articles' abstracts were screened and reviewed alongside the inclusion and exclusion criteria to see whether they should be included in the full article screening. The scoping review yielded 23610 articles that were considered eligible after the database search. During title screening, 82 articles were selected (See Table 5). One article could not be accessed from the database due to restrictions, manual searches was then employed and was found on the Witwatersrand University Website. Once duplicates were removed, 72 articles remained.

Upon abstract screening, 15 articles remained. A co-screener was used to ensure accuracy in selecting eligibility for the final full-text articles. This ensured that all 15 articles underwent full-text screening and adhered to all inclusion criteria. Ten articles were included to chart the data process. Eight qualitative studies, one mixed method study and one quantitative study was included. The exclusion was due to the participant population (n = 4) and incorrect content included (n = 1). All results are illustrated in the PRISMA-ScR flow diagram (Figure 1), which shows the reviewing process utilised to ensure eligible articles.

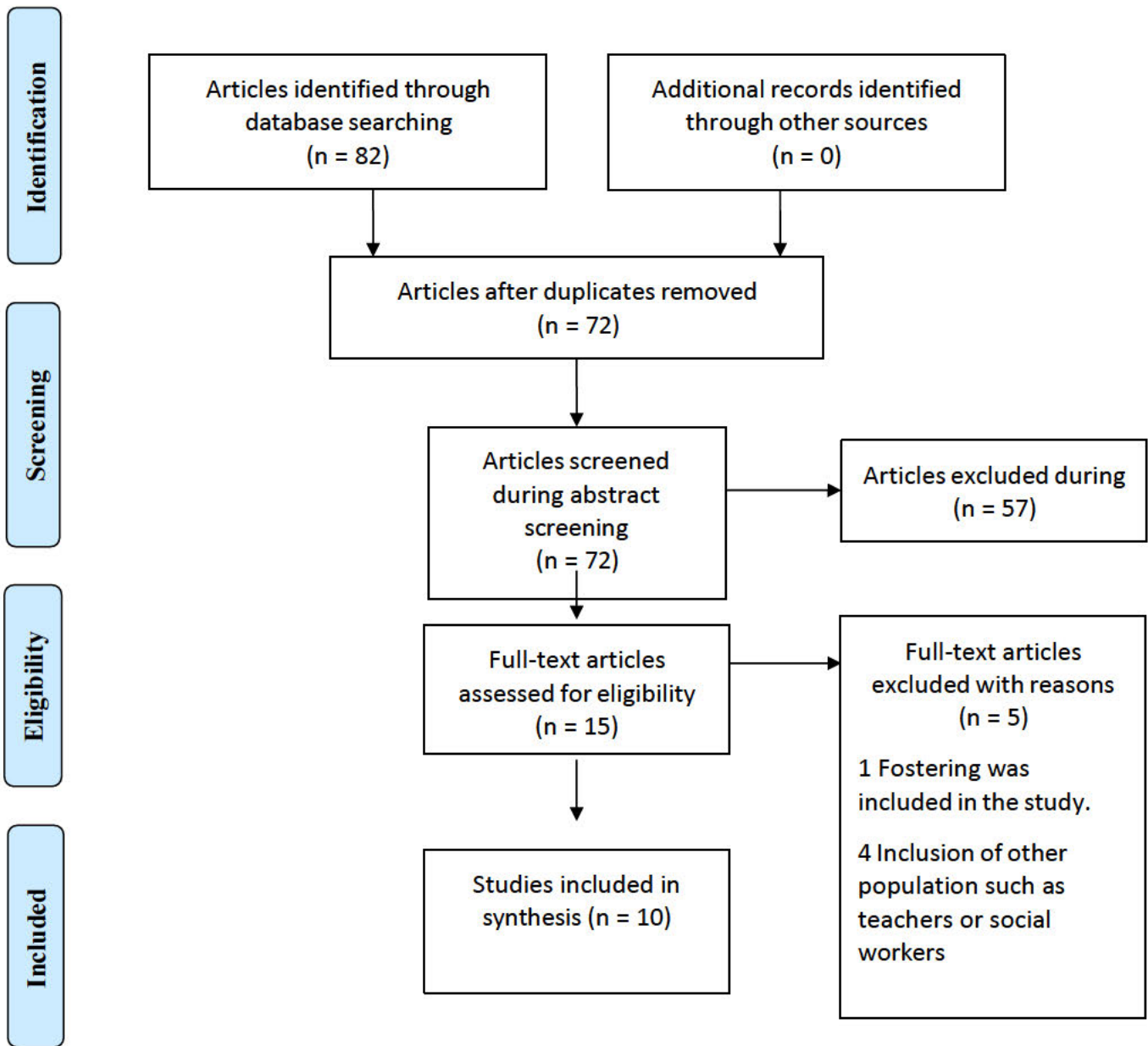


Figure 1: PRISMA-ScR flow diagram illustrating screening results

3.6 Charting Data

The data extraction technique followed step four of Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) five-stage approach, which involved charting data from each publication reviewed for this study. The important data from each included article was retrieved and charted (see Chapter 4).

3.7 Ethical Considerations: Validity, Reliability and Rigour

Maintaining validity, reliability, and rigour in a scoping review is crucial to ensure the credibility and quality of a study (Levac et al., 2010). Ethical clearance was applied for and approved by 7 August 2023 (See Appendix A). The researcher clearly defined the research question, which helped guide the process and ensure these principles were obtained. A well-designed search strategy used multiple databases, carefully selected keywords and predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. As advised by Levac et al., (2010), Two independent reviewers were used to ensure reliability when choosing selected studies for the final analysis. When discrepancies were encountered, a third reviewer was utilised. The PRISMA-ScR chart ensured the transparency and completeness of the results obtained (Hong et al., 2018).

Levac et al. (2010) recommended quality appraisal as an additional step to scoping reviews for article inclusion and exclusion purposes. The researcher utilised the quality appraisal step to assess the quality of the articles. The quality appraisal used for this study was the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (Hong et al., 2018). The MMAT quality appraisal tool was utilised to ensure that the objectives of the scoping review were met and that the utilised studies were of good quality. This helped to identify potential biases and limitations that may impact the interpretation of findings (Hong et al., 2018). In addition to quality appraisal for study selection, trustworthiness in the thematic analysis was ensured through several measures. To enhance credibility, the researcher engaged in prolonged immersion with the data and systematically reviewed themes in consultation with a supervisor (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Regular consultation with the supervisor was utilised to ensure feedback and input from an expert in the field of scoping reviews to enhance the reliability and validity of the study. Throughout the process, thorough documentation of each step was facilitated to ensure transparency.

To ensure a systematic and rigorous screening process, EndNote was used to manage

and consolidate data from the selected databases. EndNote facilitated the organisation of references, removal of duplicates, and efficient categorisation of studies for inclusion and exclusion. This software enhanced the screening process by allowing for structured data extraction, ensuring consistency in article selection, and promoting collaboration through easy reference sharing. By utilising EndNote, the study maintained a transparent and methodical approach, strengthening the reliability and credibility of the scoping review.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the results and discussion of this study. This chapter highlights the results by describing the included studies and analysing the data through emerging themes from included studies using thematic analysis. Themes were not predetermined and arose throughout the thematic data analysis process. This assisted in accurately mapping the available data. The chapter also contains a discussion of the results.

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Characteristics of Included Studies

Ten articles were included in the review. The main characteristics and quality assessment for these studies are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Description of included studies (Charting of the extracted data)

Author (s) and date	Study title	Aims of study	Study design	Population	Most relevant findings	Study limitations
1. Romanini (2017)	Parental couple experiences of transracial adoption: a Phenomenological study.	The study aimed to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of parental couples who have adopted a child transracially.	Qualitative	Transracial adoptive parental couples	The study contributed in-depth experiences of parental couples who have adopted transracially. The study provided themes relating to parental couples' positive and negative experiences.	The study results were limited as research bias can be seen in interpreting the emerging themes. Furthermore, all three couples adopted children from the same adoption organisation. The results cannot be

generalised. There are challenges of dyadic interviews, such as members dominating the conversation and having honest responses in the presence of another (the male participants were more vocal about their experiences).

2. Attwell (2004)	A Phenomenological exploration of adoptive parents' motivation for	The study aimed to explore white parents' motivation	Qualitative	Adoptive parents	The study contributed that parents had positive	The study results were limited as participants in the
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	and experience of transracial adoption in South Africa	for and experience of transracial adoption in South Africa.			and negative experiences throughout the process. Although they discussed the challenges, they viewed the overall process positively.	study's adopted children were very young (small sample size).
3. Luyt & Swartz (2023)	Motivations to adopt transracially in South Africa	The study aimed to explore the motivation to adopt transracially using the life stage model to investigate the motivation to adopt	Qualitative	Transracial adoptive families	The most important finding in the research was that the path to adoption does not look the same for all adoptive parents. The results indicated that many adoptive	The study results were limited and could not be generalised due to the small sample size. The study did not have same-sex couples. The study

in 26 transracially
adoptive families.

parents have decided to adopt as a way of growing their family due to infertility. However, participants also indicated that they had child-centred reasons for adopting, including feeling a responsibility to care for children in need of placement, which motivated their decision. had very few male participants.

4. Breshears (2018)	Transracially adoptive families in South Africa: parental experiences of outsider reactions	The study aimed to explore Transracial adoptive families' reception and response strategies in South African society.	Qualitative	Transracial adoptive families	Despite awareness of racial tension and enduring segregation, parents reported largely positive experiences with outsiders. Parents described different response strategies, dependent on circumstance and level of intrusiveness. Overall, parents were willing to endure public attention and intrusion to raise	The study results were limited and could not be generalised. In the study, the majority of participants were white. The study was conducted in the Eastern Cape.
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					awareness of adoption and transracial relationships in South Africa.	
5. Jackson (2018)	Transracial adoption in South Africa: Challenges faced by adoptive parents.	The study aimed to gain an understanding of the challenges faced by transracial adoptive parents.	Qualitative	Transracial adoptive parents	The study showcased that challenges were experienced at all levels of the ecological system.	The limitation of the study was that all participants were from the white population group. The gender of all participants was female. The study was carried out in the Western Cape.

6. Gishen (1996)	Transracial adoption in South Africa	The study aimed to research the impact that transracial adoption has on families in South Africa.	Quantitative	Transracial adoptive families	Transracial adoption appears to be viewed as positive and successful by participants. The racial identity of the child was identified in the literature study as one of the most significant concerns about transracial adoption.	The limitation of the study was that the sample size of respondents was small; this sample could not be representative. Due to transracial adoption being only legalized in 1991, children adopted at that time were very young. Another limitation was that they did not record statistics on the
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						number of transracial adoptions in South Africa.
7. Breshears (2022)	South African parents' attitudes toward cultural and racial socialisation of their transracially adopted children	The study aimed to explore parental attitudes toward the cultural and racial socialisation of their transracial adoptive children.	Mixed-method approach	Transracial adoptive parents	The Transracial Adoption Parenting Scale (TAPS) results showed that South African parents scored significantly lower on the multicultural planning with no contact subscale than the US cohort, indicating that South	A significant limitation of the study was that the theoretical framework and TAPS measure conflate the constructs of race and culture. Another limitation of the current study was the missing

					African parents place less importance on cultural socialisation.	voice of transracial adoptees. A final limitation of the study concerned the comparison in phase one to the US Transracial adoptive parent cohort in the original TAPS scale.
8. Finlay (2006)	Exploring challenges specific to cross-racial adoption in Gauteng.	The study aimed to conduct applied, exploratory, descriptive research to establish	Qualitative	Cross-racial adoptive parents	Finlay has noted two points of interest: a) there is an increase in cross-racial adoption in South Africa, as	No limitations were stated in the study.

challenges specific to cross-racial adoption in Gauteng, South Africa.

was identified by consulting the register of adoption at the Department of Social Development, and b) there is an increasing concern around the inconsistently regulated processing of cross-racial adoptions.

9. Luyt & Swartz (2022)	“I’ve really let go of the language thing.”: Language learning in	The article aimed to report on the aspects related to the use of language	Qualitative	Transracial adoptive families	The study indicated that transracial adoptive parents wish to facilitate the	The limitation of the study is the small sample of families in Western
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	transracial adoptive families in South Africa	learning as part of cultural and racial socialisation, which emerged as part of a study of the experiences of transracial adoptive families.			learning of a local language for their adopted children or the entire transracial adoptive family. However, despite their best intentions, most transracial adoptive families fail in this endeavour.	Cape, SA. Data gathering relied primarily on reports.
10. Camara (2014)	A comparative study of the meta-perceptions of transracially adoptive mothers and adoptees in South Africa.	The study aimed to explore how the meta-perceptions of white mothers and black young adults are constructed	Qualitative	Transracially adoptive family	The research indicated that context-specific interventions and support programmes should be developed	The limitations of the study included the sample size and demographics of participants. Participants may

concerning their

TRA.

in the areas identified

as challenging for

participants, as they

may benefit mothers

and young adults

involved in TRA.

Furthermore, the

study's results

highlighted the

current state of race

relations in South

Africa and how they

impact the general

functioning of South

Africans.

have felt that the

researcher could

not fully

understand their

experience as black

individuals due to

her being white.

4.1.2 Results of Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the data of this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes were not predetermined to remain objective throughout the synthesis of the findings from the data collection (Fick, 2014). Table 7 highlights the themes from the data analysis.

Table 7: The themes that emerged from data analysis

Theme 1:	Parental motivation and reasons to adopt cross-racially
Subtheme 1:	Children without a home need a home
Subtheme 2:	Adoption became an option after volunteering
Subtheme 3:	Religiously Motivated
Subtheme 4:	Wanting to become parents, create a family or add to their family
Subtheme 5:	Seeing others adopt
Subtheme 6:	Adoption was the choice from the start
Subtheme 7:	Cross-racial adoption was the only choice available
Theme 2:	Parental experiences of the pre-adoption process
Subtheme 1:	Pre-adoption experiences of the administration process
Subtheme 2:	Family members' reaction to pre-adoption
Theme 3:	Parental experiences of specific cross-racial adoption constructs
Subtheme 1:	Race
Subtheme 2:	Culture
Subtheme 3:	Language
Theme 4:	Challenges faced by cross-racial adoption parents
Subtheme 1:	Stares from strangers
Subtheme 2:	Negative encounters in public

Subtheme 3:	Questions from strangers
Subtheme 4:	Anticipated challenges parents are concerned about
Theme 5:	Opportunities and positive experiences faced by parents who adopted cross-racially
Theme 6:	Strategies that can be applied or that should be considered to minimise the adverse effects of cross-racial adoption
Subtheme 1:	Multicultural planning strategies
Subtheme 2:	Education on issues of race
Subtheme 3:	Support structures
Subtheme 4:	Partners communication and being on the same page

4.1.2.1 Theme 1: Parental Motivation and Reasons to Adopt Cross-Racially

Of the ten studies included in the review, seven referred to the motivations as to why parents have decided to adopt transracially (Attwell, 2004; Camara, 2014; Finlay, 2006; Gishen, 1996; Jackson, 2018; Luyt & Swartz, 2023; Romanini, 2017). There were various reasons for parents to adopt, which form the subthemes of this section. The subthemes included:

- Children without a home need a home;
- Adoption became an option after volunteering;
- Religiously motivated;
- Wanting to become parents, create a family or add to their family;
- Seeing others adopt;
- Adoption was the choice from the start;
- Cross-racial adoption was the only choice available.

Knowing the motivation behind why parents choose to adopt sheds light on the various reasons and challenges misconceptions regarding adoption. Gerrand and Stevens (2019) and Hall (2010) found that various individuals perceived that people only adopt due to their fertility difficulties or that they have a ‘saviour complex’ and want to be better than others.

Once there is an understanding of why parents choose to adopt children, one can use it to track the life course of the adoptive family and understand their unique adoption experience (Luyt & Swartz, 2023). Luyt and Swartz (2023) stated that the most important finding in their study is that all adoptive parents do not have the same motivation for adopting. Parents felt moved to adopt under their unique experiences or circumstances (Luyt & Swartz, 2023).

Subtheme 1: Children Without a Home Need a Home

“...I know there is a need out there, there’s just is many children who just don’t have homes ...” – Study participant (Attwell 2004). This subtheme emerged in four of the ten studies included in the review (Attwell, 2004; Gishen, 1996; Luyt & Swartz, 2023; Romanini, 2017). The participants believed babies needed a home and wanted to make a difference by adopting. They were aware of the numerous babies and children placed in children’s homes that needed a loving family.

Due to this need, they decided to adopt to make a difference in a child's life. Some families believed they would be “*saving a child*” who otherwise would not have the opportunity to grow up in a permanent home (Romanini, 2017). A participant in a study conducted by Luyt and Swartz (2023) noted that they felt like it was “*the right thing to do*”. In a study conducted by Gishen (1996), many participants indicated that transracial adoption is necessary for humanitarian reasons, such as giving a child a home.

This is consistent with existing international literature (Soares et al., 2023). A study conducted in the United States by Malm and Welti (2010) indicated that 80 per cent (80%) of

adoptive parents adopted a child for altruistic reasons, wanting to provide a permanent home. According to Goss (2022), altruism is one of the most powerful incentives for adoption.

Subtheme 2: Adoption Became an Option after Volunteering

In a study conducted by Camara (2014), a participant indicated:

I adopted after spending a couple of years volunteering in orphanages and watching children and babies die, living terrible lives, so I thought I am good with small babies and so I adopted small babies.

This theme was included in six of the ten studies included in the review (Attwell, 2004; Camara, 2014; Finlay, 2006; Gishen, 1996; Luyt & Swartz, 2023; Romanini, 2017). The participants in the research stated that volunteering and being involved in children's homes or organisations had opened their minds to the possibility of adoption. These parents did not always plan adoption, but after meeting a specific child in need of care, it became a topic of discussion for them. Prior international research indicates a relationship between prior exposure to adoption through volunteering and their willingness to adopt (Malm & Welti, 2010).

Participants in the study conducted by Finlay (2006) stated that they did not particularly want to adopt a black child, but the organisations they volunteered at only had black children at the time. For some parents, a specific baby, which they volunteered, captured their hearts and naturally progressed to adoption (Luyt & Swartz, 2023; Romanini, 2017). In a study conducted by Gishen (1996), participants indicated they chose to adopt because they knew and loved the child before adoption. Participants mentioned that they were drawn to adoption when working with vulnerable children in child protection organisations (Luyt & Swartz, 2023). They further indicated that they knew what was happening with the children, so adoption became the only option (Luyt & Swartz, 2023).

Subtheme 3: Religiously Motivated

A participant in the study by Romanini (2017) indicated, “... *what’s commanded in the bible is to care for the orphans and the widows*”. This theme occurred in three of the ten studies included in the review (Attwell, 2004; Luyt & Swartz, 2023; Romanini, 2017). In these studies, the topic of religion arose, with many people deciding to adopt because of their religious views or because they believe God is directing them to adopt for a bigger purpose. Some participants believed God told them and wanted them to adopt, so they decided to do that. For some couples, they felt that it was their Christian duty to adopt a child and consequently give the child a chance in life (Romanini, 2017).

Subtheme 4: Wanting to Become Parents, Create a Family or Add to Their Family

Participants in the study conducted by Luyt and Swartz (2023) indicated, “...*after one IVF we were like, no, this is not for us. Let’s just go the adoption route*”. This theme was noted in five of the ten studies included in the review (Camara, 2014; Finlay, 2006; Gishen, 1996; Luyt & Swartz, 2023; Romanini, 2017). Participants mentioned wanting to become parents and create a family, so they considered adoption. Adoption was an option for those who were unable to have biological children or preferred to build a family in another way (Luyt & Swartz, 2023).

Some participants reported that they chose adoption after encountering medical hurdles to having children due to infertility (Gishen, 1996) or difficulty falling pregnant (Camara, 2014; Luyt & Swartz, 2023). Most considered various alternatives to becoming parents before adopting (Luyt & Swartz, 2023). People who were unable to conceive biological children due to physiological or contextual issues were left with a restricted number of options for starting or expanding their families (Finlay, 2006). Alternative options such as invitro-fertilisation are expensive and not obtainable for everyone. This is consistent with existing international literature. A study conducted in the United States by Malm and Welti (2010) indicated that 78

per cent (78%) of participants adopted after encountering infertility factors. Additionally, a more recent study also confirmed that 71 per cent (71,4%) of participants indicated that not being able to fall pregnant was a motivation to consider adoption (Soares et al., 2023).

Other participants who were single or divorced wanted to become mothers, and adoption was the considered option (Camara, 2014). Single mothers, single fathers and same-sex couples chose adoption as it is a more practical alternative that allows them to create their own families (Finlay, 2006). In a study by Gishen (1996), participants indicated that they intended to adopt so that their biological children could have siblings. Some chose adoption to expand their families (Romanini, 2017). This aligns with findings from a study conducted by Soares et al. (2023) in Portugal, where a fifth of the participants indicated that their motivation for adoption was based on the need to fill a void and require companionship to share their life with someone.

Subtheme 5: Seeing Others Adopt

A participant in the study conducted by Attwell (2004) indicated: “*What motivated me was my friend, when they adopted their baby we fell in love with him and you know it became more natural for us to adopt...*”. This subtheme emerged in two of the ten studies included in the review (Attwell, 2004; Luyt & Swartz, 2023). Participants indicated that seeing someone else successfully adopt gave participants the courage to do the same. Others had experienced adoption in their immediate or extended families, which normalised adoption, and it was something they also wanted to do (Luyt & Swartz, 2023). Seeing someone else's experiences allowed them to know what they were committing to, which made the decision easier for some participants.

Subtheme 6: Adoption was the choice from the Start

A participant in the study conducted by Luyt and Swartz (2023) indicated: “...*I always wanted to adopt even before I was married... it was something very close to my heart...*”. This theme emerged in three of the ten studies included in the review (Camara, 2014; Jackson, 2018; Luyt & Swartz, 2023). For some participants, adoption was something they decided to do long before they decided to start a family or have children. For some parents, this was their preferred method of growing and establishing a family, and they were not invested in the experience of biological parenthood (Luyt & Swartz, 2023).

They did not prioritise having biological children, and adoption was their choice. “*We didn’t try to conceive biological children. We chose to adopt ...*” (Camara, 2014). Participants noted that this was not the norm; however, they mentioned that they wanted to adopt even before marriage (Luyt & Swartz, 2023). A recent international study indicated that a fifth of the participants stated that they planned for adoption, which they always wanted to do (Soares et al., 2023).

Subtheme 7: Cross-Racial Adoption was the only Choice Available

A Participant in the study conducted by Finlay (2006) was asked why they specifically chose to adopt a black baby and not white. “*But there is not a single white baby here*”. This subtheme emerged in four of the ten studies included in the review (Attwell, 2004; Gishen, 1996; Luyt & Swartz, 2023; Romanini, 2017). The empirical data demonstrated that, while respondents selected to adopt black children, the option to adopt a white child was not available. In a study conducted by Gishen (1996), some respondents indicated that they did not intend to adopt transracially from the onset but ended up doing so due to the unavailability of same-race children.

Louw (2009) and Gerrand and Stevens (2019) confirmed that the majority of children eligible for adoption are black. On the contrary, few white newborns are available for adoption, and the waiting list for white parents to adopt white babies is lengthy (Szabo & Ritchken, 2002). According to Mabry (1997), the wait time could extend over five years. Many participants were aware of the limited availability of white babies and the extensive waiting process that would follow if they were to have chosen to adopt interracially; thus, the option of transracial adoption was more readily available (Attwell, 2004; Romanini, 2017).

The majority of respondents stated that they had instantly believed that adopting a black baby was their only option due to the apparent truth in South Africa that the majority of newborns up for adoption are black. Some participants realised the difficulties the black population faces due to South Africa's political background and were aware of the vulnerability it brings to black children (Luyt & Swartz, 2023).

4.1.2.2 Theme 2: Parental Experiences of the Pre-Adoption Process

The adoption process is crucial and important as it is the initial contact of being able to adopt (Finlay, 2006). The period before officially adopting the child is ambiguous for many parents, and many conversations, considerations, and processes must be considered before this decision can be made and carried out (Jackson, 2018). Six of the ten studies in the review referred to parents' experiences of the pre-adoption process (Attwell, 2004; Finlay, 2006; Gishen, 1996; Jackson, 2018; Luyt & Swartz, 2023; Romanini, 2017). The two subthemes included:

- Pre-adoption experiences of the administration process;
- Family reactions to pre-adoption.

Subtheme 1: Pre-Adoption Experiences of the Administration Process

The adoption process starts when parents initiate contact with an organisation, government welfare or adoption agencies (Finlay, 2006). The adoption process has extensive steps and is subsequently overwhelming, tedious and fraught with delays (Romanini, 2017). Initially, the process was said to be administrative, and parental couples across studies had different experiences with the legal proceedings.

For some parental couples, it was a positive experience where they were treated with courtesy and respect (Finlay, 2006). A participant in Jackson's (2018) study stated, "*It was very, very easy. Very easy to follow, we had no issues*". Other parental couples had a negative experience with the process, noting that they were treated unprofessionally and unenthusiastically (Finlay, 2006). This perception was mainly due to parents feeling that the adoption service providers were incompetent (Jackson, 2018). These discrepancies raise concerns about the standardisation and efficiency of adoption services, particularly in contexts like South Africa, where social welfare resources are often strained (Hart & Luckock, 2004).

Some participants preferred having an adoption organisation and felt that it was an "*important part of the process*" (Romanini, 2017). Others who adopted through the government social department had a "*completely different*" (Romanini, 2017) experience to parents who adopted through an adoption organisation (Finlay, 2006). Participants explained that there were differences compared to people they knew who had adopted children through other adoption agencies, such as a government social department (Romanini, 2017). They, for example, received additional support in the form of workshops about transracial adoption, which was found to be highly beneficial (Romanini, 2017). This discrepancy is not unique to South Africa. International research has identified similar contrasts in adoption experiences between private and public agencies. In the United States, for example, private adoption

agencies often offer specialised services, such as cultural training for transracial adoptive parents, while public agencies, constrained by government funding, may provide minimal post-adoption support (Verbovaya, 2016).

Across studies, the responses from participants have been conflicting, which suggests that there is no regulation and consistency across the experiences with various organisations. Some participants would state: *“I think the organisation just did not want the transracial adoption, that was the impression I got all the time.”* (Jackson, 2018). In contrast, others stated: *“I spent a year working with the social worker in preparation to ensure I was ready emotionally and mentally”* (Finlay, 2006).

According to Finlay (2006), inconsistency is a significant issue for adoption agencies and organisations. This could be attributed to insufficient funds and resources provided across organisations. According to Hart and Luckock (2004), discrepancies and feelings of abandonment result from systemic failure in the social services systems. They argued that adoption laws and policies' shortcomings, which deny adoptive families their entitlement to effective, multidisciplinary care, are the root of the problem. Additionally, international author Verbovaya (2016) indicated that favourable or unfavourable interactions between parents and an adoption agency would impact the adoptive family's thoughts and attitudes regarding adoption in the long run.

Apart from the frustrating experiences in the process, many participants experienced the following emotive responses during the initial process: anxiety (Finlay, 2006), fearing disappointment (Jackson, 2018), unexpected feelings of guilt (Romanini, 2017) and some “a bit traumatic” (Finlay, 2006). Feelings of uncertainty were particularly heightened due to the unpredictability of the process, with parents fearing that unforeseen issues could jeopardise their adoption plans. Several participants were scared that something would not go as planned, resulting in them being unable to adopt after making the decision and being disappointed

(Finlay, 2006; Jackson, 2018). Other participants experienced unexpected feelings of guilt as they were completing checklists for the prospective baby they wanted and having difficult conversations with the social workers prior to adopting (Romanini, 2017).

Some participants were faced with difficult questions about language and culture and how they would deal with the permanent aspects of cross-racial adoption (Romanini, 2017). Some parents found these important questions very difficult to answer as these are not the “standard questions” surrounding parenting they had expected in their preparation before adoption (Romanini, 2017). This elicited complex emotions; many require time to process and contemplate these questions.

Not all organisations offer cross-racial adoption training or preparation courses, as it is not a prerequisite for adoption (Finlay, 2006). However, participants felt such training would provide support and allow them to meet other parents in a similar position (Finlay, 2006). International author Verbovaya (2016) confirmed this, stating that adequate preparation for transracial adoptive parents is imperative to ensure that parents are more prepared and equipped to deal with the realities of adoption.

While the pre-adoption process is often described as tedious and frustrating, the lack of consistency and regulation across different agencies exacerbates these challenges. The emotional toll on prospective parents is heightened by systemic inefficiencies, and in transracial adoption, these complexities are further compounded by cultural and racial considerations (Finlay, 2006). The findings from this study align with international research, indicating that more structured support systems and policy reforms are needed to improve the adoption experience in South Africa (Verbovaya, 2016).

Subtheme 2: Family Members Reaction to Pre-Adoption

With family playing a significant role in a person’s life, it was important for couples to

consult their families before adoption. Family members had varying responses to the transracial adoption; these mixed reactions were often experienced as a challenge by participants. Some families accepted the cross-racial adoption immediately, whereas others did not. In a study done by Jackson (2018), a participant mentioned “*Everybody embraced the decision and love her to bits*”).

Some participants received amazing support from their families (Romanini, 2017). In a study by Gishen (1996), most participants experienced acceptance from their families and communities after adopting cross-racially. Participants experienced their family members being supportive, accepting, and optimistic concerning transracial adoption (Jackson, 2018). Some noted that their family was not shocked as they had had various conversations surrounding cross-racial adoptions, and so when they finally made the decision, their family was incredibly happy for them (Finlay, 2006). Some families were interracial already, so adopting a child from a different race was welcomed by the family (Luyt & Swartz, 2023). When the family was supportive, it provided valuable support and encouragement to the participants throughout the adoption journey (Finlay, 2006); for some, their supportive families laid the groundwork for adopting and making that decision (Luyt & Swartz, 2023). One participant stated, “*I know my mom-in-law had reservations to start with*” (Jackson, 2018). Some participants experienced a lack of support from their family members once they shared their decision. This is consistent with existing literature; according to Melina (2002), the initial response can be unfavourable and adverse, especially if the family has little to no experience with cross-racial adoption.

The lack of support participants experienced was due to a variety of reasons. Some families were not supportive due to them hearing about adoption stories that were not a positive experience, and they would not want their families to go through the same experience (Romanini, 2017). Some adoptive families faced various obstacles relating to stigma about

adoption, and families had significant concerns about their decision to adopt (Luyt & Swartz, 2023). In contrast, other family members were not supportive, mainly due to them adopting a child from a different race (Attwell, 2004). Unlike in Western contexts, where racial integration has progressed differently, South Africa's historical racial divides may contribute to heightened resistance from family members in certain communities (Luyt & Swartz, 2023).

Participants reported that some family members needed to take time to adjust to the idea of transracial adoption as they were "*hesitant and concerned*" (Jackson, 2018). Some participants faced resistance, especially from their fathers, stating they were concerned and wanted to protect their family; however, they related it to racism (Luyt & Swartz, 2023). Some participants noted that it is a complicated situation when grandparents and family members treat the couple's biological children differently from the adopted child (Attwell, 2004).

The attitudes and reactions from families, communities, and society were an obstacle for various families (Luyt & Swartz, 2023). Most parents who experienced resistance from family members described it as a "*Psychologically challenging*" period accompanied by much emotion to work through (Romanini, 2017). Some participants experienced this resistance as hurtful and disappointing (Finlay, 2006). This left some with a bitter-sweet feeling of excitement as they embarked on this journey while dealing with the disappointment of not having everyone's support initially (Romanini, 2017).

Parental couples, however, mentioned that they would have gone ahead with the adoption regardless of the family members' approval (Atwell, 2004). According to Melina (2002), adopted parents must develop self-sufficiency if they do not receive support or help from their relatives. This suggests that early resistance by relatives can cause the adoptive parent to feel both alone and unsupported, feelings that may persist in the future. Melina (2002) added that even when relatives do eventually accept the adoption, adoptive parents may continue to be independent and fail to use family members as a source of support or comfort.

Participants mentioned that when they decided to proceed with the adoption in the face of resistance, they decided to educate the extended family in preparation for the cross-racial adoption (Luyt & Swartz, 2023). Participants stated that while some family members were not supportive initially, some parents expressed that post-adoption family members had a change of perspective and became supportive (Luyt & Swartz, 2023; Romanini, 2017). According to Finlay (2006), giving family members time to accept the idea is essential. A participant added (Finlay, 2006):

My mother had said if I adopted a black child, it would kill my father. When we decided to adopt our daughter, I invited my parents to the organisation where our prospective daughter was, and they spent three hours there. When we left my father said we had opened his eyes.

The findings align with Melina (2002), where her research finds that most of the time, relatives eventually accept adoption. However, family members might require time to gather information and come to terms with the idea. Although some parental couples faced family challenges, most mentioned that their friends were supportive and encouraging throughout the process, which became the most significant source of support along the journey (Finlay, 2006; Romanini, 2017).

4.1.2.3 Theme 3: Parental Experiences of Specific Cross-Racial Adoption

Constructs

While South Africa is in the era of democracy and integration, past experiences in the country cannot be separated from how individuals currently interact and understand each other (Durrheim et al., 2011). The impact of racial discrimination, cultural differences across races, and perceptions of interracial contact cannot be removed from how individuals view themselves and others in daily interactions (Camara, 2014). Of the ten studies included in the review, eight referred to parents' experiences of specific cross-racial adoption constructs

(Attwell, 2004; Breshears, 2022; Camara, 2014; Finlay, 2006; Gishen, 1996; Jackson, 2018; Luyt & Swartz, 2022; Romanini, 2017). The three subthemes included: (1) Race, (2) Culture and (3) language.

Subtheme 1: Race

A participant in the study conducted by Camara (2014) stated:

He turned and ran to me and said 'Oh my God mommy, all these people think I'm Black'. That was his wake-up call... They didn't know they were Black and then they would say 'but we're not Black we're brownish.

Throughout childhood, every child struggles to discover their identity and place in the world (Mphephu, 2022). Children who are adopted from various racial backgrounds, however, find this effort much more difficult (Mphephu, 2022). Several respondents indicated that their children notice race differences first between themselves and their parents as well as differences between the people around them (Finlay, 2006). According to Camara (2014), perceptions of an individual's language and culture are often judged based on race. In a study conducted by Breshears (2022), 13 out of 20 couples acknowledged the awareness that children are or will be affected by racial and ethnic issues in their lives.

In a study conducted by Gishen (1996), 66 per cent (66%) of respondents indicated their awareness of the importance of issues related to the racial identity of the adopted child. Some couples reported negotiating their feelings and attitudes regarding racial issues. According to international authors Steinberg and Hall (2013), everyone has internalised beliefs about race, whether overt or covert. Thus, adoptive parents who choose to raise a racially diverse family must be prepared to face their racial consciousness. According to Breshears (2022), some couples negotiated whether or not they could cope with being a multi-racial family (Breshears, 2022).

In some cases, parents have decided to adopt a colourblind approach to racial issues, implying that they are denying the racial differences between themselves and their children and/or downplaying racism and the implications of race in society (Breshears, 2022). This concept of 'colourblindness' in parenting is not exclusive to South Africa. Studies in the U.S. and U.K. have also highlighted how some parents adopt a similar stance, perhaps unknowingly fostering an environment where race is not openly discussed, despite its social significance (Steinberg & Hall, 2012). In a study conducted by Gishen (1996), 17 per cent (17%) of participants indicated adopting a neutral approach to racial identity, and 16 per cent (16%) indicated a response of little or very little importance of racial identity. A participant in Breshears's (2022) study stated:

He is just a man ... I don't think there is special preparations for him ... so I don't think there's a difference between preparing him as a black man or not, it's just preparing him as a man.

Some parents believe that race is becoming less of an issue in South Africa due to integration, the progression of younger generations and the increased visibility of multiracial families (Breshears, 2022). Couples often expressed hope that when their child is older, they will not have to engage in culture/racial socialisation because society will not be as divided as it is now (Breshears, 2022). King (2012) argued against this, stating that many parents who adopt transracial children have the mindset that race is unimportant. This is consistent with literature as Melina (2002) noted that some cross-racial adoptive parents believe race does not matter. While this perspective may stem from good intentions, it overlooks the lived realities of people of colour, as society is not colorblind. Steinberg and Hall (2013) emphasised that embracing a child's birth culture does not diminish the adoptive family's own traditions; rather, both should be integrated and celebrated as they would be with a biological child. When adoptive parents actively support their child's connection to their birth culture, they

provide opportunities for the child to develop a well-rounded sense of identity throughout their life (Steinberg & Hall, 2013).

King (2012) further mentioned that parents need to prepare their children for the realities of racial difficulties by acknowledging that they do exist because, although they have a colourblind approach, the world often does not. Some parents believe that their children can face any life challenges if they are raised strong and confident instead of focusing on the implications of race (Breshears, 2022). However, Samuels (2016) indicated that children were frequently left to make their way through a racialised world alone due to parental colourblindness.

Differently from the colourblind approach, some parents have experienced their children openly acknowledging that they are a different colour to their parents, and in some instances, have expressed that they would like to change their colour (Finlay 2006). Participants in a study conducted by Romanini (2017) shared that their daughter, who is now four, is becoming more racially aware and has started to make comments that she wants long blond hair and no longer wants to be brown. The participants conveyed how challenging it was for them and evoked many feelings of sadness and concern for their daughter's racial identity. A participant in Camara's (2014) study stated:

It's her own identity and her acceptance of her own colour. There's things like that little game on my cell phone where you make people. She doesn't like to be Black. When she makes herself she wants to be White with blonde hair I think it's just her dealing with that kind of challenge at the moment.

This participant allowed her daughter to go through the questions and phases of wanting to change so that she could accept her racial identity (Camara, 2014). Finlay (2006) noted that

parents must consider their views on race and prejudice to facilitate healthy racial awareness in their children. Participants felt ill-equipped to manage these questions and comments as their children became more racially aware (Romanini, 2017). Parents noted that they would like their children to be confident in who they are as a person (Romanini, 2017).

Some parents expressed concerns about the “coconut” label (Breshears, 2022). The Camara (2014) study participants said their children are seen as coconuts. In other words, they are seen as traitors to their racial group because of their identification with whiteness. The participants note that black children raised in a white home do not make them white children but a different type of black person with a unique racial and cultural heritage. While this particular concern seems to reflect a unique aspect of South African racial identity struggles, similar findings have been observed in international studies as well, suggesting that cross-racial adoptees face common challenges in developing racial identity, regardless of their geographical location (Morrison, 2004). This aligns with findings from a study conducted by Samuel (2009), where they discovered that cross-racially adopted children who have white parents made it harder for them to be accepted as full members of the black community. According to Finlay (2006) and Breshears (2022), parents may, at times, minimise the role of race and culture in the identity of their children, intentionally or unintentionally, which may become problematic as young adults form their identity.

This might be because parents may not engage with the different concepts, such as the child being a black person, but instead seem to emphasise their sameness with white people and, perhaps by extension, with themselves. According to Camara (2014) and Breshears (2022), an absence of discussion about their blackness and integrating this with their cross-racial adoption and place in the cross-racial adoptive family may be problematic for identity formation. These attitudes may deny their race as an essential aspect of their identity.

A participant in Finlay’s (2006) study stated: *“We have to acknowledge similarities if*

we want our children to be completely part of us and completely part of our family, but there are differences too". This is consistent with international literature; according to Steinberg and Hall (2013), transracial adoptive parents need to communicate honestly and openly with their children about race in addition to understanding how their children are feeling in certain situations. Studies have shown that parents who avoid openly discussing race and identity issues may inadvertently place their children at a disadvantage in understanding their place in society, particularly in contexts where race still plays a significant role in social dynamics (King, 2012). This is a challenge observed not only in South Africa but also in countries like the U.S. and U.K., where race and ethnicity continue to shape individual experiences. The challenges faced by transracially adopted children in forming their racial identity are multifaceted and deeply influenced by the cultural and racial dynamics of their adoptive families as well as their broader social environments (King, 2012).

Subtheme 2: Culture

Many parents had strong views regarding culture. Some parents believed that their adopted child would be raised in their culture because they are their family which aligns with findings from Park (2012), who also noted that most adoptive parents preferred raising their children within their own cultural norms. However, this differs from the South African context, where some parents felt a sense of responsibility to expose their adopted children to their birth culture, which may be a response to South Africa's multicultural environment and history of racial and cultural diversity. Breshears (2022) explored multi-cultural planning as a topic and defined it as avenues parents created for their children to engage with their birth culture. A participant in the study conducted by Breshears (2022) expressed, "*We made a very clear decision: their culture is our culture*".

Some parents reported that their adopted child is to be raised in their parents' culture. Some participants mainly felt that there was too much emphasis placed on incorporating the

child's birth culture and noted the importance of the child embracing their culture (parents' culture) as well (Romanini, 2017). According to an international study conducted by Park (2012), most parents organised their families in ways similar to how they had been raised culturally. For them, it was more important to give their children a higher education and opportunities to give them a socioeconomic advantage than raising their child in their birth culture.

Some participants argued that culture is not something a child is born with but something a family determines, just like religion. A participant in the study conducted by Camara (2014) stated:

I don't believe that children are born with a culture. They're certainly not born with a language. So for me I am not taking anything away. Because it was not there in the first place. I am giving her my perspective, my values, my whatever, in the same way that you give any other child that you raise as well.

Parents reported feeling strongly about this for several reasons. Some parents expressed that they would not be able to teach a culture as they are not part of that culture and that it would only amount to an academic understanding. This is consistent with international literature; according to Park (2012), cross-racial adoptive parents lack confidence and admit to knowing little about their children's birth culture when it comes to authentic experiences. Parents were cautious and felt it would highlight differences if one of their children were raised in a different culture than the other children (Breshears, 2022; Camara, 2014). A participant in the study conducted by Breshears (2022) stated:

My son has taught me something different. He is emotionally mature and fights the fact that we want him to learn Xhosa with us. He lets us know in his way that he is a [surname] and therefore pushes Xhosa when he knows his siblings were not encouraged to.

Existing European literature suggests that families are often ill-equipped to accept their child's cultural identity and tend to minimise the child's birth culture in favour of their own (Harf et al., 2015). Some parents also felt that it might be a painful reminder to their adopted child that they were abandoned in times of exploring questions about culture and heritage (Camara, 2014). A participant in the study conducted by Camara (2014) stated: *“If you have an abandoned child you don’t know what their culture is, I think it’s hurtful and separating for the child.”*

Although some parents felt strongly about raising their adopted child in their culture, some of them also felt that although their child will be raised in their family’s culture, they still want to honour and acknowledge their child’s heritage and culture. A participant in the study conducted by Breshears (2022) stated: *“I suppose her culture is our culture. But her roots, where she comes from, that should be honoured. And when she becomes older, she may well want to explore that”*. Similarly, another parent from Breshears’s (2022) study said: *“Yeah, I think it is good to have an understanding of where you came from and what your history is because that is part of who you are”*.

Some parents highlighted the importance of developing a multi-cultural South African identity rather than developing a strong connection with the child’s birth culture. These parents value multiculturalism over cultural heritage and prefer their children to be equipped to function confidently in diverse cultural settings, regardless of cultural ties (Breshears, 2022). In a study conducted by Romanini (2017), all participants were aware of the multicultural aspect of the family that adopting a child transracially would create. However, some couples did not want to incorporate all the cultural elements and chose what they felt should be included. Doubell (2014) found that although parents understood the value of exposing their children to their culture, choosing which cultural practices to expose their child or children to can be challenging for adoptive parents because many cultural behaviours are different from what the parents do.

Some participants said they would support their children in exploring their cultural heritage (Attwell, 2004; Breshears, 2022). This is consistent with existing literature stating that for adopted children to develop their own perspectives on the value of cultural norms, adoptive parents should expose their children to their cultural heritage (Mphephu, 2022). This mindset aligns with multicultural planning, a strategy used to increase the chances of cultural exposure for adopted children from other cultures (Klevan, 2012). A participant in the study conducted by Breshears (2022) stated: *“Yeah, I think it’s, if a child wants to learn more about their culture when they’re older that’s their decision, but they’re just part of our family now so they go along with that”*.

According to a study by Jackson (2018), participants were very aware that if they did not take responsibility for ensuring their child was exposed to their culture of origin, it would be detrimental to their child. A participant in a study conducted by Romanini (2017) decided from the onset that they would inform their daughter about her Xhosa heritage, and they began by buying her a traditional Xhosa doll. Some parents decided not to impose learning about their birth culture on their children but remain open to the idea that their children may want to learn about their birth culture when they are older (Jackson, 2018; Breshears, 2022).

According to an international study conducted by Park (2012), while most adoptive parents want to support their adopted child's exposure to their birth culture, they do not always have plans in place to make that happen. This is in line with the literature by Harf et al. (2015), which highlights the challenges adoptive parents face in understanding their child’s birth culture, the South African context may exacerbate these difficulties. Given the cultural and racial complexities of adoption in South Africa, parents may struggle not only with the authenticity of cultural practices but also with societal pressures regarding race and identity. Some parents anticipated that cultural learning would occur organically and would often leave it until the child was older. Other Participants mentioned that they would research their child’s cultural roots and make informed decisions on introducing or exposing their child to their culture of

origin (Breshears, 2022).

The parents acknowledged the role of culture and supported their children in exploring any avenue they desired and finding the balance between being the most natural version of being parents and creating a unique family dynamic (Camara, 2014). According to research conducted by Mphephu (2022), children have stronger self-esteem and an optimistic attitude toward life in households where the child's racial and cultural diversity are valued, and the child is exposed to traditions of their birth culture.

The results of this study suggest that while adoptive parents in South Africa are open to exposing their children to their birth culture, there is often reluctance to fully embrace these cultures, particularly if they differ significantly from the parents' own. This reflects the broader societal tension in South Africa regarding racial identity, as discussed by Schröder (2015) in their exploration of multicultural planning for adopted children.

Subtheme 3: Language

A Participant in the study conducted by Breshears (2022) stated:

There was an interview on the radio recently with a black boy that was grown up Afrikaans and he's fluent in English and Afrikaans. He's a radio personality. And he felt very separated from his culture because he didn't speak a black language. And he felt that his parents should have taught him a black language and that would have helped him.

This participant's experience reflects a broader tension in cross-racial adoption, especially in the South African context, where the importance of language in cultural identity is deeply felt. For parents, there were mixed views regarding language as a construct in cross-racial adopted families. Some parents felt open to teaching their adopted child their birth language, and others felt that it was not needed. A study by Luyt and Swartz (2022)

found that families with younger children tend to be more insistent about their intention to teach their children the language they associated with their biological family. In contrast, those with older children tended to be more guarded (Luyt & Swartz, 2022). This distinction between younger and older children could stem from differing experiences of identity formation, where younger children may be more receptive to learning their birth language, while older children may already be more strongly attached to the dominant culture (Ferreira, 2009; Steinberg & Hall, 2012).

In a study conducted by Luyt and Swartz (2022), many adoptive parents recognised the need for their children to be able to communicate with people of their race and consider enabling their adopted child to learn an African language. A participant in the study conducted by Luyt and Swartz (2022) mentioned, “*We’ll enrol in conversational Xhosa and then when [adopted child] is older we will take her along to baby Xhosa Classes*”. This highlights how some parents place significant importance on language as a bridge to cultural identity. In a study by Romanini (2017), couples were adamant about teaching their child an African language. In a Jackson (2018) study, most participants ensured their children would learn their birth language. The narratives of the participants above indicate that exposing their children to their African birth language was a priority for them as adoptive parents (Jackson, 2018).

Several parents expressed concern about their children not speaking a black South African language (Finlay, 2006). In some instances, respondents claim that not speaking a black language is already an issue for their children because black people they encounter assume they can speak a black language and, therefore, do not converse with them in English (Camara, 2014; Finlay, 2006; Romanini, 2017). A participant in the study conducted by Camara (2014) mentioned, “... *they will immediately assume that they can greet the child in a Black language, and they will do that, and I feel that that’s my role to say to them ‘they only speak English’...*”.

This echoes the societal pressures faced by children in the South African context, where cultural identity is often ascribed through language. In contrast, the experiences of some adoptive families illustrate the difficulties of teaching an African language. In a study by Luyt and Swartz (2022), parents of adolescents and young adults agreed on this, as they commented on the importance of learning an African language when encountering identity issues during the adolescent phase. A participant stated (Luyt & Swartz, 2022):

We did [make] the mistake of not valuing the [African] language. And now we find ourselves in a situation where obviously most of the people assume that she understands Xhosa, whereas she doesn't speak it, doesn't understand it. And this was a mistake, this was a mistake... And now we were paying the consequences, because that is automatically cutting her out from her own heritage, although she doesn't obviously feel neither Xhosa nor Zulu. But by not knowing the language, she is completely cut off from that segment of the population.

Learning a second language can assist the adopted child in having a connection to their birth culture and can minimise the encounters with prejudice, for example, being referred to as a “coconut” in South African society (Finlay, 2006). This is consistent with international literature; according to Steinberg and Hall (2013), it is highly beneficial for a transracially adopted child to learn a second language as it connects them to other people of the same ethnicity. A participant in Finlay’s (2006) study mentioned that their son stated that: “...*he is going to live in England where black people do not speak Zulu*”.

For some parental couples, learning an African language was viewed as a coping skill to protect their children from possible negative perceptions and associated with being seen to align themselves with “whiteness” (Luyt & Swartz, 2022). Steinberg and Hall (2013) further stated that acquiring proficiency in their mother tongue during adoption can help foster a sense of cultural identity and reduce the likelihood of discriminatory experiences for the adopted

child.

White families who have adopted coloured children reported that language learning was easier as Afrikaans was their home language (Luyt & Swartz, 2022). This was particularly challenging for parents who could not speak an African language. However, they made various attempts to resolve these difficulties by using domestic workers and gardeners to assist (Romanini, 2017). Some parents opted to take their children for lessons (Romanini, 2017). A participant stated (Luyt & Swartz, 2022):

“I’ve really let go of the language thing. I was hyper about that in the beginning. I was like, he’s going to be speaking Xhosa... But it’s been so hard to do. It’s been so costly. But for me it is a no-brainer... to do this and if my life was any different, I would champion that.”

This reflects the practical and financial difficulties many adoptive parents face when attempting to integrate their child’s birth language into their family’s daily life. It was a challenge for some, and it was not always possible to follow through with teaching their child an African language even though they intended to. Some families relied on their domestic workers to teach their children an African language, while others hoped their children would be taught an African language at school or learn it from another person (Luyt & Swartz, 2022). A participant mentioned (Luyt & Swartz, 2022), *“I hope that something sticks or at least at one stage she gets a boyfriend who speaks Xhosa”*. However, they also acknowledged the potential cultural benefits of learning an African language, even if it was not strictly the child’s own. This reflects the notion that any connection to an African language can foster a sense of belonging and help reduce discriminatory experiences, as discussed by Steinberg and Hall (2013).

Some parents argue that it is not possible to teach their children their language of birth because the parents do not know what their birth language is. Some, however, argue that

learning a local African language is still useful for a black African adoptee, even if parents are unsure of the language of their biological family (Attwell, 2004; Luyt & Swartz, 2022). A participant stated (Luyt & Swartz, 2022), *“It’s something that people often ask me, why is she not doing an African language. The reality is: I don’t speak an African language. We only speak English at home”*. Interestingly, some parental couples were concerned that placing so much emphasis on teaching their adopted child a different language might emphasise the differences between the adopted child and the family. For some, they all learned an African language together, not to have their adopted child feel singled out (Luyt & Swartz, 2022):

“I never want to bother my child, by learning another language, I don’t want to go “You need to go learn another language because that is your culture.” If you want to learn a language, let’s do [it] together as a family

This approach reflects the desire to maintain family cohesion while also honoring the child’s heritage, ensuring that language becomes a shared experience rather than a point of division.

A minority of parents did not feel committed to teaching their children an African language. They emphasised that the children were part of their family and that language was more important. A participant mentioned (Luyt & Swartz, 2022), *“Then you also speak Afrikaans. Because you’re part of our family.”*. For some, they felt that the country was changing and that an African language was no longer as necessary to black African people as it once was. A participant mentioned (Luyt & Swartz, 2022), *“The country is changing. The world’s changing... English is the lingua franca.”*. Others left the decision to their adopted child *“I want to do what’s respectful towards her, so I don’t want to push things on her and say, “You’re Xhosa.”... [I say] “Learn Xhosa if you want to learn Xhosa.”*

Ultimately, the decisions surrounding language in cross-racial adoption are complex and multifaceted. As Luyt and Swartz (2022) noted, some parents left the decision of whether

to learn an African language up to their adopted child, emphasising respect for the child's autonomy in shaping their own identity. This approach acknowledges the importance of personal agency in the process of cultural assimilation and the negotiation of identity within the adoptive family structure (Steinberg & Hall, 2012).

4.1.2.4 Theme 4: Challenges Faced by Cross-Racial Adoption Parents

This theme discusses the challenges faced by cross-racial adoptive parents. According to Steinberg and Hall (2013), it can be highly stressful and burdensome for parents to learn how to manage transracial relationships while thinking about the long-term safety and health of their children. The four subthemes included:

- Stares from strangers;
- negative encounters in public;
- questions from strangers;
- anticipated challenges.

Subtheme 1: Stares from Strangers

A recurring sentiment among participants was the difficulty of blending in as a family in public spaces. A *Participant in the study* conducted by Jackson (2018) stated, “*The blending in thing is impossible*”. This highlighted the visible racial differences between adoptive parents and their children, which often led to them standing out. Most parents have not always fully considered what leading up to the adoption process is, which is the experience of standing out in a crowd. Participants experienced being unable to blend in as a family, and families longed to be inconspicuous (Jackson, 2018). A participant in the study conducted by Romanini (2017) stated: “*the big difference with transracial adoption is that everyone is aware, everyone can see, everyone knows, and everybody will have questions*”.

Parents would experience people staring because of the apparent difference (Jackson,

2018; Romanini, 2017). These findings followed previous research conducted by De Haymes and Simon (2003), who stated that the increase in uncomfortable stares, remarks, and perplexed reactions is associated with the increased attention brought about by racial differences between the parent and child. According to De Haymes and Simon (2003), because they are in the limelight all the time, adoptive parents experience vulnerability.

People often stare in public settings like shops, and the parental couple wonders whether the stares are positive or negative (Romanini, 2017). Some parents have experienced it as negative, whereas some would note that it might not be negative but that others are just curious. Those who have experienced it in a negative light have reported that the increased eyes on them sparked anxiety, frustration, defensiveness and being self-conscious (Romanini, 2017). This created internal conflict for parents, who struggled to interpret the often ambiguous reactions of the public. These uncomfortable feelings raised difficult questions. Parents stated that although direct negative interactions were rare, strange looks and staring were more common when families were in public (Breshears, 2019).

For some parents, they have had blatant hostile stares. A participant in the study conducted by Camara (2014) reported: “*Sometimes I’ve had Black ladies look at me – give me filthy looks because I’ve got one of theirs*”. Being in the spotlight by the stares of others often makes the parents feel like they are not as ‘normal’ as they would have liked it to be (Romanini, 2017). A participant in the study conducted by Camara (2014) reported: “*...people are really rude sometimes. You cannot believe how they will really stare ...*”. The aggressive nature of these stares added a layer of emotional distress, making parents feel unwelcome or rejected by others. This underscores the challenges of navigating social stigmas and negative perceptions linked to racial identity.

In the early stages of adoption, many parents reported being hypersensitive to the stares and reactions of others. Some parents realised that it is not always negative stares. In

most instances, parents claim that members of the public stare and overtly observe the family, but while this can be uncomfortable and annoying at times, people usually stare out of interest or intrigue rather than for negative reasons (Finlay, 2006). Some parental couples reported that they were oversensitive to people's looks and glances and experienced it as negative in their early stages as a trans-racial family (Breshears, 2019). A participant in the study conducted by Breshears (2019) reported: “... *constantly aware of peoples facial expressions and you're probably reading more into their facial expressions than what's actually happening*”. These negative emotional impacts often arose from the unpredictable nature of public reactions, which contributed to feelings of exclusion and alienation.

Subtheme 2: Negative Encounters in Public

A Participant in the study conducted by Camara (2014) stated, “I have had blatant looks and comments to me because I've stolen their child”. This emphasises how racial prejudices and misconceptions about adoption can lead to harsh accusations. These encounters can be emotionally charged and difficult for parents to process, leaving lasting negative feelings. While such experiences were not the majority, they stand out due to their intensity and the emotional toll they cause. In most studies, participants noted that they had received a majority of positive experiences in public. However, when parents experience negative encounters in public, they find it very challenging to navigate and move on from the negative encounter (Breshears, 2019). Whether it be brief comments or disapproving looks like outsiders passed it left the parents with a negative feeling afterwards.

Participants believed that individuals would have portrayed negative attitudes towards their families if they were considered narrow-minded, making it difficult for them not to accept that there are mixed families in our society (Attwell, 2004). Although reported as very unlikely

and out of the norm, some parents experienced intense confrontations. For a particular participant in the study conducted by Camara (2014), she reported having a very negative encounter:

I took them into a salon and that was the most negative experience I've ever had.... I felt she purposefully spoke over me in words and jargon that I didn't understand; to try and tell me that, how can I be raising this child because I can't even do their hair. I just left.

Parents primarily reflected this to the lasting effects of apartheid. Participants confirmed they had experienced negative behaviour from the older and younger generations (Attwell, 2004). However, a participant further confirmed that she believes it is merely the older generations who have grown up during apartheid. Parents living in more liberal regions like big cities reported fewer negative interactions, whereas parents living in smaller communities, particularly rural ones, experienced more negative interactions. A participant in the study conducted by Camara (2014) reported:

You get positive and negative reactions from White people as well. The White people aren't thinking that it's our child, why have you taken our child? They are more like; why did you take one of them? Now we're banning you as well.

Others were disapproving, bringing in elements of 'colour and community consciousness' discourse, that the child was being stolen, losing their culture and losing their heritage rather than gaining a family as in 'colourblindness'. Similar discourses were those of 'rescue' and of 'kidnap'. Responses from white people seemed to be loaded with the racist ideology associated with apartheid dogma that black people should not mix with white people and that those white people who did were unacceptable and not worthy of their whiteness (Camara, 2014). On the other hand, a few respondents said there have been times when they

have heard people use the term “coconut” to imply that their adopted children are black on the outside but white on the inside. While this term may appear harmless, it is perceived by respondents as derogatory (Finlay, 2006).

One of the greatest frustrations for adoptive parents is when family, friends and members of the public proclaim that their adopted child is lucky for having been adopted (Finlay, 2006). Other parents felt that another frustrating element is when people view their adopted child as a “Sandton accessory”, implying that it is something just for show (Camara, 2024).

The experiences of public stares and discomfort in transracial adoptive families, as highlighted in Jackson (2018) and Romanini (2017), align with findings from international research, such as De Haymes and Simon (2003) in the United States. However, the South African context introduces additional layers of complexity due to the country’s racial history and persistent socio-political tensions. Unlike in Western countries, where transracial adoption often occurs within more racially diverse and integrated societies, South African families may face heightened scrutiny due to apartheid-era ideologies that still shape public perceptions of racial belonging.

Subtheme 3: Questions from Strangers

According to Morrison (2004), intrusive questions are inevitable and frequently asked, especially towards white parents who adopt black children. Some families reported that although most of the questions were positive, some would ask negative ones (Breshears, 2019). When parents were asked specific questions, it left them feeling confused. Questions would also be “*where is the mother?*” or “*Why did you not have your own children?*”. Parents were conflicted by these questions from outsiders and were unsure what the intent was. Parental couples in a study conducted by Jackson (2018) reported being made to feel uncomfortable by comments made by and questions asked by black people. According to Kausi (2014) and

Schröder (2015), people from majority-black racial groups worry that when members of other racial groups adopt black children, they may lose their cultural links to their racial group.

Intrusive questioning can have psychological consequences for both adoptive parents and their children. This aligns with research by Breshears (2019), which suggests that repeated exposure to intrusive questions can make parents hyperaware of their family's racial difference, potentially leading to increased stress and self-doubt about their ability to provide culturally appropriate care. For adoptees, the impact may be even more profound. Studies in the United States have shown that frequent questioning about racial identity can contribute to feelings of "otherness" and confusion regarding self-identity (Samuels, 2009). In South Africa, where racial identity plays a significant role in social interactions, the effects may be magnified. Steinberg and Hall (2013) argue that children in transracial adoptions may struggle with forming a cohesive racial identity if their adoptive parents are unable or unwilling to help them navigate these discussions. The questioning from outsiders, therefore, not only affects parental confidence but also plays a role in shaping the child's developing sense of self.

Respondents claim that the greatest number of questions they are presented with are from black South Africans who are interested to know how they came about adopting a black child (Finlay, 2006). Participants reported comments like this: *"Then you hear 'whose child is this? Who is the father? The child needs to know... you'll upset the ancestors...'"* (Jackson, 2018). Participants felt judged as black people would frequently make comments or ask imposing questions surrounding why a white person has a black child in their care (Jackson, 2018). Some parents would get cultural questions like *"when are you taking him to the bush?"*. This refers to a circumcision ritual which is part of 'Ulwaluko' (Breshears, 2019). Although some participants could understand the concern, they were more concerned about its effect on their child and their emotions.

Almost all participants felt unprepared when confronted with questions from strangers. Participants felt that they were on the receiving end of intrusive questions from strangers in the presence of their children, which caused the parents' anxiety (Jackson, 2018). Adoptive parents have varying coping skills when it comes to managing intrusive questions being asked. Some parents may choose not to engage with strangers, whereas others choose to answer the question in an attempt to provide their children with the tools to be prepared for questions regarding transracial adoption. Ultimately, while intrusive questions may be inevitable, equipping parents with the tools to navigate them effectively can contribute to a more inclusive and supportive environment for adoptive families in South Africa (Samuels, 2009).

Subtheme 4: Anticipated Challenges Parents Are Concerned About

A Participant in the study conducted by Jackson (2018) stated: *"I worry what is the future going to look like for her"*. Many parents were concerned about anticipated challenges and how they would confront them should the time come. Parents said they hoped their child would find a place in the world and not struggle with their identity. Some participants mentioned the importance of preparing themselves for future challenges their children might face in terms of comments, questions and stares from others. They thus have a strong need to protect and equip their children for the potential challenges they foresee in the future (Romanini, 2019). The concerns expressed by transracial adoptive parents in this study align with findings from both South African and international research, highlighting a pervasive anxiety about their children's future identity formation and societal acceptance. Studies from the United States and Europe (Morrison, 2004) similarly report that adoptive parents worry about racial identity struggles, potential discrimination, and their ability to prepare their children for these realities. However, in the South African context, these fears are compounded by the country's deeply rooted racial history and ongoing socio-economic disparities, which make transracial adoption particularly complex (Breshears, 2019).

Adoptive parents found that this challenge was imminent but felt inadequate to prepare their children for this challenge. Transracial parents fear the possible struggle their child might experience in the future regarding their identity. Parents also feared that their children would be exposed to racism (Gishen, 1996). In a study conducted by Jackson (2018), a participant stated, *“We worry for, especially in this country like South Africa where there are a lot of issues around race, we worry for his future, his safety”*.

There was one respondent in a study by Finlay (2006) who raised concern about how she would handle a discussion of South Africa’s apartheid history with her cross-racially adopted child. This respondent claimed that she was unsure how, if asked, she would explain precisely what her part in history had been. Unlike in Western contexts where racial tensions also exist but may not be tied to such a recent history of legal segregation, South African adoptive parents must navigate difficult conversations about their role in history and their child’s place in a post-apartheid society. These findings indicate that participants feared the exposure to racism that they may face in the future and were concerned about how to protect their adopted child from this exposure (Jackson, 2018).

The emotional burden of wanting to shield children from discrimination and prejudice is another recurrent theme across studies (Camara, 2014). Parents express a deep-seated desire to protect their children from racialised experiences, yet they also recognise the limitations of their ability to do so. A participant from a study conducted by Camara (2014) mentioned: *“You are upset because you don’t want your child to be hurt. You almost feel helpless // you don’t know how you can keep them in a perfect bubble and protect them”*. In a study by Gishen (1996), some respondents indicated concern about how the child will cope with prejudices and other aspects of the child’s future in South Africa. Other anticipated challenges, such as seeking biological parents (Finlay, 2006), feeling judged by society (Jackson, 2018), and the time their child realises they are adopted (Camara, 2014), were

mentioned across studies. This finding resonates with international literature on adoptive parenting, where parents often struggle between overprotecting their children and fostering resilience (Romanini, 2019). However, in South Africa, this concern is magnified by the reality that racial identity remains a significant social marker, making it more difficult for transracial adoptees to navigate societal spaces without encountering race-related questions or biases.

Additionally, concerns about biological parent searches and the moment when an adopted child fully grasps their adoption status (Camara, 2014; Finlay, 2006) are common across transracial adoption studies worldwide. However, South African adoptive parents' anxieties seem to be heightened by societal attitudes toward lineage and ancestry, as seen in previous discussions on cultural questions about adoption (Jackson, 2018).

4.1.2.5 Theme 5: Opportunities and Positive Experiences Faced by Parents who Adopted Cross-Racially

A participant in the study by Romanini (2017) stated, *"Love is something that grows. It's not something that's just immediately given ... It grows in your heart. It doesn't need to grow in your tummy"*. From the ten studies included in the review, six referred to parents' positive experiences and opportunities faced by parents who adopted cross-racially (Attwell, 2004; Breshears, 2019; Camara, 2014; Finlay, 2006; Gishen, 1996; Romanini, 2017).

Many parents describe their journeys as deeply fulfilling, despite the complexities of race and identity (Attwell, 2004; Camara, 2014). This aligns with broader adoption research, where studies have consistently found that adoptive parents often report high levels of satisfaction and emotional connection with their children, regardless of racial differences (Breshears, 2019). In a study conducted by Gishen (1996), all participants indicated that they would adopt again if they knew what they knew at the time of adoption, noting how positive their experiences have been. Although families have encountered challenges along the way, most

studies also emphasise the positive experiences of cross-racial adoption, where some mentioned that the majority of their experience was indeed positive (Breshears, 2019). This is consistent with existing literature; according to Morrison (2004), parents report receiving more positive than negative attention despite the hostility, intrusiveness and prejudice they face.

Participants in the study conducted by Attwell (2004) viewed transracial adoption as having a positive impact on their lives and would encourage other families to adopt transracially even though they have experienced some negativity. Participants emphasised that negative experiences were equally as every day as positive experiences, and while both had a lasting impact, negative and hurtful experiences resulted in the development of coping mechanisms that strengthened the family (Camara, 2014).

The positive public encounters with parents correlated with greater acceptance for the couples (Romanini, 2017). In a study by Breshears (2019), a couple shared that many commented: “*What you have done here is a very good thing. I wish there were more people like you*”. Some parents shared situations where black people would particularly thank them (Breshears, 2019). Parents attributed it to South Africa becoming more open to diversity, which might not have happened a few years ago. South Africa has become more inclusive, and interracial relationships and families have changed over time (Camara, 2014). A participant in Camara’s (2014) study mentioned,

Going back to 1993, it was very difficult. It was as horrifying to see a White lady pushing a Black baby in a pram as it was to see a Black man with his arm around a White girl! It was really unacceptable in those days, but I think we’ve grown a lot since then.

As changes have occurred in racist ideology and related social norms, so outwardly expressed opinions of interracial relationships seem to have shifted and become more positive (Camara, 2014). This shift is consistent with sociological studies indicating that increased visibility of interracial families has contributed to a gradual normalisation of cross-racial adoption (Breshears, 2019). Parents in various studies mentioned that parenting an adopted child and parenting a biological child are the same, mentioning that you will face challenges in your parenting journey whether it's with your biological child or your adopted child (Camara, 2014).

A participant in a study conducted by Camara (2014) stated: “... *it's not any different than if I had a biological kid, so why is it different. It's still the same amount of effort to parent*”. Some participants feared that bonding would be delayed because it was not their biological child; however, a Jackson (2018) study mentioned, “*It was immediate really. I think 'cos I have such a strong maternal feeling*”. Other participants also emphasised how quickly and strongly that bond developed and that they were very intentional about it. This supports attachment theory, which suggests that parental responsiveness and emotional investment play a more significant role in forming secure attachments than biological ties (Romanini, 2017).

A participant in a study by Romanini (2017) mentioned: “*I wish that everybody could experience the feeling of love and happiness that come out of it*”. Many couples who have adopted cross-racially referred to the strong relationships they have built, and despite the difficulties faced, their family has remained strong. A participant in a study conducted by Camara (2014) shared: “*[He] came running to me and he said 'mommy, mommy, when I was in my birth mommy's tummy I was dreaming of you'*”. This experience displays the power of the emotional attachment between both mother and child in cross-racial adoption.

These findings suggest that cross-racial adoption not only transforms the lives of adopted children but also enriches the adoptive parents' lives in unexpected ways. From a

psychological perspective, the reflections of adoptive parents provide valuable insights into the nature of parent-child bonding, identity development, and resilience in diverse family structures.

4.1.2.6 Theme 6: Strategies that can be Applied or that Should be Considered to Minimise the Adverse Effects of Cross-Racial Adoption

Through the knowledge gained in the studies, various suggestions, strategies and ideas were highlighted that could assist future parents to minimise the adverse effects of cross-racial adoption. Of the ten studies included in the review, seven referred to parent's experiences of specific cross-racial adoption constructs (Attwell, 2004; Breshears, 2022; Breshears, 2019; Camara, 2014; Finlay, 2006; Jackson, 2018; Romanini, 2017). The four subthemes included:

- Multicultural planning strategies;
- Education on issues of race;
- Support structures and;
- Partners' communication to be on the same page.

Subtheme 1: Multicultural Planning Strategies

According to Jackson (2018), it is essential that adoptive parents assist with multicultural planning. Multicultural planning is the practice of creating new opportunities for transracially adopted children to be immersed in their culture of origin (Jackson, 2018). There are various ways in which parents can do this.

A recent study by Breshears (2022) indicated that South African parents scored significantly lower in multicultural planning than the US scores. This difference in scores could be attributed to South Africa's unique socio-political history, particularly the effects of apartheid, which still influence societal attitudes towards race (Schröder, 2015). In contrast, the US has had a longer history of institutional efforts around multicultural integration, which

may explain the higher scores in multicultural planning (Morrison, 2004). This possibly indicates that South African parents place less importance on cultural socialisation. For this reason, multicultural planning is a recommendation to assist parents in knowing how to implement cultural socialisation within their family to benefit their cross-racially adopted child.

According to Breshears (2022), integration is one of the easiest ways to incorporate a multicultural approach. Parental couples acknowledged the value of integrated schools and churches in developing children's identity (Breshears, 2022). A participant mentioned: *"We've been very fortunate that the school that he goes to has interesting families. There are other adopted kids in the school as well"* (Breshears, 2022). Integration assists in exposure, whether it be a multicultural school, church, community or neighbourhood. Participants sought racially diverse schools to enrol their children and said, *"It's turned out to be a real win."* (Jackson, 2018). Those who did not seek racially diverse schools expressed some concerns and mentioned that *"the biggest problem we saw was that being the only child of colour was a problem"* (Jackson, 2018). Many parents decided to expose their children to more diverse settings and communities (Breshears, 2022). It is suggested that if parents want their children to be exposed to a more racially inclusive educational environment, adoptive parents would have to enrol their children in schools which are more racially diverse also to enhance diversity (Jackson, 2018).

Exposure to people of the same race or family type is also an advised option for cross-racially adopted families (Breshears, 2022). A participant mentioned: *"We try our best to engage with other families where there are transracial kids and find role models that have been adopted, you know?"* (Breshears, 2022). Parents mentioned that because of their children's diverse schools and communities, they have racially diverse friends (Jackson, 2018). Parents who have experimented with this mentioned that they want to prevent situations where their

children are acutely aware of their differences and thus use friendships and celebrities to expose their children to others like them. These findings align with earlier research in the literature review, such as Breshears (2022) and Finlay (2006), which emphasise the importance of cultural socialisation in minimising the adverse effects of cross-racial adoption. This highlights a common theme across studies, suggesting that multicultural planning is not only a recommendation but an essential practice for parents navigating cross-racial adoption.

According to Nakazawa (2003), children who are adopted from different racial backgrounds tend to have fewer relatives who share their racial and genetic traits. Therefore, it is crucial to assist them in realising that other factors besides skin tone and facial features influence how well a family group matches. Nakazawa (2003) asserted that parents should refrain from making racial classifications of other families or groups in order to achieve this.

Some other ideas parents have mentioned are artefacts that reflect a child's race (Breshears, 2022). However, some parents expressed frustration at not being able to find artefacts that reflected their children's racial identities and reported going out of their way to obtain books, toys, clothing and other items for their children (Breshears, 2022). A parent mentioned that:

Once you're in a transracial family you realise there are no T-shirts with dark-skinned kids on them. You can't find a book. If you want to buy a birthday card or wrapping paper, it's all Caucasians. So, I go out of my way to source things like that.

Parents were also shocked at the evidence of how Western culture was across South Africa. Participants of Samuel's (2009) study said that managing various aspects of the societal perceptions of transracial adoption had been a challenge. However, planning for it makes it more manageable.

Subtheme 2: Teaching and Equipping Adopted Children with Survival Skills

A critical theme that emerges from the studies is the importance of equipping adopted children with survival skills to cope with racism and societal prejudices. According to Steinberg & Hall (2013), it can be highly stressful and burdensome for parents to learn how to manage transracial relationships while thinking about the long-term safety and health of their children. In a study by Romanini (2017), participants needed to protect and equip their children for potential foreseeable challenges such as comments, questions and stares from others. Participants mentioned that equipping their children with the tools to handle these challenges was important.

Valby (2024) stated that parents frequently do not discuss racism in advance of their child's encounter, causing them to be unprepared. Consequently, the parents only engage in conversations about race, ethnicity or racism when their child brings up a concern. The situation may present difficulties for some adoptive parents since they may not know how to handle the acknowledgement of their adoption and racial challenges (Valby, 2024). According to Breshears (2022), giving their children survival skills would be essential, referring to the parents' recognition to prepare their children to cope with racism and the ability to impart the necessary skills to do so.

How parents cope with the situation that they are faced with is important, as they do not want to isolate themselves from society to avoid future comments and remarks made by other individuals (Attwell, 2004). These survival skills involve parents being capable of preparing their adopted child for racial prejudice (Jackson, 2018). Adoptive parents are encouraged to expand their racial awareness and gain knowledge of their child's cultural history. Valby (2024) confirmed that adoptive parents feel extremely nervous to discuss racism with their children. However, Hagland (as cited in Valby, 2024) mentioned that it is inevitable that parents will have to face those conversations. Finlay (2006) believed that parents should

be ‘groomed’ to communicate effectively with their adopted children from the time they decide to adopt, and continued guidance and support should be available post-adoption by a qualified professional.

In the South African context, where the lingering effects of apartheid still shape racial dynamics, the emphasis on preparing children for race-related challenges becomes particularly critical. Some parents are aware of the impact South Africa’s history will have on their non- white children’s racial and/or cultural identity. As a result of the lasting effects of apartheid in South Africa, the themes of segregation, racial inequality and racial tension are ever lingering within the South African context (Breshears, 2019). A participant mentioned: *“I’m a little bit scared when she does history and learns the whole apartheid thing...”* (Breshears, 2022). Some parents expressed the importance of discussing issues of race and cultural history with their children to help them understand and process the role of race in their lives (Breshears, 2022).

This is in alignment with existing literature stating that it is essential to foster a conversational environment through which adoptive parents teach their adoptive children about their culture and cultural dynamics. This will allow for more effortless conversations once the child faces uncomfortable circumstances (Mphephu, 2022). A participant mentioned: *“They are very clear about what the history of the country has been. They know about the way in which black peoples have been marginalized and oppressed. They know that.”* (Breshears, 2022). These parents are equipping their children with an understanding of some (white) people’s lingering negative attitudes towards them and the history behind the racial divides.

They are open to discussing the knowledge of where we are as a society, where we came from, and hope to be heading (Breshears, 2022). Research conducted in the United States of America on transracial adoption has found that parents’ attitudes and behaviours related to racial socialisation affect the outcomes of their transracially adopted children on a variety of variables (Boivin & Hassan, 2015). The research further indicated that parents can play a

crucial role in allowing children to see multiracial systems and heritages as distinct and shared (Boivin & Hassan, 2015).

Some parental couples are preparing their children for racism that they may face in society (Breshears, 2022). Other parents are preparing their children for adoption-based discrimination (Breshears, 2022). Parents in this category are aware that their children are vulnerable to comments or questions about their adoptive identity that may lead to feelings of isolation and difference. (Breshears, 2022). Adoptive parents should be honest when answering questions from people but simultaneously share only what is appropriate because the adoptive parents and the adopted child are also entitled to their privacy (Finlay, 2006).

Participants in a study conducted by Jackson (2018) experience society as being ignorant about adoption mentioning, *“I think it’s about ignorance, it’s about educating people”*. According to Camara (2014), some of her participants answered the questions approach was to be straightforward and honest or to share their story to have them understand and educate them. Some single respondents stated that they answered difficult questions in front of their children to provide a model for how questions about cross-racial adoption could be answered (Finlay, 2006; Jackson, 2018).

While some parents may choose not to engage with strangers, others may choose to answer questions in an attempt to provide their children with the tools to be prepared for questions regarding transracial adoption (Jackson, 2018). Some parents made light of the situations, making jokes about the attention they received in public or laughing as they retold the stories in the interviews (Breshears, 2019). In a book compiled by Coughlin and Abromowitz (2004), questions and answers were created to help adoptive parents respond to potentially challenging inquiries from children and adults. According to their advice, questions asked must be appropriately addressed to safeguard the adopted child's feeling of identity and belonging. While adoptive parents have the right to privacy, it is advised that they respond truthfully to questions and only provide essential information.

For other parents, it is important to instill a sense of pride and ownership of their identities in their adopted child. For some parents, providing their children with a strong sense of self will allow them to combat discrimination (Breshears, 2022). In situations where older children experienced negative interactions with outsiders, parents were quick to reframe the negativity for their children, reassuring them that there is nothing wrong with their family and attributing the situation to ignorance (Breshears, 2019).

Subtheme 3: Formal Sources of Support

According to Romanini (2017), parents have made use of formal means of support in the form of workshops and support groups specifically aimed at addressing transracial adoption. Providing this support from social workers or agencies specifically to transracial adoption has been a great source of support for parental couples. This is consistent with existing literature; Doubell's (2014) research indicated that adoptive parents should get thorough support prior to adoption that addresses specific concerns better to prepare them for the realities of transracial adoption. This was supported by Klevan's (2012) findings, which pointed out that not all potential adoptive parents are aware of the difficulties associated with transracial adoption. The empirical findings and literature review clarified that several pertinent issues must be explored before the adoption process proceeds with prospective parents (Finlay, 2006). Doubell (2014) indicated that support that focuses on issues of race and culture prior to adoption allows that opportunity to expose prospective parents to potential challenges that accompany transracial adoption. This can allow parents to have a more accurate perception and expectation of racial issues, allowing the adjustment to transracial adoption to be easier as parents feel more prepared (Hartinger-Saunders & Trouteaud, 2015).

Social workers play a significant role in the adoption process, and it has been beneficial to couples when they receive the necessary support (Romanini, 2017). The social worker plays a significant role in the parent's consideration as they are gradually eased into the decision to

want to adopt (Attwell, 2004). The social worker should provide adequate information to the prospective parents and discuss all the relevant negative and positive aspects of transracial adoption (Attwell, 2004). Social workers should provide sufficient information to enable the couple to make an informed decision (Attwell, 2004).

Child Welfare and adoption agencies should provide prospective family members with extensive research and literature regarding the process of transracial adoption and all the necessary areas and issues related to the phenomenon (Attwell, 2004; Gishen, 1996). This will provide families with information to consider before they decide to adopt transracially. According to Gishen (1996), the literature provision will make it possible to cover many areas and issues related to transracial adoption.

Information can also be shared in educational workshops. Participants indicated that these available workshops were beneficial in preparing prospective parents (Jackson, 2018). According to Attwell (2004), agencies need to provide educational workshops for prospective and present families who have adopted a child transracially. This can assist families to be updated with available and new studies on issues of transracial adoption. Jackson (2018) added that this would educate family members and include them in the adoption process, making them more accepting of transracial adoption sooner (Jackson, 2018). Finlay (2006) opined that a mandatory, comprehensive training course should ideally be completed before prospective parents adopt. This training should combine elements of academic theory and real-life case studies explored with parents.

According to Attwell (2004), support should be provided to parents continuously. A form of continuous support includes support groups with other parents who have adopted cross-racially. Congruently with the literature, Doubell's (2014) research highlighted that even though pre-adoption support may give parents the impression that they are ready to adopt a transracial child, reality and perception are never the same. Doubell (2014) further suggested

that support groups and family counselling become crucial in the post-adoption phase.

According to a participant in a study conducted by Jackson (2018), “...*I would have loved to have spoken to more people who’ve adopted transracially, just to understand what the things are we could be doing*”. Less than half of the participants suggested they would have liked to connect with other adoptive parents, whether in support groups, workshops, or meet-ups (Jackson, 2018; Romanini, 2017). According to Gishen (1996), agencies should encourage parents to join support groups and emphasise the value and importance thereof. According to Attwell (2004), the agency and Child Welfare should emphasise the importance and the value of belonging to these groups, which will benefit the families in the future.

This is consistent with Doubell’s (2014) findings that these services can facilitate family bonding, support resolving parenting and racial issues, and provide access to essential resources. This can encourage parents to gain insight and experiences from other parents who have adopted transracially. Belonging to a support group should encourage parents to adjust to the experiences and concerns they may have (Attwell, 2004). In agreement, Wason et al. (2014), emphasised that these formal sources become imperative for families who adopt. Allowing space for adoptive parents to feel supported, assisted and encouraged will foster resilience, allowing them to be more capable of managing the challenges, according to Watson et al. (2012).

In international studies, particularly in the U.S., there is a greater focus on training parents to navigate racial and cultural complexities through workshops and support groups tailored to transracial adoption (Klevan, 2012). South African adoption agencies could benefit from similar tailored workshops that consider the unique racial and cultural landscape of South Africa. Furthermore, the involvement of social workers in the adoption process is crucial in providing not only pre-adoption support but also ongoing post-adoption counseling to ensure that parents are adequately supported throughout the adoption journey.

Subtheme 4: Informal Sources of Support.

According to Romanini (2017), informal sources of support include friends, extended family and acquaintances. According to Attwell (2004), support is especially important for those who will play an important role in the lives of the family and their children. Gaining support from family and friends is just as important as gaining the support of the social worker and the agency or child welfare when initiating the idea of wanting to adopt transracially (Attwell, 2004). Many couples noted this was crucial in their journey of cross-racial adoption (Romanini, 2017).

Given the couple's journey and the potential difficulties, they must work as a team and support each other every step of the way (Romanini, 2017). Couples mentioned the importance of communicating, being there for each other and being in accord with one another (Romanini, 2017; Attwell, 2004). In a study by Jackson (2018), parental couples stated that both partners must reach a consensus before adoption. In a study conducted by Romanini (2017), some couples' greatest source of support was the support they received from one another, "*We were very lucky that we had each other*". Some parents took time to adjust to adopting a child, which was essential and a process that could not be hurried (Jackson, 2018). For transracially adoptive parents to provide consistent and supportive environments for their children, open and continuous communication is essential. Partners need to navigate cultural differences, gender dynamics, external pressures, and individual perspectives on racial identity in a way that fosters unity and shared commitment. Implementing structured discussions, seeking professional guidance, and engaging in racial socialization as a team can significantly enhance the well-being of both the parents and their adopted child. In South Africa, formal resources on transracial adoption often focus on administrative processes rather than post-adoption support for couples (Jackson, 2018). In countries like the U.S. and Canada, structured programs exist to help adoptive parents navigate transracial adoption challenges together (Watson et al., 2012).

Chapter Summary and Conclusion

Chapter 4 presented a detailed exploration of the findings from the ten selected articles using a thematic analysis. The chapter was structured around six central themes that arose, capturing the essence of experiences faced by parents who have adopted cross-racially. Initially, the chapter delved into the diverse motivations and reasons parents decide to adopt cross-racially. Parents have pre-adoption experiences surrounding the logistics of adopting and the reactions of family members. This research found that there were negative and positive reactions. The selected articles constantly made references to race, culture, and language. Furthermore, cross-racial adoption constructs were explored from the experiences of parents, considering both the challenges and opportunities from the parents' perspectives and experiences.

The chapter further examined challenges parents encountered, including stares from strangers, negative encounters in public, questions from strangers, and concerns about anticipated challenges. The societal judgments and the emotional toll of managing these challenges were discussed. The discussion then shifted to parents' strategies to navigate these challenges, including open communication about race, involvement in their child's cultural heritage, and developing coping mechanisms (Breshears, 2022; Jackson, 2018).

The chapter underscored the importance of formal and informal support systems in adoption. Formal sources like workshops, support groups, and informal support from family and friends were crucial in assisting families to adjust and thrive (Doubell, 2014). The chapter also highlighted the positive experiences and opportunities from cross-racial adoption, such as personal growth, expanded perspectives, and increasing societal acceptance (Breshears, 2019; Romanini, 2017).

Finally, the chapter outlined practical strategies for minimising the adverse effects of cross-racial adoption, emphasising the need for adequate preparation and ongoing education. Overall, Chapter 4 provided a comprehensive overview of the complex dynamics of cross-racial adoption, revealing that while there can be significant challenges, there are also substantial positive outcomes and strategies for enhancing the adoption experience.

In conclusion, this chapter has provided an in-depth analysis of the experiences and challenges associated with cross-racial adoption. The findings underscored the multifaceted nature of cross-racial adoption and highlighted both the significant difficulties and the profound opportunities that arose for adoptive families. The thematic analysis revealed that while adoptive parents and children navigate a range of challenges, including societal prejudice and identity issues, they also experience positive outcomes such as personal growth and increased societal diversity acceptance (Watson et al., 2012).

The strategies for managing these challenges, including effective multicultural planning, survival skills training, and the importance of formal and informal support systems, offered practical guidance for future adoptive families. Moreover, the positive experiences reported by participants underscored the potential for cross-racial adoption to foster strong, resilient family bonds and contribute to broader social change (Breshears, 2019). This chapter not only added to the understanding of the complexities of cross-racial adoption but also served as a foundation for future research and practice aimed at supporting families in this unique journey. The insights gained from this review emphasised the need for continued dialogue and research to support and enhance the experiences of cross-racially adopted children and their families.

Chapter 5: Conclusion, Limitations, and Recommendations

This chapter presents the conclusions, limitations, and recommendations for this study. This chapter highlights the conclusions of this scoping review, followed by the study's limitations, noting the included studies. After that, recommendations are highlighted to inform future study suggestions and topics.

5.1 Conclusions

This study aimed to map and synthesise evidence in parents' experiences of cross-racial adoption in South Africa. The main objective was to explore the experiences of parents who have adopted cross-racially. This was followed by the sub-objectives of exploring both challenges and opportunities faced by parents who adopted cross-racially and the critical strategies that can be applied to mitigate the adverse effects of cross-racial adoption. The analysis focused on exploring these objectives. Each objective has led to significant conclusions and highlighted notable gaps in the literature, providing a foundation for future research.

Ten articles satisfied the inclusion criteria for the current investigation and were included in the scoping review to answer the relevant aims and objectives. The following themes were identified using a thematic analysis:

1. Theme 1: Parental motivation and reasons to adopt cross-racially
2. Theme 2: Parental experiences of the pre-adoption process
3. Theme 3: Parental experiences of specific cross-racial adoption constructs
4. Theme 4: Challenges faced by Cross-racial adoption parents
5. Theme 5: Opportunities and positive experiences faced by parents who adopted cross-racially

6. Theme 6: Strategies that can be applied or that should be considered to minimise the adverse effects of cross-racial adoption

These themes answered the relevant aims and objectives of this scoping review. The significant findings and notable literature gaps follow under each objective.

5.1.1 Exploration of the Experiences of Parents Who Have Adopted Cross-Racially in South Africa

The exploration of parental experiences in cross-racial adoption in South Africa revealed a complex and multifaceted picture. Parents often face significant social (Gishen, 1996) and emotional challenges (Romanini, 2017). These challenges included navigating societal prejudices (Finlay, 2006) and addressing the unique needs of their adopted children related to racial identity (Breshears, 2022). Despite these challenges, many parents experience substantial personal growth and satisfaction from their adoption journey.

The study highlighted that parental experiences were profoundly shaped by South Africa's socio-cultural context, with its historical and ongoing racial dynamics playing a critical role in shaping these experiences (Schröder, 2015). Although overlapping experiences were highlighted, it was also evident that parents had individualised experiences due to varying factors such as their circumstances, reason for adopting, support received in the process, views on race and culture, and their exposure to resources.

From the literature review, one significant gap was found in the lack of focus on the perspectives of adopted individuals. Most studies concentrated on parental experiences and motivations, neglecting the viewpoints of adult transracial adoptees (Gishen, 1996). Future research should prioritise the experiences of adoptees, particularly in understanding their racial and cultural socialisation as they mature. Another notable gap in the literature was the limited longitudinal studies tracking the long-term experiences of cross-racial adoptive families in

South Africa. Longitudinal studies are needed to explore the long-term impacts on adoptees and how their experiences evolve (Gishen, 1996; Attwell, 2004; Romanini, 2017). Most existing studies provided snapshot views without addressing the evolving nature of these experiences over time.

5.1.2 Exploration of the Challenges and Opportunities Faced by Parents Who Decided to Adopt Cross-Racially

The review of literature on the challenges and opportunities faced by cross-racial adoptive parents underscored a dual landscape. On the one hand, parents encounter challenges such as societal prejudice and the complexities of integrating their child's cultural heritage into their family life (Luyt & Swartz, 2022; Romanini, 2017). On the other hand, opportunities arose through personal enrichment, resilience development, and increased racial awareness (Breshears, 2019; Camara, 2014). The evolving socio-cultural environment in South Africa provided challenges and a progressively supportive framework for adoptive families.

There was a lack of research addressing the specific types of societal prejudice faced by cross-racial adoptive families and the variability of these experiences across different regions in South Africa. Additionally, there was a limited exploration of how opportunities are effectively harnessed and translated into benefits for families. Additional research is needed to understand the intersection between societal support systems and practical outcomes for adoptive families. There was also a noted scarcity of research focusing on the experiences of same-sex couples in adoption (Romanini, 2017) and the motivations of men who adopt (Luyt & Swartz, 2023).

5.1.3 Exploration of the Key Strategies to Minimise the Adverse Effects of Cross-Racial Adoption in South Africa

Critical strategies for minimising adverse effects included proactive racial socialisation, engagement in formal support systems like workshops and support groups and fostering strong communication within families (Breshears, 2022; Doubell, 2014). These strategies can be critical for preparing adoptive parents to handle the challenges associated with cross-racial adoption and for equipping them with tools to support their children effectively (Watson et al., 2012). This study highlighted the importance of both formal and informal support systems in enhancing the adoption experience and mitigating potential issues.

A gap in the literature exists in detailed, actionable guidance on implementing strategies within the South African context. Research should investigate the effectiveness of various support mechanisms and develop a framework for consistent pre- and post-adoption support. There is also a need to research why support levels vary between organisations and to explore the potential benefits of a regulated support system for all prospective adoptive parents (Finlay, 2006; Jackson, 2018). Furthermore, research could investigate the perspectives of black South Africans on transracial adoption to enhance understanding and support for adoption practices (Finlay, 2006).

5.2 Limitations

In this scoping review, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to look for articles that met the criteria. The review was limited to papers published in English, which was a limitation as it excluded studies conducted in other languages. Many articles included insights from professionals in cross-racial adoption, such as teachers (Robinson, 2018) and social workers (Doubell, 2014). Due to this scoping review only using parent's experiences, those articles could not be utilised.

With cross-racial adoption only being legalised in 1991, there were limited available studies where parents could speak and share the entirety of their parenting journey where their children are now young adults or adults. In most studies, parents share their experiences and decision-making processes, but their children are young. It is, therefore, challenging to indicate whether those were the right decisions and establish whether they positively or negatively affected the child growing up.

5.3 Recommendations

An essential aspect of the scoping review was to identify gaps in the literature that can be explored by future research aiming to broaden the field. As part of the recommendations, gaps are highlighted that future research can utilise. With transracial adoption only legalised in 1991, it is a relatively new research topic. Previous studies focused on adoptive parents' experiences, investigating how they make decisions and their attitudes toward their adopted children while they were still reasonably young. These studies frequently investigated parental motivations, expectations, and the perceived barriers and rewards of adoption. However, there was a significant gap in the literature concerning adopted individuals' voices, particularly in South Africa.

Existing research has relied too extensively on parental narratives of cross-racial adoptive family experiences, notably overlooking the viewpoints of adult transracial adoptees (Gishen, 1996). Future studies should look into adoptees' experiences with racial and cultural socialisation, mainly as studies have found differences between parent and child reports of parental socialisation efforts (Luyt & Swartz, 2023).

In South Africa, where cross-racial adoption is relatively new, the long-term impact on adoptees has not fully been recognised. While parents' viewpoints are significant, reflecting the adopted children's lived experiences is equally critical as they mature into young adults and adults. These individuals can provide unique perspectives on how their adoptive parents' decisions, such as cultural exposure, identity concerns, and societal judgments, have shaped their lives, both positively and negatively. Many researchers suggest that longitudinal studies are needed to investigate identity developments over a long period (Gishen, 1996) and determine how they have experienced the various developmental stages (Attwell, 2004; Romanini, 2017).

According to Jackson (2018), further research could be conducted with transracial adoptive parents whose children are adolescents, where identity versus role confusion could present some unique challenges. This research could prove invaluable in understanding the long-term psychosocial impact transracial adoption could have on adoptees. Such research would be useful in establishing the long-term impact of adoption and its ability to break down intergenerational transmission of emotional problems.

Some researchers noted that limited research is available on the experiences of same-sex couples in their journey with adoption (Romanini, 2017). Due to there being a gap in the literature regarding same-sex couples adopting, it is recommended to include same-sex couples in future research (Luyt & Swartz, 2023).

In the various literature, there is a paucity of research conducted explicitly on the motivations of men who adopt. Many studies focus on mothers or couples that adopt a child. However, limited research has focused on men's motivations and perspectives. This could bring clarity on various aspects found in literature, specifically for women who cited that their male partners were obstacles to adoption (Luyt & Swartz, 2023).

Most of the literature and studies included families who have adopted, but limited research addressed families who wanted to adopt but did not continue the process due to obstacles. According to Luyt and Swartz (2023), because the participants included in this research were all adoptive families, it was impossible to see how obstacles to adoption prevented those who considered but did not proceed with the process. To get an accurate impression of the consequences of various obstacles to adoption, it is essential to research those who considered adoption but gave up during the process and did not continue to the placement stage (Luyt & Swartz, 2023).

Based on the findings regarding the challenges faced by transracial adoptive parents, it is recommended that further research focus on the pre-and post-adoption support provided by adoption organisations. In light of the empirical findings and the literature review, it became apparent that consistent and regulated support of the adoption process is crucial (Finlay, 2006). Such research should aim to understand why the level of support varies significantly between different organisations (Jackson, 2018).

This information could help adoption agencies enhance their services and consider implementing regulations to ensure that all prospective adoptive parents receive consistent support, regardless of their financial situation (Jackson, 2018). Developing a support and guidance framework to be tested with a group of parents entering the adoption process is also recommended. Identifying the direct benefits of such a framework could provide strong

evidence to advocate for a mandatory support system for all adoptions (Jackson, 2018; Finlay, 2006).

Finally, research could be conducted to investigate the views of black South Africans on transracial adoption (Finlay, 2006). This research could prove effective in educating the black population on the desperate need for black adoptive parents to adopt abandoned and orphaned children. Furthermore, it will give this population group a better understanding of why white parents are adopting black children and the alternative future these children would have to face if transracial adoption was not a reality. The general views and perceptions of adoption amongst the black population could also be an area of research to aid in the understanding as to why they are apprehensive towards adoption.

5.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this scoping review has provided valuable insights into parent's experiences of cross-racial adoption in South Africa. By exploring the personal narratives of adoptive parents, the challenges and opportunities associated with cross-racial adoption, and the strategies for mitigating potential adverse effects, this study has illuminated key areas of concern and potential for growth within this relatively new field. The review has identified significant gaps in the literature, including the need for more diverse perspectives, longitudinal studies, and research on the experiences of individuals beyond the early stages of adoption.

These findings underscored the importance of continued research to enhance our understanding of the long-term impacts of cross-racial adoption and to inform better support systems for adoptive families. It would be beneficial for future research to consider the highlighted gaps in the literature to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of both adoptive parents and their children, ultimately contributing to more informed and effective adoption practices.

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Appendix A: Ethical Clearance



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Yours sincerely,



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Computes: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix B: Full article screening results

Author and Year	Reviewer 1: Response	Reviewer 2: Response
Luyt & Swartz, 2023	1	1
Dos Santos & Wagner, 2018	0	0
Attwell, 2004	1	1
Finlay, 2006	1	1
Robinson, 2018	0	0
Luyt & Swartz, 2022	1	1
Luyt, Swartz & Vogel, 2021	0	0
Mokati, 2016	0	0
Romanini, 2017	1	1
Beshears, 2021	1	1
Thomson, 2006	0	0
Jackson, 2018	1	1
Gishen, 1996	1	1
Breshears, 2019	1	1
Camara, 2014	1	1